



3. Humanitarian situation

3.1. Economic and humanitarian crisis

Decades of conflict, persistent economic crisis, and natural disasters have been pushing large parts of the Afghan population into poverty.⁷⁷⁵ The economy suffered a severe shock amid the Taliban takeover in 2021,⁷⁷⁶ and entered a stage of ‘free fall’.⁷⁷⁷ By mid-2022, it stabilised again but at a lower equilibrium than before, with a general loss of economic ground and increased poverty.⁷⁷⁸ According to the World Bank, the Afghan economy contracted by 20.7 % in 2021, and 6.2 % in 2022.⁷⁷⁹ In this period, the population became increasingly reliant on humanitarian aid,⁷⁸⁰ peaking in 2023 with 28.3 million people in need of assistance.⁷⁸¹

In 2023–2024, the economy showed signs of slow recovery.⁷⁸² The World Bank however noted that the growth was insufficient to improve living standards⁷⁸³ and remained below the population growth rate.⁷⁸⁴ As a result, per-capita income stagnated.⁷⁸⁵ The World Bank forecast a 4 % contraction of GDP per-capita for FY2025, due to rapid population expansion,⁷⁸⁶ and almost half of the population, 22.9 million people, required humanitarian assistance in 2025 ‘to survive’, according to UN OCHA.⁷⁸⁷ The economy continued to be impacted by sanctions and isolation resulting from the de facto government not being recognised,⁷⁸⁸ and has suffered new shocks, including a significant reduction in US aid in 2025 and the mass influx of returnees from Pakistan and Iran, placing additional strain on humanitarian needs.⁷⁸⁹

Millions of Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan in recent years,⁷⁹⁰ and over 2.5 million in 2025 alone.⁷⁹¹ Returnees face multiple challenges upon arrival, including accessing adequate shelter, income, food, clean water, and healthcare.⁷⁹² More information on returnees is available in section [1.4. Treatment of persons returning from abroad](#).

The US, previously the largest state donor contributing to Afghan aid relief, decided to cut funds to almost all of its humanitarian programmes in April 2025,⁷⁹³ and other donors have followed.⁷⁹⁴ The consequences of aid cuts have included, *inter alia*, hundreds of health centres shutting down,⁷⁹⁵ and the suspension of USAID programmes supporting millions of Afghans with food provision, urgent healthcare services, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services.⁷⁹⁶ Restrictions by the de facto authorities have also negatively impacted aid delivery, and complicated the work of aid organisations on the ground.⁷⁹⁷ More information is available in section [4.7. Human rights defenders and activists](#) and in the [2024 EUAA COI Report Afghanistan: Country Focus](#) (section 3.6. Aid delivery).

Afghanistan is vulnerable to climate-related disasters⁷⁹⁸ and face annual flash floods,⁷⁹⁹ persistent droughts⁸⁰⁰ and earthquakes causing severe damage and deaths.⁸⁰¹ Reuters reported on an annual average of 560 persons being killed by earthquakes in Afghanistan and

annual damages of USD 80 million.⁸⁰² A compilation by UN OCHA indicated that over 90 000 people had been affected by natural disasters in 2025 (as of 6 October), 2 059 people were killed and 3 882 injured. Moreover, 4 467 houses were damaged and 7 559 houses destroyed.⁸⁰³ The most destructive incident of 2025 was an earthquake hitting the eastern province of Kunar on 31 August,⁸⁰⁴ affecting over 59 000 people in adjacent districts, killing 1 986 persons and injuring 3 565, as reported by UN OCHA.⁸⁰⁵ In some cases, entire communities were wiped out,⁸⁰⁶ with women and children being overrepresented among those dead and injured.⁸⁰⁷ Meanwhile, there is a shortage of female rescue staff, exacerbated by the de facto authorities' restrictions.⁸⁰⁸ Some witnesses stated that there were instances of male rescuers neglecting women trapped in the rubble,⁸⁰⁹ as they did not want to touch them,⁸¹⁰ while others credited male volunteers for saving female earthquake victims.⁸¹¹

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