

# REACH MEDIA BULLETIN

JULY 2022

## As we approach one year since the Taliban regained control in Afghanistan, REACH analysis sheds light on how humanitarian conditions have evolved.

In this edition of our Media Bulletin, we delve into data collected by the REACH Afghanistan team from the past year, which aimed to inform humanitarian and development actors as they responded to changing needs in the country.

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## Across the country, recent needs have been driven by the economic crisis – but are still underpinned by longstanding factors like natural disasters, climate impacts, chronic poverty, and a legacy of conflict.

The escalation of active conflict in May 2021 and eventual political shift, with the Taliban becoming the de facto national authority in August 2021, garnered much global attention, especially as these events drove new internal and cross-border displacement. These events also had a crippling effect on the economy, due to disruptions to service provision, cuts in international aid, and global sanctions. However, the humanitarian consequences of the Taliban takeover cannot be understood in a vacuum, given the multiple overlapping shocks and drivers of the overall crisis.

In June 2021, the former Afghan government declared a drought across 80% of the country, having experienced drought conditions since October 2020, this had a significant impact on Afghanistan's primarily agro-dependent economy. These climatic factors occurred alongside a spike in reported COVID-19 cases from May to July, which was followed by another spike in November.

Amidst a complex humanitarian response to these various interrelated shocks and an estimated 24.4 million people in humanitarian need, eastern Afghanistan experienced a 5.3 magnitude earthquake on 22 June 2022. The earthquake has caused at least 1,000 deaths, 1,500 injured, and considerable damage to homes in Paktika and Khost provinces. It also serves as a reminder of how the country is at continual risk of natural disasters, further contributing to its fragility.

### Zoom-in on the last year

Compounding shocks following 40 years of conflict

- May 2021**  
Escalation of active conflict
- 22 June 2021**  
Drought declared by former president
- May - July 2021**  
Spike in COVID-19 cases
- August 2021**  
Political transition to Taliban governance
- Nov 2021 - Jan 2022**  
Spike in COVID-19 cases
- June 2022**  
5.9 magnitude earthquake

## Since August 2021, economic drivers of needs have come to the fore, intensifying household vulnerability, displacement, and creating new barriers to accessing services.

Through a nationwide household survey called the **Mid-Year Whole of Afghanistan Assessment (WoAA)**, REACH interviewed internally displaced, cross-border and IDP returnees, host community, and refugee households across the country between March and April 2022. Key findings were shared with the humanitarian community in Afghanistan to inform the response as it adapted to new dynamics.

The WoAA found a shift in the drivers of the crisis and humanitarian needs: **economic shocks replaced conflict, COVID-19, and natural disasters as the most reported reason behind the need for assistance**, and were found to be both a primary cause of displacement and a barrier to possible returns.

- Compared to 2021, conflict and COVID-19 were much less frequently cited as a shock that households had experienced in the last 6 months; 37% of households reported conflict in 2022, down from 60% in 2021, and 28% reported COVID-19, down from 65% in 2021.
- All shocks negatively impacted households' access to food, income sources, and basic services. There was little variation across population groups in terms of reported exposure to and impact of shocks, suggesting similar levels of vulnerability irrespective of displacement status.

**Afghan households also experienced higher socio-economic vulnerability as a result of soaring food prices, decreasing incomes, and overall market disruptions following August 2021.**

- Crisis-affected households reported lower incomes (reduced by 15% compared to 2021), a higher reliance on debt, and on average were taking on more debt compared to the previous six months (AFN 58,159 in 2022 versus AFN 52,342 in 2021) – despite cutting back on spending for basic needs in order to cope.
- The assessment also found a continued use of extreme coping strategies with clear protection implications, such as child labour, early marriage, migration, or illegal/dangerous labour.



Findings from REACH's monthly Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI) underscored the impact of the crisis on market dynamics and aligned with what households reported in terms of their own economic conditions.

- Food prices spiked 37% between July and December 2021 and although they began to decrease in early 2022, prices have remained considerably higher than pre-August 2021 levels.
- Fuel prices rose 21% between September 2021 and March 2022, impacting transport costs, and by extension, contributing to rising food prices.

However, overall, **supply chains appeared functional and resilient** – core food and non-food items were generally available, and traders were reportedly able to continue responding to consumer demand.

**Economic conditions, specifically unemployment and poverty, were also found to be the primary driver of displacement and a factor suppressing returns**, compared with violence and active conflict as the main reason reported in 2021.

- Only 5% of internally displaced households reported an intention to return to their place of origin in the WoAA. The considerable reduction in intentions reflects the increase of IDP returns across the country, whilst signalling the need for durable solutions based on structural changes, such as improved livelihoods opportunities and rehabilitation of homes, both in areas of origin, and in areas of continued displacement. Findings from a recent REACH rapid shelter assessment also found similar household intentions.

## Acute food insecurity, a persistent issue in Afghanistan, appeared to increase post-August 2021 due to economic factors.

The mid-year WoAA also found that the **magnitude of food insecurity appeared to be worsening as food prices rose**. Households faced reduced purchasing power for food and reported spending less overall, particularly for key needs like health and education. Given both increased debt and decreased spending, households may have been purchasing cheaper, less nutritious or varied foods to cope, suggesting a risk of more severe food insecurity and malnutrition without continued assistance.

**Recent analysis from the IPC** – the global analysis body that classifies food security crises and raises the alarm when there is a risk of famine – shows that as a result of the drought and collapsing economy, nearly 20 million people across the country are at Crisis level or higher (Phase 3+), with 6.5 million people at Emergency levels (Phase 4). These projections will hold through the end of November.

According to IPC analysis, **Afghanistan has also felt the secondary impacts of the Ukraine conflict**, as the country relies on imports to meet food demands. The current conflict is both driving up global food prices and placing additional pressures on wheat exporters and supply chains.



## The recent earthquake signifies the latest shock in an ongoing, complex crisis.

Afghanistan has a history of large earthquakes, as the Hindu Kush mountain range along its border with Pakistan is "one of the most seismically active regions in the world". However, the country's disaster management capacity was strained even prior to the political shifts, highlighting the continued risk of such shocks and the impact they can have on a population that is already deeply affected by crisis, with resilience capacity almost completely eroded.

In the aftermath of the June earthquake, **UN OCHA launched an emergency response plan** and funding appeal for 110.3 million USD, targeting 382,000 people living in high intensity impact areas. Paktika and Khost were already considered vulnerable areas prior to the earthquake, known as "hotspots" for severe food insecurity and acute malnutrition and also hosting refugee populations from Pakistan. **Concerns now focus on rapidly spreading Acute Watery Diarrhoea and a potential cholera outbreak in the affected districts (as well as elsewhere in the country), in addition to the significant destruction to homes and critical infrastructure.**

According to **WoAA province level findings** in Khost and Paktika, **pre-earthquake**:

- The vast majority (90%+) of households reported being in debt
- In both districts, significant portions of the population were found to be dependent on negative coping strategies as a result of inadequate access to food – 33% of households in Khost and 61% in Paktika.
- Significant portions of the population were using inadequate sanitation facilities – 39% in Khost and 71% in Paktika.

In support of the response efforts, the REACH team in Afghanistan launched a Household and Building Damage Assessment, covering household shelters, as well as Education, Health, and Market facilities, in partnership with the ES-NFI Cluster. Preliminary analysis and information products will be published imminently.

In advance of the assessment, the team also produced a **series of damage maps**. These maps help to visualise and identify key areas and infrastructure affected, as well as the extent of damage, to inform the initial response.



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