

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 standards^{[783](#)} 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 disasters^{[798](#)} and face annual flash floods,^{[799](#)} persistent droughts^{[800](#)} 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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