

## 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.<sup>775</sup> The economy suffered a severe shock amid the Taliban takeover in 2021,<sup>776</sup> and entered a stage of ‘free fall’.<sup>777</sup> By mid-2022, it stabilised again but at a lower equilibrium than before, with a general loss of economic ground and increased poverty.<sup>778</sup> According to the World Bank, the Afghan economy contracted by 20.7 % in 2021, and 6.2 % in 2022.<sup>779</sup> In this period, the population became increasingly reliant on humanitarian aid,<sup>780</sup> peaking in 2023 with 28.3 million people in need of assistance.<sup>781</sup>

In 2023–2024, the economy showed signs of slow recovery.<sup>782</sup> The World Bank however noted that the growth was insufficient to improve living standards<sup>783</sup> and remained below the population growth rate.<sup>784</sup> As a result, per-capita income stagnated.<sup>785</sup> The World Bank forecast a 4 % contraction of GDP per-capita for FY2025, due to rapid population expansion,<sup>786</sup> and almost half of the population, 22.9 million people, required humanitarian assistance in 2025 ‘to survive’, according to UN OCHA.<sup>787</sup> The economy continued to be impacted by sanctions and isolation resulting from the de facto government not being recognised,<sup>788</sup> 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.<sup>789</sup>

Millions of Afghans have returned from Iran and Pakistan in recent years,<sup>790</sup> and over 2.5 million in 2025 alone.<sup>791</sup> Returnees face multiple challenges upon arrival, including accessing adequate shelter, income, food, clean water, and healthcare.<sup>792</sup> 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,<sup>793</sup> and other donors have followed.<sup>794</sup> The consequences of aid cuts have included, *inter alia*, hundreds of health centres shutting down,<sup>795</sup> and the suspension of USAID programmes supporting millions of Afghans with food provision, urgent healthcare services, and water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services.<sup>796</sup> Restrictions by the de facto authorities have also negatively impacted aid delivery, and complicated the work of aid organisations on the ground.<sup>797</sup> 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<sup>798</sup> and face annual flash floods,<sup>799</sup> persistent droughts<sup>800</sup> and earthquakes causing severe damage and deaths.<sup>801</sup> Reuters reported on an annual average of 560 persons being killed by earthquakes in Afghanistan and annual damages of USD 80 million.<sup>802</sup> 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.<sup>803</sup> The most destructive incident of 2025 was an earthquake hitting the eastern province of Kunar on 31 August,<sup>804</sup> affecting over 59 000 people in adjacent districts, killing 1 986 persons and injuring 3 565, as reported by UN OCHA.<sup>805</sup> In some cases, entire communities were wiped out,<sup>806</sup> with women and children being overrepresented among those dead and injured.<sup>807</sup> Meanwhile, there is a

shortage of female rescue staff, exacerbated by the de facto authorities' restrictions.<sup>808</sup> Some witnesses stated that there were instances of male rescuers neglecting women trapped in the rubble,<sup>809</sup> as they did not want to touch them,<sup>810</sup> while others credited male volunteers for saving female earthquake victims.<sup>811</sup>

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