

A lifeline at risk: food assistance at a breaking point

Global brief

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World Food
Programme

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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
APARO	Asia and the Pacific Regional Office
BSFP	Blanket Supplementary Feeding Programme
ESARO	Eastern and Southern Africa Regional Office
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FCS	Food Consumption Score
FGD	Focus Group Discussion
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRFC	Global Report on Food Crises
HQ	Headquarters
IDP	Internally Displaced Person/People
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification

ACRONYM	Acronym spelled out
MAM	Moderate Acute Malnutrition
MENAEERO	Middle East, North Africa, Eastern Europe and Central Asia Regional Office
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
ODA	Official Development Assistance
PDM	Post-Distribution Monitoring
SAM	Severe Acute Malnutrition
UN	United Nations
UNICEF	United Nations Children's Fund
US	United States
USD	United States Dollar
WACARO	West and Central Africa Regional Office
WFP	World Food Programme

Key messages



WFP estimates that its funding shortfalls could push 10.5–13.7 million people currently experiencing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) levels of acute food insecurity into Emergency (IPC Phase 4).¹



There is already ample evidence of impacts on food insecurity and malnutrition, some of which are irreversible, with women, children, refugees and IDPs particularly affected. We expect these impacts to worsen into 2026 as funding runs out.



The humanitarian system is under severe strain as partners pull back from frontline locations, creating a vacuum. Programme coverage has been slashed and rations cut. Life-saving assistance to households in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) is at risk, while preparedness for future shocks has dropped drastically.



The collapse in humanitarian assistance risks further destabilizing these fragile states. There is already evidence of broader impacts in some countries, such as forced migration.

Studying the implications of funding cuts

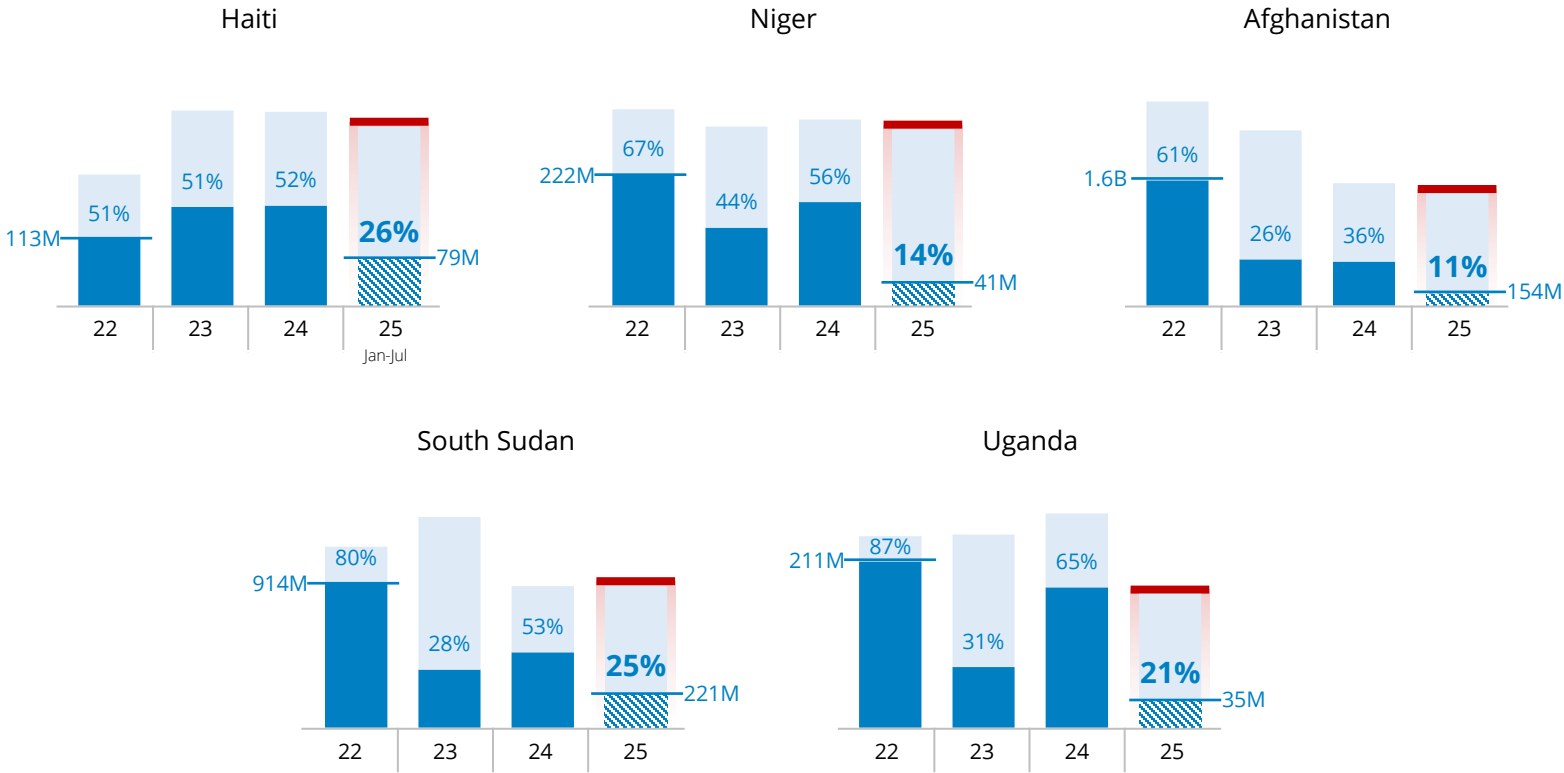
The number of people in need of urgent food and livelihood assistance has reached a record high, at 295 million people, according to the Global Report on Food Crises 2025 (GRFC 2025), just as major donors are drastically reducing their allocations to humanitarian and development activities. WFP alone is facing a 40 percent cut in funding in 2025, with a funding forecast of USD 6.4 billion compared with USD 9.8 billion in 2024.

WFP conducted a global risk analysis estimating how many people in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) could deteriorate into Emergency (IPC Phase 4) based on 2025 budget projections and consumption thresholds.²

A five-country study was conducted in Afghanistan, Haiti, Niger, South Sudan and Uganda (refugees). These countries offer a variety of political, economic and social settings that reflect the diverse contexts in which these cuts are occurring. They are also among countries with protracted food crises or persistently high levels of acute food insecurity.

This in-country study outlined the impacts of the funding cuts by considering the following questions:

Figure 1 – By end of July 2025, funding secured by WFP in the countries studied reached maximum 26% of their needs-based plan and as little as 11% at minimum



How does reduced Official Development Assistance (ODA) affect the economies of aid-dependent countries and specific government sectors?



How are the funding shortfalls affecting WFP, local partners and the broader humanitarian sector in their missions to provide assistance?



How are these cuts in assistance affecting or expected to affect people in need and their food security?

The emerging humanitarian vacuum

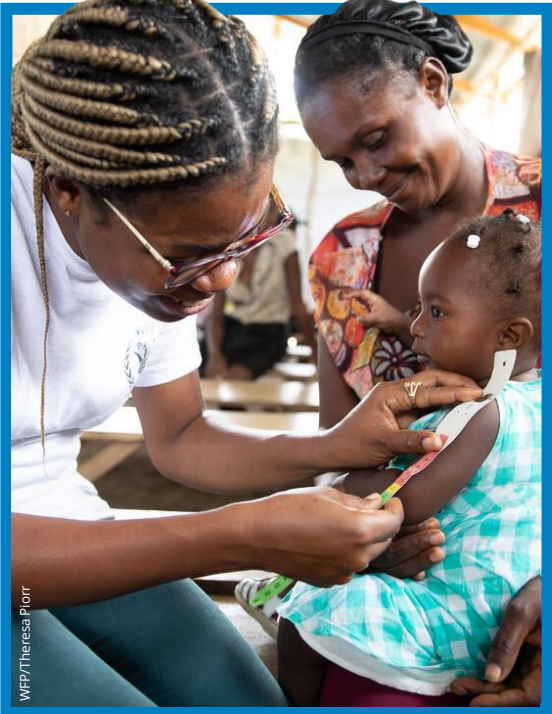
The findings show that humanitarian actors in affected countries are facing severe funding cuts that are critically compromising their operational capacity. WFP has had to reduce rations and prioritize its coverage: in Afghanistan, Haiti, Niger, South Sudan and Uganda, many or all beneficiaries have experienced ration cuts. In Niger, 900 000 people are no longer receiving assistance. In Uganda, over 1 million refugees have lost access to food assistance in 2025.

The funding cuts have started to erode WFP’s ability to meet the urgent need of people facing catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 5) in high-cost, hard-to-reach settings. For instance, WFP Haiti has stopped providing hot meals to IDPs, while funding for airdrops in South Sudan is running out.

WFP’s preparedness levels are also degraded: in Haiti, for the first time since 2016, there is no full physical contingency stock in the country at the height of the hurricane season. Humanitarians are less able to respond to new occurrences of

population displacement in Afghanistan, Haiti and South Sudan due to lack of resources. In such contexts, humanitarian responses are not keeping pace with spiralling needs.

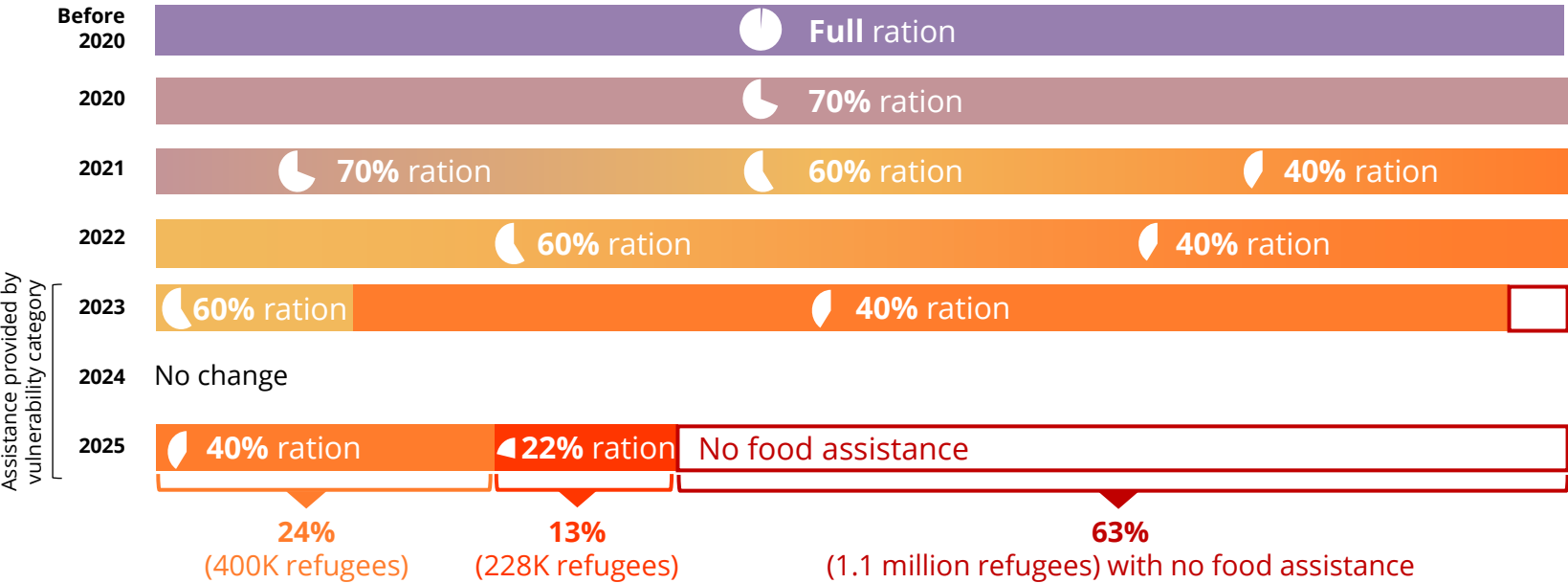
There is a humanitarian retreat. The funding cuts have meant that the UN and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) have closed their field offices. National and local NGOs have borne the brunt of the crisis, as they have less financial capacity than other actors. They report having cut back on their staff and expenditure in 2025.



The coverage of services has suffered. Extensive closure of nutrition centres, such as in Afghanistan (298 sites closed) and South Sudan (160 sites closed), have severely reduced service coverage.

These represent initial impacts, as some actors have managed to sustain their operations until now by relying on reserves. However, funding levels are expected to remain low in 2026, jeopardizing many additional activities.

Figure 2 - WFP ration size evolution in Uganda



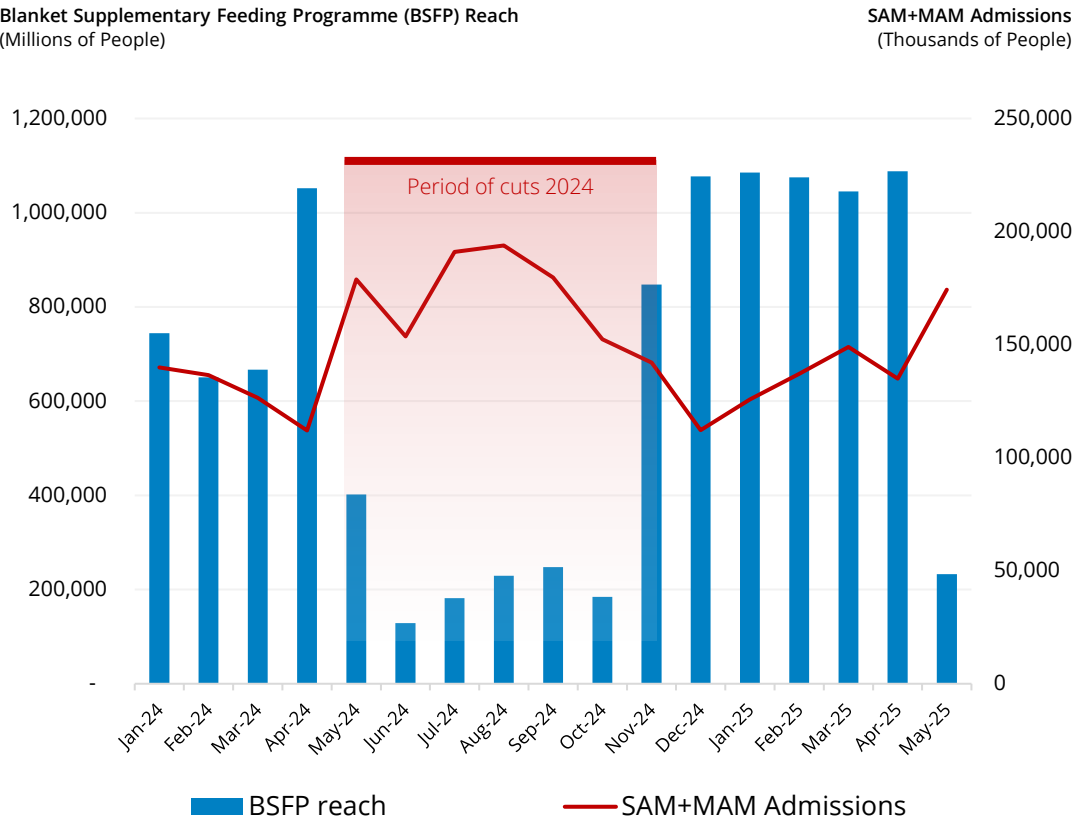
Evidence of worsening food insecurity and malnutrition

Shortfalls in humanitarian funding and ensuing caseload cuts could push an estimated 10.5–13.7 million people currently in IPC Phase 3 and reliant on assistance into IPC Phase 4.³ Household in this phase have large food consumption gaps reflected in very high acute malnutrition and even death or they are resorting to emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation. The Lancet estimated that 14 million additional deaths, associated with disease, nutritional deficiencies, and maternal and perinatal conditions, could occur globally by 2030 as a result of cuts to US assistance alone.⁴

WFP data indicate that household food consumption is being degraded. Among refugees cut off from assistance in Uganda, there has been a 20 percent reduction in the food consumption score between 2024 and 2025. Diet quality for refugee children and adults in the country has been eroded, with the consumption of dairy products cut by 96 percent, aggravating the risks of malnutrition.

Since 2024, over half of Afghanistan’s mobile health and nutrition teams have

Figure 3 - Reach of BSFP programmes and admissions to SAM and MAM treatment programmes in Afghanistan



been closed. The blanket supplementary feeding programmes (BSFP) delivered alongside general food assistance was sharply reduced in the latter half of 2024 and again in May 2025. During the May to

November 2024 period of cuts in BSFP, the hardest-hit districts registered a 16 percent rise in admissions of acutely malnourished children compared with the pre-cut period. See figure 3.

Post distribution monitoring (PDM) data from Haiti show that WFP programmes have become less effective since the January funding cuts with relatively smaller improvements in food consumption among beneficiaries than previously. The findings highlight that funding cuts have a cascading impact across sectors, underlining the interdependence of operations and the need to sustain a coordinated multi-sectoral response.

Further impacts are projected as funding runs out. Without aid, it is projected that almost 40 percent of protracted assistance beneficiaries (refugees, IDPs, and host communities) in Niger may struggle to cover their basic consumption needs, an increase of 20 percent compared with current levels of assistance.

Households are expressing deep despair and resorting to harmful coping strategies. Affected people have reported instances of school dropouts, gender-based violence, child labour, and even self-harm. Many of these impacts, such as child malnutrition and educational disruptions, can have lasting consequences that are irreversible.

It also reveals that country offices are having to prioritize between equally vulnerable communities and households. For instance, in June and July 2025, the Afghanistan country office had to identify 4 percent of the 9.5 million people in IPC Phase 3 or above for the hotspot response. Even more severe prioritization is planned for the winter season when



The erosion of interventions aiming to strengthen resilience is a major concern. In Niger, gains achieved through WFP's Integrated Resilience Programme are already showing signs of reversal, threatening WFP's contribution to averting future needs. In South Sudan, reductions in funding threaten the country's longer-term development prospects as livelihood activities are being more dramatically cut compared to emergency assistance.









There are also regional spillovers of the crisis. In South Sudan, reduced assistance is contributing to cross-border movement, with already 90 000 people crossing into

[illegible]

The funding cuts risk further destabilizing these fragile states. In Haiti, funding cuts are deepening vulnerabilities and increasing the risk of social unrest and illegal narcotics and firearms trade, just as the country approaches elections, threatening the country's path to stability. In Niger, government counterparts report that funding cuts endanger the stabilizing role that WFP assistance has played for the security situation of the country.

Redefining food assistance in a funding-constrained environment

Food assistance is at a breaking point, requiring a careful rethink.

	Advance Famine (IPC Phase 5) prevention	In a world with two concurrent Famines and with fewer resources, agencies like FAO, UNICEF and WFP should emphasize a Famine-prevention agenda in at-risk countries/territories, articulated in plans at the country level.		Continue to think long term	Aid agencies may be tempted to pivot to life-saving work only, and drop their resilience programming – a result of highly earmarked funding allocations. Resilience requires strategic investment, not retreat.
	Invest in political engagement	Diplomacy is needed more than ever to secure humanitarian access. Robust political engagement is vital to secure host government funding, and to address the emerging humanitarian vacuum.		Shift to cash, with careful consideration	Assess the cost efficiency of different modalities and shift to cash-based transfers where relevant. This is also the direction of travel in the Humanitarian Reset.
	Rethink general food assistance in emergencies	When funding isn't enough to cover targeted food or cash transfers to households, humanitarians may need to design more cost-effective interventions that improve systems (supply chains, information systems).		Safeguard information systems	Without reliable and timely data, there is no high quality programming, no targeting, and no advocacy.
	Provide a meaningful level of assistance, or don't assist at all	In a hyper-prioritized planning scenario, agencies may need to establish minimum coverage thresholds, below which providing food assistance is no longer effective. Agencies should avoid providing assistance that addresses a tiny fraction of needs (e.g. 4 percent of IPC3+ in Afghanistan). Such low amounts of assistance create tensions at the community level.		Advocate for all acute needs	Report the full scale of global food security needs, rather than narrowing to what seems fundable. Only by showing the complete picture can the world grasp the true magnitude of the crisis and mobilize an adequate response.



Clouds on the horizon

This is just the beginning

The brunt of the cuts has not yet hit all countries. More cuts are expected, and continued monitoring is required.

A legitimacy crisis?

Funding cuts have caused loss of trust in the humanitarian system for affected communities and local actors.



The displacement crisis is worsening

As hunger and instability grow, more people are being forced to leave their homes. WFP estimates that refugee outflows increase by 0.4 percent for each additional year of conflict, and increase by 1.9 percent for each percentage increase in food insecurity.⁵



Conclusions

This study demonstrates that funding cuts are undermining global food and nutrition security, and have weakened the humanitarian system. These findings echo a recent analysis published in *The Lancet*, which warned that reductions in US foreign aid alone could result in over 14 million preventable deaths worldwide by 2030.⁶



Just as lives are at stake, the stability of nations hangs in the balance. Previous research on the link between food insecurity, conflict, and migration suggests that the crisis these funding cuts sparked may intensify global migration pressures and further destabilize vulnerable regions.⁷

Annex

Methodology

The findings in this report leverage quantitative and qualitative data. Post-distribution monitoring data were accessed from over 2 000 people surveyed, structured focus group discussions took place with 100 men and women in vulnerable communities in the selected countries. More than 20 UN agencies and NGOs were interviewed as key informants, and more than 15 government ministries were consulted. The methodology used to calculate the impact of assistance cuts on the global caseload of IPC4 is explained in the study referred to in endnote i.

Notes

1 WFP (2025). [Food Security Impact of Reduction in WFP Funding | World Food Programme](#).

2 Ibid.

3 Ibid.

4 The Lancet (2025). [Evaluating the impact of two decades of USAID interventions and projecting the effects of defunding on mortality up to 2030: a retrospective impact evaluation and forecasting analysis - The Lancet](#)

5 WFP (2017). [At the Root of Exodus: Food security, conflict and international migration](#).

6 Ibid.

7 Ibid.

Acknowledgements

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