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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