

# AFGHANISTAN

## Risk overview



Risk report  
29 June 2023

### OVERVIEW

Almost two years after the political transition of August 2021, engagement between the Taliban and the international community, particularly the US, has arrived at an impasse. The Interim Taliban Authority (ITA) has unsuccessfully pursued formal international recognition, the removal of sanctions against Taliban members, and the unfreezing of Afghanistan's central bank assets (VOA 18/06/2022; DIIS 06/09/2022; CFR accessed 15/04/2023). Domestically, the ITA has issued numerous decrees and directives, strongly affecting the daily lives of Afghans, their human rights, and the operating environment for humanitarian responders (ACAPS 21/04/2023). Official development assistance is still limited to humanitarian assistance, and prospects for economic recovery remain grim (UNDP 18/04/2023).

Afghanistan ranks among the countries with the highest climate risk index score, showing high levels of hazard exposure and underlying vulnerability as well as limited coping capacities (EC accessed 16/05/2023). At the same time, the ITA ban on poppy imposed in April 2022 has drastically reduced poppy cultivation, and wheat production dominates many of Afghanistan's traditional poppy-growing areas. That said, many families do not own sufficient land, and the shift to wheat will not automatically reduce food insecurity (Alcis 06/06/2023).

Between May–October 2023, 15 million Afghans are projected to be acutely food-insecure, including 2.8 million people facing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity (WFP 25/01/2023 and 24/05/2023). The country's vulnerability to hazards, particularly drought, heatwaves, and floods, will further increase food insecurity and affect food production.

This report identifies four risks, including the loss of income across all sectors of the rural population, an increase in state land reclamation cases, a further deterioration of relations between the ITA and Pakistan, and increased tensions in northern Afghanistan and between the Afghan and Pakistani Taliban. These risks collectively paint a challenging picture for Afghanistan's economic stability, humanitarian situation, security, and regional dynamics. Should these risks materialise, they would significantly affect some or all of the population, compounding the already dire situation.

### METHODOLOGY

The ACAPS risk analysis aims to enable humanitarian decision makers to understand potential future changes that would likely have humanitarian consequences. Explaining how situations might develop and understanding their impact can support decision makers and responders in planning and preparedness, improving overall response.

This risk analysis is based on the ACAPS Risk Methodology Note. This risk overview is the result of a workshop involving nine analysts and experts on Afghanistan and bilateral conversations with contextual experts. In addition, a short risk survey was sent out to more than 60 people, but the response rate was low with only 10 responses. [Read more about the ACAPS risk methodology.](#)

ACAPS conducts the internal monitoring of key risks and provides updates and alerts as risks evolve. ACAPS also provides updates on the risks every three months, taking into consideration the dynamism of the crisis and developments that might change the chain of events or ways in which the identified hazard(s) materialise. Every six months, past risks identified are assessed and the accuracy of the analysis evaluated.

#### Key principles of risk analysis

Risk analysis requires a solid understanding of the context and an investigation of the interaction of variables that could cause or resist change.

Risk analysis is not an exact science. An event identified as a hazard might not evolve or materialise as anticipated or not have the projected impact. Events or factors (triggers) expected to drive a shift or change in the situation may not occur, or new factors may arise that prevent the projected change or shift from happening.

The probability of a risk does not need to be high to warrant concern. A hazardous event with a low or medium probability of occurring should be a cause of concern for humanitarians if the expected impact is medium, high, or very high.



## What is a risk

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The ACAPS risk methodology defines risk as the probability of a hazard or multiple hazards materialising, combined with the estimated impact of such hazards. The associated risk level (low, medium, or high) rises with the hazard's probability of occurring and the severity of its expected impact.

**Impact** is the predicted overall humanitarian consequence of a hazard materialising. It can be an increase in the number of people needing assistance, the severity of their needs, or both. The impact is based on exposure to the hazard, the intensity of the hazard, and the population's vulnerability and coping capacity. ACAPS classifies impact on a five-point scale: very low, low, moderate, significant, or major.

**Probability** is the chance of a hazard materialising. ACAPS assesses probability on a five-point scale: very low, low, medium, high, or very high. A hazardous event estimated to have a 50% probability of occurring should be a cause of concern. In some cases, a probability of as low as 25% (a one in four chance of occurrence) may be a concern depending on the hazard's potential humanitarian impact.

In this report, some of the risks represent 'newly emerging crises', and others indicate a potential 'rapid and marked deterioration' in an existing crisis. A steadily deteriorating humanitarian situation that continues at the same rate is considered a trend instead of a risk. This report does not include trends.

## LIMITATIONS

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The continued deteriorating trends in Afghanistan make it very difficult to establish if a risk will occur or if a situation will simply gradually deteriorate. Although this analysis follows a specific methodology, risk analysis is not an exact science.

Information gaps limit the analysis. It was particularly challenging to identify the impact on the most vulnerable groups and assess the short- and medium-term impact of bans on poppy/opium and ephedra/methamphetamine cultivation, production, and trade.

All figures provided for the impact of the risks are estimations. While efforts were made to ensure that all information was up to date at the time of publishing, the rapidity with which the situation evolves means significant changes are often observed weekly.

### About this report

The Afghanistan Risk Overview is a biannual risk identification report outlining key emerging risks likely to affect the humanitarian situation in the country over the next six months. It aims to inform the humanitarian community of possible changes in context and humanitarian needs in Afghanistan to facilitate contingency planning, risk management, and response. ACAPS regularly tracks these and other risks for Afghanistan and publishes alerts and updates as the context evolves. The next Afghanistan Risk Overview will be published in December 2023.

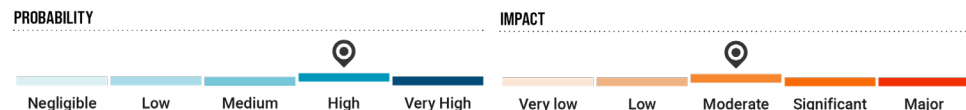
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# Risk 1

**Reduced crop harvest because of drought, heatwaves, large-scale locust outbreak, and government anti-narcotics policies leads to income loss across all sectors of the rural population, with particularly strong impacts on the poorest rural populations.**



## Rationale

Agricultural production levels strongly influence the economic wellbeing of households in Afghanistan. More than half of Afghanistan's working population, including a large number of women (54% of those employed in the agriculture sector), works in the agricultural sector, and an estimated 80% of livelihoods in Afghanistan rely directly or indirectly on agriculture (FAO 16/10/2022; WB 18/10/2022; WB accessed 03/05/2023).

Afghanistan has gone through three consecutive years of La Niña-related drought (OCHA 23/01/2023), which ended in March 2023. In the next six to ten months, the country may be affected by El Niño-related weather events (Modern Sciences 08/05/2023; WB accessed 09/05/2023). Seasonal rainfall forecasts from June to August indicate below-normal rainfall in southern provinces, but normal to above-average rainfall in the rest of the country, which may improve growing conditions for rice and maize (EU May 2023; USDA accessed 09/06/2023). However, seasonal temperature forecasts for June-August show a high probability for above-normal temperature in large parts of the country, particularly in southern and central provinces. Heat waves will augment evapotranspiration and cause additional stress to crops, further decreasing crop yields. From January 2024 onwards, El Niño events are expected to bring above-average rainfall across most of the country, particularly in north and north-eastern provinces. This could be beneficial for agriculture, but also increases the risks of floods and landslides (OCHA 20/01/2019).

Water scarcity from drought also affects agricultural productivity and livestock production (AAN 06/11/2021). Wheat, the staple crop in Afghanistan, is particularly vulnerable to water scarcity, which results in decreased production and higher import costs (WB 18/10/2022; STC 26/08/2021; FEWS NET 08/2022). Water scarcity has led to a 10% fall in wheat production, from 5 million tonnes in 2020 to 4.5 million in 2022 (Index Mundi accessed 14/04/2023). At the same time, soaring import costs decreased wheat imports by 20% in 2022 compared to 2021 (TOLOnews 19/04/2022).

Insufficient irrigation water, coupled with plant diseases, lower quality seeds, inadequate access to fertilizer, and lower selling prices are some of the reasons leading more than two-thirds of crop producers to plant less area compared to a typical year (FAO accessed 27/06/2023).

The FAO has also warned about a potential large-scale outbreak of the Moroccan Locust, which is one of the most damaging plant pests in the world (The Guardian 11/5/2023). The locust has been sighted and is expected to hit the country's northern and northeastern provinces, where much wheat is produced. The locust is estimated to destroy about 25% of the country's total annual harvest or 700,000 to 1.2 million metric tonnes of wheat (FAO accessed 27/6/2023).

In December 2021 and April 2022, the ITA banned the production, usage, and trade of methamphetamine and poppy, respectively (BBC 12/12/2021; CNN 03/04/2022; Reuters 03/04/2022). Opium cultivation served as a significant source of income for some rural households in Afghanistan. After the ban, the farm-level rural economy of Afghanistan suffered a staggering loss of over USD 1 billion in economic activity each year (UNODC 17/02/2021; USIP 08/06/2023).

Low production levels reduce rural employment opportunities and farmers' household incomes (WB 18/10/2022). The declining economy and limited job opportunities make competition for jobs in urban areas high and provide few options for rural migrants (CSRS 08/02/2023). This unemployment and the lack of income have caused a surge in food insecurity and malnutrition. In 2023, a staggering 2.3 million Afghan boys and girls are projected to confront the harrowing reality of acute malnutrition, with 875,000 of them requiring urgent treatment for severe acute malnutrition, while an additional 840,000 pregnant women and breastfeeding mothers face the grave challenge of acute malnutrition, risking their ability to provide their newborns with a healthy start (UN 18/05/2023).

All these factors are jeopardising the economic wellbeing of households in Afghanistan, which heavily rely on agriculture and alternative income sources.

## Impact

The combination of anticipated heatwaves, floods, government policies, and yet another year of drought will reduce agricultural production and household income in Afghanistan. The bans will particularly affect household income in the central highlands region (Bamyan, Farah, Ghor, and Nimroz, the main areas of ephedra harvest) and the south (Faryab, Helmand, and Kandahar, the major poppy-growing areas), where many rely on seasonal income from the harvests (Alcis 06/06/2023). Lower agricultural production compounded with lower income in the agricultural sector means rural households may not be able to afford adequate food and may experience food insecurity. Projections for the period between May–October 2023 indicate that about 12.5 million people living in Afghanistan will face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food insecurity, while 2.8 million will experience IPC 4 (IPC 15/05/2023).



To alleviate hunger, households may resort to less nutritious alternatives and other negative coping mechanisms, such as reducing their number of meals, selling household assets, and placing girls in forced early marriages (CARE 29/12/2022).

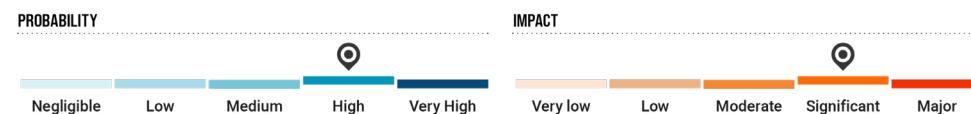
Households may also sell off productive assets such as land, livestock, tools, and machinery, consume seeds usually held for the following years, and decrease investments in farming for the coming year (FAO Accessed/07/06/2023).

Child malnutrition will likely increase, heightening their vulnerability to diseases. The limited access to healthcare resulting from the combination of increased widespread poverty and a weakened public health system may contribute to increased child mortality rates (MSF 06/02/2023).

A lack of adequate food intake and reduced access to healthcare also expose pregnant women, people with disabilities, people living with chronic diseases, and older people to increased health risks. The continuing drought will disproportionately affect women-headed households, child-headed households, and those headed by older people or people with chronic diseases, as most of these will not be able to feed themselves and their families. These households may already face economic and social disadvantages, making them more susceptible to the impacts of these health risks and the cascading effects on food security and healthcare access.

## Risk 2

**Increased state land reclamation cases, led by the Land Grabbing Prevention and Restitution Commission of the Ministry of Justice, increase the number of displaced people and amplify humanitarian needs.**



### Rationale

On 21 October 2022, the Amir of the ITA approved the Code of Prevention of Land Grabbing and Restitution of Grabbed Lands (IEA 21/10/2022). The code delegated the Land Grabbing Prevention and Restitution Commission of the Ministry of Justice to address land-related injustices and restore land rights (TOLOnews 28/01/2023). The decree also appointed a special court to deal with involved cases (AAN 22/12/2022).

The intention to combat 'land grabbing' is not new in Afghanistan; the Republic Government also made several attempts to pass relevant land laws (WB 03/02/2019). Following the political transition of August 2021, the resolve to implement state-led land reclamation has increased. By February 2023, the Ministry of Justice commission had processed the registration of 2.3 million jeribs (460,000 hectares) of appropriated land as government property, with another 720,000 hectares under investigation (Pajhwok 06/02/2023). By April 2023, the commission had reclaimed 202,343 hectares of land (TOLOnews 07/04/2023).

Some of these land reclamations have and will affect IDPs living in informal settlements, as well as other people who bought land in good faith (ACAPS 27/02/2023). Without providing alternative solutions, land reclamation risks worsening an already dire situation for many Afghans and leading to an escalation in humanitarian needs. Systematic numbers of affected IDPs and other people are currently not available, but in 2022, the Norwegian Refugee Council estimated that 500,000 Afghan IDPs faced the threat of homelessness (NRC 30/06/2022). In December 2022 alone, almost 20,000 people residing in eight informal camps in Badghis were forcefully removed and their camps dismantled (NRC 15/12/2022; GIHA 20/12/2022).

Continues land reclamation worsens the already dire situation for many Afghans and will lead to an escalation in humanitarian needs.

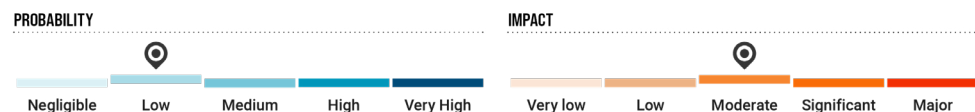


## Impact

The lack of adequate compensation associated with state-led land reclamations will make rebuilding lives more challenging for the affected households who must bear the economic cost of displacement. Even when many other households strongly affected by the dismal economic situation are forced to sell land to make ends meet, many of those affected by state-led land reclamations lack the means to buy it (ACAPS 16/06/2023). Land reclamation could intensify existing inequalities, aggravate social conflict and segregation, and invariably affect the poorest, most socially and economically vulnerable, and most marginalised sectors of society who have no adequate coping mechanism.

## Risk 3

**The ITA's unwillingness to neutralise the Tehrik-e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Pakistan's continued fencing of the Durand line, and the ITA's developing engagement with India further deteriorate relations between the ITA and Pakistan and increase security incidents on both sides of the Durand line.**



## Rationale

Since the Taliban takeover of Kabul in August 2021, Pakistan has demanded that the ITA act seriously against the TTP on Afghan territory (Dawn 06/01/2022; USIP 4/5/2022). Since 2017, Pakistan has also been building fence along the 2,640km long Durand Line to prevent the cross-border movement of armed militants affiliated with the TTP, drug smugglers, weapons, infiltration and illegal immigrations (Global Village Space 25/11/2022). The ITA has officially opposed and caused disruptions to the construction of the fence, with the defence ministry calling the fencing of the border illegal as it will divide the Pashtun tribes living alongside the border line (Reuters 22/12/2022; The Diplomat 11/01/2022; HT 25/12/2021). The ITA continues to assert the right to free movement of people across the Durand line, consistent with their position during the first Islamic Emirate (1996–2001) (USIP 12/01/2022).

That said, the TTP continues to operate from Afghan territory (UNSC 13/02/2023). In November 2022, the TTP ended the ITA-mediated ceasefire that it had agreed to with the Government of Pakistan in May 2022. The group has increased its attacks in Pakistan, particularly in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Balochistan provinces (FP 18/04/2023). Trends suggest that 2023 may become worse than the 2013 peak year of TTP-related violence in Pakistan, with almost 200 terror-related incidents and at least 340 fatalities as at March 2023 alone (East Asia Forum 29/03/2023). With the Pakistani military set in a serious power struggle with deposed Prime Minister Imran Khan, whom the ITA viewed favourably, this trend is unlikely to change in the next six months.

The relationship between Pakistan and Afghanistan has also become more delicate as a result of the ITA's inability to provide security for foreign officials. The attack on Pakistan's ambassador to Kabul, claimed by the Islamic State terrorist group at the end of 2022, put significant strain on ties between the two countries (The New Arab 17/04/2023).

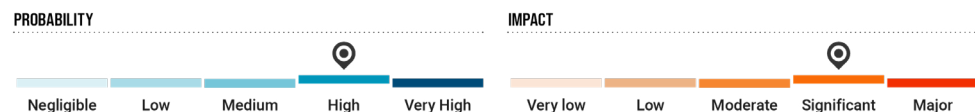
## Impact

Increased tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan will likely increase security incidents on both sides of the Durand line. An increasingly insecure environment along the Durand Line will hinder economic and infrastructure development and mostly affect local communities living in border areas, as increased tensions further limit their ability to move freely across the border.

Heightened tensions between Pakistan and Afghanistan will continue to disrupt trade and the cross-border movement of goods. Increased security incidents and restrictions along the border could further impede the seamless flow of goods, resulting in delays and reduced trade volumes. This disruption could directly contribute to a scarcity of goods supply in the Afghan market, further increasing already high commodity prices. As a result, ordinary citizens, particularly those from low-income households, may struggle to afford basic necessities. Tensions and security incidents could also result in the diversion of public expenditure from development and services, such as health, education, and infrastructure, towards the security sectors.

## Risk 4

**Increased tensions in northern Afghanistan and between Afghan and Pakistani Taliban, resulting from the relocation of TTP members and their families from the Durand line to the north, result in substantial mobilisation for the Islamic State – Khorasan Province (IS-KP) and the National Resistance Front of Afghanistan (NRF) and increase armed violence.**



### Rationale

Northern Afghanistan has a history of ethnic diversity, with various ethnic groups, such as Tajiks, Uzbeks, Pashtuns, Turkmen, and others, residing in the region (TWP 28/07/2021). Since the 1960s, these groups have had complex relationships marked by power struggles, competition for resources, and political marginalisation and have increasingly challenged the privileged position of Pashtun elites (CR 01/06/2023).

Based on interviews with ITA and Pakistani security officials, Afghan authorities have recently agreed to relocate TTP militants from the Durand Line (Khost, Kunar, Paktia, and Paktika) to other Afghan provinces (The Khorasan Diary 17/06/2023). The plans emerged in reaction to an increase in cross-border militant attacks in Pakistan since the political transition of August 2021 (VOA 04/06/2023). The number of individual TTP fighters in Afghanistan is estimated at 8,000–12,000, while the total with their families is approximately 30,000 (Tribune 24/02/2023). It is unclear if the above-mentioned relocation plans foresee moving all of them to northern Afghanistan.

Based on official ITA sources suggest that relocating TTP fighters to northern Afghanistan would serve a dual purpose. On the one hand, the ITA would take a substantive step in accommodating a security concern of Pakistan, which is a crucial neighbouring state. On the other, “Taliban authorities intend to use TTP fighters as proxies against the anti-Taliban National Resistance Front of Afghanistan” (The Khorasan Diary 17/06/2023). Since the collapse of the Republic in August 2021, the NRF has emerged in northern Afghanistan as the main armed opposition to the ITA and operates mainly in areas populated by members of the Tajik ethnic group connected to Panjshir Valley (ISW 29/11/2022).

The relocation of TTP could also lead to confrontations with the IS-KP, which is increasingly present in northern Afghanistan. The IS-KP has claimed major attacks in the north, particularly Badakhshan and Balkh provinces (The Khorasan Diary 17/06/2023). These attacks include the killing of the acting Taliban provincial governor of Badakhshan and attendees of his funeral in June 2023 (RFE/RL 06/06/2023). The IS-KP’s relation with the TTP has soured in the aftermath of Operation Zarb-e-Azb led by the Pakistani military against the TTP in North Waziristan in 2013/2014. The military operation weakened and fragmented the TTP, allowing the IS-KP to adopt a “poaching strategy notably aimed at every level of the TTP” (EFSAS 06/2022).

The relocation plan for TTP members could alleviate Risk 3 but also create a volatile situation in northern Afghanistan, especially when coupled with the mobilisation of NRF forces and the potential involvement of the IS-KP.

### Impact

Local communities in northern Afghanistan, particularly those affected by the activities of armed groups in the region, could perceive the growing presence of TTP members as a threat. This perception may lead to increased suspicions, fears, and a sense of insecurity, fuelling ethnic tensions.

The relocation also translates into displacement, aggravating already precarious humanitarian conditions in Afghanistan. This situation could further strain limited resources, such as land, water, and employment opportunities, intensifying competition between these two groups (Pashtuns and non-Pashtuns) and increasing economic and resource-related tensions in the region.

Different armed groups, particularly the NRF and the IS-KP, may exploit growing resentment in the north, with the population perceiving the relocation as a ‘Pashtunisation’ of the north that goes hand in hand with the redistribution of scarce resources (fertile land and water) from non-Pashtuns to Pashtuns.

The influx of TTP members could inadvertently provide a breeding ground for IS-KP recruitment and activities, as the IS-KP has shown a tendency to exploit ethnic fault lines to further its agenda and gain recruits. This will lead to an increase in armed violence, further aggravating ethnic tensions in the region.