

Humanitarian situation in Afghanistan

Since the Taliban takeover in August 2021, Afghanistan has been suffering one of the most severe humanitarian crises. The economic recession, the high rate of unemployment, the lack of food, and the collapse of the healthcare system are some of the factors worsening the humanitarian situation. The scope of this report is to provide updated data about the country's current situation in terms of food insecurity, access to employment, and health care services.

Food (in)security

Dealing with the access to food, around 37% of Afghan households are said not to have enough money to cover food expenditures.¹ Since the Taliban takeover, the level of hunger experienced by Afghani people has risen exponentially, with the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) affirming that the food and malnutrition crisis hitting Afghanistan has reached unprecedented levels.²

It is stated that the percentage of Afghani people who cannot consume the minimum amount of food reached 95%. Since July of the last year, the number of people suffering from hunger has almost doubled, from 14 million people registered in 2021 to 23 million in March of 2022.³ In geographical terms, malnutrition is said to be spread in 28 out of 34 Afghani provinces.⁴

International programs providing Humanitarian Food Assistance (HFA) have started distributing food to the most impacted households. 38% of the population has received a form of food support.

¹ Tolo News (20 April 2022) World Bank to push Ahead with some afghan projects, available at <https://tolonews.com/business-177656>

² Afghan Voice Agency (AVA) (19 April 2022) 95 Percent of the People in Afghanistan Faces Food Insecurity, Says OCHA, available at <https://avapress.com/en/260412/95-Percent-of-the-People-in-Afghanistan-Faces-Food-Insecurity-Says-OCHA>

³ The United Nations – UN News (15 March 2022) Afghanistan: food insecurity and malnutrition threaten “an entire generation”, available at <https://news.un.org/en/story/2022/03/1113982>

⁴ *Ibid.*

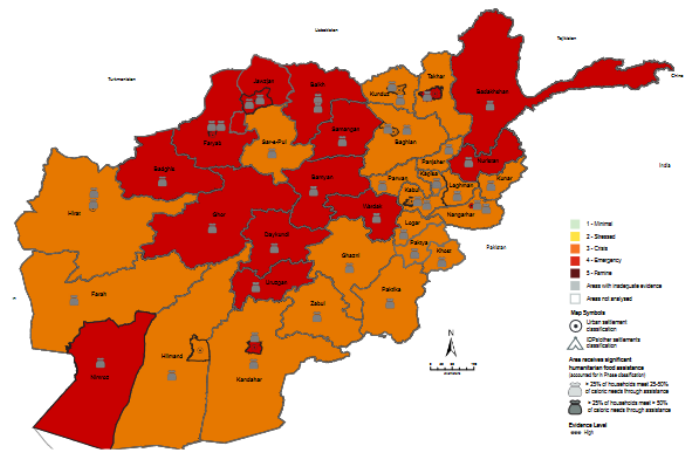
However, according to the IPC (Integrated Food Security Phase Classification), which establishes a scale classifying food security, half of the population is still in the third phase or above. Phase 3 represents people in a crisis status, phase 4 indicates an emergency, while phase 5 designates a situation of famine and catastrophe. 6,6 million people fall into the emergency phase (Phase 4). The famine phase has been recognised for the first time since the implementation of the IPC instrument for 20,000 people living in the Ghor province.⁵ The following tables (Figures 1 and 2) help understand the current situation in the country. Figure 1 explains the indicators characterising each IPC phase. Figure 2 indicates the current situation of food insecurity divided by provinces in the period going from March to May 2022.

Figure 1. IPC Reference Table

		Phase 1 None/Minimal	Phase 2 Stressed	Phase 3 Crisis	Phase 4 Emergency	Phase 5 Catastrophe/ Famine
First-level outcome	Food consumption (focus on energy intake)	Adequate	Minimally adequate	Moderately inadequate	Very inadequate	Extremely inadequate
	Livelihood change (assets and strategies)	Sustainable	Stressed	Accelerated depletion	Extreme depletion	Near collapse of strategies and assets
Second-level outcome	Nutritional status	Minimal	Alert	Serious	Critical	Extreme critical
	Mortality	CDR: <0.5 / 10,000 / day	CDR: <0.5 / 10,000 / day	CDR: 0.5 - 0.99 / 10,000 / day	CDR: 1 - 1.99 / 10,000 / day or >2x reference	CDR: >2 / 10,000 / day
Contributing factors	Food availability, access utilization and stability	Adequate	Borderline adequate	Inadequate	Very inadequate	Extremely inadequate
	Hazards and vulnerability	None or minimal effects	Stressed livelihoods and food consumption	Results in assets and food losses	Results in large food assets and food losses	Results in near complete collapse of livelihood assets

Source https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/manual/IPC_Technical_Manual_3_Final.pdf

Figure 2. Food Insecurity March-May 2022



Source: https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Afghanistan_AcuteFoodInsec_2022Mar_2022Nov_report.pdf

As a result of this situation, the population is adopting different strategies in order to access food. These strategies are not new to the Afghani population. A part of the population was already resorting to them in the period preceding the Taliban takeover. However, since August, the percentage of people needing to adopt coping strategies has experienced a significant increase.

⁵ IPC (March-May 2022) Afghanistan. IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis March-November 2022, available at https://www.ipcinfo.org/fileadmin/user_upload/ipcinfo/docs/IPC_Afghanistan_AcuteFoodInsec_2022Mar_2022Nov_report.pdf

According to UNICEF, the increase corresponds to six times the number previously recorded in July. Moreover, since last December, an 8% increase has been registered.⁶

One of the strategies is selling organs to receive money used to buy food or pay debts. It is estimated that more than 80% of Afghani people are confronted with debts to be paid off.⁷ In particular, numerous cases of people undergoing a kidney extraction surgery have been registered in the western city of Herat up to the point of naming a settlement "one-kidney village".⁸ Moreover, since August 2021, the number of people forced to buy food on credit suffered an increase of 12%. 14% for those receiving food from families with higher economic possibilities.⁹

Furthermore, the news notified cases of children resorting to stealing in order to provide their families with food. However, stealing can have harsh consequences. Indeed, a case was reported of the Taliban arresting and beating a child for having stolen some loaves of bread from a store.¹⁰

The desperation characterising the population because of the impossibility of finding employment and means to feed children has led several parents to commit suicide. Nevertheless, the exact estimate of the phenomenon is hard to assess as journalists covering this news have been subjected to torture.¹¹

The situation is even worse in families where women are the only breadwinners. A category which the financial crisis has hit is the one of women working in the media sector. Indeed, according to the international federation of Journalists, women working in the media accounted for the 60% of the total workers. Almost the totality of them, 90%, were responsible for earning money to sustain the family economically.¹²

The lack of food and the consequent malnutrition spreading in the country is having an impact on the number of neonatal deaths, with the Ministry of Public Health registering 13,700 babies and 26 mothers who died because of malnutrition.¹³

⁶ UNICEF, (1-28 February) Afghanistan Humanitarian Situation Report – Reporting Period, available at <https://www.unicef.org/media/117781/file/Afghanistan-Humanitarian-SitRep-28-February-2022.pdf>

⁷ The United Nations (15 March 2022) op.cit.ref.no.3.

⁸ Al Jazeera (28 February 2022) Desperate Afghans sell kidney amid poverty, starvation, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/2/28/desperate-afghans-resort-to-selling-kidneys-to-feed-families>

⁹ Save the Children (14 February 2022) Afghanistan: A fifth of starving families sending children to work as incomes plummet in past six months, available at <https://www.savethechildren.net/news/afghanistan-fifth-starving-families-sending-children-work-incomes-plummet-past-six-months>

¹⁰ Khan, H (9 March 2022) The families losing their loved ones to hunger suicide in Afghanistan, *Prospect*, available at <https://www.prospectmagazine.co.uk/world/the-families-losing-their-loved-ones-to-hunger-suicide-in-afghanistan>

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² Kumar, R (31 March 2022) In Afghanistan, “people selling babies, young girls to survive”, *Al Jazeera*, available at <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2022/3/31/afghanistan-faces-hunger-crisis-of-unparalleled-proportions>

¹³ *Ibid.*

Moreover, according to the last report, UNICEF estimates that the number of children who will be affected by malnutrition in the current year is 3.2 million.¹⁴ The number is said to be twofold compared to the one registered before August 2021.¹⁵ Since the Taliban takeover, 800,000 children have already been treated for malnutrition¹⁶ and 200 children have died in the first three months of this year because of hunger.¹⁷

One of the reasons behind the food crisis is the rise in prices of fundamental goods. For instance, the current price of wheat flour, if compared to the average price registered in the past five years, has been subjected to a rise of 81%¹⁸. According to locals living in Kabul, the previous price to buy a sack of flour was 1,400 Afghanis, while nowadays, the price varies between 2,800 and 3,000 Afghanis. The inflation of prices has also affected other goods, such as cooking oil. Currently, with the same amount of Afghani with which one could buy 20 litres of cooking oil, now one can buy less than half the amount.¹⁹ The impact of rising prices is even more significant considering that 88% of the population needs to buy cereals at the market. This data results from the severe drought that forced people to consume their available stock from the previous harvest.²⁰

Economic crisis and unemployment

The food crisis is linked to the economic situation characterising the country. The triggering factors of the economic collapse have to be found in the sanctions imposed by the United States in conjunction with other countries, causing a shortage of liquidity with banks limiting the amount of cash available for withdrawal.²¹ In addition, after the Taliban takeover, the International Monetary Fund (IMF) decided to suspend the access to its funds.²²

On the occasion of the G20 Meeting on Afghanistan, which took place last October 2021, the European Commission communicated the provision of a 1-billion-euro support package for the Afghan people and neighbouring countries.²³ However, development aids remain frozen provided the Taliban respect the five benchmarks established by the Council of the European Union. The first

¹⁴ UNICEF (1-28 February) Afghanistan Humanitarian Situation Report, op.cit.ref.no.6

¹⁵ Save the Children (14 February 2022), op.cit.ref.no.9.

¹⁶ The United Nations (15 March 2022) op.cit.ref.no.3.

¹⁷ Khan, H. op.cit.ref.no.10.

¹⁸ UNICEF (1-28 February) Afghanistan Humanitarian Situation Report, op.cit.ref.no.6.

¹⁹ Eqbal, S (22 May 2022) Food Inflation; A Sack of Flour Costs 2,800 Afghanis in Kabul, available at <https://www.khaama.com/food-inflation-a-sack-of-flour-costs-2800-afghanis-in-kabul36822/>

²⁰ IPC (March-May 2022) op.cit.ref.no.5.

²¹ Kumar, R (31 March 2022), op.cit.ref.no.12.

²² Timmins, B (19 August 2021) IMF suspends Afghanistan's access to funds, BBC News, available at <https://www.bbc.com/news/business-58263525>

²³ European Commission Press Release (12 October 2021) Afghanistan: Commission announces € 1 billion Afghan support package, available at https://ec.europa.eu/commission/presscorner/detail/en/ip_21_5208

point refers to the safe evacuation of all foreign nationals and Afghan people who want to leave the country. The second benchmark is related to promoting and protecting human rights with particular reference to the rights of women, children, and ethnic minorities. Furthermore, the Taliban are asked to respect the rule of law and grant freedom of speech and media. The third point establishes the conditions under which humanitarian operations must be implemented. The fourth one is linked to the cease of Taliban relations with international terrorism. The last one imposes the establishment of a government that is inclusive and representative of minorities.²⁴

The following sections describe some indicators representing the economic crisis. Starting with Afghani people's income per capita, it has decreased by a third during the last four months of 2021.²⁵ Furthermore, after the Taliban takeover, half a million people could not continue working in their previous jobs.²⁶ According to the International Labour Organization (ILO), the projected number of people who will lose their jobs by next August 2022 may reach the level of 900,000.²⁷

According to a survey based on interviews taken with 1,400 households living in seven different provinces of the country, it has been estimated that the percentage of people losing their income has reached 82%. Consequently, almost 20% of the interviewees affirmed that the only practical solution was for their children to start working. Furthermore, people living in cities have suffered the highest losses. For instance, 50% of families living in Kabul have lost all their available income.²⁸

Projections realised during the three months following the Taliban takeover show the economic implications on the labour market. In particular, in January 2022, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) conducted a study focussing on the current situation in Afghanistan, comparing it with estimated data of a scenario where the Taliban takeover would not have occurred. The first indicator considered is the contraction of employment of both men and women. According to estimates, as shown in figure 3, employment suffered a contraction of 8% compared to the hypothetical situation with no change of administration. Furthermore, the figure also indicates data representing the pessimistic and optimistic future scenarios. In the first case, pessimistic statistics

²⁴ European Council conclusion on 15 September 2021, Council conclusion on Afghanistan, available at <https://data.consilium.europa.eu/doc/document/ST-11713-2021-REV-2/en/pdf>

²⁵ Tolo News (20 April 2022) op.cit.ref.no.1

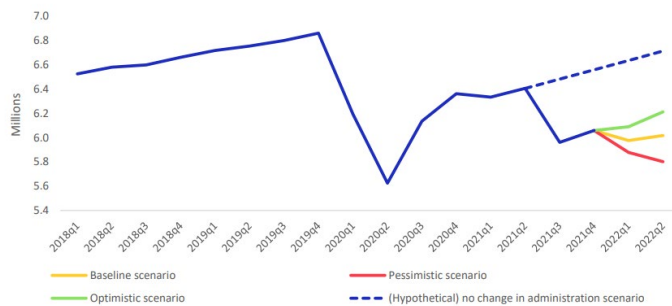
²⁶ Glinki, S (4 March 2022) Afghanistan six months on from the Taliban takeover- photo essay, The Guardian, available at <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2022/mar/04/afghanistan-six-months-on-from-the-taliban-takeover-photo-essay>

²⁷ Loy, I. (15 February 2022) Afghanistan's crises, by the numbers, The New Humanitarian, available at <https://www.thenewhumanitarian.org/news/2022/2/15/Afghanistan-crises-hunger-inflation-migration-by-the-numbers>

²⁸ Save the Children (14 February 2022) op.cit.ref.no.9.

project that 900,000 people – representing a decrease of 14% – will be unemployed in 2022. On the other side, the optimistic scenario foresees an employment loss of 7%.²⁹

Figure 3. Total employment in Afghanistan



Source: [file:///C:/Users/Giulia/Downloads/Employment%20prospects%20in%20Afghanistan%20-%20a%20rapid%20impact%20assessment%20\(January%202022\).pdf](file:///C:/Users/Giulia/Downloads/Employment%20prospects%20in%20Afghanistan%20-%20a%20rapid%20impact%20assessment%20(January%202022).pdf)

The second parameter considered is the number of hours worked. According to estimations, it has decreased by 13% compared to the hypothetical scenario with no change in the administration. An additional decrease of 5% is expected in the pessimistic future scenario, while the optimistic scenario foresees that the reduction of hours worked would reach 8%.³⁰

The third parameter represents the level of daily wages for the category of skilled and unskilled workers. In the first period of 2022, a decrease of 9,5 and 9,4 have been registered compared to data gathered in the first six months of 2021.³¹

Moreover, the level of unemployment affecting women has increased at a higher rate than the one regarding men. Compared to the hypothetical scenario where the Taliban takeover would not have occurred, women's employment is said to have suffered a decrease of 16%. In comparison, men's percentage is estimated to be at 6%.³² Women's unemployment will have a further impact on the country's GDP. The reason is that women represent an integral part of vital sectors of the economy, such as the agricultural and manufacturing sectors. It measured that preventing women from working would result in an additional loss of 5% of the GDP, summing up the already enormous economic losses.³³

²⁹ ILO, 19 January 2022, ILO Brief - Employment prospects in Afghanistan: A rapid impact assessment, available at https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/briefingnote/wcms_834525.pdf

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ Loy, I (15 February 2022) op.cit.ref.no.27.

Health situation

The economic crisis is drastically affecting the country's health system. The World Health Organization affirms that the system is close to collapsing with workers who cannot receive their monthly salary and clinics running out of medicines. Indeed, after the Taliban takeover, the Sehatmandi programme – the pillar sustaining the Afghan health system representing 64% of all public health facilities – is not receiving international funds.³⁴ The already critical situation is worsened by the outbreak of several diseases such as measles, watery diarrhoea, dengue fever, and malaria.³⁵ According to Médecins Sans Frontières, 43,000 are the cases of children who contracted measles. The most affected provinces are Herat, Kunduz, and Helmand. Furthermore, even though special units have been opened in Herat to treat the disease, all available beds are already occupied with no space for other children to be treated.³⁶

Moreover, polio is spreading among children due to the decision of the authorities to interrupt the vaccination campaign. The suspension comes with high risks for health workers who continue administering the vaccine. Indeed, cases have been reported of health workers providing polio vaccination attacked and killed in the provinces of Kunduz and Takhar.³⁷

Furthermore, several provinces such as Kabul, Nangarhar, Kandahar, Helmand, Herat and Zabul have been hit by a cholera outbreak. For example, in the last one mentioned, in Zabul, 400 cases were reported in previous months.³⁸ People's coping mechanisms to fight the spread of diseases are weakened by the high levels of poverty and unemployment and the consequent impossibility of buying medicines.

³⁴ WHO (24 January 2022) Afghanistan's health system is on the brink of collapse: urgent action is needed, available at <https://www.who.int/news-room/feature-stories/detail/afghanistan-s-health-system-is-on-the-brink-of-collapse-urgent-action-is-needed>

³⁵ Lalzoy, N (20 April 2022) Extreme poverty, trolley man burns himself to death in Kabul, Khaama Press, available at <https://www.khaama.com/extreme-poverty-trolley-man-burns-himself-to-death-in-kabul-4876567/>

³⁶ Ariana News (6 April 2022) MSF raises concern over the increase in measles cases in three provinces, available at [https://www.ariananews.af/msf-raises-concern-over-increase-in-measles-cases-in-three-provinces/#:~:text=MSF%20raises%20concern%20over%20increase%20in%20measles%20cases%20in%20three%20provinces,-Published&text=M%C3%A9decins%20Sans%20Fronti%C3%A8res%20\(MSF\)%20in%20Helmand%20are%20the%20most%20affected.](https://www.ariananews.af/msf-raises-concern-over-increase-in-measles-cases-in-three-provinces/#:~:text=MSF%20raises%20concern%20over%20increase%20in%20measles%20cases%20in%20three%20provinces,-Published&text=M%C3%A9decins%20Sans%20Fronti%C3%A8res%20(MSF)%20in%20Helmand%20are%20the%20most%20affected.)

³⁷ UNICEF (1-28 February) Afghanistan Humanitarian Situation Report, op.cit.ref.no.6.

³⁸ Ariana News (24 May 2022) 400 confirmed cases of cholera in Zabul: Health officials, available at <https://www.ariananews.af/400-confirmed-cases-of-cholera-in-zabul-health-officials/#:~:text=As%20many%20as%20400%20cholera,health%20officials%20said%20on%20Tuesday.>