

Regional conflicts have worsened Afghanistan’s humanitarian crisis by increasing displacement, restricting humanitarian access, and disrupting key trade routes. Border tensions with Pakistan have intensified food insecurity, driven up prices, weakened access to essential services, and increased protection risks for vulnerable groups. Disruptions along the Iran border have added further pressure by limiting alternative trade routes, affecting imports of food, fuel and medicines, and increasing the risk of additional returns into already strained communities.

Background

Tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan escalated in late February 2026 following cross-border clashes, airstrikes and armed confrontations along the Durand Line. Pakistan accused the Islamic Emirate of Afghanistan (IEA) of allowing armed groups, including the Tehrik-i-Taliban Pakistan (TTP), to operate from Afghan territory, while the IEA rejected the allegations and described the strikes as violations of Afghan sovereignty. The escalation triggered insecurity across several eastern and southern border provinces, including Khost, Kunar, Nangarhar, Nuristan, Paktia and Paktika.

The hostilities caused civilian casualties, displacement and damage to civilian infrastructure, including homes, schools, health facilities, water systems and transport routes. Border closures and insecurity disrupted trade flows, population movement and humanitarian access, particularly around key crossings such as Torkham and Spin Boldak. Humanitarian agencies also reported restrictions on field operations, delays in aid delivery and reduced access to conflict-affected communities due to insecurity, road closures and unexploded ordnance contamination.

At the same time, regional tensions involving Iran further increased pressure on Afghanistan’s humanitarian and economic situation. Restrictions affecting trade and border movement disrupted imports of food, fuel and medicines and raised concerns over additional returns into already vulnerable communities. Together, these regional developments intensified humanitarian needs and placed additional strain on Afghanistan’s already fragile humanitarian response system and public services.

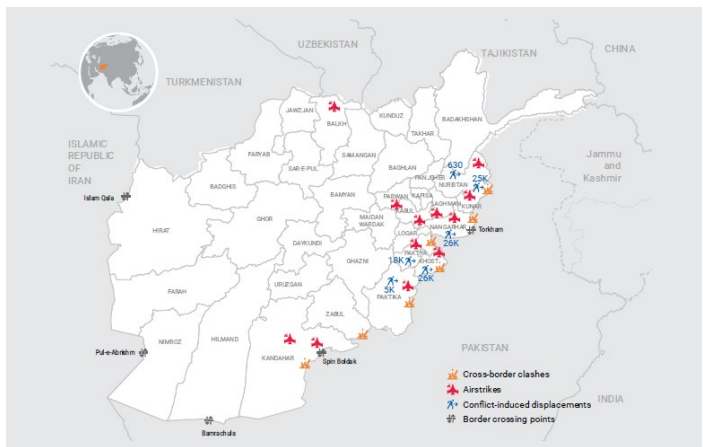


Figure 1. Geographic distribution of cross-border clashes, airstrikes, and displacement in Afghanistan (OCHA, 2026)

Displacements

Regional conflict, forced returns and cross-border hostilities have intensified displacement pressures across Afghanistan and compounded an already severe humanitarian crisis driven by conflict, economic decline and climate shocks. Afghanistan already hosts

approximately 3.2 million internally displaced people, while 5.6 million Afghans have returned or been forcibly returned from Iran and Pakistan since the end of 2023, including 2.6 million in 2025 alone.

Renewed fighting and insecurity along border areas triggered additional displacement, with reports indicating that more than 94,000 people were displaced overall following the escalation. Many displaced families and returnees require temporary shelter, food assistance, healthcare, protection services, documentation support and assistance reconnecting with community networks, particularly in areas where infrastructure and public services are already under strain.

The pressure on host communities has increased, especially in eastern and southern border provinces receiving large numbers of returnees and displaced populations. Repeated displacement and unstable living conditions have heightened exposure to exploitation, violence and exclusion from assistance, particularly for women, children, older persons and child- or women-headed households. Protection risks have also increased due to insecurity, disrupted services and the presence of unexploded ordnance in conflict-affected areas.

Potential increases in returns from Iran could place additional strain on western border provinces, transit facilities and local services already affected by displacement, weak infrastructure and limited humanitarian capacity.

Humanitarian Access and Response Capacity

Regional conflict and border disruptions have constrained humanitarian access and response operations across several parts of Afghanistan. Cross-border hostilities, insecurity, shelling, road closures and unexploded ordnance contamination disrupted humanitarian movement and reduced access to affected communities, particularly in eastern and southern border areas.

Humanitarian operations were halted, relocated or temporarily suspended in locations including Torkham, Bahramcha, Spin Boldak and Takhta Pul. Restrictions on movement and damaged transport routes delayed humanitarian deliveries and reduced operational mobility in several conflict-affected districts. In Nuristan, approximately 100,000 people in Bargi Matal and Kamdesh districts have been unable to access humanitarian assistance since late February because of insecurity, fighting and road closures.

Humanitarian and public service infrastructure sustained damage during the escalation. Facilities affected included the IOM Transit Centre, the Omari Returnee Reception Centre at Torkham and a 20-bed emergency hospital. In addition, at least 25 health facilities and 41 schools were damaged, closed or forced to suspend activities, disrupting access to health, nutrition and education services. Damage to local water systems in some communities further reduced access to safe water and increased pressure on already fragile public services.

The humanitarian impact extended beyond the immediate conflict areas. As a landlocked country dependent on regional transit routes, Afghanistan faced additional pressure when access through Pakistan was restricted, increasing reliance on imports through Iran. This route was further disrupted when Iran closed its border on 2 March 2026, suspended trade and restricted exports of essential goods, including food and medicines. The disruptions affected commercial supply chains and humanitarian logistics, increasing the risk of shortages, operational delays and rising transport costs.

Despite these constraints, humanitarian actors continued to provide emergency assistance where access and security conditions allowed.

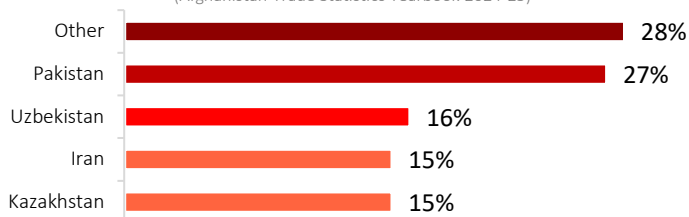
Food Security and Economic Impacts

Regional conflicts, border closures and trade disruptions have affected Afghanistan's food security and broader economic conditions, with direct consequences for humanitarian needs and response capacity. These developments have constrained the flow of essential imports, increased market instability and reduced household purchasing power, thereby intensifying already high levels of acute food insecurity.

According to the latest IPC analysis, 13.8 million people (28 percent of the population) were in IPC Phase 3 or above between September and October 2025, including 2.9 million in Emergency and 10.9 million in Crisis. This situation was projected to deteriorate further during the November 2025–March 2026 winter lean season, reaching 17.4 million people (36 percent), including 4.7 million in Emergency. These trends reflect the compounding effect of conflict-driven trade disruptions, aid constraints and economic instability on humanitarian food security outcomes.

Afghanistan's high dependency on imports makes it particularly vulnerable to regional shocks. Imports account for approximately 66 percent of GDP, with Pakistan and Iran serving as the main trade corridors for essential commodities. Together, they supply more than 42 percent of Afghanistan's food imports, alongside shares of fuel, medicines and other basic goods. Disruptions along these routes due to border closures and trade restrictions have therefore had immediate humanitarian implications, limiting availability of essential supplies and increasing market volatility.

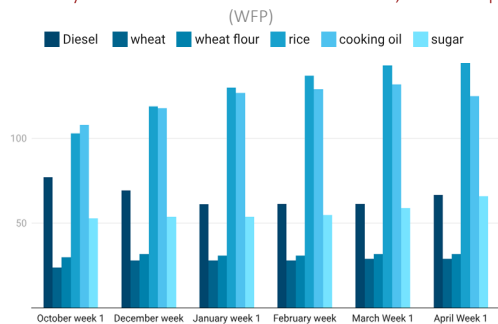
Figure 2. Afghanistan's food and agricultural products import (Afghanistan Trade Statistics Yearbook 2024-25)



The closure of key crossings and restrictions on movement through Pakistan reduced direct imports and transit trade, while increasing reliance on Iran as an alternative route. However, this corridor was also disrupted. These combined disruptions constrained supply chains, reduced market availability and increased pressure on already fragile humanitarian logistics systems.

As a result, food prices rose in local markets, driven by reduced supply and higher transport costs. According to WFP market monitoring data, the price of rice, Afghanistan's second main staple and largely imported from Pakistan, increased by 33 percent in early January 2026 compared to October 2025. Prices of imported wheat and cooking oil also increased by approximately 17 percent and 19 percent respectively compared to pre-conflict levels. These increases have directly affected household food access, particularly among poor and displaced populations who rely heavily on markets.

Figure 3. Weekly Market Price data for selected food items, Oct 2025-Apr 2026 (WFP)



Disruptions in regional trade have also affected humanitarian supply chains, delaying the delivery of food assistance and increasing

operational costs. Restrictions through Pakistan and Iran have further limited access to third-country imports, including supplies from the United Arab Emirates and India, reducing flexibility in humanitarian procurement and logistics.

At the same time, broader regional instability, including disruptions in key transit routes such as the Strait of Hormuz, has contributed to higher transport costs and delayed humanitarian shipments, further affecting the timeliness and predictability of food assistance.

Food assistance and nutrition services have also been constrained by funding gaps and access limitations. Coverage has declined, with assistance reaching only a small proportion of the population in need compared to previous years. In conflict-affected areas, distributions have been suspended due to insecurity and access constraints, affecting vulnerable populations dependent on humanitarian food support. Nutrition services have similarly been disrupted due to facility closures and operational suspensions in several provinces.

Mass returns, drought conditions and weakening economic resilience have further amplified the impact of these regional disruptions. Large-scale returns have increased demand for food and basic services, while drought-affected provinces continue to experience reduced agricultural production. Combined with rising prices, declining remittances and limited livelihood opportunities, these factors have further reduced household purchasing power and increased reliance on humanitarian assistance.

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