



A lifeline at risk: food assistance at a breaking point

Afghanistan country report

2025 September



World Food
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Foreword

The global humanitarian landscape is undergoing a profound transformation, driven by an unprecedented crisis in international funding. As major donors scale back their commitments, the ripple effects are being felt across the humanitarian system—threatening the ability of organizations like the World Food Programme (WFP) and its partners to deliver life-saving assistance to millions. In 2025 alone, WFP is facing a staggering 40 percent reduction in funding, with projections of USD 6.4 billion compared to USD 9.8 billion in 2024.

In response to this challenge, WFP initiated a study to examine the food security implications of the funding crisis. The first phase of the research revealed alarming projections: dramatic reductions in WFP's reach could severely undermine global food security. Building on these findings, the second phase focused on country-level realities—exploring how reduced foreign aid is reshaping humanitarian operations and affecting the lives of vulnerable populations. The study was conducted in five countries—Afghanistan, Haiti, Niger, South Sudan, and Uganda—each offering distinct political, economic, and social contexts that reflect the diverse settings in which these cuts are unfolding.

This in-country research explored the impacts of funding reductions through three key questions:

1. How does reduced Official Development Assistance (ODA) affect the economies of aid-dependent countries and specific government sectors?
2. How are funding shortfalls impacting WFP, local partners, and the broader humanitarian sector in their efforts to deliver assistance?
3. How are these cuts affecting—or expected to affect—people in need and their food security?

By combining rigorous quantitative analysis with rich qualitative insights, this study aims to provide compelling evidence to support global advocacy. The findings will inform strategic decision-making, guide operational adjustments, and ultimately contribute to safeguarding food security in a time of profound change.

Acronyms

ACRONYM	Acronym spelled out
AFN	Afghani (Afghanistan currency)
AMN	Acute Malnutrition (used with IPC classification)
ARTF	Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund
BSFP	Blanket Supplementary Feeding Programme
CARI	Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security
CFM	Community Feedback Mechanism
CP	Cooperating Partner
CSP	Country Strategic Plan
DFA	De Facto Authority
ECMEN	Economic Capacity to Meet Essential Needs
EU	European Union
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization
FCS	Food Consumption Score
FES	Food Expenditure Share

ACRONYM	Acronym spelled out
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
FSAC	Food Security and Agriculture Cluster
FTS	Financial Tracking Service (OCHA)
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GFA	General Food Assistance
GIEWS	Global Information and Early Warning System
HEB	High-Energy Biscuit
HNO	Humanitarian Needs Overview
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IDA	International Development Association
IDP	Internally Displaced Person/People
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
KII	Key Informant Interview
LCS	Livelihood Coping Strategies

ACRONYM	Acronym spelled out
MAM	Moderate Acute Malnutrition
MHNT	Mobile Health and Nutrition Team
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OCHA	UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
PDM	Post-Distribution Monitoring
rCSI	reduced Coping Strategies Index
SAM	Severe Acute Malnutrition
SFSA	Seasonal Food Security Assessment
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
USD	United States Dollar

ACRONYM	Acronym spelled out
VAM	Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping
VHI	Vegetation Health Index
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme
WHH	Welthungerhilfe (German humanitarian organization)

Key messages

Afghanistan's food security and nutrition crisis is deepening fast, and humanitarian funding cuts are an important driver. The international community can still prevent catastrophic outcomes if political, financial and operational choices are made urgently.



Afghanistan has deep, structural vulnerabilities that are being amplified by funding cuts

Even before the current funding crisis, Afghanistan ranked among the world's lowest in human development and most climate-vulnerable countries. Decades of conflict, a fragile economy heavily dependent on external aid, recurrent droughts, and weak basic services left the country highly exposed. With minimal fiscal space and a widening trade deficit, it faces social service collapse with severe consequences for its population.



Cuts in assistance are eroding diets and driving a faster-than-anticipated rise in severe food insecurity

The number of people in need of urgent food and livelihood assistance (IPC Phase 3 or above) was projected to decrease from 12.6 million in March to April 2025 to 9.5 million in May to October 2025, based in part on high agricultural production forecasts. However, persistent drought conditions this year in 19 of 34 provinces have severely reduced agricultural output. WFP data and on-the-ground monitoring indicate that the exclusion of households will result in at least a 26 percent increase in poor food consumption,¹ while communities consistently report children surviving on bread and tea.



Without urgent funding, Afghanistan risks an alarming surge in child wasting and preventable mortality

The closure of 298 nutrition sites in the first half of 2025 has significantly reduced programme coverage, with a 54 percent decline in mobile health and nutrition team sites since 2024. In southern Afghanistan, the closure of 38 WFP-supported nutrition sites has left over 141 000 people without treatment, including more than 82 000 young children. In districts with the deepest cuts, admissions for acute malnutrition are 16 percent higher, mainly children under 2 years old.



Households are normalizing extreme coping, including child labour and sale

Cuts have normalized severe and culturally unthinkable coping strategies: child labour, early marriage, sale of children, and sale of body organs. One mother described selling her 9-year-old daughter for AFN 120 000 (about USD 1 700) to pay debts. Others spoke of fathers taking their own lives after failing to find work. These are not isolated tragedies but indicators of a systemic collapse in households' coping capacity and erosion of social norms under pressure.



Effective targeting is being strained as vulnerabilities deepen and widen

WFP targeting directs aid towards the most vulnerable, but differences in the coping strategies employed by assisted and excluded households are marginal. For instance, 19–22 percent of both resorted to stress livestock sales and 10–14 percent of both resorted to consuming seed stocks needed for planting. Beneficiary numbers have already been significantly cut (by up to 67 percent) and rations halved progressively since 2022. While the funding cuts oblige further prioritization, it is increasingly a matter of rationing scarcity rather than meeting needs.



Returnees from Iran and Pakistan are a 'hidden caseload' – and numbers are staggering

In the first eight months of 2025 alone, 1.7 million Afghans returned to the country, including 1.4 million from Iran and 247 000 from Pakistan, with Iran alone sending back 17 300 people daily in July. Returnees represent lost remittances, an added burden on an already saturated labour market, and increased pressure on overstretched social services. They also remain largely invisible in food security assessments. This gap suggests that initial projections may significantly understate actual needs, while host communities face further strain on scarce resources.



Cuts are deepening gender inequalities

In a context where girls are already barred from secondary education, families also increasingly resort to early marriage and pulling girls out of school, compounding intergenerational deprivation. The double shock of aid cuts and restrictive policies accelerates the loss of a generation's female human capital.



Innovative solutions required to avert humanitarian collapse during winter months

Further WFP beneficiary cuts in 2025 – more than halving since 2024 – could push 2.4 million more people into IPC Phase 3 or above. A likely complete halt of General Food Assistance and Targeted Supplementary Feeding will have catastrophic consequences in the winter. Sustained diplomatic engagement to unlock funding, stronger inter-agency coordination, pragmatic coordination with the de-facto authority and innovative financing (including Gulf and Islamic social finance) are vital to avert a worse humanitarian crisis.

Introduction

Afghanistan remains one of the most fragile and aid-dependent countries globally. Successive decades of conflict, political isolation, and under-investment have deeply fractured social and economic development. The country ranks among the lowest worldwide in human development: literacy rates are below 40 percent, maternal mortality is among the highest in the world, and 41 percent of children under 5 years are stunted.

Agriculture is the backbone of the economy and the main source of livelihood for over half the population, but it is highly exposed to climate shocks, with access to land and livestock ownership becoming increasingly restricted as a result. Recurring droughts, floods and temperature extremes undermine crop and livestock yields, and erode household resilience.

Prior to the de facto authority's (DFA) takeover in 2021, external grants funded 75 percent of public expenditure and accounted for about 40 percent of GDP. Since then, the withdrawal of development aid and the



scaling down of humanitarian support have left a structural vacuum. At the same time, nearly 6 million Afghans have since returned from Iran and Pakistan, placing additional strain on the food system, housing and employment.

In 2025, Afghanistan is once again enduring one of the most severe food insecurity crises in the world amid even deeper cuts to humanitarian and development assistance and a geopolitical standoff with international partners that is embedding the country's isolation.

This study employs a mixed-methods approach to provide a comprehensive understanding of how funding cuts are impacting the country, the humanitarian sector, WFP's programmes, and the food security of vulnerable people. We also set out recommendations relevant to humanitarian actors.

Background

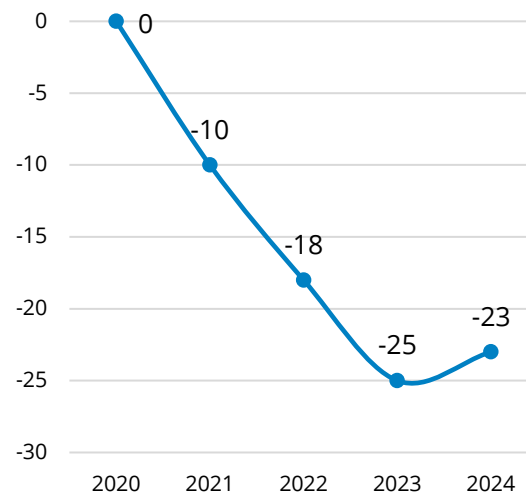
The political economy of Afghanistan

Afghanistan's economy has been in decline since 2021. GDP contracted by over 25 percent between 2020 and 2023, followed by a modest but insufficient rebound of 2.5 percent in 2024. Agriculture is a significant part of the Afghan economy, contributing at least 25 percent of GDP, alongside the trade and services sectors (around 50 percent).

The shock due to the reduction in official development assistance (ODA), which represented 40 percent of GDP before 2021, has been unprecedented. The cuts have left authorities unable to sustain basic service delivery, which is now dependent on limited donor support through the World Bank-administered and UN-implemented Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund (ARTF).

Remittances fell sharply from USD 789 million (4 percent of GDP) in 2020 to USD 320 million in 2021, and remain low at 1.9 percent of GDP, further threatened by mass deportations from Iran and Pakistan that have sharply reduced inflows.

Figure 1: Cumulative GDP change, 2020–2024 (%)



ODA accounted for **40% of GDP** before 2021

The Afghani currency has paradoxically strengthened from AFN 104.2/USD in January 2022 to AFN 69.2/USD in July 2025, partly due to strict capital controls and foreign exchange management. This has eroded export competitiveness, while imports rose by 41 percent in early 2025, widening the trade deficit. Afghanistan imports most of its wheat and fuel, leaving it highly exposed to price volatility and currency shocks.

Geopolitics further constrain recovery. Sanctions, frozen reserves, and lack of recognition of the DFA limit fiscal and monetary flexibility. Regional trade remains vulnerable to border closures (especially with Pakistan), while restrictions from Kazakhstan and the Russian Federation tighten wheat availability.

Without renewed engagement from international actors, the macroeconomic environment will remain fragile, aid-dependent, and exposed to shocks.



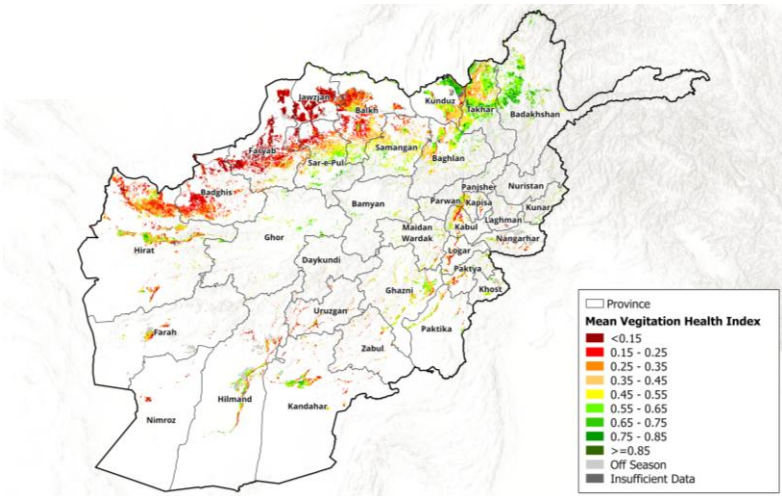
Food security

The most recent IPC analysis (April 2025) projected that 9.5 million Afghans would face Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above) levels of acute food insecurity during the May to October 2025 post-harvest period down from 12.6 million 6 months earlier. While these numbers suggest improvement, the drivers of food insecurity indicate a worsening crisis across all four dimensions:

Availability: Afghanistan faces a structural wheat deficit of 2–3 million metric tonnes each year. According to FAO-GIEWS,² this year’s harvest is projected to be below the 2019–2023 average due to the ongoing drought described by some as the worst since 2018. Assistance cuts mean an even greater deficit that will be difficult to fill both at household and macro levels due to prevailing conditions.

Access: Unemployment has spiked, wages stagnated, and returnees add labour competition to a saturated market. With low food aid rations (50 percent of daily requirements), beneficiaries’ ability to purchase food is sharply curtailed. Communities highlight families relying on child labour: “We had to take our children

Map 1: Afghanistan, Mean Vegetation Health Index (Season 1- Crops) As of 10 May 2018



The Weighted Mean Vegetation Health Index is an indicator used to assess the severity of drought and overall vegetation health during a crop growing season. It is derived from the Vegetation Health Index (VHI), which combines vegetation condition and temperature condition data.

Source: WFP

out of school and send them to sell ice cream in the streets.” (focus group participant, Ghulam Dag, 2025).

Utilization: Some diets have shifted to bread and tea, with sharp reductions in protein and micronutrient intake. Households report skipping meals and

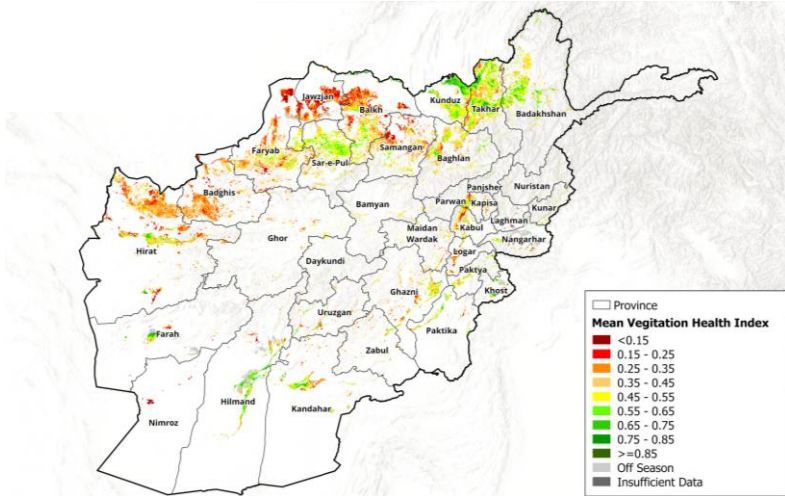
adults sacrificing their own food consumption so that children can eat. Water and sanitation challenges compound the risk of disease.

Stability: Border closures and import dependence expose markets to volatility. Humanitarian pipelines, once a stabilizing

factor, are now uncertain, leaving households exposed to sudden shocks.

In summary, decimated production, weakening purchasing power, and increasingly staple-based diets all point towards rising food insecurity in the coming months, particularly during the winter (lean) season.

Map 2: Afghanistan, Mean Vegetation Health Index (Season 1- Crops) As of 10 May 2025



IDPs and returnees face heightened food insecurity

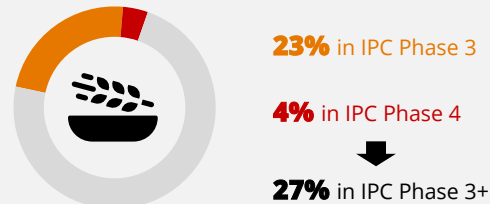
According to the April 2025 IPC analysis, 27 percent of residents or 12.6 million people were in IPC Phase 3 or above during March to April 2025.

Estimates based on the 2024 Seasonal Food Security Assessment (SFSA) indicate that out of the 8.8 million IDPs and returnees, 56 percent or 4.9 million individuals were moderately food insecure and 2.7 million were severely food insecure from November–December 2024 (CARI methodology).³



High levels of acute food insecurity among residents, March–April 2025

Total population: 46 million people



Source: IPC, June 2025

High levels of acute food insecurity among displaced people

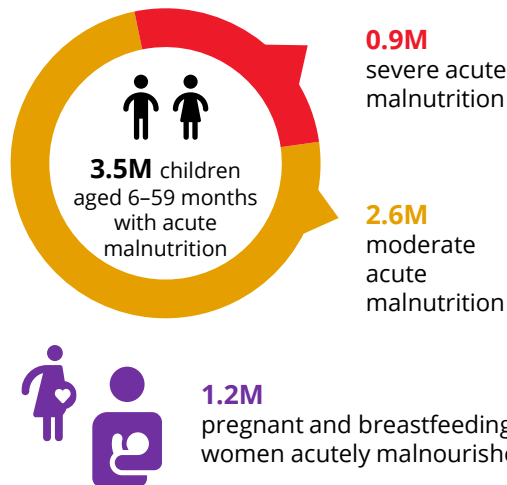


Source: CARI methodology, SFSA data

Nutrition and health

Afghanistan remains one of the world's most severe nutrition crises, with 41 percent of children under 5 years stunted and 9.5 percent wasted. From November 2024 to May 2025, 28 out of 34 areas were classified in Serious or worse (IPC AMN Phase 3 or above) with four In Critical (IPC AMN Phase 4), according to the IPC acute malnutrition analysis. The health and nutrition system, previously 80 percent donor-funded, has contracted dramatically.

Malnutrition remains a silent crisis, and assistance cuts are aggravating access



Source: Afghanistan IPC January 2025

barriers and treatment gaps, with likely devastating consequences on women and children.

Service reduction: The closure of 298 WFP/UNICEF nutrition sites due to funding cuts has led to sharp drops in admissions for severe and moderate acute malnutrition (SAM and MAM), not because children were healthier, but because treatment was unavailable. When limited assistance resumed, admissions spiked, revealing unmet needs.

“When there was support, our children received special food at the clinic. Now the clinic is closed, and we have nothing.”

FGD, Chak, 2025


Dietary degradation: Families report children eating bread and tea only, with no vegetables, pulses, or milk, while adults often skip meals.


Mortality risk: Untreated severe acute malnutrition can be fatal in children, and current cuts risk triggering a surge in preventable deaths.


Long-term impacts: Chronic malnutrition erodes cognitive development, education outcomes, and future productivity.


Key stakeholders


The humanitarian and development response in Afghanistan is delivered largely through international actors, with limited engagement from the DFA due to the lack of international recognition. This creates a constrained context for engagement, with uncertainty around the extent to which partnerships between international actors and the authorities can develop. While the DFA released a five-year National Development Strategy in April 2025, there is limited information on what actions have been implemented and, equally so, on the efforts undertaken in support of the humanitarian response.

 **Clusters:** There are seven active humanitarian clusters, of which the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster, FSAC (FAO/WFP/WHH-led) and Nutrition Cluster (UNICEF-led) are the central coordination platforms for food security and nutrition activities respectively.

 UN agencies, national NGOs and international NGOs continue to be the backbone of delivery but face growing resource shortfalls and restrictions on female staff participation, especially in health and nutrition.

 The IOM-led Border Response Consortium co-implements reception services for returnees at border points and provides immediate assistance to support their movement and settlement in areas of return. Various sectoral activities are delivered at the border. For food security specifically, a lifesaving package consisting of high-energy biscuits (HEBs), a hot meal, and cash for food is provided. Returnees who meet the stated criteria also receive a one-off cash transfer to facilitate relocation to their preferred areas.

 Donor presence in Afghanistan is minimal, and funding remains overwhelmingly humanitarian with cuts amid high needs and an extremely fragile situation. Predictability and multi-year commitments are limited, further complicating planning.

 The DFA regulate humanitarian access and impose restrictions, but their lack of international recognition precludes direct funding and undermines meaningful engagement as well as national ownership of systems. The DFA restrictions on women and girls remain severe and limit their contribution to household general welfare and the overall economy.





The contraction of funding has not only reduced coverage but also weakened synergies among partners. Previously, sectoral linkages such as food assistance tied to nutrition screening were possible at scale. With resources now siloed and short-term, many of these cross-sector benefits are lost. Agencies often compete for shrinking budgets rather than align for complementary impact.

At the same time, the crisis has generated a new momentum, particularly within the Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC)

to explore tighter collaboration and maximize limited resources through, for example, aligning targeting criteria, sequencing food distributions with livelihood inputs, and linking cash transfers to nutrition outcomes. Similar thinking is emerging in the Nutrition and Health Clusters, where service delivery is being co-located to reduce duplication. While these are still early steps, they signal an opportunity to leverage the cluster system not just for coordination, but for integrated, multi-sectoral response.

WFP operations

WFP’s operations in Afghanistan, as per the 2018–2025 Country Strategic Plan, combine emergency food and nutrition assistance (including the innovative hotspot famine-prevention approach) with resilience-building and climate adaptation projects. In 2024, WFP reached 11.8 million people (6.5 million of them women and girls) with emergency rations, supplementary feeding, school meals, vocational training, and agricultural support, despite escalating restrictions on women’s participation, climate shocks, and operational challenges. Yet, with funding sharply reduced from its 2022



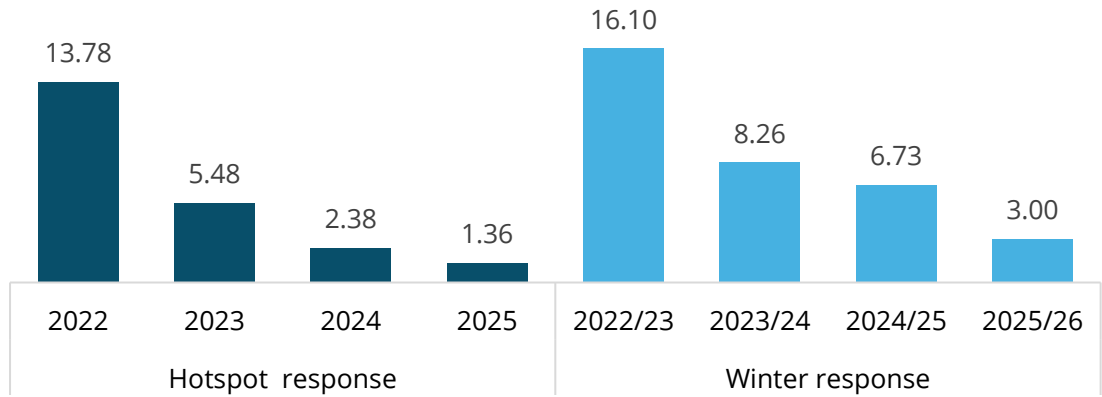
18.6 million people
reached in 2023



11.8 million people
reached in 2024

peak, WFP adopted a seasonal approach and prioritized the most food-insecure communities. As a result, the number of beneficiaries is declining significantly in 2025 compared to nearly 18.6 million reached in 2023. Figure 2 summarizes the drastic decline in the number of GFA beneficiaries since 2022, driven by funding cuts.

Figure 2: Number of GFA beneficiaries (millions, not unique) for the hotspot and winter responses since 2022



Note that the 2025 hotspot response includes 0.36 million assisted in Jun–July (actual) and 1 million planned for August–October.

Funding situation

Development funding

Afghanistan has experienced a historic contraction in aid flows, undermining both humanitarian delivery and longer-term development prospects.

Before August 2021, it was one of the most aid-dependent countries in the world, receiving more than USD 8 billion annually in combined development and security support. This represented roughly 40 percent of GDP and three-quarters of public expenditure.

From 2014 to 2021, the World Bank’s International Development Association (IDA) and the Afghanistan Resilience Trust Fund (ARTF) were the largest sources of funding for essential services in health, education, community development, agriculture and other sectors.

Following the DFA takeover in 2021, most bilateral donors suspended aid. In 2022, the World Bank resumed support for essential services through the ARTF and implementation by UN agencies, followed by the reintroduction of IDA in 2024.

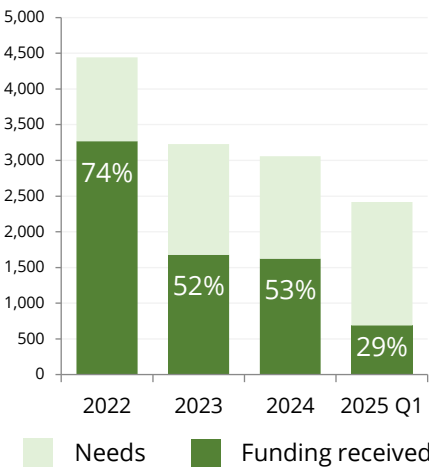
However, development assistance remains a fraction of pre-2021 levels, with no substantial resources for infrastructure, institution-building, or systems development. Key sectors such as agriculture, livelihoods and nutrition have inevitably seen reduced investment.

Humanitarian funding

Afghanistan’s Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) has been among the largest globally since 2022. In 2022, donors contributed about USD 3.2 billion (against a USD 4.4 billion appeal). In 2023, funding dropped to USD 1.7 billion, forcing agencies to cut coverage. By mid-2025, only 29% percent of the USD 2.4 billion HRP appeal had been funded.

This trend reflects not only declining envelopes but also increased earmarking, short cycles (6–12 months), and reduced predictability, which undermine pre-positioning in hard-to-reach areas and multi-sector linkages. Major donors have been the United States, European Union and Gulf countries, but overall funding gaps persist.

Figure 3: HNRP needs versus funding received (USD, millions)

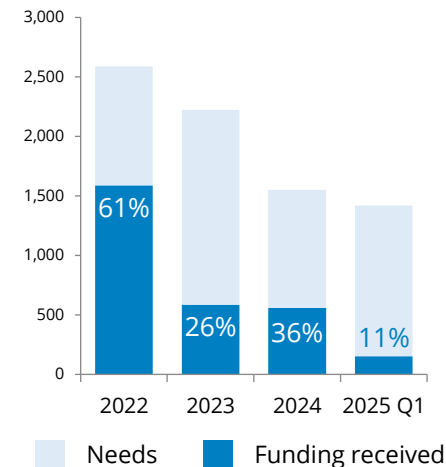


Source: FTS (OCHA)

WFP funding

As the lead agency for food assistance, WFP’s pipeline constraints are among the clearest markers of the crisis. In 2022, WFP reached over 16 million Afghans with general food assistance. By 2023, due to cuts, coverage fell to 13 million people, with ration sizes halved. In 2024–25, pipeline breaks forced WFP to cut off

Figure 4: WFP funding needs versus funding received (USD, millions)



Source: WFP

millions of households entirely from food distributions, and many areas shifted from monthly to bimonthly rations.

Resourcing shortfalls also disrupted nutrition-specific programmes (blanket and targeted supplementary feeding programmes contributing to surges in untreated moderate/severe acute malnutrition cases.

Implications of funding cuts

Methodology

To assess the effects of reduced funding on food security and beyond, this study draws on desk research, quantitative data analysis and qualitative interviews conducted in the field by expert WFP staff. More details in the methodology are given in annex.

Socio-economic impacts

The contraction of aid is reshaping Afghanistan's economy not only at the national level but also within the meso-economy i.e. the district and provincial markets, local trade systems, and labour dynamics that connect households to the broader economy. Cuts are not only reducing access to food aid but also undermining the local economy that depends on that purchasing power.

Currency and imports

Afghanistan remains highly import-dependent, especially for cereals, fuel and

medicine. Some 25–30 percent of wheat needs are imported on average annually, though it can be more in poor harvest years. With reduced aid inflows, which were an important source of foreign exchange, it will be increasingly difficult to source dollars, pushing up transaction costs for wheat, rice and fuel. While the currency (Afghani) has remained artificially stable due to capital controls and remittance inflows, this stability is fragile.

Market and labour dynamics

Discussions with traders revealed that provincial and district markets are deeply tied to humanitarian activity. In Chak district, they reported having lost 25–50 percent of turnover when cash transfers or food distributions stopped:

"People stopped buying meat or oil and only ask for the cheapest flour."

Traders, Chak



Shopkeepers in Nangarhar claimed that aid distributions “anchored demand,” sustaining local commerce. Traders also reported a growing number of customers purchasing on credit, raising the risk that these small, undercapitalized businesses could shut down in the short to medium term.

The labour market is similarly depressed. Agricultural and unskilled wage rates have fallen sharply since 2021, from about AFN 350/day to AFN 200–220/day in urban centres, representing around a 40 percent decline. In focus groups, people recounted “two or three men competing for each day job,” highlighting how returnees from Iran and Pakistan add further pressure on an already over-saturated labour market.

Deflationary trends and food price volatility

Contrary to expectations, given Afghanistan's economic fragility and international isolation, the country has entered a deflationary cycle. According to the World Bank, consumer prices fell by 1.5–2 percent in 2023–24 and, illustratively, national wheat prices have also been declining (Figure 5).

This trend is partly driven by the spiralling effects of reduced humanitarian funding (Figure 5), which has weakened aggregate demand. Traders report fully stocked shelves but few buyers; in Nangarhar, sales have dropped by as much as 40 percent. The withdrawal of humanitarian assistance reduces foreign exchange availability and household purchasing power. This initially causes short-term price increases for staples like wheat flour, followed by medium-term deflation as demand collapses, undermining both household access to food and the viability of local markets.

As a result, traders are increasingly selling on credit, with community debt logs growing longer. Declining prices are occurring alongside falling wages and incomes, pointing to stagnation rather



than recovery. From a food security perspective, households remain unable to afford even cheaper goods. WFP's cost of diet study found that 78 percent of households cannot afford a nutritious diet. Local traders confirmed this reality, noting that:

“Even when flour is cheaper, people are buying less because they don't have cash”

Local traders

with many small shops now being forced to close.

Long-term consequences

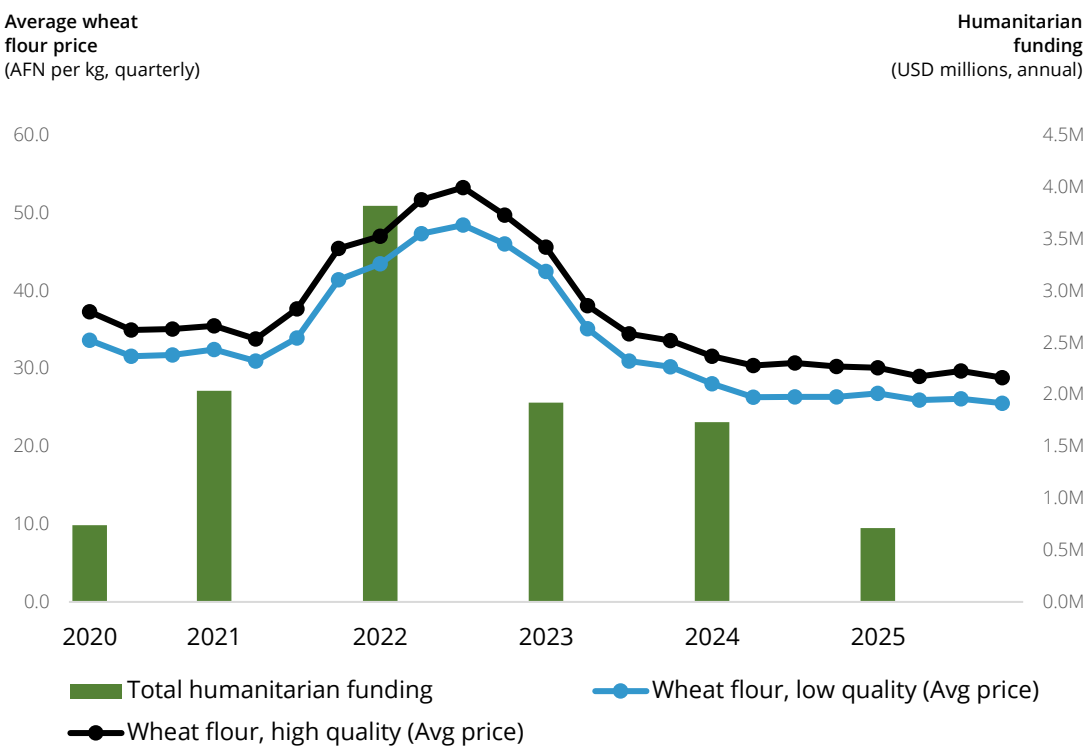
These dynamics threaten to hollow out Afghanistan's meso-economy. Traders are scaling back orders to wholesalers, transporters are moving fewer goods, and daily wage earners are losing income

opportunities. With development investment frozen, infrastructure gaps and credit constraints are compounding stagnation, now marked by weakening market functionality at the local level. As one elder in Wardak summarized:

“Markets are here, but they are empty of buyers. The village has no work, so there is no future.”

Elder, Wardak

Figure 5: How food prices are correlated with humanitarian assistance in Afghanistan's markets



Source: OCHA FTS; WFP VAM)

WFP, local partners and the broader humanitarian sector

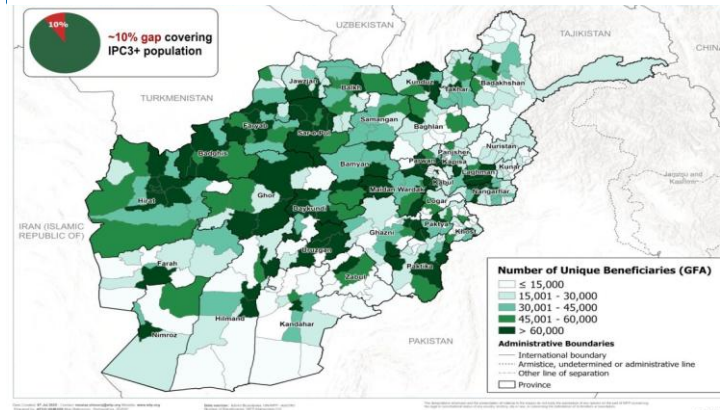
As a result of the funding cuts, the humanitarian footprint is shrinking with WFP and partners closing programmes/facilities, reducing rations/beneficiaries, or withdrawing entirely.

As of August 2025, WFP is operating with 25 percent fewer co-operating partners (CPs) compared with 2024, with a greater reduction (nearly 40 percent fewer) in international. Figure 6 illustrates the significant reduction in WFP operations since 2022.

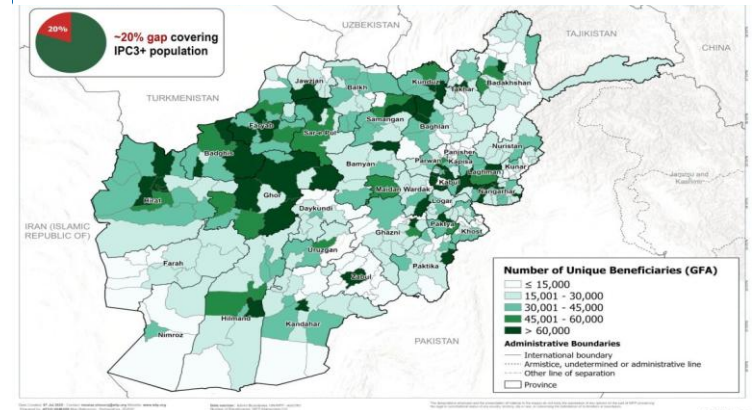
In June and July, Afghanistan had to identify and assist only 4 percent of the 9.5 million people in IPC Phase 3 or above for the hotspot response, with more severe prioritization planned in the winter season when needs increase. Assistance programmes have become more volatile and uncertain, and communities report distress from one-off assistance cycles, which undermine trust and fuel coping strategies like child marriage, child labour, or migration.

Figure 6: WFP GFA coverage from 2022 to May 2025

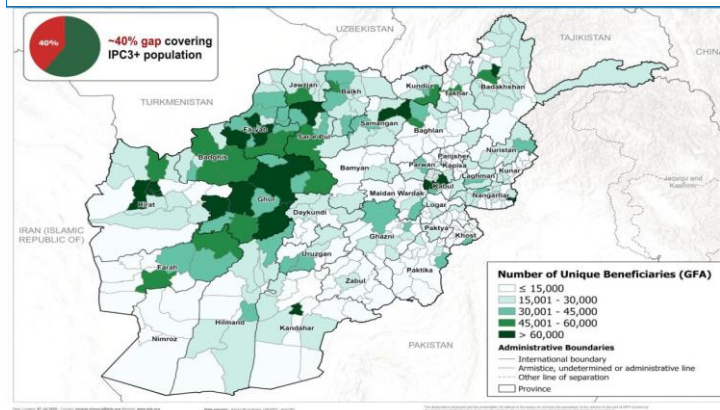
January – December 2022



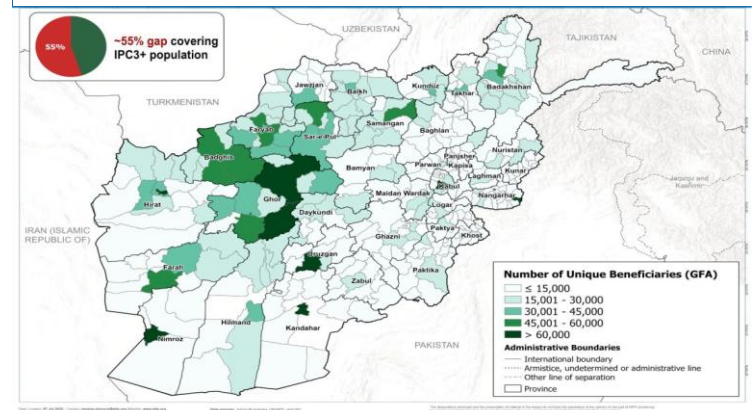
January – December 2023



January – December 2024



January – May 2025



Source: WFP AFG Early Warning and Famine Prevention Analysis

Similarly, in the absence of strong state institutions and a constrained political engagement context, there is a collapse in the development sector with no meaningful systems-building, leaving partners and clusters to fill governance, coordination and delivery gaps. Specifically:



Agriculture The loss of seed, fertilizer and irrigation support is undermining agricultural production, while distress sales of livestock are depleting household assets. The ongoing drought has not only reduced rainfed production but also depleted groundwater sources that are crucial for irrigation in Afghanistan.



WFP/Mohammed Hasib Hazinjar



Health and nutrition The closure of 298 WFP/UNICEF nutrition sites – around 10 percent of the total – has drastically reduced access to lifesaving support in affected areas. This comes against a backdrop of cuts to malnutrition prevention programmes. Shortages of drugs and staff, coupled with severely constrained treatment for severe malnutrition, risk triggering a surge in preventable deaths.



Education Reduced humanitarian funding compounds restrictions on girls' education. Families pull children out of school due to costs or so they can work. Learning for those who remain in school is compromised by poor diets.



Social protection Even before the DFA takeover in 2021, Afghanistan's social protection system was weak. For example, the Martyrs and Disabled pensions and the Citizens Charter programmes each supported a small fraction of the population and were suspended in 2021, along with the World Bank's efforts to support pension reform. In the absence of national systems or stand-alone

programmes, social protection support since 2021 has been grounded in humanitarian and development agencies' safety-net programming such as cash, in-kind and service provision in the health, nutrition and education sectors, including school meals, many of which are supported by the World Bank. Without sustained assistance, humanitarian cash and voucher programmes are shrinking. The more development or safety net style cash+ programmes are still being sustained (at least until the end of 2026) amid an uncertain funding outlook.



Infrastructure Since 2021, donor-funded rural development and community assets (dams, irrigation canals, feeder roads) have largely stalled, leaving communities vulnerable.

In summary, while there has been reliance on clusters and external actors to ensure delivery, this cannot substitute for a coherent national development strategy. Yet assistance cuts are now hollowing out both sectoral systems and coordination mechanisms, exacerbating humanitarian dependence while blocking pathways to sustainable recovery.

Food security and nutrition implications of the cuts

The consequences of funding cuts are cascading across food security and nutrition. They are visible in deteriorating household food consumption, rising admissions to malnutrition centres amid heightened barriers to treatment, and the normalization of extreme coping.

These dynamics combined point towards a worsening humanitarian crisis with severe long-term consequences.

Food consumption is crumbling among excluded households, with gendered disparities

WFP’s post-cut monitoring consistently indicates rising food insecurity among excluded households.

The latest analysis shows a 26 percent increase in poor food consumption, with 88 percent of households that previously had acceptable consumption now falling to borderline or poor levels.

Female-headed households are disproportionately affected, with 60 percent reporting poor consumption compared with 53 percent of male-headed households.

“We used to cook rice and sometimes meat once a week. Now my children only eat bread dipped in tea”

Mother, Ghulam Dag

Acute malnutrition is spiking

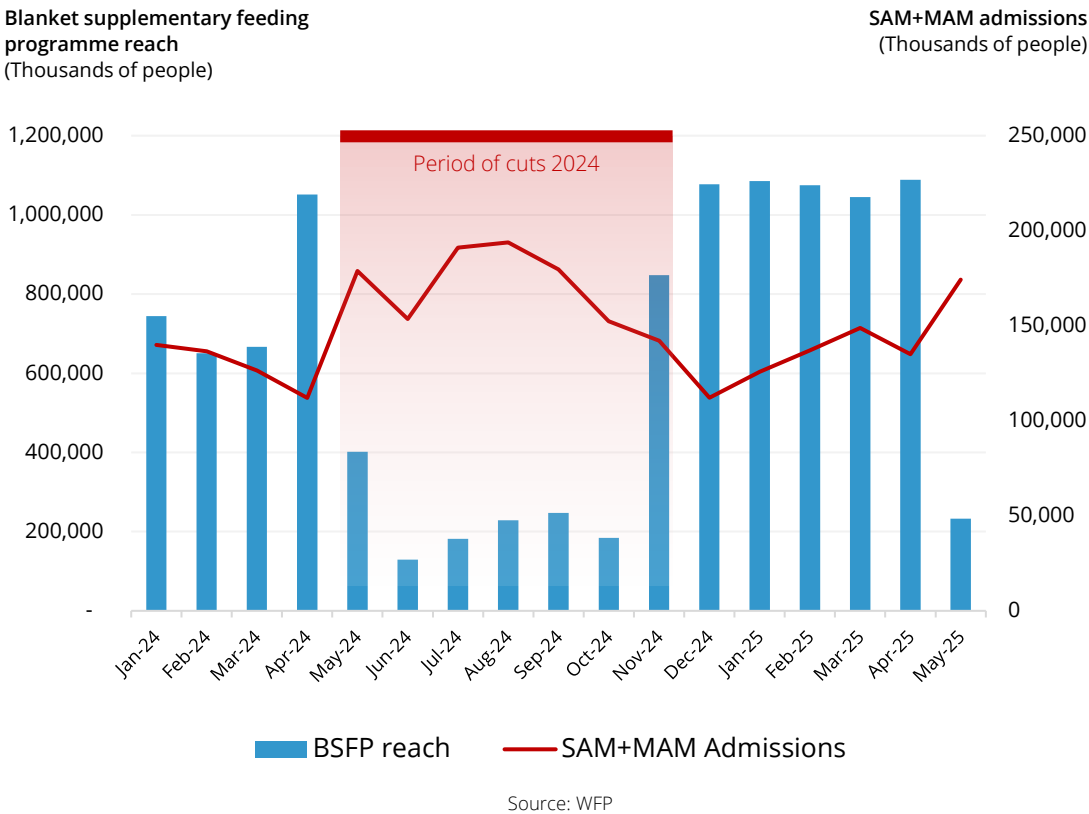
In Southern Afghanistan, the closure of 38 WFP-supported nutrition sites has left 141 121 people without treatment, including 82 336 children under 5 years and 58 785 pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Nationally, between January and July 2025, the closure of 298 nutrition sites has reduced programme coverage, with a 54 percent decline in mobile health and nutrition team (MHNT) sites since 2024.

WFP analysis shows that in districts with the deepest cuts, admissions for acute malnutrition are 16 percent higher than pre-cuts, and over 80 percent of admitted children are under 2 years old (Figure 7).

Without urgent funding, Afghanistan risks an alarming rise in child wasting and preventable mortality.

Figure 7: Significant rises in admissions to SAM and MAM treatment programmes observed following cuts to BSFP programmes



“Our community is facing extreme poverty with few jobs in sight ... people are barely surviving ... many of the young children are inevitably falling into malnutrition. Now there is no service to help them recover”

Father, Uruzgan province

This service reduction is compounded by unaffordable diets (78 percent of Afghans cannot afford nutritious food), weak livelihoods and recurrent droughts. In some districts, the absence of female health workers has left mothers unable to seek care:

“The female doctor was sent away, and we cannot go to a man.”

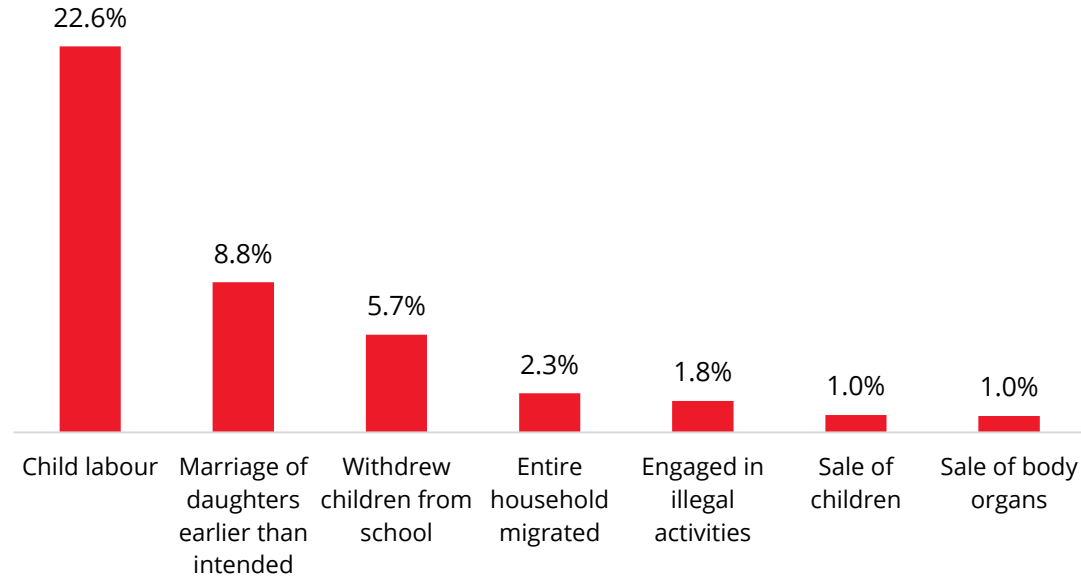
Mother

Without reversal of funding cuts, Afghanistan faces a real risk of abnormal increases in child wasting and mortality.

Severe coping is becoming normalized

The desperation triggered by food assistance cuts is driving households into culturally unthinkable strategies: child labour, early marriage, even the sale of children and body organs (Figure 8).

Figure 8: Adoption of severe coping strategies in prioritized areas



Community Feedback Mechanism (CFM) data confirm the trend: in 2024–2025, 12 callers reported cases of suicide, child sales and blood selling.

These are not isolated tragedies. They represent a systemic erosion of social and moral boundaries, with women, children, the elderly and persons with disabilities suffering most.

Razor-thin margin between prioritized and de-prioritized households in a context of widespread need

An analysis of the latest PDM data suggests that WFP’s targeting has been effective in principle: assistance reaches districts with higher levels of hunger and severe coping. However, the differences in coping mechanisms in the face of food shortages are marginally small. For instance:



22 percent of households in prioritized areas resorted to stress sales of livestock

compared with 19 percent in deprioritized areas.



14 percent of households in prioritized areas consumed seed stock compared with

10 percent in deprioritized areas.



“Vehicles filled with children travel daily to Jalalabad for work, returning at night. Most are under 12 years old.”

Father, Nangarhar

“I sold my 9-year-old daughter for AFN 120 000 (about USD 1 700). I had debts and no food. There was no other choice”

Mother, Nangahar province

“A man tried many times to find work. When he failed, he took his own life because he could no longer feed his family.”

Male participant, Nangahar province

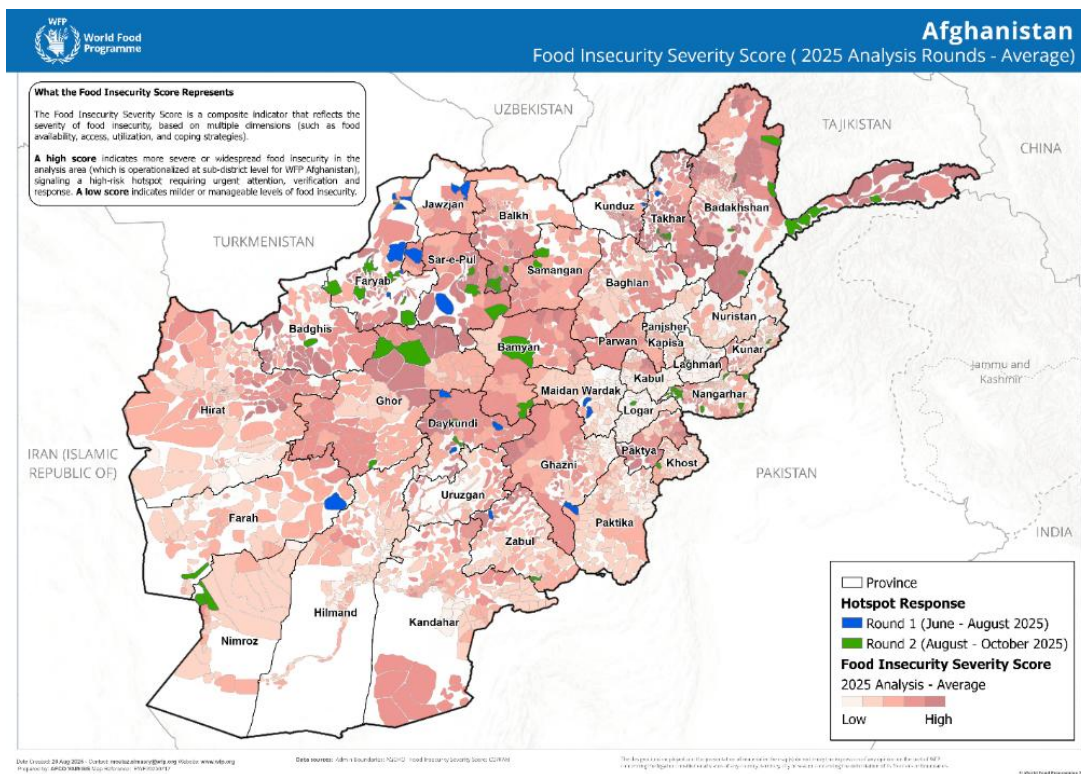
"Whether you are on the list or not, we are all struggling to eat."

Participant, Chak

"The assistance divides us, but the hunger is the same"

Community leader, Chak

Figure 9: An illustration of the inadequacy of the scale of assistance relative to the high prevalence and severity of food insecurity



Source: WFP AFG Early Warning and Famine Prevention Analysis



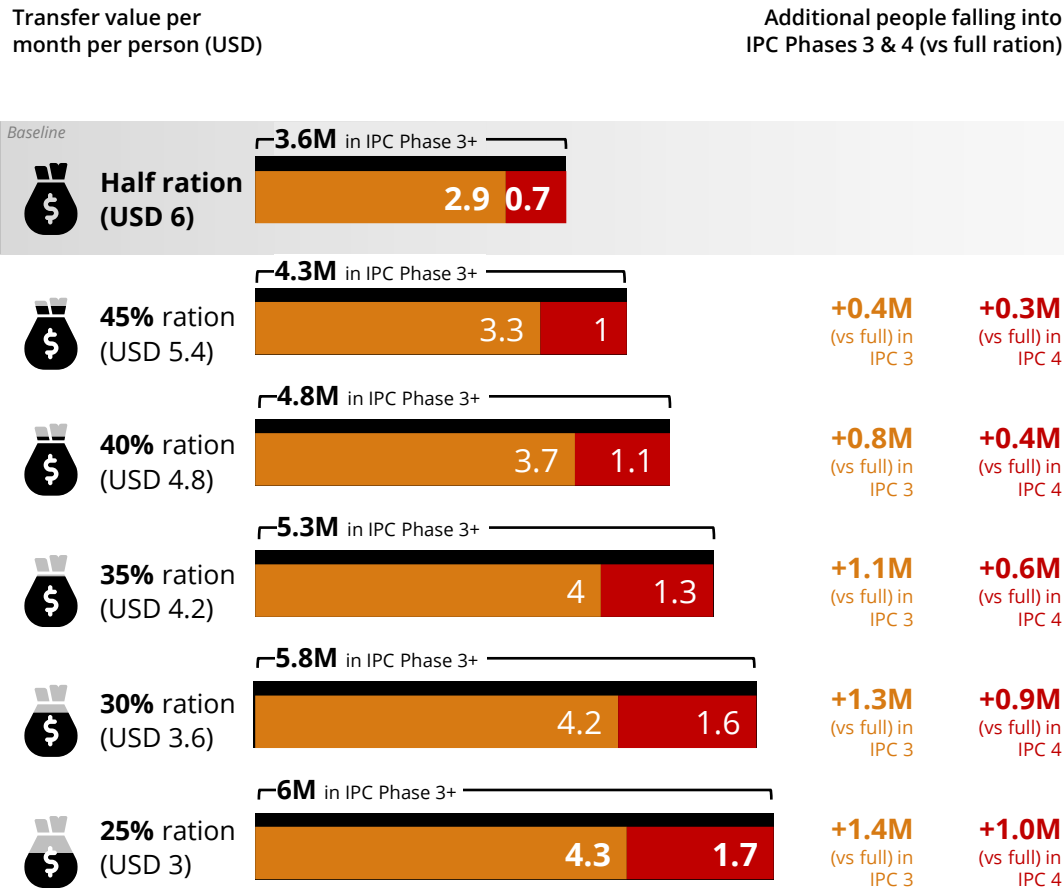
Planned cuts will have devastating impacts in the 2025–26 winter

With WFP planning to significantly reduce the caseload in 2025, including over the winter season, the consequences will be devastating. Current transfers are already inadequate: households receive USD 6 per capita per month, only half of the required USD 12.

Out of the 7.4 million people currently supported with USD 6 assistance, 3.6 million face high levels of acute food insecurity (2.9 million in IPC Phase 3 and 0.7 million in IPC Phase 4).

Quantitative correlation-based modelling suggests that if the planned cuts go ahead, an additional 2.4 million people could fall into IPC Phase 3 or above (1.4 million people in IPC Phase 3 and 1 million in IPC Phase 4), though the actual impact may be higher due to underestimation of coping dynamics and seasonal factors such as level of harvests and labour opportunities. This will represent a dramatic reversal in fragile food security gains for a country already facing multiple overlapping crises.

Figure 10: Potential assistance levels and implications for acute food insecurity



Source: WFP RAM

The big unknown – returnees’ food security situation not yet documented

In the year to mid-August 2025, 1.7 million Afghans have returned from neighbouring countries, with 1.4 million of them from Iran and 247 000 from Pakistan.

In July alone, 539 000 returned from Iran, averaging 17 300 returnees per day.

In early September, the Pakistani government is expected to initiate the repatriation of over 1.3 million additional Afghan refugees.

The sudden influx is straining communities that are already grappling with reduced aid. Returnees represent lost remittances for families left behind, while their own food security situation remains largely undocumented.

Food Security and Agriculture Cluster (FSAC) partners warn that official IPC projections may severely underestimate the real caseload, since returnees are not yet systematically captured. Meanwhile, IOM notes that many continue to leave Afghanistan, some using Iran and Pakistan as transit points, underscoring how worsening food insecurity could fuel renewed migration pressures.



Conclusions

The simultaneous contraction of humanitarian and development funding, compounded by climate risks, economic fragility, and mass returns from Iran and Pakistan, is driving a rapid deterioration in food security and nutrition. While assistance cuts have already eroded household food consumption, disrupted nutrition services, and normalized extreme coping strategies, the reality is that even with effective targeting, the margin separating the assisted from the excluded is razor-thin, underscoring the systemic vulnerability of nearly all Afghan households.

The persistence of the geopolitical deadlock over recognition of the DFA further constrains donor engagement and the sustainability of basic service delivery. With nearly 2.4 million additional people at risk of slipping into IPC Phase 3 or above in 2025 if cuts proceed, the costs of inaction will be devastating, both for Afghanistan's people and for regional stability. This is a humanitarian crisis that also tests the international community's commitment to avert preventable suffering. Responding to these interrelated crises will require a mix of political, operational and financial strategies/actions.



Unlock the political and financial space

There is a need to diligently pursue higher-level diplomatic engagement to reduce the geopolitical stalemate that has locked significant humanitarian and development funding. Such engagement would necessarily also seek to create the space for structured dialogue with the DFA to enable smoother operations, while maintaining principled humanitarian safeguards.



Reinforce engagement with the Afghan authorities

Greater programmatic engagement with the DFA, especially in food security, health and education, to sustain delivery of essential services is critical in view of sector-wide funding shortfalls. This could be done alongside UN-led multi-stakeholder negotiations for assurances of operational neutrality in view of concerns raised by donor organizations.



Prioritize the returnee crisis

Collaborate with IOM and relevant partners to systematically assess the vulnerability of returnees, integrating them into the Seasonal Food Security Assessment (SFSA) and IPC food security and nutrition analyses.



Maximize synergies and efficiency within the humanitarian system

Pursue ongoing cluster and inter-agency dialogue on programmatic and operational synergies, including shared targeting, sequencing of transfers, and joint use of digital registries.



Diversify funding sources

In view of the geopolitical deadlock, intensify individual giving campaigns to broaden the funding base and reduce dependence on a shrinking pool of traditional donors. In addition, explore innovative Islamic social financing instruments (zakat, waqf, sadaqah) to help fill critical shortfalls.

Annex

Methodology

Qualitative

To understand the implications of reducing humanitarian assistance, WFP conducted six focus group discussions (FGDs) and multiple market-based key informant interviews (KIIs) across three locations: Maidan Wardak province (Chak district) and Nangarhar province (Behsud and Chaparhar districts) on 11–12 August 2025. These areas were selected because all beneficiaries had been removed from assistance either at the end of 2024 or earlier this year. Additional KIIs were held with the International Organization for Migration (IOM), Food Security and Agricultural Cluster (FSAC), and senior WFP staff. Findings were further triangulated with information from the CFM, secondary sources, as well as other qualitative and quantitative analyses.

Quantitative

To understand the implications of reducing humanitarian assistance, we applied quantitative correlation-based modelling using household expenditure to predict variations in food consumption score (FCS) and vulnerability. Using post distribution monitoring (PDM) data from April–May 2025, the analysis estimated how FCS and vulnerability shift with every 10 percent reduction in expenditure derived from assistance. The model was designed to simulate the impacts of both gradual and complete funding cuts on food security and household resilience. It was first piloted in Cox's Bazar, Bangladesh (report link: [Impact of Cuts - Bangladesh](#)) to quantify the human cost of funding cuts.

Data sources

The PDM covered a total of 4 948 households of which 4 001 were retained for analysis following removal of households that received assistance before February 2025.

Model limitations

The model focused on household expenditure and does not account for changes in livelihood coping strategies (LCS), as these are captured as categorical rather than continuous variables. Vulnerability levels could be higher if variations in LCS were incorporated into the modelling.

Notes

1 The household food consumption score (FCS) is a composite indicator designed to reflect the quantity and quality of people's diets and is used as a proxy for household food security. Households are classified into three groups (poor, borderline and acceptable). Households with poor FCS do not consume staples and vegetables every day and never or very seldom consume protein-rich food such as meat and dairy.

2 Global Information and Early Warning System

3 The WFP Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security (CARI) methodology addresses the multiple dimensions of food security through five indicators: food consumption score (FCS); reduced coping strategies index (rCSI); economic capacity to meet essential needs (ECMEN); food expenditure share (FES) and livelihood coping strategies (LCS). Each surveyed household is classified into one of four food security categories: food secure; marginally food secure; moderately food insecure and severely food insecure.

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