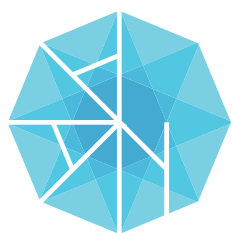




Kate Clark

ANOTHER DROUGHT YEAR FOR AFGHANISTAN ... But prospects are not as bad as they could be



AFGHANISTAN
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NETWORK

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Economy, Development, Environment

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Afghanistan is facing its fourth drought in five years. Even so, agroclimate experts are forecasting a surprisingly mixed picture: the national harvest of Afghanistan's staple crop, wheat, has done reasonably well, thanks to the mass distribution of drought-tolerant seed varieties over the last few years. At least, that is the case for farmers who sowed winter wheat. Farmers who depend on the spring rains, which largely failed this year, have had a catastrophic year, whether they have orchards, grow wheat on rainfed land or graze livestock. AAN's Kate Clark has been scrutinising the agroclimate data and hearing from farmers who received the improved wheat seeds. She also heard from those for whom this year's drought is calamitous. They were acutely anxious, not only over harvests and herds, but also because of all the other problems hitting Afghans – the forced return of Afghans living in Pakistan and Iran, cuts to public sector jobs and the cessation of United States' aid. Indeed, despite the better-than-expected news on the national wheat harvest, the famine watchdog, the IPC, considering just the period up to October, has projected that 9.5 million Afghans – more than a fifth of the population – face 'crisis' or 'emergency' levels of food insecurity. The IPC puts that down largely to non-agricultural factors – the fragile economy, cuts to aid, natural disasters and endemic poverty.

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INTRODUCTION

The almond trees have lost their blossom and the springs have dried up because of the drought and, in spring, the dry cold, the lack of rain. About 80 per cent of agriculture in the mountainous areas has been damaged. On top of that, we have the migrants expelled from Iran and Pakistan, and the reduction in teaching posts in the schools – so many problems.

Ghulam Abbas in Daikundi's provincial capital, Nili, describes waves of problems, alongside the drought, hitting his community all at once. Usually, he said, families have several income streams, all limited, but taken together, they can manage: one or two men would be working in Iran and sending money home and there would be "some produce from agriculture and donations from international charitable institutions." This year, he said, "the situation was utterly different" and underlying everything was "this severe drought."

Interviews with Ghulam Abbas and other people living in his region, hard-hit by the drought this year, were the initial impetus for this report. However, on the heels of those interviews, which were conducted a month into the spring, came reports from two expert bodies, the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET)'s [Afghanistan Agroclimate Monitoring Report for the 2024-25 season](#), published on 5 May and updated on 6 June 2025,¹ and the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC)'s [Acute Food Insecurity Analysis, March – October 2025](#), published on 4 June. The reports confirmed that, as our interviewees had described, and as shown in the map below (Figure 1), most of Afghanistan is suffering another year of drought.²

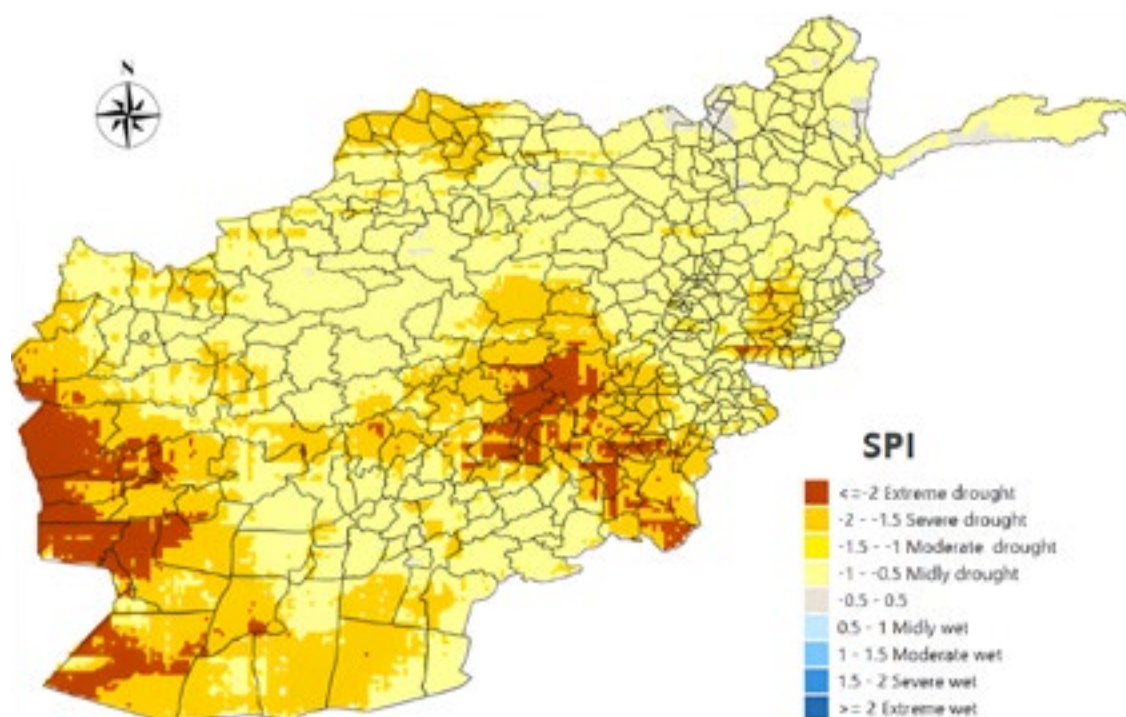
So, it came as a surprise that both reports were relatively optimistic about this year's wheat harvest. Wheat is Afghanistan's staple crop, grown on 70 to 80 per cent of agricultural land and supplying more than 65 per cent of people's dietary energy. So this is particularly good news. Even though overall precipitation, the rain and

¹ FEWS NET's [Afghanistan Agroclimate Monitoring Report for the 2024-25 season](#) was prepared by Fahim Zaheer and Diego Pedreros, with contributions by NOAA/PSL & CPC and reviewed by Chris Funk, Greg Husak and Daniella Alaso.

² If readers go to the original map, they can get a wealth of current and historical data by clicking on districts, provinces, river basins and livelihood zones.

snow that fell over winter and spring during the ‘wet season’, was below-average, the mass distribution of drought-tolerant varieties of wheat seeds has meant that the hit to the harvest was not as bad as it would have been, even a few years ago. Reading these reports prompted another round of interviews with farmers who had received the improved seeds to see what they thought of them.

Figure 1: Standardised Precipitation Index (SPI), 1 October 2024 to 31 May 2025



Source: FEWS NET, ‘Afghanistan Agroclimate Monitoring Report for the 2024-25 season,’ p13

This report starts from the weather and how it is affecting harvests, herds, farming families and the national wheat harvest. It takes stock of what is, undoubtedly good news, the extra resilience coming from those drought-tolerant wheat seeds, but also reflects on the experiences of farmers less lucky with the weather this year. It concludes with a look at the multiple other pressures facing farmers and other Afghans this year. Its main focus is on Afghans living in rural areas (although food security is scarcely better in Afghanistan’s cities).³

³ The IPC reports that in March-April 2025, 27 per cent of both rural and urban populations were suffering food insecurity classified as IPC Phase 3 or above. However, for May to October, the projected percentage fell a little more for urban than rural populations: 21 per cent of people living in rural areas in ‘crisis’, at IPC Phase 3 or above, including 4 per cent in ‘emergency’ at IPC Phase 4; and 17 per cent of the urban population to be in IPC Phase 3 or above, including 2 per cent in IPC Phase 4. (For definitions of the IPC phases, see footnote 12.)

The report falls into four sections:

1. Data on the weather this year, its impact on agriculture, the impact of the new improved varieties of wheat seeds on the harvest and on food security;
2. Interviews with farmers who received the improved seeds;
3. Interviews with farmers and others living in one of the regions hard hit by severe drought; and
4. Other pressures on Afghans this year: cuts to aid, cuts to public sector job, forced returns.

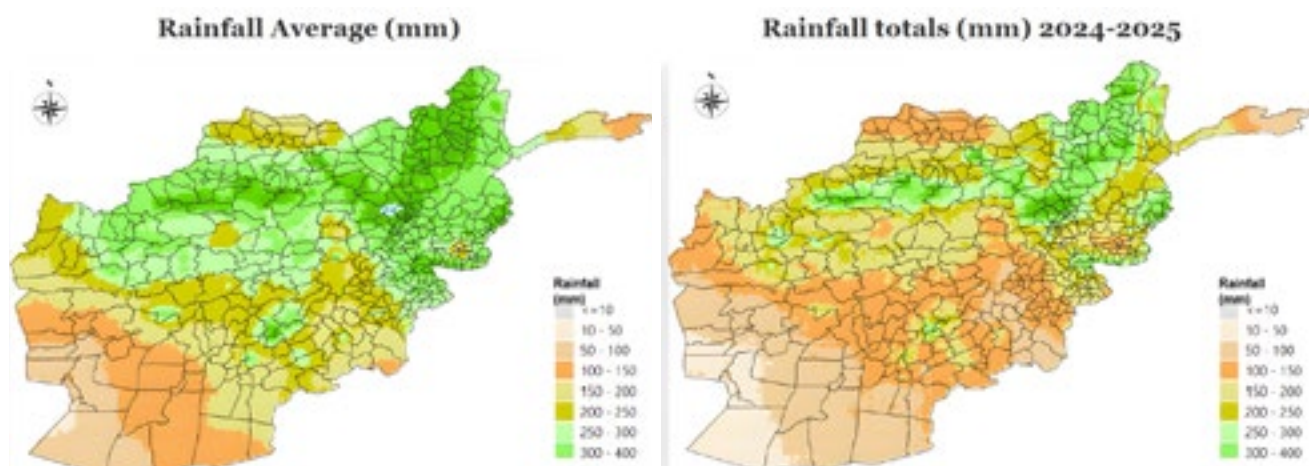


Livestock scour the parched land for something to eat in Khwaja Sabz Posh district of Faryab province.
Photo: Hashim Azizi/FAO, 7 July 2025

WHAT THE WEATHER DATA TELLS US

FEWS NET's Afghanistan Agroclimate Monitoring Report for the 2024-25 season confirmed drought affecting most of Afghanistan this year. It detailed below-average precipitation over the winter and spring months, the main months for rain and snow to fall. Parts of the west, southwest, centre and Central Highlands, FEWS NET said, saw cumulative precipitation that was only 60 to 75 per cent of the average, with deficits elsewhere mostly between 75 to 90 per cent of the average. Rainfall in April and May is crucial for rainfed wheat and the grasses and wild plants of the pasture in the rangeland to grow and that was significantly down. Indeed, said FEWS NET, the wet season ended in "widespread abnormal dryness throughout the country." The lower rainfall can be seen in Figure 2 (below), which compares the rainfall for the period October 2024 to April 2025, with the average.

Figure 2: Rainfall in Afghanistan, 2024-25 (October to May), compared to the average



Source: FEWS NET, Climate Hazards Group InfraRed Precipitation with Station data (CHIRPS), via the 'Afghanistan Agroclimate Monitoring Report for the 2024-25 season', p7

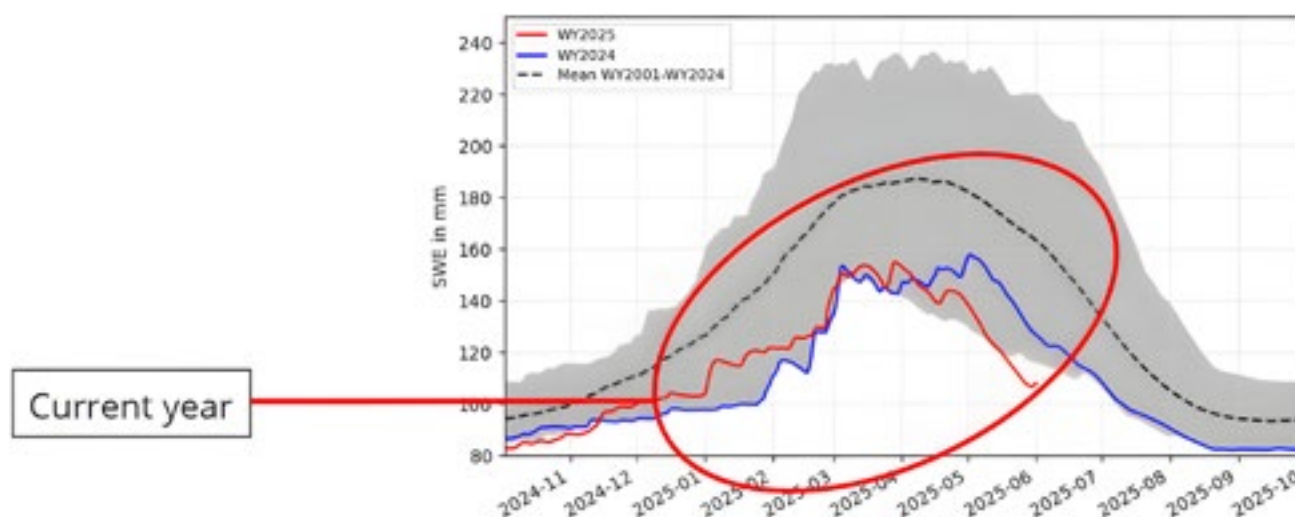
FEWS NET said that temperatures have been above-average and this, together with the below-average precipitation, means the soil is drier than normal.

It also gave data on the snowpack. This is the mass of compressed snow that lies on Afghanistan's mountains and higher terrain and melts in spring, providing crucial

water for irrigation in many areas, especially for second crops, planted after winter wheat, typically garden produce and cash crops. Meltwater is also important for irrigating the winter wheat crop.

The 2024-25 winter began, said FEWS NET, with the snowpack at record-low levels and ended with it even thinner and smaller in extent. That meant the volume of water released by the melting snow this spring has been less than average (see Figure 3 below), while the high temperatures meant it was released early.

Figure 3: Snow water equivalent for this last winter, 2024-25 (in red), 2023-24 (in blue) and the winters of 2001-24 (the spread in grey, and the average, a dotted black line)



Source: FEWS NET, 'Afghanistan Agroclimate Monitoring Report for the 2024-25 season', p12

FARMING IN A DROUGHT YEAR

Despite precipitation, soil moisture and meltwater all being less than average, and temperature being above average, both FEWS NET and the IPC are positive about the overall prospects for Afghan farmers this year: the IPC report said the outlook is for a “favorable productive season” and a “significant wheat harvest.” However, there are caveats, depending on whether farmers sowed wheat in winter (on irrigated land) or spring (on rainfed land). Both reports are also particularly concerned about livestock.

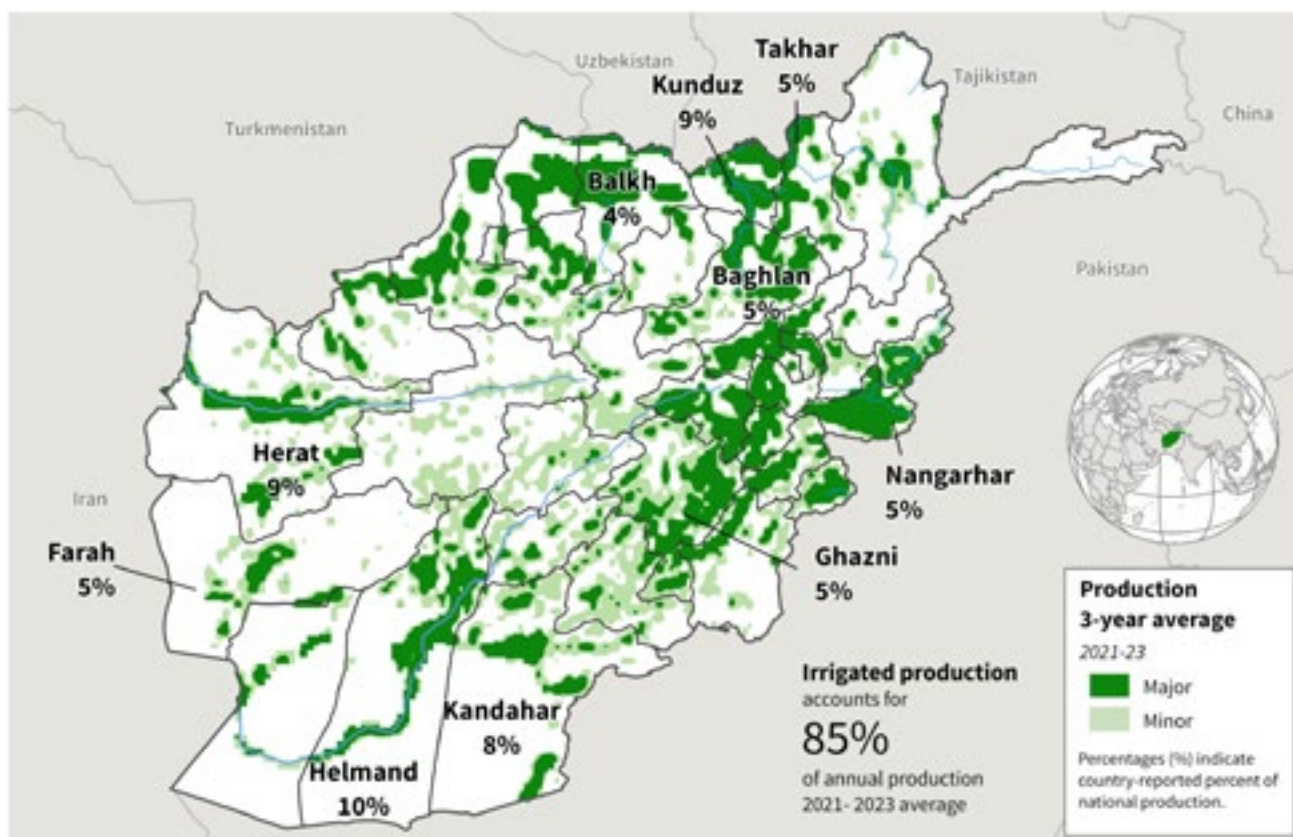
Poor spring rains, unseasonably high temperatures and early snowmelt led “to an early decline in water availability,” said the IPC, “hence moisture stress for crops and rangelands [is] expected.” FEWS NET also expected a “deterioration” of the rangeland and has serious concerns about “fodder availability during the late summer months, which could have a grave impact on the livestock sector from July to September.” The IPC also said that “pasture and water availability are expected to remain limited,” and that this “may weaken livestock conditions for animals that are already vulnerable due to previous droughts and disease outbreaks, meaning the risk of disease for livestock is high.”

In Afghanistan, there will be a major difference in the wheat harvest depending on whether it was planted in winter or spring. Where farmers have access to irrigation, they generally sow winter wheat. Farmers without irrigation sow in the spring and are dependent on the spring rain to fall. Yields from winter wheat tend to be better as it has longer to develop before being harvested. It also harvests earlier, so a second crop, typically a cash crop, can be grown on the same land. The maps below, from the US Department of Agriculture, show: where [winter wheat is grown on irrigated land](#) (Figure 4), typically where meltwater from the snowpack is crucial for providing irrigation; and where [spring wheat is sown on rainfed land](#) (Figure 5).

Wheat needs four to six ‘flushes’ of water (rain or irrigation) per season, and that needs to happen at particular times for germination, growth, flowering and the filling out of the grain. In general, because winter wheat is usually irrigated, erratic precipitation is less of a problem than for rainfed wheat. This year, precipitation was better in the earlier months of the season, said FEWS NET and was “sufficient for winter wheat planting and development.” Reports of the winter wheat harvest,

which provides the bulk of the national harvest and is already complete in many areas, are looking good.

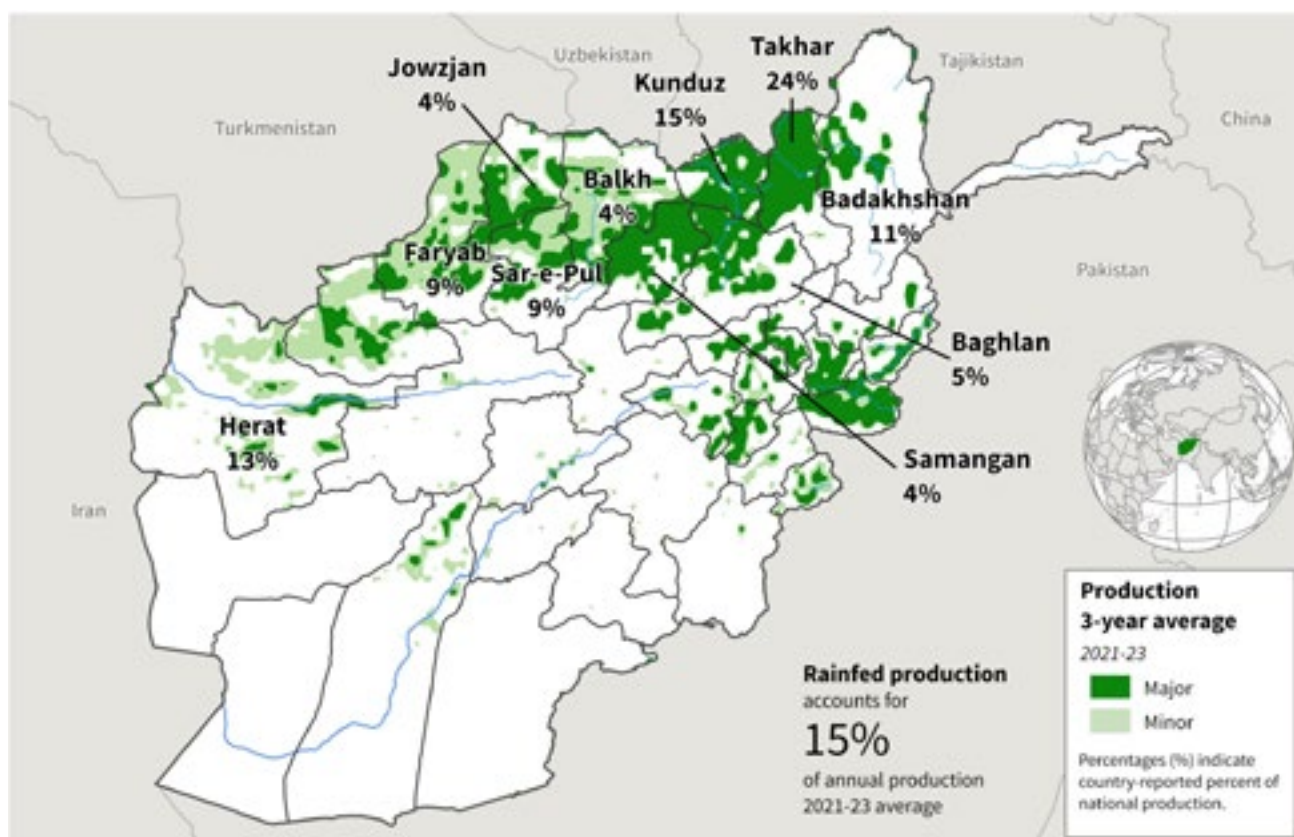
Figure 4: Irrigated wheat production in Afghanistan



Source: US Department of Agriculture website

However, rainfed wheat, sown in spring, is a different matter. The poor rainfall in April meant that, in seven provinces in the northwest and west, according to agricultural experts speaking to AAN, farmers decided not to sow spring wheat at all. Where it was sown, it has suffered. FEWS-NET described the rainfed wheat as struggling to flower and fill out the grain, especially in the country's northern, northwestern and central regions. The IPC said there was an "escalating drought in northern provinces of Balkh, Faryab, Jawzjan, Samangan and Sar-e-Pul and the western provinces of Badghis and Hirat," which "resulted in failed wheat production in rain-fed areas." The one major exception to the rainfed wheat harvest, agricultural experts told AAN, was Takhar where the rainfed harvest is looking good. Overall, however, said FEWS NET, indications at the end of the wet season were for a wheat harvest that "may be successful at a near average to average level at least in the irrigated areas," but "likely to be negatively impacted in the rainfed belt."

Figure 5: Trend in Afghan wheat production (million metric tonnes), 2025 estimated



Source: US Department of Agriculture website

Improved wheat seeds

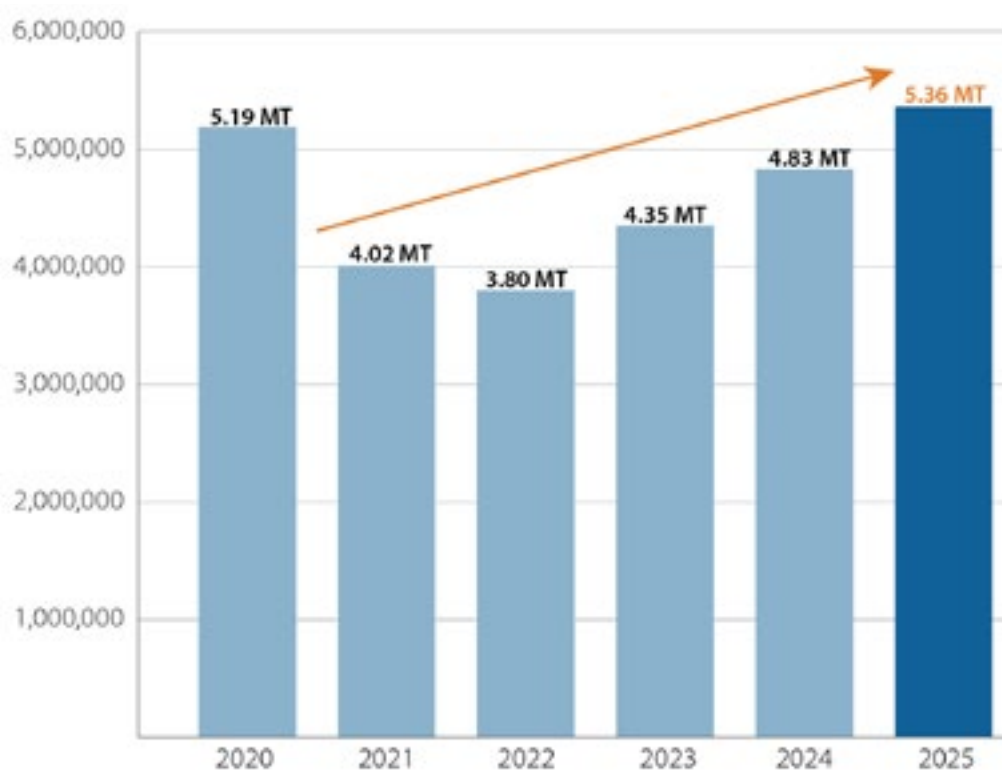
Apart from the rain coming at a good-enough time for the winter wheat, a second factor has been crucial, said the IPC:

Over the last four years, an unprecedented level of agricultural assistance ... [has been] provided to a cumulative 35 million Afghans. ... [F]rom 2021 to 2024, [it] provided people with high-quality drought- and pest-resistant seeds which can be planted in the subsequent three to four wheat cultivation seasons. Other factors expected to contribute to a significant harvest in 2025 include replenished groundwater and repaired irrigation systems through cash-for-work programs... [although] the heavy reliance on groundwater raises concerns about long-term sustainability.

The drought-resistant seeds managed to compensate for the below-average rainfall, for the winter wheat, at least. The UN's Food and Agriculture Organisation's (FAO)

Representative in Afghanistan, Richard Trenchard, described the seeds, which are intended to be sown on irrigated land, as having “moved the dial” of what an average wheat harvest in Afghanistan is. In the past, he said, an average harvest would have been 4.5 million metric tonnes of wheat, a bad year 3.5 million tonnes, and a good year 5 million tonnes. In 2025, the FAO estimates the harvest will be 5.36 million tonnes, a ‘good year’ by historical standards, and this, despite the below-average rainfall and far from ideal general growing conditions. 5.36 million tonnes would be an 11 per cent increase compared to the 2024 harvest and a 41 per cent increase compared to 2022 (see Figure 6 below). The ultimate aim, Trenchard said, is to reduce the gap between the national harvest and the total national demand for wheat, which is 6.7 million tonnes. Currently, that is met by imports, mainly from Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan.

Figure 6: Trend in Afghan wheat production (million metric tonnes), 2025 estimated



Source: FAO Afghanistan, via ‘IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis’, 4 June 2025, p9

Trenchard said the new seed varieties are also far more productive, typically yielding 30 to 50 per cent more than local seeds, although some of the farmers we spoke to reported an even greater improvement in yield.

There are currently 30 improved wheat seed varieties approved to grow in Afghanistan, all bred in research centres to be resistant to drought and pests and adapted to the country's diverse climate and terrain. Once a variety is approved, seed production begins. It takes several generations to multiply the seed: with wheat, each generation typically produces 50 to 80 times more seeds. The penultimate generation, known as 'foundation seeds', go to the private sector to mass produce seeds in the large quantities needed. After their quality, purity and genetic integrity is certified, they can be distributed or sold to farmers. In Afghanistan, there are 15 private seed companies partnering on the improved wheat seed project and producing wheat seeds in bulk. Quality assurance is provided by the Agricultural Research Institute of Afghanistan (ARIA) and certification by the national Seed Board, both of which are overseen by the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock. FAO also monitors the seeds' journey from the research centres to the seed companies to certification and distribution (more on this below).

WHAT FARMERS SAY ABOUT THE IMPROVED SEEDS

News that drought and pest-resistant varieties of wheat seeds are making a huge difference to farmers prompted the author to hear about their experiences of growing them. We heard from five farmers, two from Helmand, two from Ghazni and one from Paktia, who have a range of landholdings, including those who own their land and those who rent it, and across different climatic zones. All had been given the improved seeds, fertiliser and advice by NGOs.



A farmer in Kandahar province weeds his fields, planted with improved wheat seeds, to ensure a better harvest.

Photo: Hashim Azizi/FAO, 20 February 2025

Jan Muhammad from Nad Ali district in Helmand province lives in a 15-member, multi-generational household with eight jeribs of land (1.6 hectares). They normally grow wheat on four to five jeribs and keep the rest for cotton and maize, as well as vegetables for the household to eat. He said there was “a huge difference between the NGO’s seed and the seed bought from the market.” His figures were clear: each

kilo of the new wheat seeds had produced 28.4 kilos this year; each kilo of the old seeds, 5.6 kilos.⁴ Even with the new seeds, though, he said: “This wheat harvest won’t be enough for one year for our household, let alone there being any surplus to sell. Thank God, my brother and I are tailors and supporting our household on that.”

Another farmer in **Helmand, in Lashkargah district, Gul Muhammad**, lives with his parents and brothers – who bring in some additional income as day labourers – and their wives and children. They have 20 jeribs (4 hectares) of land, sowing wheat on seven jeribs and cotton and vegetables on the rest. The NGO that gave him the seed also monitored the crop, did some spraying and bought up the harvest, leaving him with 50 kg of seed for next year. He said that the old seeds, unlike the improved ones, are vulnerable to disease and that they spent a lot of money on ‘medicine’ (not clear if this was herbicide or pesticide) and still could not get a good harvest – 6,000 kilos, compared to 9,450 kilos of wheat from the improved seeds from the same amount sown.

In **Rohani Baba district in Paktia province, Jafar Ibrahim**, who supports a young family, said the NGO which supplied the community with seeds also advised them on their benefits and how to use the fertilisers, although, “no one was listening to them properly because we’re all farmers and we know what to do.” The yield was far better, he said, and the flour made good bread, white and soft. However, the improved seeds were more attractive to birds and more vulnerable to wind; for these reasons, the community was less happy with them. Jafar Ibrahim also spoke about the underlying problems of insufficient rainfall. He has one well, drilled in the past: it has less water in it than previously, but still enough to water four jeribs of land near his house where he grows wheat, vegetables and orchard fruit. However, the *karez* (underground irrigation system) that used to provide water is dry and he cannot afford to drill another well to irrigate his other five jeribs of land. That means that, in a good year for spring rain, like 2024, his rainfed land is productive, but not this year: “There’s been no rain at all,” he said. “It’s a severe drought.”

We also heard from two farmers in **Jaghathu district in Ghazni province. Ahmad Shah**, with nine in the household, depends on crops and livestock for a living – the family, like most others in the area, has no salaries or remittances coming in. He is a tenant farmer and depends on meltwater for irrigation. He said that he and most others in the district cannot afford to drill wells. He grows wheat, potatoes, alfalfa,

⁴ From the 45 kilos of improved seeds that he sowed on one jerib of land, Jan Muhammad harvested 1,280 kilos of wheat. From 360 kilos of the old seed, grown on four jeribs, he harvested 2,000 kilos.

barley and lentils, all for the household. The new wheat seeds, sown in winter, were far superior to the old seeds, yielding 40 to 50 times what was sown, although, he said:

This year, we don't have a good harvest because of the lack of water. It didn't snow enough in winter and spring, and it didn't rain either. If we'd sown the old seeds, though, our situation might have been worse. In recent years, it was only last year that we had enough water for agriculture. Otherwise, there's been drought – like this year – and people in our area had to buy wheat and other food from the bazaar.



The Kandahari farmer, pictured on page 13, surveys his wheat crop, planted with certified seeds, prior to harvest. Photo: Hashim Azizi/FAO, 18 May 2025

Another farmer in **Jaghatu, Juma Gul**, who grows wheat, potato, alfalfa and lentils, said he sowed the improved wheat in the spring on what should have been irrigated land, but the harvest had failed. He blamed the seeds as not suitable for colder areas, but also said the drought this year was worse than in the past. “We didn’t have enough snow last winter. In the spring, it never rained. So we don’t have enough water for irrigation.”

Climate change, said Juma Gul, means that, in some years, they not only have no water for irrigation, but also only a little for drinking, washing dishes, bathing and a little for the animals. “There are villages, he said, where people “don’t even have drinking water and they were sometimes coming to our village to take some drinking water for their families.” As to his household finances, he said his son lost his government job when the Taliban came to power and now teaches in a private school on a salary that is insufficient to support his wife and children. One daughter teaches in a government school. Her salary has been reduced, but it does pay for her sick mother’s medicine.

As Juma Gul’s experience shows, even seeds of drought-tolerant varieties need some water to grow. However, they are better adapted to local conditions and, in many cases, better able to cope with less water and with variations in water availability. That is important because the climate crisis has destroyed the old certainties of when rain and snow usually falls, or the air warms or cools.⁵ Afghan farming is adapted to weather patterns which no longer exist, or at least can no longer be relied upon. However, even in years of less rainfall, or erratic rainfall, the new varieties of wheat should produce a better harvest than if the old varieties had been sown. In the face of climate crisis-induced droughts, which are forecast to be more frequent and more severe, the improved seeds mean there is now more resilience in Afghanistan’s staple crop, wheat. The better yields of the improved seeds should also mean an overall increase in the harvest.

⁵ For much more detail on the climate crisis, see AAN’s, [Not at COP27, but Already in Crisis: A dossier on Afghanistan and the climate emergency](#), 9 November 2023, and a more recent report by guest author, Mohammad Assem Mayar, [The Economic Consequences of Climate Change for Afghanistan: Losses, projections ... and pathways to mitigation](#), 22 March 2025, in which he summed up the climate crisis facing the country:

Climate change is threatening Afghanistan’s already fragile economy, with both rapid onset disasters, such as floods, and slow onset ones, such as droughts, causing far-reaching harm. The resulting decline in agricultural productivity due to frequent droughts exacerbates food insecurity, rural poverty and displacement. The country’s water resources, heavily reliant on seasonal snowmelt, are increasingly threatened by reduced glacier coverage and erratic precipitation. The decline in water availability not only disrupts agricultural productivity but also jeopardises urban water supplies and hydropower generation. Furthermore, the interconnected nature of Afghanistan’s economy means climate-induced shocks ripple across multiple sectors. Transport networks, energy systems and public services such as health and education are all affected, creating cascading challenges that deepen economic and social vulnerabilities.

These climate-induced challenges exacerbate food insecurity, drive displacement, strain health and education systems and intensify gender-based violence, particularly in vulnerable rural communities.



People in Khwaja Sabz Posh district of Faryab province, watering their livestock in one of the few ponds not yet dried out.

Photo: Hashim Azizi/FAO, 7 July 2025

The certified seeds of improved varieties should keep their quality and productivity for three to four years, as is normal for wheat seeds around the world. After that, they should behave like good quality local seeds, for a while at least, although deterioration is inevitable.⁶ As is often the case with nature and agriculture, research into new wheat varieties and the introduction of new varieties better adapted to shifting climate patterns will need to continue to keep pace with Afghanistan's changing and increasingly unpredictable climate. Also important, though, said FAO, is the sustainability of the project, in order to fully 'move the dial' and make Afghanistan once again food self-sufficient, at least with regard to the staple food, wheat, as it was fifty years ago, before the war. For this, the improved

⁶ Wheat is pollinated by the wind so some pollen from other varieties growing nearby gets mixed in, meaning that, over time, replanted seeds cease to be 100 per cent the same variety as the original. The deterioration is accelerated by mixing seeds of different varieties when sowing, which is common practice in Afghanistan and something farmers are advised not to do. Over multiple seasons, diseases may also creep into replanted seeds, further lowering potential productivity.

seeds need to move beyond being an aid project and become part of the regular commercial agricultural economy.

Up to now, FAO has distributed the improved seeds through national and international NGOs. FAO Country Representative Richard Trenchard said they work very closely together. FAO does “all the procurement and specifications, supplying certified seed of the 30-plus varieties of wheat suited to different parts of the country.” The NGOs help with targeting and monitoring, as well as distribution, while FAO “follows the seeds through [the whole process], from the research farms to the seed companies to the certification and then to distribution.” Last year, it supplied 43,000 metric tonnes of certified seeds, plus 86,000 metric tonnes of fertiliser, reaching more than 220,000 families. Since 2021, FAO has also been the largest purchaser of seeds of improved varieties from private seed companies, but is keen to get the market working, with farmers themselves buying the seeds from the companies, rather than being given them. This year, Trenchard said, certified seed production was much higher, but the FAO was buying far less. They were supporting market-based approaches, he said, so that private seed enterprises develop local demand for their seeds and the whole enterprise becomes more commercially sustainable.⁷

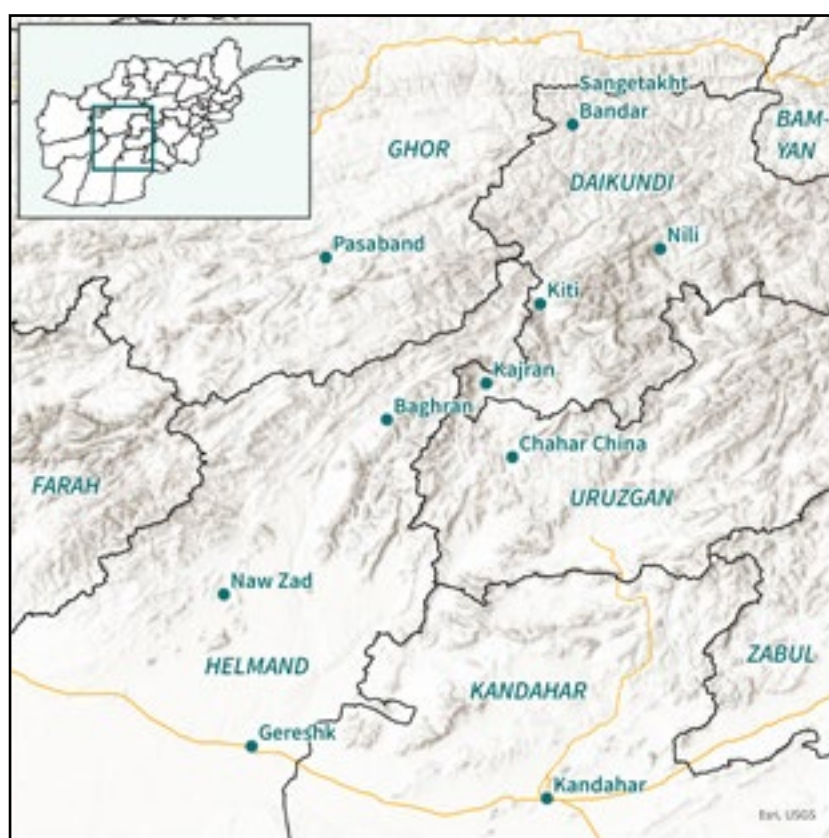
There will also likely be a continuing need for some support to ensure poorer farmers have access to quality seeds, while still working with the market, for example, providing vouchers to lower the cost of seeds. “Such efforts to ‘de-risk’ poorer farmers’ investment in quality inputs,” he said, “are starting to become common in other countries.” Trenchard also thought that, for now, at least, FAO support would be needed in facilitating access to new varieties and developing national capacity to evaluate and approve them for national release:

⁷ See the FAO document outlining additional project funding by the World Bank, agreed to in April 2025: [Additional Financing for Afghanistan Emergency Food Security Project \(P178280\)](#): one of the aims is to “support [private seed companies] in producing and marketing quality seed of climate resilient varieties. The goal is to strengthen the linkages between [them] and farmers, improve the responsiveness of the seed system to farmers’ demands, and promote a market-oriented seed sector for long term resilience of the agriculture food system.”

The author could find no direct link to the World Bank’s original 2022 project appraisal document, but an internet search for its title will bring up the document: ‘Project Appraisal Document on a Proposed Grant From the Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund Grant in the Amount of US \$195 Million, a Proposed First Tranche in the Amount of US \$150 Million, a proposed Subsequent Tranche in the Amount of up to US \$45 Million to the Food and Agriculture Organization of The United Nations for The Afghanistan Emergency Food Security Project,’ 2 June 2022’.

National links with international public-sector research centres had lapsed in the past few years and the development of new varieties had largely stopped. Furthermore, for many crops beyond wheat, for example, legumes, vegetables and potatoes, there had previously been little or no breeding in the country, and capacity needs to be developed from the ground up. FAO's support is reconnecting Afghanistan to these essential international partnerships, allowing the country to benefit from new varieties, training, and technical support.

Figure 7: Map showing the location of the ten interviewees in Daikundi, southeastern Ghor; northern Uruzgan and Helmand provinces



Source: Map by Roger Helms for AAN (2025)

There is hope stemming from this project, but as the interviews with the five farmers who received improved seeds also demonstrated, many Afghan families live on a knife-edge. For some, like Juma Gul, the “severe drought” this year is catastrophic. He lives on the margins of the region that was the original impetus for this report, where we interviewed farmers and others who are fearing ruin because of the weather. One farmer described how, this year, they are just watching the “wrath of nature,” unable to do anything about it. Their accounts form the basis of the next section of this report.

Earlier in the spring, before the FEWS NET and IPC reports were published, we had been hearing from people living in Daikundi province in the Central Highlands and nearby districts of southeastern Ghor and northern Uruzgan and Helmand about the drought afflicting them. The locations of the interviewees are shown on the map above (Figure 7). Most were farmers, either full or part-time, but we also heard from those buying and selling produce and commodities, a truck driver and a wholesaler living in Kandahar city. They spoke about the weather this year, crops and herds, household expenses, prices and markets. What also came across strongly from the interviewees was that their worries went far beyond the drought. They also mentioned cuts to public sector jobs and to aid, as well as the forcible return of Afghans from Pakistan and Iran, which can be a double blow: the returnees mean more people to feed and, if they were workers, an end to the remittances they were sending home.

THE CATASTROPHIC FACE OF THE DROUGHT: ACCOUNTS FROM THE FIELD

Hashem Khan in Pasaband district in Ghor province spoke about all these worries. He is a teacher earning about 8,000 afghanis (USD 114) a month, who also owns two dozen goats and some land for farming.

In previous years, my life was going well... but this year, the spring rains didn't fall. The grass in the mountains didn't grow properly and now that we're in the second month of the Hijri year [Saur, 21 April to 20 May], the goats and sheep can't feed themselves because there isn't enough pasture. In previous years, the springs and karez had plenty of water in the first three months of the year – the spring season [21 March to 21 June]. It was sufficient for the trees and the growing season, even without resorting to the reservoir [nahur]. But this year, not one drop of water from the spring or the karez has made it to the fields. We're at the beginning of the second month of spring, and the reservoir is completely dry.

He said that cold, dry weather in early Saur [end of April] had cost the fruit trees their blossom and that even the trees that had managed to set fruit lost them while they were still unripe. Realistically, he said, the next chance of rain or snow will not be until the month of Qaws, which begins on 21 November. "Imagine," he asked, "with this situation, how will it be possible for fruit trees like almonds and apricots to survive without water until Qaws?"

Hashem Khan recalled how, this time last year, the sale of sheep and goats was going well, bringing in money, enabling people to "solve many of life's problems." This year, by contrast, the lack of pasture meant no one was willing to buy livestock. "People are just watching the wrath of nature," he said, "and can do nothing."

For now, his living and income is still better than others, although he was acutely anxious, he said, as all other teachers were, that his name might be on the Ministry of Education's list of those losing their jobs. Even so, he said:

I have no idea what my neighbours – who are in a worse condition than me – will do. Then, there are the people who went to Iran in previous years and are

now returning: several families have come to the village and the number of returning migrants is increasing every day.

Abdul Jaffar, a livestock farmer, **in neighbouring Kajran district, also in Daikundi**, described the situation for the animals there as “catastrophic.” When we spoke to him in late April/early May, that is, early in the second month of spring, there had been no rain for about 60 days. “There’s no grass for the livestock in the mountains,” he said. “The little water that was available is now contaminated and making the animals sick. Access to medicine and a vet is also almost impossible. The government has no capacity or plan to support us livestock farmers.”

Another farmer, **Yaqin Ahmad, from Sangtakht and Bandar district in northern Daikundi**, explained that, because their winters are cold, they plant rainfed wheat in the spring. This year, it had not grown. “In previous years, even if there was a drought,” he said, “there would be a few light rains in the spring – especially in the months of Hamal and Saur [21 March to 20 May] – and they were very useful and valuable for the growth of the mountain grasses and seasonal crops. But this year, not only did the rain not come at all, but ... for more than a week, there was a wave of dry cold that destroyed the mountain grass and even some people’s crops.” The crops and the livestock, he said, “need rain. They are directly dependent on rain, but year on year, climate change is doing ever more damage to people’s lives.”

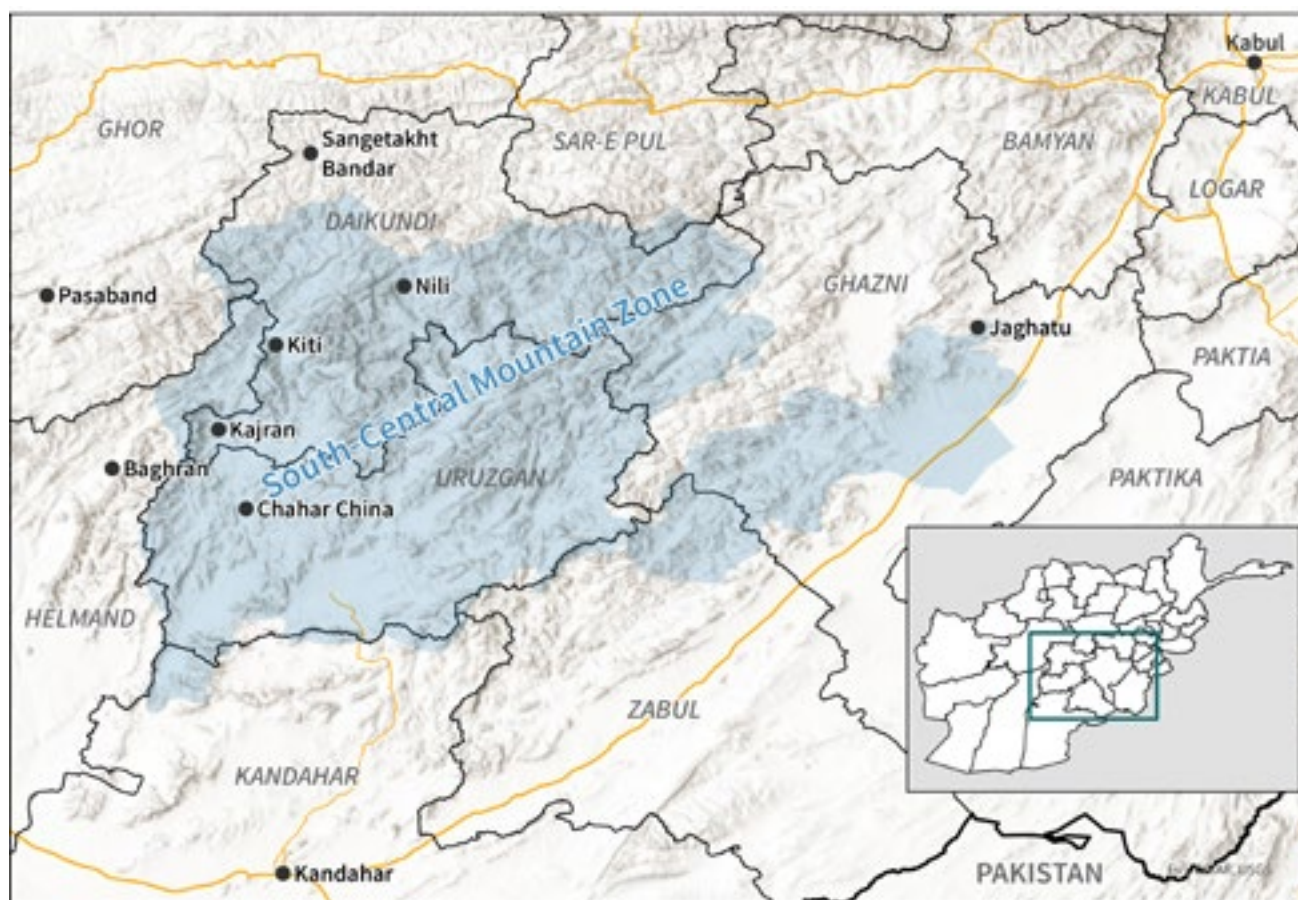
Moving southwest into **Baghran district in Helmand province**, farmer **Haji Abdul Matin**, described the drought in his district as “so severe, the springs and karez are drying up.” He said there was “a high probability that people’s trees will also dry up” and described a deadly disease that had spread among livestock in many villages, killing people’s goats and sheep.

Most of our interviewees in this section fall into what FEWS NET calls the South-Central Mountain Wheat, Dried Fruit and Livestock Livelihood Zone,⁸ shown as the area highlighted in red on the map of Afghanistan above (Figure 8).⁹ FEWS NET divides Afghanistan into 19 different ‘livelihood zones’, regions where climate and terrain lead to particular mixes of agriculture.

⁸ To access this map and the accompanying data, click on the Standardized Precipitation Index (SPI) October 1st 2024 to March 31st 2025 map in the FEWS NET, ‘Afghanistan Agroclimate Monitoring Report for the 2024-25 season’ (p13).

⁹ The other interviewees live or work in Naw Zad and Greshk in Helmand, which fall a little to the southwest of the zone and Sangetakht Bandar just to the north. Jaghatu, where two of our interviewees who had received improved wheat varieties live, falls on its margins to the east.

Figure 8: Map of Afghanistan showing the South-Central Mountain Wheat, Dried Fruit and Livestock Livelihood Zone (see footnote 8 in this report)



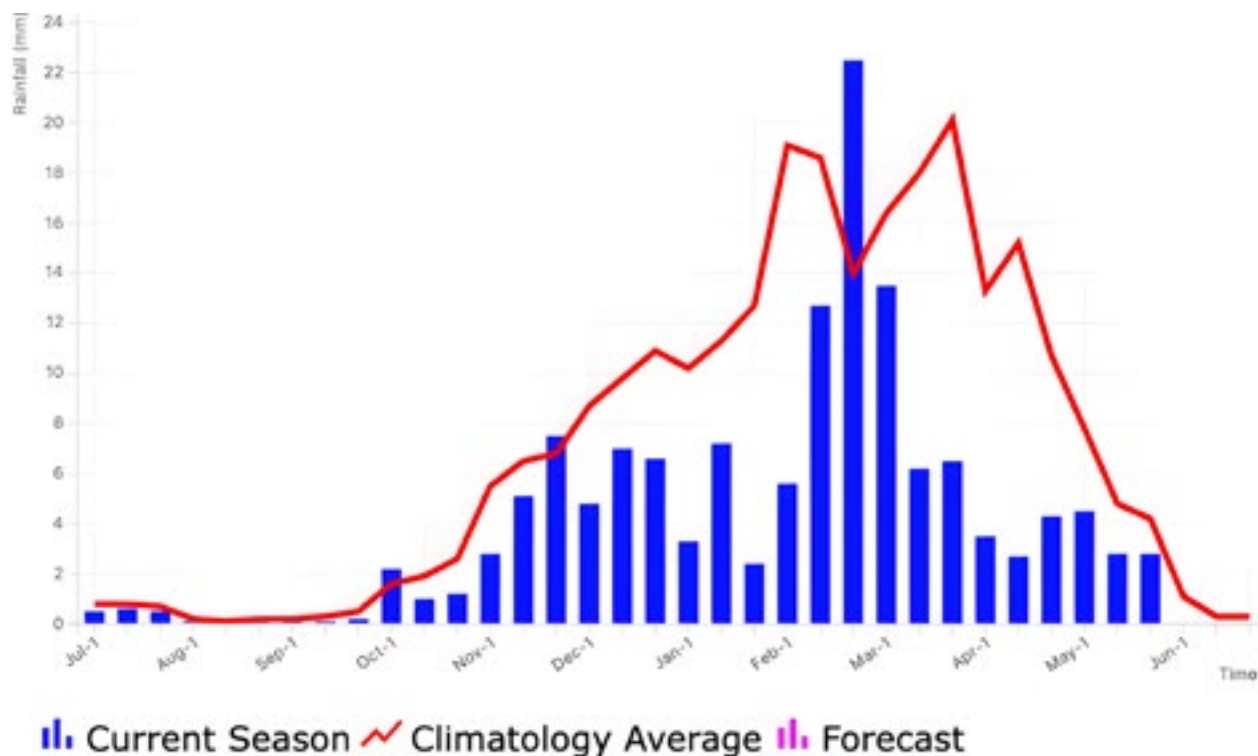
Source: Map by Roger Helms for AAN, 2025

The FEWS NET report showed the rainfall for this zone over the last year. The failure of the rain is clear (Figure 9).

The impact of the drought in the worst-hit areas is not just on livestock and crops, said truck driver, **Haji Gul Muhammad**, who delivers food and other goods to **Gereshk and Naw Zad districts in northern Helmand**. He said discussions among shopkeepers there centred on fears that “villages in the remote and mountainous areas will probably be forced to migrate because the water sources, the springs, will dry up and, because the ground is rocky, they cannot dig wells.” Those villagers, Gul Muhammad said, were already finding it hard to find water for themselves, let alone their livestock. People, he said, were already “in dire straits,” with many “buying and selling on credit.”

Also speaking about the acute need for credit this year was shopkeeper **Haji Amin**, who lives in **Daikundi province’s Kiti district**.

Figure 9: Rainfall in the last year, shown against the average, for the South-Central Mountain Wheat, Dried Fruit and Livestock Livelihood Zone, the region where many of our drought-struck interviewees live



Source: FEWS NET, 'Afghanistan Agroclimate Monitoring Report for the 2024-25 season' (see footnote 10 in this report)

In previous years, some poor families in the district facing food shortages, especially in the months of Hamal, Saur and Jawza [the three months of spring, 21 March to 20 June] would usually borrow food from shopkeepers and in return, promised to sell them orchard and garden produce such as almonds, dried apricots, rose petals and dried mulberries. But this year, there will be no harvest. Yet, they will still have to borrow food, and that too at prices higher than normal.

He said this was not the only economic difficulty facing people. “The aid from charities that used to exist – like the World Food Programme [WFP], which used to provide food aid three or four times a year – has now completely stopped. It seems as if everything is over in Afghanistan.”

Businessman **Haji Muhammad Khan**, a wholesaler with more than ten years' experience working in **Kandahar City**, who sells goods to shopkeepers in various districts in Ghor, Daikundi, Uruzgan and Helmand Province, also described how:

In the last two months, the number of trucks bringing goods to the city has gone down significantly. When I asked the reason, they said that shopkeepers have no sales and the market is almost stagnant. People have become extremely poor and farming isn't doing well either; horticulture crops, especially in the orchards, have been damaged and destroyed. Also, those who were working in Iran and Pakistan have returned.



The Kandahari farmer, pictured on pages 13 and 15, feeds bundles of wheat into a threshing machine to separate the grain from the chaff, helped by his son.

Photo: Hashim Azizi/FAO, 23 May 2025

Some of our interviewees couched what was happening to their household economies in criticism of the government. **Atiqullah**, a farmer, **in Helmand province's Gereshk district (aka Nahr-e Saraj)**, described how, in the past, “powerful Pashtuns” had “usurped government lands,” drilling deep to access groundwater for irrigation to grow opium.¹⁰ He said they had then sold the land,

¹⁰ This appears to match AAN reporting from April 2022: see Fazl Rahman Muzhary, [One Land, Two Rules \(10\): Three case studies on Taliban sales of state land](#).

leaving the buyer at risk of having it reclaimed by the government. The level of water in the solar-powered wells they had drilled had also fallen, he said, from 120 to 150 metres. “That excessive use of groundwater,” he contended, “could be dangerous for the region’s climate in the future, but no one is paying attention to this issue.” Moreover, he alleged that commanders and others with links to the government were still growing poppy, despite the ban on cultivation, but ordinary people did not dare to, after their opium crops were destroyed last year. As for the main alternative crop, wheat, he said the failure of the spring rains meant farmers were extremely worried about what sort of harvest they might reap this year.¹¹

We also heard from a former Taliban fighter, **Juma Gul**, who lives in **Uruzgan province’s Chaharchina district (aka Shahid-e Hassas)**, who was bitterly critical of “the elders and leaders.” He said he had been “a mujahed for more than 10 years,” but he and other comrades had not received their salaries for four months. “I have ten mouths to feed and the region is dry. The land gives us no produce. ... If I’d known the outcome of the struggle, and that positions and power would go to the powerful, I would never have done jihad. I’d have focused on my own personal life. I regret that now, but there is nothing I can do.”

¹¹ For more on opium cultivation in Helmand (and Badakhshan) this year, see Fabrizio Foschini and Jelena Bjelica’s 27 June 2025 report for AAN, [The Fourth Year of the Opium Ban: An update from two of Afghanistan’s major poppy-growing areas](#).

BEYOND DROUGHT AND AGRICULTURE: OTHER DRIVERS OF ECONOMIC HARDSHIP THIS YEAR

Despite the prospects for a good wheat harvest nationally, the IPC is concerned about the millions of Afghans who will not have enough food to eat this year, but attributes this largely to non-climate, non-agricultural factors. “Food insecurity,” the IPC says, “is mainly driven by a fragile economy, a significant cut in humanitarian assistance and environmental disasters, notably flooding and drought. Endemic poverty and the limited job opportunities still leave many people in a highly vulnerable state.” Its forecast for food insecurity in the period May to October 2025 is that 1.6 million Afghans (4 per cent of the population) will be in an emergency (IPC4) and a further 7.9 million (17 per cent) in crisis (IPC3) (see Figure 10 below).¹²

This year, economic shocks that contribute to food insecurity for many Afghan households are coming from multiple directions.

Cuts to foreign aid

Mentioned by two of our interviews was the end to what they called “donations” or “aid” from “international institutions” or “charities” in their areas. Foreign aid has, indeed, fallen dramatically this year after US President Donald Trump decided to terminate all USAID funding for Afghanistan (and with many other donors cutting

¹² The exact projections given by the Integrated Food Security Phase Classifications (IPC) for May-October 2025 are as follows:

7,926,000 people are projected to be in IPC 3, Acute Food and Livelihood Crisis, defined as households either: having food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; or are marginally able to meet minimum food needs, but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies.

A further 1,595,000 are people projected to be in IPC 4, Humanitarian Emergency, defined as households either: having large food consumption gaps which are reflected in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality; or are able to mitigate those food consumption gaps only by employing emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation.

(Definitions of IPC 3 and 4 are explained [here](#).)

their budgets).¹³ In 2024, US aid made up 40 per cent of all aid. One senior United Nations source told AAN the USAID cut amounted to one billion dollars this year.

Figure 10: Map showing projected acute food insecurity projection, May-October 2025



Source: FEWS NET, 'Afghanistan Agroclimate Monitoring Report for the 2024-25 season' (see footnote 8 in this report)

Emirate officials have repeatedly urged that humanitarian aid not be 'politicised'. Deputy Minister of Economy Abdul Latif Nazari, has said this many times over the last six months, but also insisted that Afghanistan's economy can endure without US assistance, pointing to ongoing efforts toward economic self-sufficiency. Even if the aid stops, [Ariana](#) reported him saying on 24 June 2025, the economy will rely on domestic sources.

That brave note underplays the grave consequences of the cessation of US aid already playing out.¹⁴ UN relief chief, Tom Fletcher, visiting Afghanistan at the end

¹³ The US Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) [reported](#) in its second quarterly report to Congress, published on 30 April 2025, that all USAID funding to Afghanistan had been cut, apart from two small education programmes that had been given a few months' grace. It had yet to receive information about the extent of cuts to State Department programmes.

¹⁴ The consequences of the cessation of USAID funding were looked at in detail by the author in [The End of US Aid to Afghanistan: What will it mean for families, services and the economy?](#), published on 9 May 2025.

of April, said the cuts would “directly result in deaths.” As of late June, 420 health centres had closed, along with 300 nutrition sites.¹⁵ Funding for food assistance, alone, has been cut by 40 per cent. That means, said the IPC report, that, on average, only 625,000 people out of the almost 1.6 million expected to experience large food gaps resulting in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality (IPC Phase 4) will receive food assistance in the May to October period.



Shepherds walk their flock of sheep along a hill road in Khash district, Badakhshan province.
Photo: Omer Abrar/AFP, 21 May 21, 2025

Food insecurity is worst, it said, in Badakhshan province with 40 per cent of the population classified as in IPC Phase 3 and above, followed by Balkh, Bamyan, Daikundi, Ghor, Jawzjan, Nimroz and Sar-e Pul, all with 35 per cent of their populations in IPC Phase 3 and above.

One of the major agencies hit by the funding shortfall is the UN’s World Food Programme (WFP), mentioned by one interviewee as no longer giving food aid to needy families in his locality. According to its [May 2025 Situation Report](#), published on 12 June, only ten per cent of its June to December 2025 programme is funded.

¹⁵ See the [briefing](#) on Afghanistan to the UN Security Council by Assistant Secretary-General for Humanitarian Affairs and Deputy Emergency Relief Coordinator Joyce Msuya on 23 June 2025.

Despite rising malnutrition, it said it “could only cover a small fraction of the acutely hungry,” and is operating “way below the minimum threshold.”

WFP Deputy Country Director Harald Mannhardt told AAN that its main programme, providing food assistance to Afghans suffering an acute (IPC Phase 3) or emergency (IPC Phase 4) food security crisis, should be helping 9.5 million people every month from May to October 2025, but they could only afford to reach one million. Also, they would normally give extra help to pregnant or breastfeeding women, as well as any children under the age of two in a household targeted for food assistance, as a means of preventing malnutrition. Not only has that additional help stopped completely, but Mannhardt said the funding cuts also meant WFP was treating fewer moderately malnourished children. WFP’s school feeding activities will also soon be suspended due to a lack of funding, said the Situation Report, “leaving 400,000 children without the daily meals they depend on.” It expects increasing numbers of children to drop out of school as a result, with girls disproportionately affected.

As well as the funding shortfall, WFP has also had to shift resources, Mannhardt said, so that it could help Afghans being forcibly returned en masse from Iran and Pakistan. That included delaying its famine prevention response by a month. Its early warning system has identified particular households within communities of concern for whom early intervention with cash and other help would save them from selling off assets or coping in other harmful ways. The famine response should have started in May, but began only in June with a first round targeting 35 districts in 16 provinces – Badakhshan, Balkh, Daikundi, Farah, Faryab, Herat, Jawzjan, Kandahar, Kunduz, Laghman, Maidan Wardak, Nuristan, Paktika, Sar-e Pul, Takhar and Zabul. The choice of where to start, he said, was driven by the need to prioritise, taking into account the following factors:

- *Remote and hard to reach areas, particularly during winter, with limited access to markets;*
- *Areas that are affected by a prolonged lean season (when stocks are low and prices high), notably the Central Highlands, and localised drought conditions, notably northern and western regions;*
- *Areas where communities have had to resort to emergency coping strategies for prolonged periods and are suffering from high levels of unemployment and reduced incomes.*

As for the coming winter, Mannhardt said, unless funding increases, WFP expects to support only one million Afghans every month, rather than the six million it supported in winter 2024-25.



A farmer and his son rest and drink a tea during a break from working the land in Zhari district, Kandahar province.

Photo: Javed Tanveer/AFP, 17 January 2022

Cuts to public sector jobs

Also hitting some households are swingeing cuts to public sector jobs announced in April. For anyone following the Islamic Emirate's relentless expansion of the public sector *tashkil* (authorised workforce) since its re-establishment in August 2021, the cuts will have come as no surprise. The Emirate has proved far more effective, less corrupt and more inventive in finding activities to tax than the Islamic Republic, but the Afghan economy is also far smaller than it was. It shrank by a quarter following the collapse of the Republic and has since grown by just 2.3 per cent in 2023 and 2.5 per cent in 2024, barely enough to keep up with population growth, so there is less economic activity to tax. Unlike the Republic, the Emirate also no

longer gets on-budget aid to bolster government spending. It has decided to cut a fifth of civilian and military jobs. Spokesman Zabiullah Mujahed downplayed the move: “Downsizing in government institutions was a natural matter,” [TOLONews](#) reported him saying on 23 April. However, the timing of the cuts is grim, given all the other problems and anxieties besetting many households. Moreover, there are also reports of delays in paying salaries and of salary cuts (see [Amu](#), [Hasht-e Subh](#)), albeit this is rejected by the Ministry of Finance ([Alemarah](#)). There have also been reports that the women sent home from government offices in August 2021, whose salaries were cut to 5,000 afghanis a month in July 2024 ([AAN](#)), may now lose even that little amount.

Many public services had been made vulnerable to foreign aid cuts by the spending choices of the Islamic Emirate and its focus on expanding the security services after taking power. Instead of taking advantage of the peace dividend to expand public services, in 2022, it directed 60 per cent of the budget to the army, police and intelligence service, according to the [World Bank’s October 2023 Afghanistan Development Update](#). It set aside just one per cent for public health, said the Bank, which described the Emirate as “utilizing available resources largely to pay for security, teachers’ salaries, and core civil and administrative functions while leaving donors to finance healthcare, food security, broader education needs, and the agri-food system.” It added that “Financing for long-term economic development needs, including infrastructure, from either source, is minimal.”¹⁶

Forced returns from Pakistan and Iran

Only adding to the difficulties besetting people this year is the intensification of needs driven by the mass forced ‘return’ of Afghans from Pakistan and Iran in what the [Norwegian Refugee Council](#) (NRC) has called “one of the most significant and rapid population shifts the country has seen in recent years.”¹⁷ More than one million people have returned to Afghanistan from Pakistan since it announced its Illegal Foreigners Repatriation Plan in September 2023, according to an IFRC report

¹⁶ For more on this, see AAN reports: Kate Clark, [Survival and Stagnation: The State of the Afghan economy](#), 7 November 2023, and Kate Clark and Roxanna Shapour, [What Do the Taliban Spend Afghanistan’s Money On? Government expenditure under the Islamic Emirate](#), 10 May 2023.

¹⁷ See Norwegian Refugee Council, [One million Afghans returned from Pakistan at risk if unsupported](#), 23 May 2025.

The notion of ‘return’ is complicated by the fact that many of the Afghans now arriving in Afghanistan are new to the country, having been born in Pakistan or Iran.

published on 1 July 2025.¹⁸ In April 2025 alone, it said, more than 144,500 Afghans returned, including approximately 29,900 who were deported.

In addition, roughly a million Afghans were forced to return from Iran in 2024, according to the NRC, while the IFRC reported a further 870,000 returning this year, including 600,000 since 20 March. It said that average daily returns have risen in each recent month: 3,000 a day in March, 5,000 in April, 7,000 in May and early June, and, since Israel launched attacks on Iran on 13 June, an average of 11,500 each day. On 25 June, 34,400 people crossed the border, which, the IFRC said, was the highest single-day return recorded in 2025.



Taliban security stands guard as men perform Namaz-e Istisqa, a special prayer for rain, in a field in Faizabad district, Badakhshan province, after spring rains failed.

Photo: Omer Abrar/AFP, 19 May 2025

In late May, Tehran set a hard deadline of 6 July for all undocumented Afghans to leave the country. The head of the Bureau for Aliens and Foreign Immigrants' Affairs (BAFIA), Nader Yarahmadi, said the situation had reached a tipping point and the more than four million Afghans whose refugee residency documents (Amayesh cards) or census registration cards – previously used as a marker of temporary

¹⁸ See IFRC, [Afghanistan: Population Movement \(Returnees\) - Operation update #1](#), 1 July 2025.

status – had either expired or been invalidated would have to leave his country ([Amu TV](#) 28 May 2025).¹⁹ There would be some exemptions, he [said](#), including, notably, the children of Iranian women and Afghan men: those children would now get Iranian nationality and their fathers would also be able to legalise their status.²⁰ Yarahmadi also said they would support female heads of households who may face difficulties, including threats, if they were returned to Afghanistan. Most Afghans living in Iran, however, do not have residency documents, nor do they fall into the exemption categories.²¹

It was “[p]articularly alarming,” said the [International Organisation for Migration](#) (IOM) on 3 June that, following Iran’s announcement of the 6 July deadline, there was “a significant surge in the number of families being deported – a new and concerning trend, as returnees deported in previous months were predominantly single young men.” In May, families accounted for approximately 44 per cent of all returnees, compared to 26 per cent in April and 11 per cent in January.

Being forced to return is, for most, an experience full of hardship and uncertainty. A recent AAN report featuring interviews with four Afghans who had lived in Pakistan for decades – one of them was born there – illustrated how returnees leave businesses, schools and lives behind.²² Most arrive with very few belongings, little in the way of savings and with no land or home to go back to. Many have also lost connections to their home communities. Moreover, they are arriving in a country

¹⁹ IOM, quoting Iranian government sources, reports that out of the approximately 4.5 million Afghans living in Iran, 750,000 hold Amayesh cards, 360,000 hold passports, 270,000 hold residence permits, 2.6 million are registered through a government-led headcount exercise, as well as a “hard to estimate number of undocumented Afghans.” See [IOM in Iran](#) webpage.

²⁰ For more background on the laws in Iran and elsewhere where mothers either cannot or are severely restricted in being able to pass on their nationality to their children, see UNHCR’s [Background Note on Gender Equality, Nationality Laws and Statelessness, 2025](#).

²¹ The six exemptions to the deportation order, where Afghans can get temporary residence permits, as reported, are: 1) couples where one spouse has an Amayesh card and the other a census document; 2) spouse and children of an Amayesh card holder; 3) those who have a valid passport and expired visa, who can return to Iran by obtaining a new visa after paying a fine; 4) those who have census cards and work permits; 5) those who worked for the previous Afghan government or served in its military; and 6) individuals who have left Iran, but have a valid passport and meet the requirements to reside in Iran. In addition, families whose children are in education can obtain a three-month exit form from the relevant office ([Fararou](#)).

²² See Nur Khan Himmat, [The Second Phase of Forced Returns from Pakistan: Afghans tell stories of hardship and misery](#), 22 June 2025. See also, one man’s account of having to leave Iran with his family: Nur Khan Himmat and Roxanna Shapour, [The Daily Hustle: Afghans flee the Iran-Israel war](#), AAN, 30 June 2025

with huge humanitarian needs, few jobs, and for women, especially those heading households, extreme difficulties caused by the Emirate restricting their movement and legal employment.



A farmer surveys his failed rainfed spring wheat in a district of Faryab province, Khwaja Sabz Posh, where, this year, there was nothing to harvest in 90 to 100 per cent of all the fields.

Photo: Hashim Azizi/FAO, 7 July 2025

Returnees get some support from the Afghan government, as well as from IOM and the UN's refugee agency, UNHCR, although these two agencies have had to reduce their assistance because of the unprecedented number of returnees and funding shortfalls. "This record movement," said IOM in a [30 June press release](#), "is pushing border resources to the brink, while critical funding gaps hinder the ability of IOM and partners to provide assistance, reaching only 10 per cent of those in need."

Among the returnees are also single men who had gone abroad to find work and send money home. They sometimes supported whole extended families. That sudden loss of income, as some of our interviewees mentioned, can put households into crisis. Remittances are also a significant boost for the national economy. In 2023, the [World Bank](#) (p26) estimated that Afghans living abroad sent home two

billion dollars. By way of comparison, aid that year, including United Nations cash shipments, amounted to USD three billion.²³

The fallout from multiple blows to the national economy

The cut to US aid was so massive and sudden that it will dent the national economy, pushing up unemployment, reducing consumer demand and the income available to pay for essential imports, including food, medicine and fuel, and potentially also weakening the afghani and driving up the price of those imports. Any cut to remittances will also hurt the economy, while aid cuts, job cuts, returnees and, in some places, a failed harvest and at-risk livestock, increase and intensify needs. At the same time, government revenues, and the ability of the Emirate to support its people, will suffer. That includes both the revenue that comes from taxing incomes and profits, collected by the Ministry of Finance, which funds general government spending (we have some data on this, largely via World Bank reporting) and the income that the Emirate's Ministry of Agriculture collects on harvests and increases in livestock, *ushr* and *zakat*: this goes straight to the Amir's office. How he spends the money is not known. (For more on taxation, see the author's September 2022 report, [Taxing the Afghan Nation: What the Taliban's pursuit of domestic revenues means for citizens, the economy and the state.](#))

²³ For an in-depth look at the economic and social (including progressive) impact of remittances sent by men working in the Gulf, see this 25 January 2024 report by Sabawoon Samim: [Sending Money Home: The impact of remittances on workers, families and villages.](#)

CONCLUSION

Agriculture remains the backbone of Afghanistan's economy. Approximately one-third of the population, says the IPC, including 42 per cent of those in rural areas, have access to agricultural land. Farming supports not only those who grow crops and keep livestock to eat or sell but also those who work others' land – it is the largest employer in the country. The Afghan staple, wheat, grown on about three-quarters of all agricultural land, and especially winter wheat, which makes up the bulk of the harvest, is fundamental to the entire national economy. A bad wheat harvest dents economic growth. A good harvest boosts it. This year, in defiance of below-average rainfall and a smaller snowpack, the harvest is looking good. Amid all the myriad difficulties facing Afghans, the mass distribution of improved wheat seed varieties is mitigating some of the horrors of drought, and increasing food production in Afghanistan. However, this is not universal. For most of the farmers who rely on rain falling in springtime, whether they have orchards or rainfed land where they grow wheat, or graze livestock on the rangeland, the severe drought has made this a catastrophic year.



A girl drinks water at a brick kiln on the outskirts of Mazar-e Sharif.

Photo: Wakil Kohsar/AFP, 22 June 2025

One consequence of the heating of the earth's atmosphere – which Afghans have had virtually no hand in – is that their country, which is so reliant on agriculture, is now facing droughts that are more frequent and more severe. There is almost nothing they can do to reduce global greenhouse gas emissions and, because of the non-recognition of the Taliban government, Afghanistan is shut out of most global climate adaptation funds. They also have no control over many of the other economic ills affecting their lives – forced returns, reduced foreign aid, spending decisions by their government that has squeezed the money available for public services, cuts to public sector jobs, and – not explored in this report as they are ongoing – the freezing of Afghanistan's reserves and the hampering of trade caused by continuing, sanctions-related difficulties in making international banking transfers. As the IPC commented, food insecurity in Afghanistan is largely a result of non-agricultural factors. However, for many Afghan farmers, at least, the fourth drought in five years has not proved the calamity it would previously have been.

Edited by Roxanna Shapour and Rachel Reid

Design and layout by Žolt Kovač

Cover: A farmer harvests wheat on the outskirts of Mazar-e Sharif in Balkh province.

Photo: Farshad Usyan/AFP, 13 June 2020