The Shift to the New Humanitarian Paradigm

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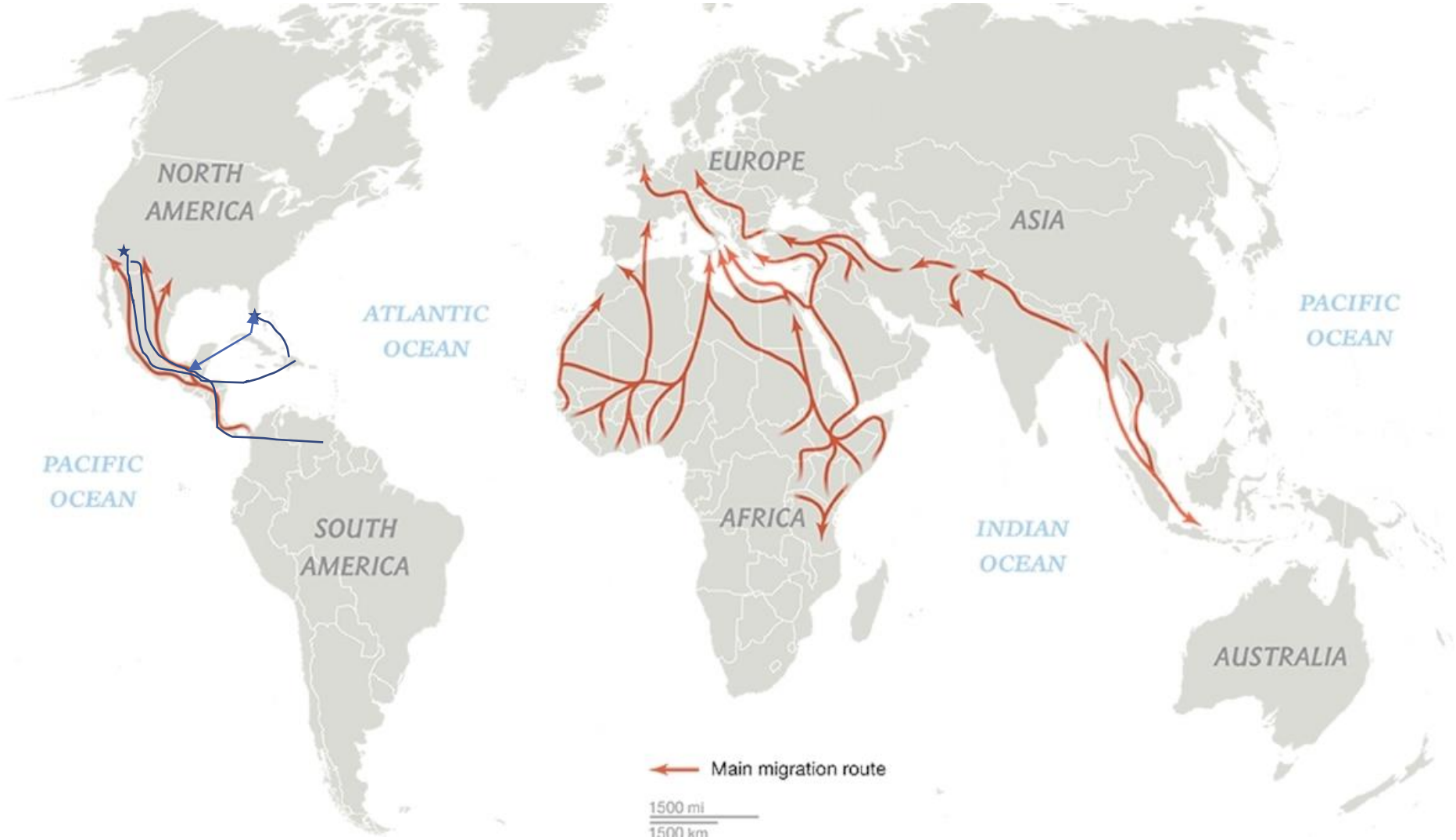
Transcontinental Migration

- Refugees and migrants are no longer just crossing borders and settling into camps in neighboring countries. Instead, large numbers are increasingly travelling long distances to show up at their desired destinations in Europe and the United States. The tipping point occurred in the summer of 2015, when mass refugee and migrant flows from the Middle East, Africa, and central Asia began making their way into Europe. Likewise, in the Western Hemisphere, there was a spiked increased in the number of migrants and unaccompanied minors from Central America, Mexico, Haiti, Cuba, and Venezuela making the trek to Mexico-US border, which peaked in 2022.

- Personal smartphones, social media, and criminal human trafficking gangs provide refugees and migrants with the assistance and means to traverse long distances. Refugees and migrants are more likely to come from middle income, urban areas than from rural areas.

Transcontinental Migration Routes

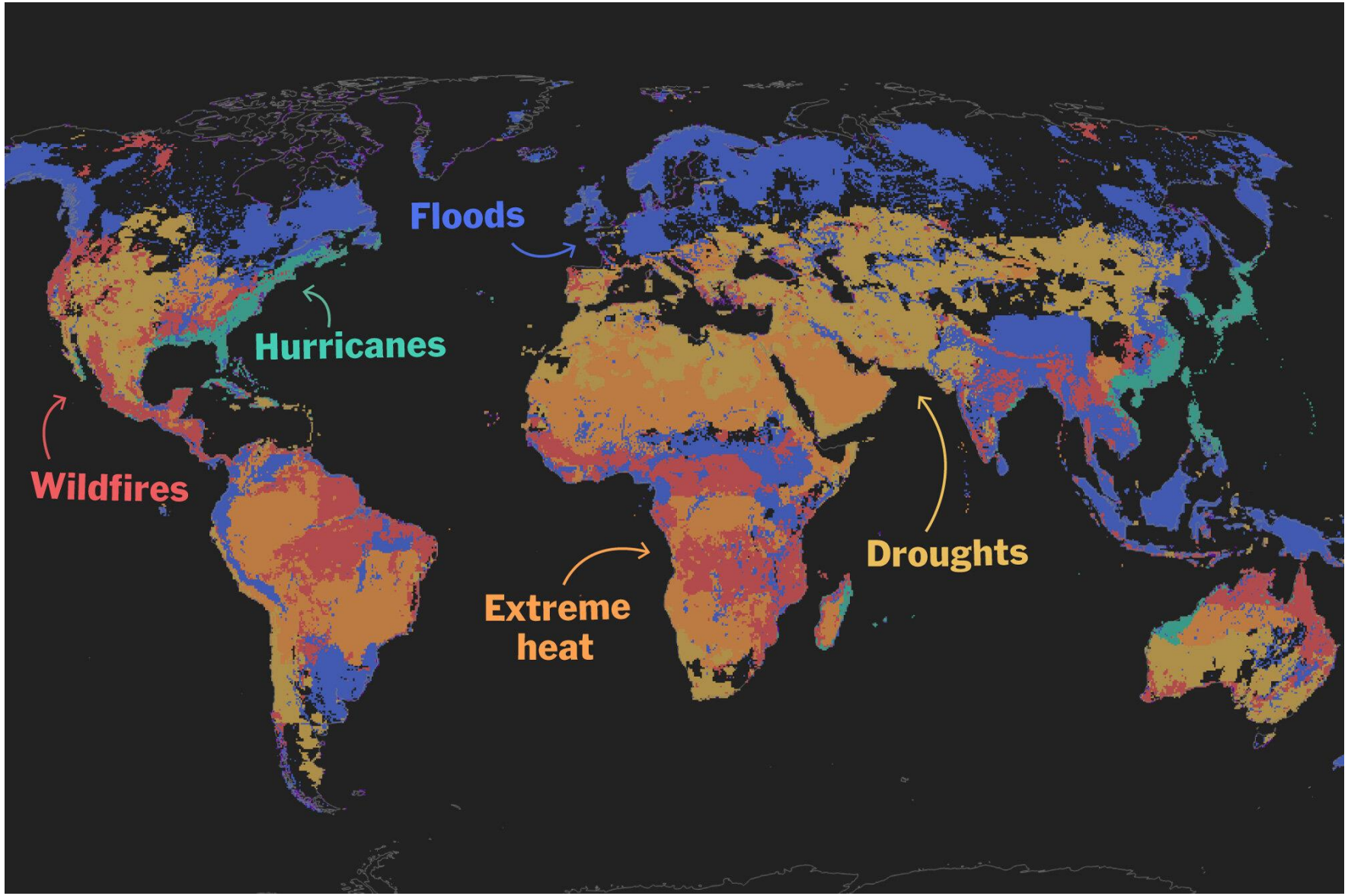


National Geographic/IOM blog: https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2016/12/a-world-on-the-move-why-we-need-new-rules-for-migration

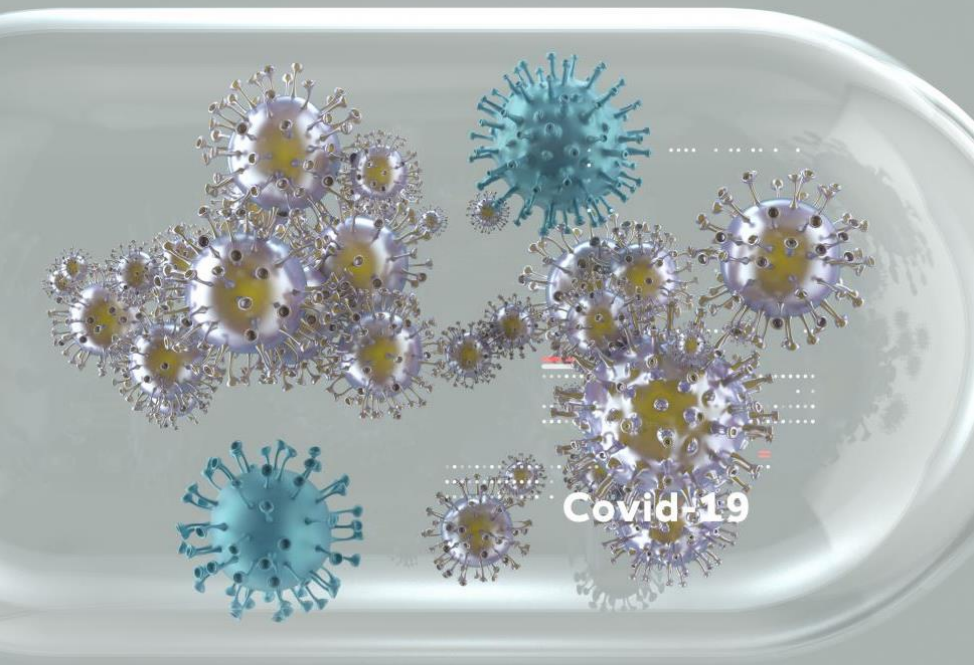
Climate Change-driven Disasters

- The years since 2015 have been the warmest on record, which has altered worldwide climate patterns, resulting in the increased frequency of floods, storms, droughts, heatwaves and wildfires and a paradigm shift in the impact of climate disasters. These climate-driven disasters are causing greater economic damage, destruction of livelihoods, crop loss, and unprecedented levels of displacement. However, improved early warning systems, evacuation programs, and preparedness and mitigation measures have led to lower death tolls from these disasters.

- Climate change is driving increased food, water, and energy insecurity, which are also adding pressures on worldwide political and economic stability. Increased national preparedness and local resilience is no longer sufficient to address these climate change disasters but require international coordinated efforts and adaptive mitigation strategies.



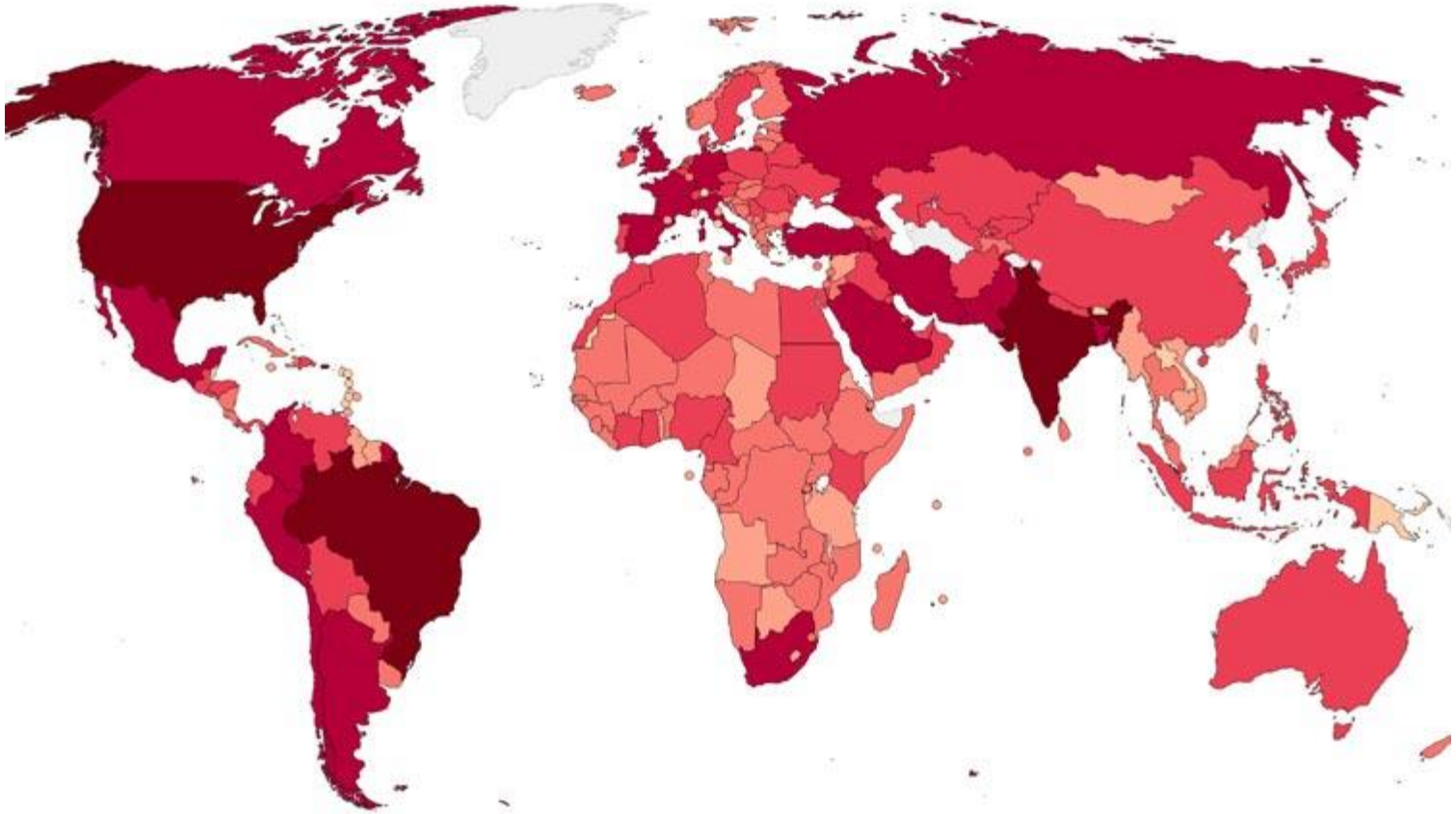
https://www.nytimes.com/interactive/2021/01/28/opinion/climate-change-risks-by-country.html



COVID-19 Pandemic

- COVID-19—the deadliest pandemic since the 1918 – 19 influenza pandemic or the peak of the HIV/AIDS crisis—has forced a paradigm shift in how to address global health emergencies. Although the emergence of a pandemic had been identified as a potential future threat, COVID-19 caught the world unprepared and has been unlike any other crisis that the international humanitarian system has faced.

- From 2020 until the end of 2022, more than 750 million reported COVID-19 cases have resulted in 6.8 million deaths worldwide. Unlike previous epidemics such as Ebola, cholera, and malaria that devastated lesser developed countries and regions, 75 percent of reported COVID-19 deaths by the end of 2021 occurred in Europe and the Americas, with only 3 percent in Africa.



Highest Death Tolls

United States
Brazil
India
Russia
Mexico
United Kingdom
Peru
Italy
Germany
France

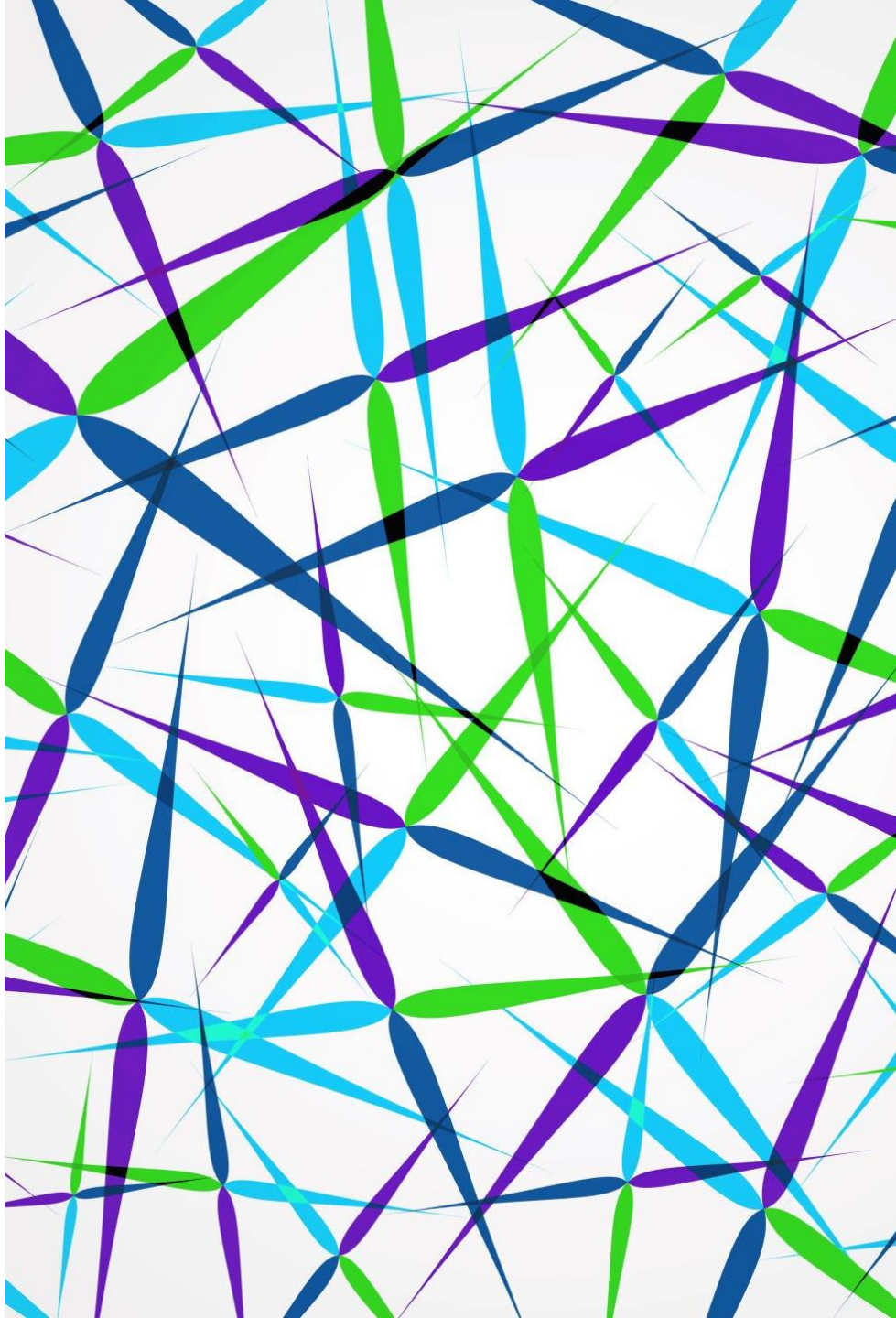
https://www.bloomberg.com/graphics/2020-coronavirus-cases-world-map/

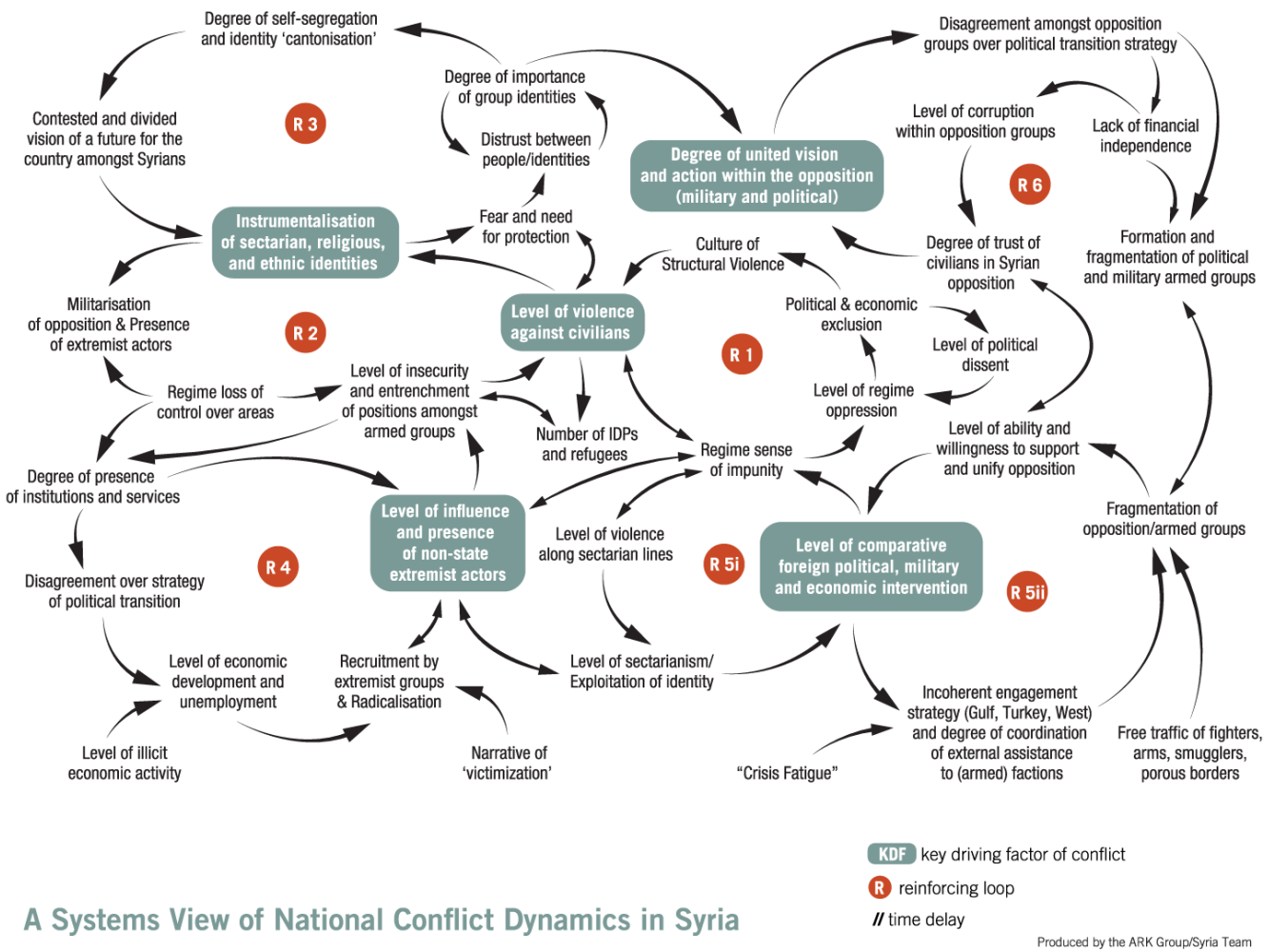
Protracted Armed Conflicts and Criminal violence

Protracted armed conflicts and nonconventional criminal violence indicate another paradigm shift in the drivers of displacement, migration, and political and economic instability. Long term unresolved conflicts, such as Somalia, Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Mali, Sudan, South Sudan, Libya, Syria, Iraq, Ukraine, and Yemen continued to have lingering effects, put stresses on the international humanitarian system and increased humanitarian requirements.

The 20+ year conflict in Afghanistan ended in 2021 with the victory of the Taliban, leading to a retreat of the traditional international humanitarian community's nation-building and human rights agenda. More recent conflicts in Burkina Faso, Burma, Ethiopia, Mozambique, and the inter-state Russo-Ukraine war have added to the global humanitarian needs.

Moreover, the intensification of criminal gang violence— previously considered a national governance and security issue—has emerged as a driver of instability and migration in Haiti, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, and Mexico. Vigilante violence in the Philippines, South Africa, and Venezuela has also become a humanitarian concern. In 2022, economic instability in Sri Lanka ignited violence, which added to the humanitarian concerns.





A Systems View of National Conflict Dynamics in Syria

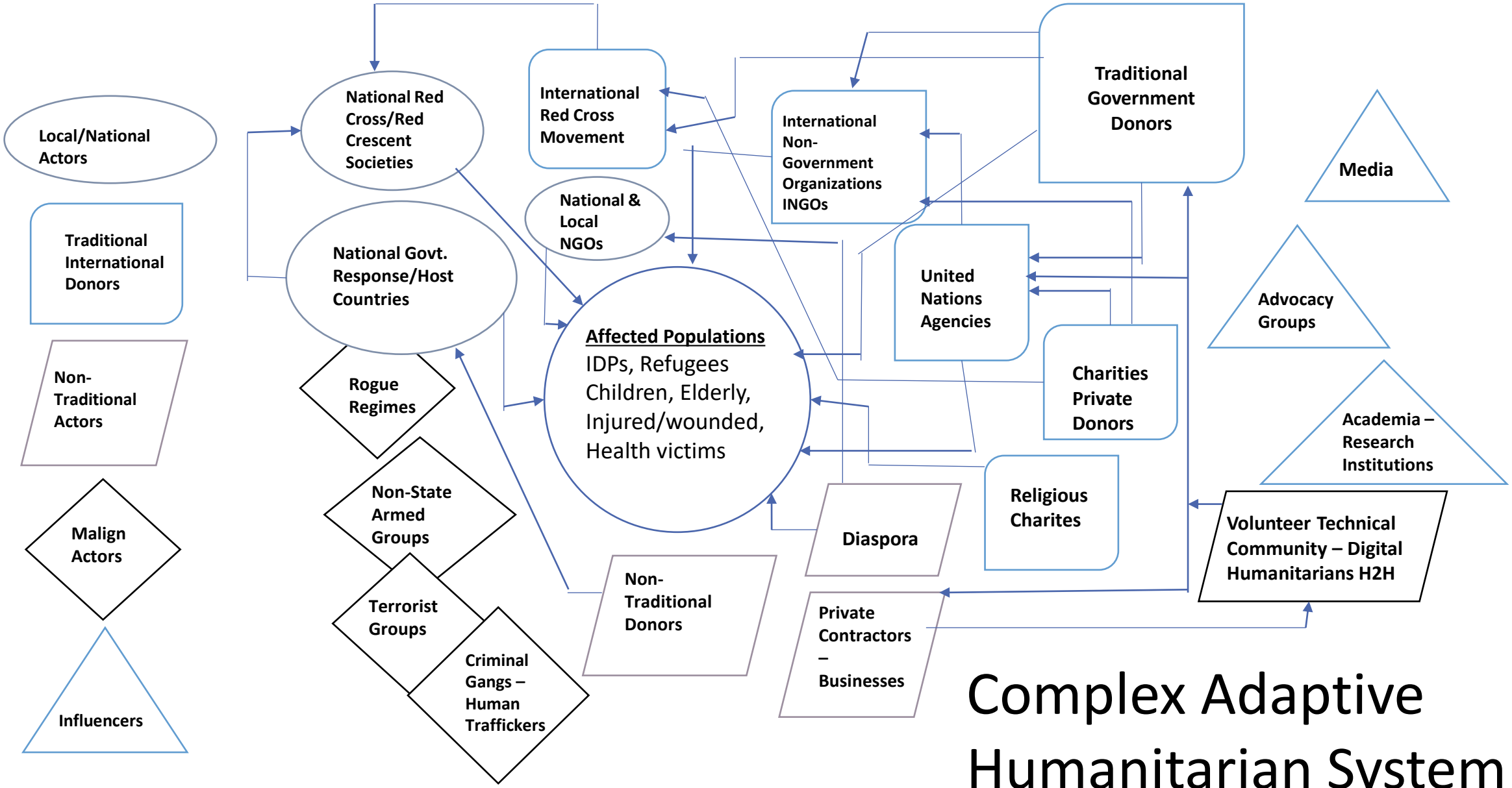
https://www.cdacollaborative.org/publication/the-syrian-conflict-a-systems-conflict-analysis/the-syrian-conflict-a-systems-conflict-analysis-systems-view/

Changes to International Humanitarian System

The emergence of new nontraditional donors, such as China, Turkey, the Gulf States, and others who provide most of their aid bilaterally, signifies a paradigm shift in established Western-dominated UN and NGO system. These new nontraditional actors do not always follow accepted humanitarian principles, norms, and best practices, such as coordination, transparency, and localization.

At the same time, local volunteers, national civil society groups, and diaspora organizations are playing a more independent and stronger role in direct humanitarian response, often in geographic areas not accessible to international aid organizations.

The past decade has also seen malign Government anti-humanitarian actors work to deny humanitarian access and obstruct and attack humanitarian operations. Non-State terrorist groups have targeted aid workers for abduction and assassination. Human trafficking and criminal gangs, along with paramilitary mercenary organizations, have also become new rogue actors on the humanitarian stage.



Complex Adaptive Humanitarian System

Redefinition of Humanitarianism

Although humanitarian issues and assistance have always been political, under this newly emerging paradigm, donor humanitarian aid has become even more blatantly transactional and politicized.

With the recognition that humanitarian aid could be used as an instrument of "soft power," political policy is more often taking priority over humanitarian principles.

Using humanitarian aid to support military/political ally countries, breakaway territories, common ethnic minorities in other countries, etc.

Using humanitarian aid to leverage political support in the United Nations, economic/trade agreements, increased military presence, etc. with recipient country

Cutting off humanitarian aid to punish or pressure affected countries

Cartoon by Cecigian from Italy.
https://blog.cartoonmovement.com/2017/08/10-cartoons-for-world-humanitarian-day.html

Humanitarian Paradigm Shift

2001 – 2015 (Complicated)

- Refugees from marginalized populations in conflict-affected, low-income countries crossed borders into neighboring countries and settled into camps.
- Sporadic storms, floods, droughts
- Regional/country epidemics of cholera, malaria, yellow fever, Ebola
- Armed conflicts between a State and secessionist, revolutionary, sectarian, or terroristic non-state groups
- UN and western NGOs and donor governments dominate international humanitarian system
- Traditional humanitarian system endorsed humanitarian principles and best practices

Current Paradigm (Complex)

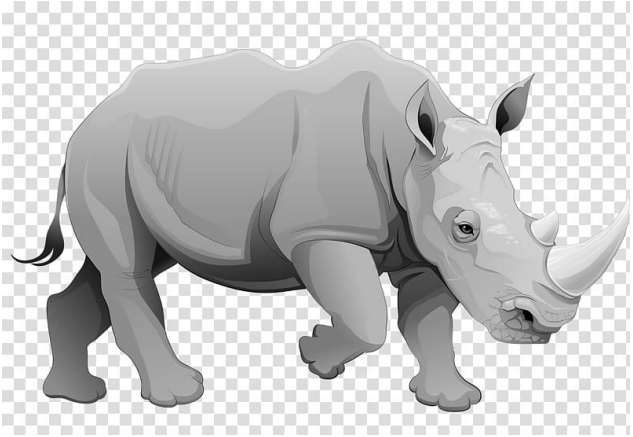
- Refugees and economic migrants travel long distances to desired destinations with help from human traffickers, smart phones and social media.
- Changing climate patterns resulting in more frequent storms, floods, droughts, heat waves, wildfires
- COVID-19 Pandemic
- Unresolved protracted armed conflicts and criminal violence drive humanitarian crises
- New non-traditional donors and malign actors
- Increased politicized and transactional humanitarian aid

Anticipating the Next Paradigm Shift

Mega-Disaster, Climate Catastrophe

New Pandemic, Biological warfare/incident

Nuclear warfare-incident, Chemical warfare/incident

Cyber-attack on global critical infrastructure

System disruption/re-alignment