



By Tom Joyce

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Food insecurity a global threat

The Ecological Threat Register warns of climate threat in Africa, the Middle East and South Asia, with worrying consequences for global food security



The inaugural edition of the Ecological Threat Register (ETR), produced by the Institute for Economics and Peace (IEP), has outlined the regions of the world expected to be least likely to cope with extreme ecological shocks.

The report identified sub-Saharan Africa, South Asia, the Middle East and North Africa as the regions facing the largest number of ecological threats.

A total of 5bn people could suffer from food insecurity by 2050, according to the report, 1.5bn more than today.

A lack of resilience in many at-risk countries is expected to lead to "worsening food insecurity and competition over resources, increasing civil unrest and mass displacement, exposing developed countries to increased influxes of refugees", the report warned.

Over 1bn people live in 31 countries unlikely to sufficiently withstand the impact of ecological events by 2050, the report stated, contributing to mass population displacement.

By 2040, it warned, a total of 5.4bn people – over half of the world's projected population – would reside in the 59 countries experiencing high or extreme water stress.

Lebanon, Singapore, Israel and Iraq were expected to be among the worst affected countries by 2040, with China and India also likely to be impacted.

"There are a number of countries in the Middle East that are going to be vulnerable to severe water shortages in the future," said Steve Killelea, founder and executive chairman of the IEP. "Countries like Iraq, Syria and Yemen will have low resilience to ecological stresses. We saw the impact wars had in those countries in terms of the numbers who were forced to migrate. Now they are also going to be facing increased stress on their water and food supplies."

The five most food insecure countries in the world are Sierra Leone, Liberia, Niger, Malawi and Lesotho, according to the report, with over half of these populations experiencing uncertainty in access to sufficient food to be healthy.

The report stated that Covid-19 had exacerbated levels of food insecurity and led to substantial price increases, a sign of the potential volatility provoked by future ecological change.

The Ecological Threat Register analyses risk from population growth, water stress, food insecurity, droughts, floods, cyclones, rising temperatures and sea levels. The report found that 141 countries would be exposed to at least one ecological threat by 2050.

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