

# DJIBOUTI

## Drought

### KEY FIGURES

**199,000**  
AFFECTED PEOPLE

**72,000**  
PEOPLE IN NEED OF  
HUMANITARIAN  
ASSISTANCE

**High risk**  
VEGETATION AND  
GROUNDWATER LEVEL  
CONDITIONS

**4.4**  
INFORM CLIMATE  
CHANGE RISK SCORE

#### FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

- UN agencies (WFP, UNICEF, IOM)
- Several INGOs that have started response activities

### CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

In Djibouti, drought is affecting around 200,000 people. The current drought started in 2020 and has continued with five below-average rainy seasons since (IOM 27/02/2023). The most recent IPC projections, from May 2022, predicted that around 192,000 people (18% of the population) would be acutely food-insecure and experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse food insecurity levels in the country between July–December 2023 (WFP 06/04/2022; IPC 04/05/2022). As at October 2022, about 72,000 people, including 29,000 children, were in need of humanitarian assistance as a result of the drought (UNICEF 06/10/2022). The crisis has displaced approximately 6,000 people (WFP 27/02/2023).

A combination of extremely low rainfall levels and rising seasonal temperatures during the past three years has made Djibouti one of the most arid countries in the world. A lack of vegetation coverage and below-average groundwater levels significantly affect pastoralist livelihoods in rural areas (WFP 06/04/2022).

Drought has mainly affected rural areas and the regions of Ali Sabieh, Arta, and Obock, as well as some parts of Tadjourah. Such conditions have made people rely on negative coping strategies, such as involvement in illegal activities and reduced food rations (WFP 06/04/2022; IPC 04/05/2022).

### ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

- The drought progressively worsened in 2022, after the Horn of Africa's fifth consecutive below-average rainy season (NASA 13/12/2022; UNICEF 06/20/2022). 15 meteorological and humanitarian organisations have forecast another below-normal or normal, but not above-normal, rainy season in the Horn of Africa. If this materialises, the countries in the region would face an unprecedented sequence of six below-average rainy seasons (FAO et al. 16/02/2023). This is likely to further aggravate the crisis, as it could mean the further disruption of livelihoods (livestock and agriculture for rural populations), higher food prices, and increased food insecurity in the country (WMO 23/02/2023; DTE 06/07/2022; UNICEF 06/10/2022).
- Even if there is an above-normal rainy season, full recovery will take years. For people who have lost livestock, rebuilding herds is not an immediate process. In 2020, many pastoral areas had still not recovered from the 2016–2017 drought. As communities have lost livelihoods, they will likely not have the resources to invest in planting (FAO et al. 16/02/2023).

### HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

- Given Djibouti's political stability, its central location in the Horn of Africa, and the low levels of violence within the country, the country attracts several international organisations. Coordination with local NGOs is often still difficult, as many of them have little experience or technical capacity. In the past, these constraints have delayed some humanitarian assistance projects (BTI 2022; USAID/FHI 360 30/04/2019; UNHCR 04/05/2022).
- Djibouti is one of the most underfunded countries in the Horn of Africa for the drought crisis. Although organisations have few access constraints, a lack of resources is a major constraint to humanitarian assistance (IOM 27/02/2023).



## CRISIS IMPACTS

### Livelihoods

Drought has disrupted the livelihoods of several populations in Djibouti. A WFP assessment from 2022 showed that 50% of livestock and other income sources (milk or agriculture) in the country were lost by midyear (WFP 28/07/2022). More than 76% of Djibouti's economy depends on services, such as through the country's position as a transit port, the transportation of international goods to Ethiopia, and its status as a free trade zone in the Horn of Africa (AFDB 2022; AEZO accessed 07/03/2023). About 90% of the food supply comes from abroad (JICA accessed 02/03/2023; WB 04/11/2022). The drought arrived at a time when Djibouti's economy was suffering from external disruption following Russia's invasion of Ukraine, two countries that supply much of Djibouti's inputs (UNICEF 06/10/2022; OCHA accessed 10/03/2023). The impact of the drought is different for rural and urban communities.

**Rural populations** usually engage in subsistence agriculture, as Djibouti's arable land represents just over 4% of the territorial area. That said, about 15–20% of the population lives in rural areas, and their main income comes from agriculture. About 72.5% of the population in rural areas of Djibouti experience extreme poverty. Rural areas of Djibouti account for 45% of the country's poor (WB 01/2020; IFAD accessed 02/03/2023). A lack of water in rural communities prevents people from irrigating their crops or feeding their livestock (UN/WFP 20/11/2022). Given these conditions, some families have decided to sell their livestock and use the money to buy food (ECHO 07/06/2022). In 2022, there was a 22% reduction in livestock ownership compared to 2021. Other negative coping mechanisms involve begging or involvement in illegal activities, such as theft. In some regions, including Ali Sabieh, Dikhil, Obock, and Tadjourah, 12–21% of the population use extreme coping mechanisms (WFP 06/04/2022).

**In urban areas**, the main impact comes from income loss and high food prices. In some districts of the country (such as Balbala in Djibouti city), about 50% of households reported recently losing their income. As urban households rely heavily on market-generated income, a lack of crops and livestock in rural areas affects their ability to work (WFP 06/04/2022). About 46% of the country's population resides in Balbala alone (WB 01/2020).

### Food security and nutrition

In May 2022, IPC predicted that more than 192,000 people would become acutely food insecure and experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity levels between July–December 2022 (IPC 04/05/2022). IPC has not released an updated prediction since then. The regions of Ali Sabieh and Arta, as well as refugee camps (mainly in Ali Addeh, Holl-Holl, and Markazi d'Obock), have the highest levels of food insecurity, with around 20–40% of the population facing IPC 3 or 4 food insecurity. Djiboutian households faced a 10% increase in food insecurity between 2020–2022 (IPC 04/05/2022).

Nearly 75% of households in Djibouti have insufficient access to sufficient and diversified food. One of the coping strategies people use in the face of the economic crisis is reducing the number and diversity of their meals (WFP 28/07/2022). Households in Djibouti spend about 77% of their income on food. Drought-induced price increases and reduced livelihoods affect Djiboutians' food security and nutrition (WFP 30/11/2022). The recent absence of agricultural production has forced people to rely more on markets as their main food source, with around 84–97% of households relying on markets, including in rural areas. Nearly 54% of rural households face inadequate food consumption, particularly in Ali Sabieh, Arta, and Obock regions. Between 60–100% of the population across Djibouti are not meeting minimum acceptable dietary requirements (WFP 10/05/2022). In 2021, about 54 out of every 1,000 children died before the age of six (WB accessed 07/03/2023). An estimated 35% of mortality among children under five in Djibouti is directly or indirectly related to malnutrition (UNICEF 19/01/2020). The average mortality rate for under-fives is 54 out of every 1,000. This proportion is higher than in nearby countries, such as Kenya (37 per 1,000), Eritrea (38 per 1,000), and Ethiopia (47 per 1,000). In the Horn of Africa, only Somalia has a higher rate (WB accessed 07/03/2023). Close to 31% of children between 6–59 months of age suffer from chronic malnutrition (WFP 12/2022).

Both drought and the war in Ukraine drive food insecurity in Djibouti. The drought particularly affects the rural population and contributes to price increases through livestock deaths and a lack of crop irrigation. The war in Ukraine is affecting food imports, as Russia and Ukraine are among the country's main suppliers of inputs (such as oil and seed oils) and food (IPC 04/05/2022; OEC accessed 07/03/2023).



## Health and WASH

Across the country, about 20% of the population (192,000 people) have no access to safe drinking water (WB 22/04/2021). In 2019, about 65% of the rural population had no access to safe drinking water (UNICEF 30/04/2019). Djibouti experiences little rainfall (about 150mm annually) and has few surface water sources. Drought increases the risk of infectious diseases and waterborne illnesses and affects access to water needed for menstrual health and hygiene (IOM 31/12/2022; UNICEF 06/10/2022). Poor rural households also do not have access to sanitation (WB 01/2020).

The drought has affected the country's healthcare system, particularly for those living in remote areas. Nearly 90% of poor rural households live more than 1km from a health facility (WB 01/2020). Drought-induced water shortages are forcing people to use potentially contaminated water sources. Measles and cholera outbreaks have been confirmed in other drought-affected countries in the Horn of Africa. In Djibouti, measles, malaria, dengue, and acute watery diarrhoea outbreaks have recently occurred. As at November 2022, the country had reported around 546 suspected measles cases (WHO 02/08/2022; APA News 24/02/2023).

## Education

The drought has also disrupted children's education, as families rely on negative coping strategies that involve suspending school attendance. Some of these strategies include migration to less drought-affected regions and using children to collect water, which requires travel over longer distances (UNICEF 06/10/2022; WFP accessed 01/02/2023). Some teachers have also stopped teaching to engage in other more profitable activities or to migrate, affecting the supply of education (UNICEF 23/08/2022). An estimated 26,500 children need education support because of the drought. Limited access to safe water in schools also causes school dropouts (UNICEF 06/10/2022).

In 2020, there were approximately 182,200 children of compulsory school age across Djibouti (Trading Economics accessed 28/02/2023). In 2021, 33% of these children were out of school. The number of out-of-school children decreased in 2019 from 43% in 2016, but it has since either plateaued or increased slightly (WB accessed 28/02/2023). Two-thirds of rural households living in poverty are more than 1km from an elementary school (WB 01/2020).

## Protection

Women and children are normally responsible for water collection, and the drought forces them to travel to distant places to collect water, putting them at risk of gender-based violence, exploitation, or abuse during the journey. Many people have also adopted other negative

coping mechanisms, such as child marriage or child labour, during droughts, posing risks for the affected population (UNICEF 06/10/2022; WB accessed 10/03/2023). Around 48,900 women, girls, and boys need protection (UNICEF 06/10/2022).

## COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

### Conflict and humanitarian crisis in neighbouring countries

In the absence of widespread violence or political unrest, Djibouti has become a destination country for some refugees from other countries in the Horn of Africa. About 23,000 refugees and 11,000 asylum seekers are in the country, equivalent to 3% of Djibouti's total population or one in every 30 Djiboutians (IOM 28/06/2022; UNHCR accessed 02/02/2023). Roughly 10% of the population (100,000 people) are migrants, mostly from Ethiopia. An additional 300–400 people normally travel through Djibouti daily, either migrating through Djibouti or returning to their country of origin (OCHA accessed 10/03/2023). People usually enter Djibouti because of war in their home countries and food insecurity (OCHA accessed 10/03/2023; IFRC 30/09/2022). The drought has also motivated some people to leave rural areas of their countries for urban areas, including Djibouti. Refugees, migrants, and asylum seekers in Djibouti are at greater risk of food insecurity during droughts, as they have fewer stable sources of income and sometimes do not have access to shelter (IOM/MMC 01/03/2023). Accidents during the migration process and smugglers put migrants in unsafe conditions (IOM 23/05/2022).

Aside from the added pressure of caring for migrants, refugees, and asylum seekers, violence in neighbouring countries has reduced the flow of trade across borders. This affects people in Djibouti and its border countries, who often make a living from cross-border trade. It also affects Djibouti's food prices, as much of its food supply depends on foreign countries (ECHO 16/03/2022; UNICEF 06/10/2022; MEI 20/07/2021).

### Economic crisis and poverty

Around 84% of Djibouti's wheat imports come from Russia and Ukraine, suggesting that it is one of the more affected countries following the February 2022 invasion of Ukraine (UNICEF 06/10/2022). In Djibouti, there has been a 10% increase in food prices and a 3.4% increase in the prices of other goods. The World Bank estimates that these could increase poverty in the country by as much as 17.6% (WB 30/06/2022). In 2022, 35% of Djiboutians were in poverty, and 21% were in extreme poverty (OCHA accessed 10/03/2023). Poor people have the least access to food, clean water, and healthcare. A generalised increase in poverty could affect the humanitarian needs of the population of Djibouti (WB 30/06/2022).



## Natural hazards

Climatic hazards, occasional flash floods, and repeated droughts have worsened the country's soil conditions. The cyclical nature of these events means that soil recovery has not been possible (OCHA accessed 10/03/2023; WFP 06/04/2022). For example, during the years before the drought, several floods affected about 25% of Djibouti's population (Govt. Djibouti/ UNCT Djibouti 24/11/2019; Floodlist 22/04/2020). Historically, flash floods affect the southwestern pastoral regions the most. These regions have sandy soils, making them more vulnerable to periods of heavy rainfall and flooding (WB accessed 03/03/2023). Droughts also represent a long-term challenge, as they can contribute to increased soil aridity and desertification (EC 16/06/2022; EC accessed 03/03/2022). Although it is not yet possible to verify that this has happened in Djibouti, subsequent rains may not necessarily alleviate drought problems if soils remain arid or if floods follow droughts.

## FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

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Among the countries in drought crisis, Djibouti's humanitarian response is one of the least funded. IOM reported that as at January 2023, only 1% of the necessary response for Djibouti was funded (IOM 27/02/2023). UN FAO has not received any funding for Djibouti (FAO 10/02/2023).

In Djibouti, UNICEF reported that it had only achieved 20–40% of its targets for providing psychosocial support and treating under-fives for severe acute malnutrition. Of its targets for cash transfers, access to education, access to safe water, and life-saving health services, it had only reached 0–5% of the targeted population. This shortfall is despite exceeding targets for some sectors in other countries in the region (UNICEF 29/09/2022).

Djibouti's Ministry of Interior is coordinating the response to the hunger crisis (IFRC 01/07/2022). Other aspects of the drought crisis unrelated to food insecurity and nutrition may receive less attention.

# IMPACT OF THE DROUGHT IN DJIBOUTI AS AT 16 MARCH 2022

Emergency Response Coordination Centre (ERCC) – DG ECHO Daily Map | 16/03/2022

## Horn of Africa | Food insecurity and population displacement

