Overview

Despite some slight improvements from previous analyses, nearly a third of the population of Afghanistan (13.1 million) remains in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis) or above, and are therefore in urgent need of humanitarian food security assistance. Afghanistan’s economy remains exceedingly fragile, with several key factors contributing to high food insecurity levels.

The country’s post-takeover economic contraction has continued, following a reduction in GDP of approximately 30 percent between 2021 and 2022. While economic contraction slowed down in late 2022 and early 2023, the overall economic situation remains precarious. Despite indications of a decline in inflation rates since the peaks of the previous years, food prices remain significantly elevated compared to pre-Covid levels, and the aggregate demand in the economy is still experiencing sluggish growth. Labour demand is still not on pace to match supply, and despite reducing prices, the average purchasing power remains low.

The decline in the total number of highly food insecure people (IPC Phases 3 or above) projected in the lean season (November 2023 – March 2024) compared to the same period in the previous years, and especially for Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity, is largely driven by the scale-up of humanitarian food assistance and emergency agricultural assistance in 2023. It can also be attributed to the improved climatic conditions, which manifested in an improved 2023 cereal harvest, and the forecasted above-average precipitation between November 2023 and March 2024.

In spite of a slight decrease, food insecurity levels persist at elevated 2023 cereal harvest, and the forecasted above-average precipitation largely driven by the scale-up of humanitarian food assistance and emergency agricultural assistance in 2023. It can also be attributed to the improved climatic conditions, which manifested in an improved 2023 cereal harvest, and the forecasted above-average precipitation between November 2023 and March 2024.

Displacement: In 2022 overall 32,424 individuals fled their homes due to conflict and a total of 1 out of 34 provinces had recorded some level of forced displacement. Moreover, the forced displacement of the estimated 1.3 million undocumented Afghans residing in Pakistan is likely to create a significant crisis for returnees into the country. UNHCR estimates that 770,000 people will need support at border points between now and July 2024.

Reduced income and unemployment: Households will experience increased financial strain due to reduced income stemming from high unemployment, reduced economic activities, and decreased remittances, especially from Iran. Restrictions on female participation in economic activities continue to put a strain on household income. Availability of agricultural labor opportunities will be average during the winter wheat planting season and minimal during the winter months. High unemployment rates across formal, informal, and agricultural sectors will lead to an above-average supply of laborers, driving down average incomes and contributing to increased food insecurity in the country.

High food prices: Food commodity prices, including wheat flour, have stabilized at levels higher than the long-term average. Small increases in main food commodities are expected, driven by seasonal scarcity, and likely extending through February. Fertilizers and seeds are less expensive than in their 2022 peak, but still significantly higher than in June 2021, and slightly higher compared to the last 3 years average. Prices are anticipated to rise during the winter wheat cultivation season due to higher demand. This may result in the overall capacity of farmers to benefit from favorable weather conditions. High food and energy prices, disruptions in international supply chains, and reduced incomes will impede households’ access to food and purchasing power, particularly for those living below the poverty line.

Evidence Level

*Catastrophe
**Famine
*44.5M
**5 - Famine
*1 - Minimal
**No humanitarian access
**5 - Famine
**Evidence Level

Amount of food assistance

Raised incomes

Return of remittances

High food prices

Reduced income and employment

Key Drivers

Climatic shocks: Accumulated precipitation was moderately below average compared to the long-term average in the last agriculture season, especially in the south, west, and northwest parts of the country. While Badghis province was affected severely by drought. Due to the El Nino phenomenon, the level of precipitation for the period between October 2023 and May 2024 is forecasted to be above average, including snowfall. This will likely have both positive and negative effects. Winter wheat harvests will benefit from the favorable 2023-2024 seasonal forecast. The likelihood of above-average precipitation, however, will also imply an increased risk of flooding from March to May 2024 in flood-prone areas.

map
The areas likely to be most affected are the Eastern and Southern parts of the country. Remittances from Western countries are expected to be stable or slightly below average while the flow of remittances from Gulf countries is expected to remain the same compared to last year, which was higher than average.

Due to ongoing political and economic tensions in Iran and Pakistan, a reduction in seasonal labor migration to both neighboring countries is anticipated. Both income from non-agricultural wage labor and labor demand may decrease due to the general economic slowdown, compounded by high competition due to continued high levels of unemployment, on top of the normal seasonal decrease of work opportunities during wintertime. The expected high volume of forcible deportations of Afghan migrants from Pakistan and Iran during the winter months in Afghanistan will likely induce an above-average supply of laborers to the market, driving average income down among those who access this labor opportunity, thus contributing to increased food insecurity in the country.

Wheat prices are likely to remain elevated compared to long-term averages but lower than the peak prices observed in mid-2022. The price of wheat flour, which has stabilized after a year-long decline, is expected to increase minimally through February due to seasonality. Despite a 4 million metric ton wheat harvest, covering 66 percent of estimated requirements based on NSIA population estimates, Afghanistan will still face a deficit requiring an import of about 3 million metric tons. Rice prices are expected to moderately increase, remaining significantly above average, mainly due to international rice price hikes and low household availability due to below-average production.

Due to higher demand in early winter (November – December), livestock prices are projected to remain near average levels. However, pasture will be scarce during winter, regenerating to average levels in February/March in warmer regions and in April/May in higher-elevation areas. Livestock body condition will typically be poor during winter due to limited grazing areas and lower fodder availability through February.

**Recommended Actions**

**Urgent advocacy and resource mobilization:** High-level advocacy and resource mobilization efforts should be undertaken to address the immediate food security needs of populations in IPC Phase 3 and above. It is crucial to ensure the sustained delivery of humanitarian assistance and active participation of female humanitarian staff in aid delivery.

**Humanitarian food assistance:** Continuation of food assistance, including increasing levels to cover all populations classified in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) is imperative. This will help prevent them from slipping into higher levels of food insecurity, including Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) for the most vulnerable.

**Scale-up of emergency agricultural and livelihood support:** For populations in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4), scaling up emergency agricultural and livelihood assistance is essential. This support is necessary to safeguard livelihoods, aid spring season crop cultivation, prepare for the next winter wheat season, and ensure the well-being of livestock. Special attention should be given to women farmers to prevent asset depletion and further deteriation of household food production capacity in rural areas.

**Gender-sensitive and responsive interventions:** Implement gender-sensitive food assistance initiatives and interventions specifically designed to support female-headed households, women, and children who face challenges in accessing their basic needs. These groups are often socially marginalized and require targeted support.

**Crop pests and disease monitoring:** Maintain monitoring and control measures for crop pests and diseases to prevent losses in agricultural production. By leveraging technology, fostering collaboration, and adopting sustainable practices, risks posed by pests and diseases can be mitigated and a stable and secure food supply can be ensured.

**Integrated programs:** Develop and implement joint integrated programs in collaboration with nutrition, health, and WASH clusters. These programs should aim to break the cycle of food insecurity, particularly for populations in IPC Phases 3 and 4.

**Collaboration between development and humanitarian programs:** Given the low resilience of the population and their vulnerability to shocks, it is crucial to foster close collaboration between development programs and humanitarian initiatives. This collaboration will address the root causes of food insecurity and enhance the resilience and livelihoods of the affected population.

**Trends**

Acute food insecurity in the current October 2023 period is at the lowest level recorded in Afghanistan since 2017. The improvement from previous years is the result of multiple factors: widespread humanitarian food security assistance (HFSA), including emergency livelihood assistance; a projected improvement in the cereal harvest; and a strengthening Afghan currency against the USD. The percentage of people classified in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in Pakistan has above decreased from 41 percent in September 2022 to 29 percent in October 2023 (post-harvest season). Similarly, during the lean season (November 2023 - March 2024), the proportion of acute food insecurity is projected to decrease from 46 percent to 36 percent compared to the same period in 2022. The prevalence of people in IPC Phase 4 facing Emergency levels decreased from 14 percent to 8 percent in October 2023 compared to the same period in 2022 post-harvest.