AFGHANISTAN: IPC Acute Food Insecurity Snapshot | September 2024 - March 2025

Published on 7 January 2025

Overview

Afghanistan continues to experience marginal improvement in the food security situation since 2021, despite facing a series of significant challenges over the past few years. These include the political transition in August 2021, impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, and multiple natural disasters like floods, earthquakes, and droughts. Additionally, the country is managing the influx of Afghan returnees from neighbouring regions, all of which continue to strain resources and impact food security.

In the current period (September to October 2024), an estimated 11.6 million people (25 percent of the total population) are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity, classified in IPC Phase 3 or above (Crisis or worse) and are in urgent need of humanitarian food assistance. Of these, about 1.8 million people (4 percent of the total population) are in IPC Phase 4 (Emergency) and around 9.8 million people (21 percent of the total population) are in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis). Out of the 34 provinces analysed, 31 are classified in Phase 3, while only three—Paktya, Khost and Ghazni—are classified in IPC Phase 2 (Stressed). This slight improvement in the food security situation can be attributed to improved agricultural production, the scale of humanitarian food and emergency agricultural assistance in 2023/2024 and improved household purchasing power.

Despite improvements compared to previous analyses, the projection period (November 2024 to March 2025), which coincides with the peak of the lean season, will see14.8 million people (32 percent of the total population) classified in IPC Phase 3 or above (Crisis or worse). This includes 3.1 million people (7 percent of the total population) classified in Phase 4 and 11.6 million (25 percent of the total population) in Phase 3. Overall, the number of people projected to be food insecure would be 1.1 million fewer than during the same period last year (November 2023 to March 2024), including half a million fewer people in Phase 4. This slight improvement in the food security situation can be attributed, among other factors, to the humanitarian food and emergency agricultural assistance and above-average agricultural harvests during the 2024 season.

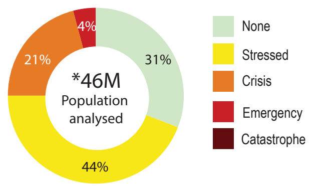
Since the end of 2021 when food insecurity peaked with 22.8 million people classified in IPC Phase 3 or above, after the political transition and the economic turmoil, households have continued to report improvements in their capacity to meet basic needs. However, food prices currently are still higher than the long-term average, including levels seen before COVID-19 and while the 2024 wheat harvests were above average, their yield still fell short of national levels, indicating a need for wheat imports or complementary humanitarian food assistance.

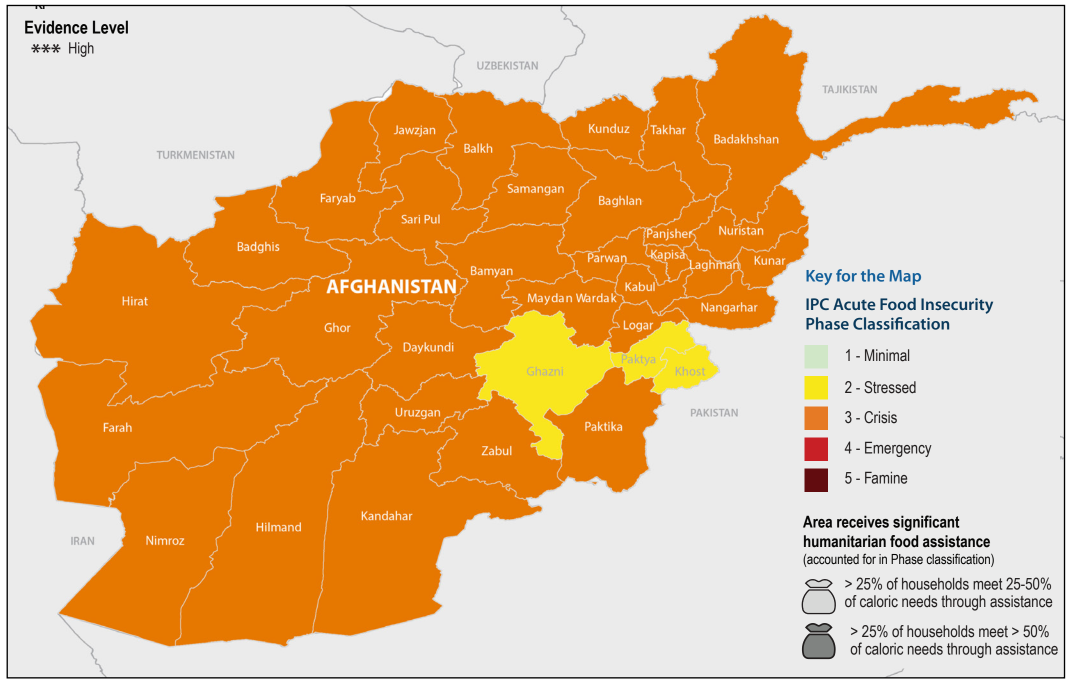
Current Acute Food Insecurity | September - October 2024

11.6M

Around 11.6 million Afghans are experiencing high level of acute food insecurity, classified in Crisis or Emergency (IPC Phase 3 or 4) between September and October 2024. This includes nearly 1.8 million people experiencing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of food insecurity

25% of the population is in IPC Phase 3 or above



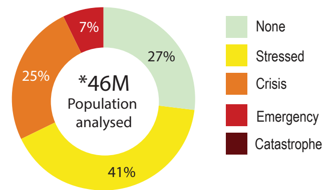


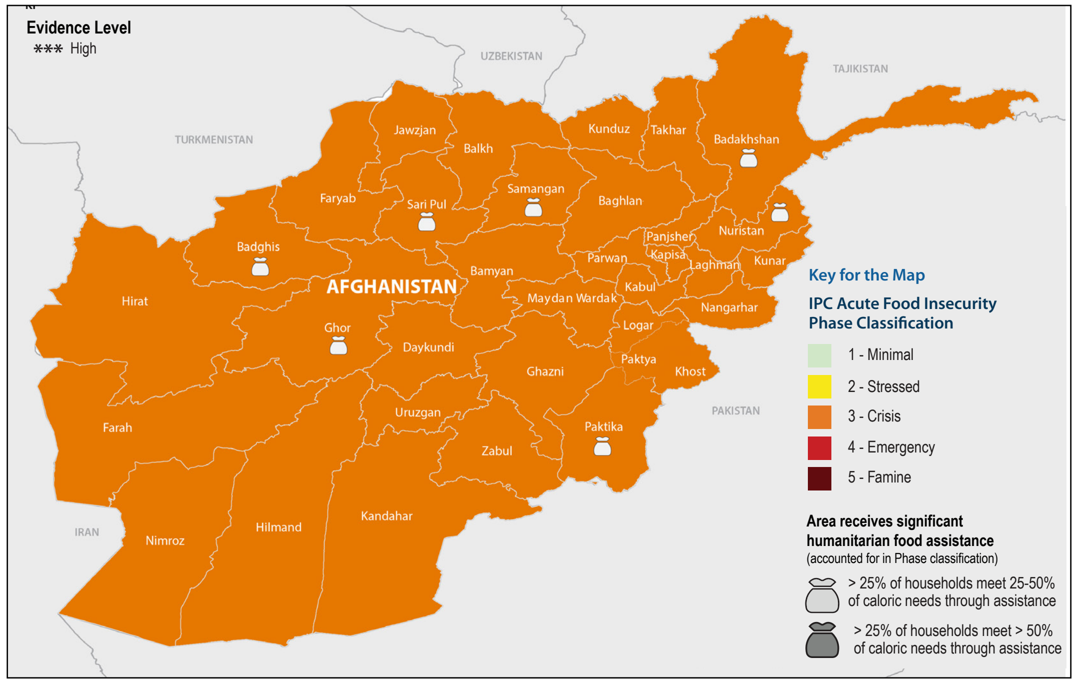
Projected Acute Food Insecurity | November 2024 - March 2025

14.8M

Between November 2024 and March 2025, a decline in the food security situation is expected, with around 14.8 million people likely to experience high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above)

32% of the population will likely be in IPC Phase 3 or above





Key Drivers

Climatic shocks: Cumulative precipitation at the start of the 2024/2025 precipitation season is forecasted to be below average, linked to the anticipated onset of La Niña conditions likely by October 2024. Snowpack and snow water volumes are expected to decline around September/October 2024, as usual, and are likely to remain below average in areas where snowpack typically persists during this period.

Macroeconomic fragility: Expected to deepen poverty and unemployment. The country is already experiencing high levels of household debt, and it has not recovered from the COVID-19 pandemic, multiple environmental disasters and the lingering impact of three consecutive years of drought as well as the forced return of Afghans from neighbouring countries.

High food prices: Food prices have continued to decline. Key factors include the Afghani's appreciation which reduced import costs, and the above-average harvests from the 2024 agricultural season. On a broader scale, a minor drop in global food and energy prices added to the downward pressure on the overall price level. Nevertheless, the prices of most food items remain significantly above pre-COVID levels.

Unemployment: High unemployment, decreased economic activities and reduced remittances are evident in the high debt rate. Income from non-agricultural wage labour as well as general labour are both expected to be below average due to the general economic situation and high competition amongst labourers. Restrictions on women employment are expected to continue.

Displacement: From January 2023 and during 2024, more than 757,000 Afghans returned from Pakistan and Iran. Iran has recently intensified its efforts, aiming to expel at least two million undocumented Afghans until March 2025, putting these returnees in need of assistance at the border crossings and in their areas of return.

IPC Analysis Partners

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Situation overview for the projection period

The weather and climate forecast predicts above-average temperatures and below-average precipitation from October 2024 to May 2025, due to La Niña conditions. This is expected to further strain agricultural productivity in the country, leading to diminished water availability for both crops and livestock.

The economic outlook remains challenging due to prolonged deflation, the appreciation of the Afghani, high unemployment rates, reduced economic activity, and adverse climatic conditions. These shocks, coupled with the return of Afghan refugees from neighbouring countries, will severely impact the economic situation, leading to widespread loss of livelihoods and decreased access to critical resources for millions of vulnerable households.

Despite a decline in global food prices, the demand remains depressed due to low incomes, and high unemployment. Employment, particularly in agriculture and industry, is expected to further decline during the winter season, reducing household purchasing power. The restrictions on female employment continue to limit household income, exacerbating poverty in many families. Remittance inflows from Iran are expected to decline due to reduced employment opportunities and the forced returnees of Afghans from both Pakistan and Iran.

Economic sanctions on Iran have further limited labour opportunities for Afghan migrants. In contrast, remittances from Gulf countries and Western nations are likely to remain stable. The return of Afghan migrants from Pakistan and Iran will likely strain the labour market, especially in urban provinces, contributing to below-average household income. As of September 2024, a total of 647,500 returnees arrived from Pakistan, mostly settling in the eastern and southern regions. These returnees continue to place pressure on host communities, compete for work with the host communities and increase strain on limited resources and facilities

Prices and market conditions of the major staple foods have decreased due to deflation and currency appreciation, although they remain higher than pre-COVID-19. Overall, food prices are expected to increase nominally (less than 5 percent) during the lean season, while supply levels are anticipated to remain stable.

Fuel and transportation costs are also expected to rise during the winter months, particularly in areas affected by heavy snowfall and road blockages, such as the Salang pass.

Limited rainfall and below-average snowpack are expected to negatively affect the planting winter wheat in rainfed areas, which may reduce the overall harvest for the 2024/25 season. Livestock conditions are expected to deteriorate during the lean season, limiting the availability of livestock products until March 2025.

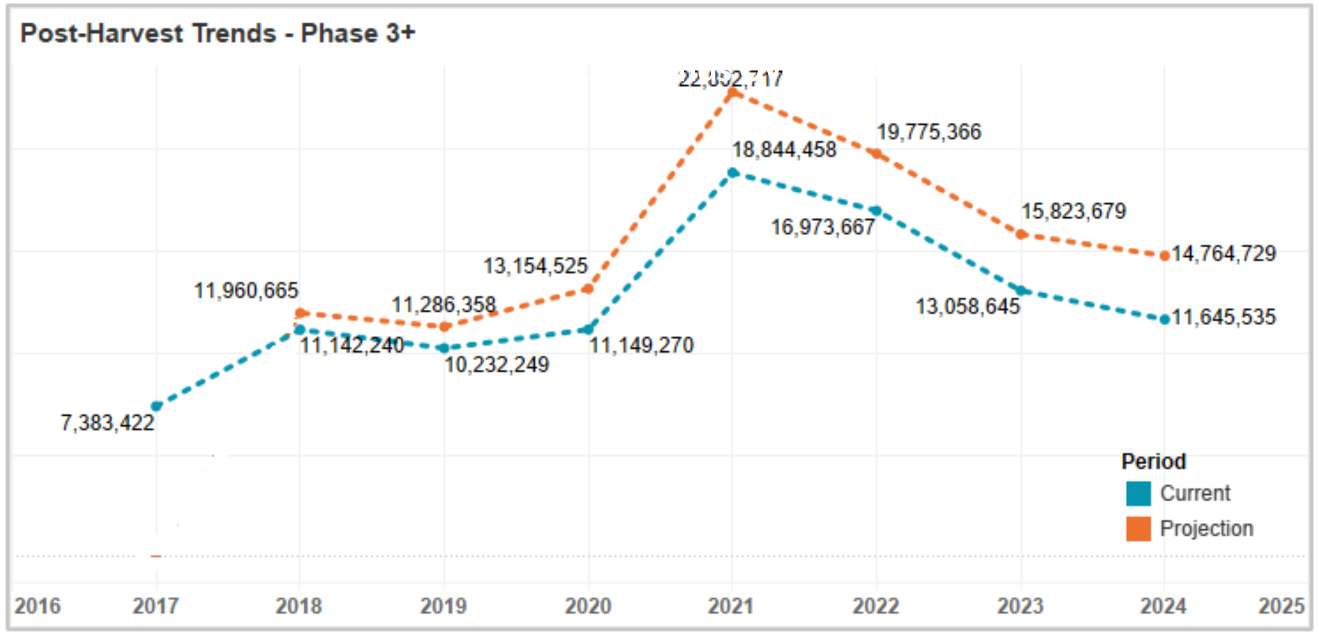
In terms of livelihoods, the non-agricultural wage labour demand is expected to remain below average, particularly due to the slowdown in construction and the ban on poppy cultivation, which was a significant source of income for many households. Casual labour opportunities will decrease throughout the cold season, further constraining household income. With continued high unemployment and continued restrictions on female employment, many households will face further reductions in income during the projection period. Pastures, livestock activity and conditions of rangeland vegetation are currently near average in some parts of the country, though below average in much of the north of the country. In contrast, eastern and northeastern rain-fed agricultural areas are experiencing above-average vegetative conditions. However, these favourable conditions are expected to remain seasonally sparse until February 2025. As temperatures begin to warm in February and March, vegetation conditions are projected to either stabilize or deteriorate, largely due to the anticipated combination of higher-than-average temperatures and below-average precipitation.

While some improvement in vegetation is expected during this period, it will likely be less pronounced than usual. Additionally, from March to May 2025, negative vegetative anomalies such as stressed vegetation due to drier conditions are expected to increase, further stressing rangeland conditions and potentially impacting livestock productivity across key regions. These developments could have significant implications for pastoral households, limiting the availability of forage and exacerbating the challenges posed by deteriorating livestock conditions during the lean season.

Humanitarian Food Assistance

Humanitarian food assistance for the projection period of November 2024 to March 2025, is expected to increase significantly, as compared to the summer harvest season, covering approximately 6 million beneficiaries (13 percent of the total population). Each vulnerable household selected for assistance will receive rations designed to meet 50 percent of their caloric needs, aimed at mitigating the severe food insecurity risks during the lean season.

Wheat remains a critical staple in Afghanistan, accounting for up to 66 percent of the population's daily caloric intake, primarily consumed as bread alongside vegetables and legumes. Of the country's 3.5 million hectares of cultivated land, two-thirds are dedicated to wheat production, including both irrigated and rainfed fields. Emergency agriculture programs have contributed to increasing production. For instance, FAO's wheat seed distribution programme during the 2024 planting season has supported 700,000 households which are expected to now being able to sustain their grain requirements for 6 to 12 months, contributing significantly to food security for vulnerable communities across the country.



Trends

Several factors, including humanitarian food assistance, an improved cereal harvest, increased income and a stable Afghan currency, have contributed to reducing food insecurity. The percentage of people facing acute food insecurity classified in Phase 3 or above during the past lean season (November 2023 - March 2024), is projected to decrease from 46 to 26 percent in 2025, compared to the same period in 2022/2023. The prevalence of people in Phase 4 is projected to decrease from 14 to 7 percent in 2025 compared to the same period in 2022 post-harvest.

Recommended Actions

Sustained humanitarian food assistance: With food gaps expected to increase during the winter/lean season, it is crucial to scale-up humanitarian food assistance for people in Phase 3 or above. This is essential to prevent them from descending into more severe levels of food insecurity.

Crop pests and disease monitoring: Maintain monitoring and control measures for crop pests and diseases to prevent losses in agricultural production.

Partner lifesaving and resilience activities: considering the population's limited resilience and susceptibility to shocks, it is essential to bridge the gap between immediate, lifesaving humanitarian assistance and longer-term basic needs support. This partnership will help address the underlying causes of food insecurity and bolster the resilience and livelihoods of the affected communities.

Integrated programming: With the deteriorated food security situation, implementation of collaborative integrated programs in partnership with other key clusters like Nutrition, Protection, Health, and Water, Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH) will be critical. These initiatives should focus on disrupting the cycle of food insecurity, especially targeting populations in Phase 3 or above to mitigate malnutrition and protection risks.

Gender sensitive action: Implementing food assistance and emergency agriculture initiatives and activities that are sensitive to gender considerations, specifically tailored to support households led by women, as well as women and children who encounter obstacles in accessing food and incomes, are critical. These segments of the population are frequently marginalized in society and necessitate focused assistance.

Advocacy and resource mobilization: In the current funding crisis which already hampers critical activities to improve food security, high-level advocacy and resource mobilization must be prioritized. Ensuring the continuous provision of humanitarian aid for the most food-insecure communities and activities to help communities grow their own food.

Publication date: 7 January 2025 *IPC population data is based on population estimates by Flowminder 2024. I Disclaimer: The information shown on this map does not imply official recognition or endorsement of any physical and political boundaries. I For more information please contact ipc@fao.org.

DISCLAIMER

FEWS NET agrees with the IPC conclusion that millions of people in Afghanistan are in need of urgent humanitarian assistance through March 2025. However, FEWS NET respectfully disagrees with the magnitude and severity of acute food insecurity as concluded upon by the IPC, especially as household purchasing capacity and food stocks have improved in 2024, thereby increasing access to food.