# KENYA

# Anticipated impact of drought conditions in Mandera, Tana River, Turkana, and Wajir counties

acaps
Anticipatory note
27 November 2025

## CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

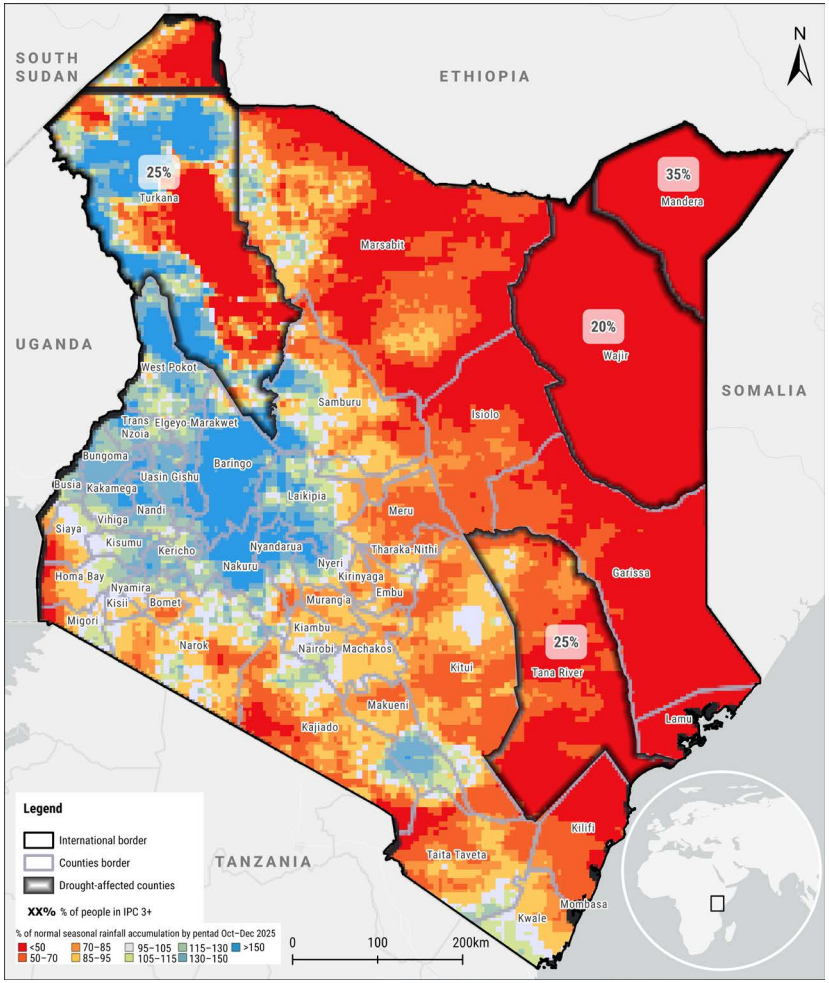
According to the Climate Prediction Center, La Niña conditions are present and expected to persist until February 2026 (NOAA 24/11/2025). The combination of La Niña and a negative Indian Ocean Dipole, a climate phenomenon driven by differences in sea surface temperatures across the Indian Ocean, typically suppresses rainfall in the Horn of Africa between October–December, heightening the risk of drought (ICPAC 27/06/2025 ; FEWS NET accessed 18/11/2025).

In Kenya, La Niña is forecast to bring below-average rainfall and above-normal temperatures through December and likely into the first quarter of 2026. These conditions are expected to intensify the current drought, with impacts already observed in counties including **Turkana and Mandera** (FEWS NET 31/11/2025; IPC 08/09/2025). The anticipated below-average rainfall associated with La Niña will be a continuation of failed rainy seasons (with below-average rainfall experienced) since the first quarter of 2024 (IFRC 22/04/2025).

Until January 2026, Mandera, Tana River, Turkana, and Wajir are projected to face heightened climate stress, with below-average precipitation and above-average temperatures expected to affect water sources and result in less pasture for grazing, lower yields, fewer crops for consumption, and disrupted livelihood resilience (ICPAC accessed 13/11/2025 a; KNA 28/08/2025; The Star 10/09/2025). At the same time, at least 20% of the populations of Mandera, Tana River, Turkana, and Wajir counties are projected to experience Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse food insecurity because of the impact of the anticipated drought to the end of the year and into the first quarter of 2026 (IPC 08/09/2025).

The majority (over 80%) of Kenya is classified to feature arid or semi-arid land (ASAL), with Turkana falling within the arid zone and Mandera, Tana River, and Wajir counties categorised as semi-arid (IPC 08/09/2025; ADA 2024; NDMA 13/03/2024). These counties have experienced chronic challenges, including poverty, limited basic services, and frequent climate shocks, such as droughts and floods, in recent years (IFRC 27/10/2025; UNCCD accessed 12/11/2025). As a result, communities have reduced coping capacity to manage and recover from the anticipated drought.

Map: Projected rainfall performance and distribution of IPC 3+ food insecurity across Kenya, October–December 2025




Source: ACAPS using IPC (08/09/2025); FEWS NET (accessed 20/11/2025)

## ABOUT THIS REPORT

This rapid analysis anticipatory report is based on a secondary data review of publicly available sources. It examines projected drought conditions in a select sample of northern and eastern counties (Mandera, Tana River, Turkana, and Wajir) in ASAL regions that climate forecasts and early warning indicators project will experience some of the most severe impacts. It does not aim to be exhaustive but attempts to focus on counties with limited granular coverage, enabling targeted analysis of anticipated humanitarian needs and different communities' vulnerabilities to drought conditions.

## ANTICIPATED DEVELOPMENT/IMPACT

The short rainy season, which runs from mid-October to mid-December, has been delayed and poorly distributed across eastern Kenya, affecting vegetation conditions. Dry conditions are expected to continue, as seasonal forecasts anticipate below-average precipitation and above-average temperatures across most of the country until the end of December, with a 45% probability of below-average precipitation (IRI accessed 11/11/2025). Despite some rainfall warnings and risk of flooding because of resulting soil conditions, drought conditions are already present, and rain is likely to be below normal (FEWS NET 05/11/2025; WFP 11/2025).

Seasonal forecasts also indicate that above-average temperatures and below-average precipitation are expected to continue between January–February, anticipating a hotter and drier start to the dry season, which is likely to compound drought conditions and contribute to the depletion of pasture and water supplies (ICPAC).

## CRISIS IMPACT (CURRENT AND ANTICIPATED)

### WASH

If below-average rainfall persists, walking distances across Mandera, Turkana, Tana River, and Wajir counties are anticipated to exceed 5km just to reach functional boreholes, likely pushing domestic water consumption below the WHO-recommended minimum in humanitarian emergencies of 15L per person per day (WHO accessed 12/11/2025). This would heighten public health risks, intensify pressure on already fragile pastoral livelihoods, and deepen humanitarian needs as climate-driven scarcity increases the risk of waterborne diseases, malnutrition, and weakened immunity, particularly at a time when communities are already facing drought-related stress and declining humanitarian support (IRC accessed 20/11/2025; IFRC 27/10/2025). The increase in the distance to obtain water exposes people to various risks, as elaborated in the protection section of this report below (IRC accessed 20/11/2025).

Limited water availability in the affected areas also reduces hygiene practices such as handwashing and safe food preparation, producing a high risk of waterborne diseases, such as diarrhoeal diseases, typhoid, amoebic dysentery, and cholera, as well as dehydration and malnutrition (DW 23/09/2025; MSF 06/05/2024; CDC 28/03/2024).

Households in **Wajir county** typically rely on boreholes, water pans, and shallow wells for domestic and livestock needs. Although the county had 350 boreholes and over 20,000 shallow wells in 2023, many open sources have become unreliable after heavy late-2023 rains damaged infrastructure and disrupted recharge/refill (FSD 04/2024; KFSSG/CSG 02/2024). As a result, water trucking has increased. The average distance to water sources also rose from about 5km in July 2025 to 7.6km in August, a 22% increase above the historic average, signalling mounting pressure on water access and infrastructure (WFP 11/11/2025; KFSSG/CSG 02/2024; The Kenyan Daily Post 11/10/2024). Until 25 November, it remained unclear if water prices had increased because of the higher demand and little sources available.

Strain on water supplies is also reported in Mandera, Tana River, and Turkana counties, where existing deficits and growing reliance on boreholes are already stretching household coping capacities. In **Tana River,** boreholes provide 24% of domestic water, followed by ponds and rivers (13%) and pans and dams (11%), yet average trekking distances of 4.6km are already about 34% above the long-term mean and, by August, had risen further, reaching 7.6km in Mandera and Turkana as pans dried up and sources were depleted (KIPPRA 03/06/2025; The Standard 24/03/2025; WFP 11/11/2025; NDMA 14/08/2025 c and 14/08/2025 d).

In **Mandera,** where groundwater accessed through boreholes makes up roughly 42% of the supply, and the only river is seasonal and unreliable, households are increasingly vulnerable to extended dry spells (Mandera City Government accessed 13/11/2025). **Turkana** households also face severe water access constraints. Despite borehole investments, many still walk over 2km to reach hand-dug shallow wells, where the water is unsafe, frequently shared with livestock, and often contaminated with sand (DW 23/09/2025). In **Turkana,** roundtrips for water-collection range between 6- 8km (and sometimes above 20km) under drought conditions (NDMA 14/09/2025 d).

## Food insecurity

Between October 2025 and January 2026, an estimated 2.1 million people across the 23 ASAL counties are projected to face IPC 3+ food insecurity, representing a 2% increase compared to the same period the previous year. **Approximately 35% of the population in Mandera, 25% in Tana River, 25% in Turkana, and 20% in Wajir are projected to face IPC 3+ acute food insecurity** (IPC 08/09/2025).

If drought conditions persist, food insecurity in the affected counties is expected to deepen further. Prolonged dry spells will likely reduce water availability, diminish pasture regeneration, and lower livestock productivity, leading to declining milk yields and livestock body conditions (FEWS NET 10/2025). Crop production in mixed-farming zones will also be severely constrained, further tightening household food supplies and increasing dependence on markets where prices are already high (ACAPS accessed 14/11/2025). These are expected to erode purchasing power, limit dietary diversity, and drive more households, particularly in pastoral and agropastoral zones, into IPC 3+ food insecurity (FEWS NET 10/2025).

In August 2025 in **Wajir,** roughly 22% of households reported a poor food-consumption score, and 31% were in the borderline category, with the pastoral livelihood zone particularly affected (including around 34% falling into the poor category). The deterioration in food security outcomes has been linked in part to a reduction in humanitarian assistance; organisations such as WFP have been forced to reduce their operations because of a lack of funding (NDMA 14/09/2025 a; WFP 22/05/2025).

In **Tana River,** just 36% of households recorded an acceptable food-consumption score in August, while 33% were borderline and 31% classified as poor. In the pastoral zone, 72% of households reported poor scores, compared with 26% in mixed-farming and 8% in marginal mixed-farming zones (NDMA 14/09/2025 b, 14/09/2025 c, 14/09/2025 d, and 19/08/2025). Across **Turkana and Mandera** counties, similar pressures were evident.

Coping strategies show rising stress across the affected counties, with households adopting varied levels of strategies with negative outcomes, including resorting to restricting adult consumption or selling productive assets. In **Turkana and Mandera,** reductions in crop yields and livestock productivity, along with market access constraints, are pushing households towards IPC 3 food insecurity and increased dependence on assistance (NDMA 14/09/2025 b, 14/09/2025 c, and 14/09/2025 d). With drought conditions projected to persist, more households are likely to adopt potentially harmful coping strategies to meet food needs. Increased food insecurity also means increased risk of malnutrition, particularly for children, though specific data is lacking.

## Livelihoods

The anticipated deterioration in livestock conditions and market values is expected to trigger cascading economic risks that will substantially erode household resilience and purchasing power throughout the drought period. As livestock prices fall owing to deteriorating body conditions and reduced pasture quality, household purchasing power will decline, since families will earn less from livestock sales. Fresh produce, food, and water prices also typically rise during dry periods. Food and water prices usually rise because dry conditions lower subsistence production and increase market demand. This combination of higher living costs and lower livestock earnings substantially erodes household purchasing power (FAO 14/02/2017; KFSSG 02/2025).

The projected persistence of below-average rainfall through December will likely intensify this pattern, as continued pasture degradation forces sales of livestock in poor condition at depressed prices. This process systematically depletes household herds, which serve as the primary form of savings and social capital in pastoral and agropastoral communities, fundamentally eroding household resilience to future shocks. These deteriorating terms of trade dynamics mean households must sell more animals to purchase the same amount of food or other essentials, creating an accelerating spiral of asset depletion (ACAPS 29/03/2022; Sintayehu et al. 24/03/2025). The decline in livestock prices, particularly for goats and cattle, carries significant implications for livelihoods in **Wajir and Tana River,** where a substantial proportion of households depend on livestock-rearing as their primary source of income, food, and savings. In **Wajir,** livestock prices have declined owing to factors unrelated to drought (there is an oversupply of livestock in the market, the reasons for which are not clearly articulated), but they remain approximately 47% above the long-term average (NDMA 14/09/2025 a; NDMA 14/09/2025 b).

Farmers also report crops drying up from the lack of rain as irrigation is too expensive. This may affect the whole planting cycle and affect the income and food security of communities, particularly small-scale farmers (NRC accessed 28/08/2023; Nation 17/11/2025).

Agriculture constitutes the primary economic activity across the affected counties, sustaining over 80% of the population, particularly in rural areas, which renders communities highly vulnerable to climate variability and underperforming food systems. Most smallholder farms – whether reliant on crops or livestock – are rain-fed, providing an unreliable and inconsistent water supply that amplifies vulnerability to livelihood loss during drought conditions (WFP 11/11/2025; CNN 24/10/2025).

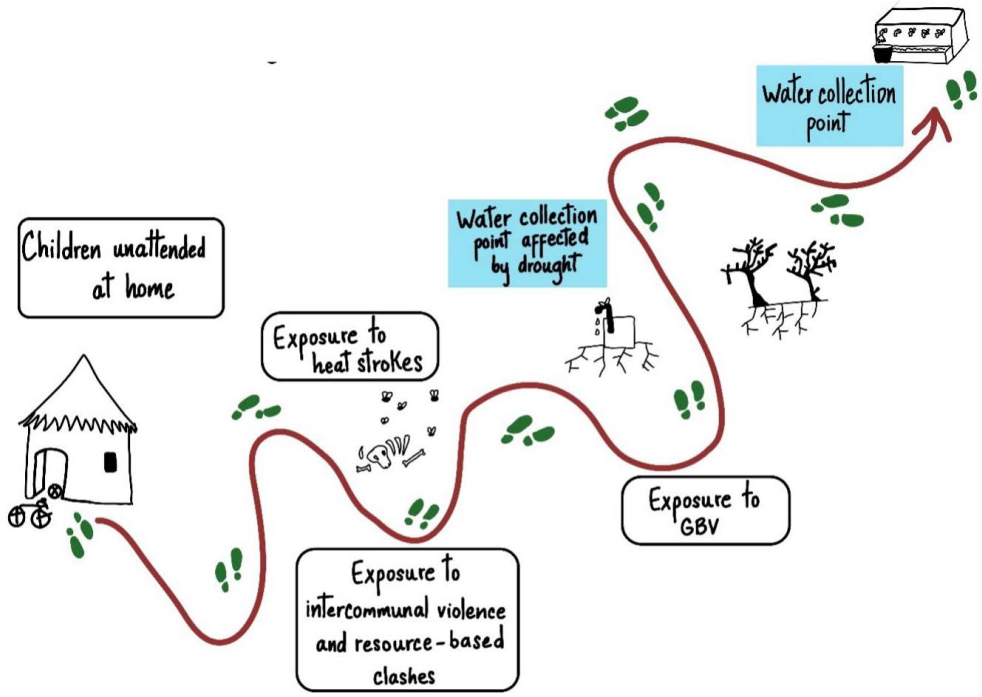
## Protection

During drought, families are likely to resort to coping mechanisms with potentially harmful consequences, such as early or forced marriage to reduce household burdens or gain dowries, pushing girls out of school, and exposing them to domestic violence, unwanted pregnancies, and further protection impacts. As many households in counties such as **Mandera and Wajir** walk increasing distances to secure water for domestic use, women and girls – traditionally responsible for water collection – are usually more frequently exposed to dangers including harassment, gender-based violence (GBV), and loss of educational opportunities (NDMA 14/09/2025 a; NDMA 14/09/2025 d; Mburu et al. 19/07/2024; The Elephant 17/12/2021). Such protection risks were observed during the 2022 drought in Kenya (UN 23/10/2022).

The lengthened treks carry particular risks for children. As women depart earlier and return later, children are left unsupervised, drop out of school, or assume a heavy household workload and become more vulnerable to exploitation (Mburu et al. 19/07/2024). Pregnant and lactating women also face elevated risks of malnutrition, miscarriage, and ill health from the physical strain of long walks and inadequate water for childcare and hygiene (NDMA 04/2022).

With further deterioration in drought conditions projected, water point breakdowns are likely to intensify the migration of livestock and herders, increasing competition over scarce resources and straining already fragile social protection systems.

Figure 2. Main risks of collecting water during drought




Source: ACAPS

## Displacement

With drought conditions deepening, the capacity of national, county, and humanitarian systems to sustainably support both long-term refugee populations and new internal displacements is increasingly stretched. In drought-affected ASAL counties such as Tana River, where livestock death, pasture loss, and water scarcity compel migration and settlement changes, displacement may accelerate (IOM 25/10/2023). In 2024, climate-related displacement was recorded in four counties, including Turkana, where among at least 245,000 arrivals to settlements, more than 50% cited drought as the main cause of movement (IOM 31/05/2024). For the displaced and their hosts, this means intensified competition for resources and basic services, raising risks of secondary displacement, urban migration, overburdened settlements, and reduced resilience.

On 31 May, UNHCR recorded approximately 843,100 refugees and asylum seekers in Kenya, with more than a third (36%) living in Kakuma camp, Turkana (UNHCR accessed 25/11/2025; UNHCR 31/05/2025; RI accessed 11/11/2025). Between 15 June and 12 October, IOM recorded around 14,300 individuals crossing from Kenya into South Sudan, with the most cited reason for movement among respondents being food insecurity (77%) resulting from food ration cuts in refugee camps in Kenya (IOM 17/10/2025). In June, there were 141,312 displaced people in Tana River; the vast majority of whom were displaced by climate-related disasters (98%), including floods and drought (IOM 10/10/2025). Limited data on levels of displacement is available on other counties in focus.

Climatic stress in neighbouring Somalia is likely to have differentiated impacts across Kenyan border counties, particularly in **Mandera and Wajir,** which share porous borders and longstanding population movements with Somalia. In **Mandera,** any increase in movements from Somalia could raise pressure on scarce water points, overstretch limited social services, and heighten competition over rangelands. **Wajir,** facing similar climatic vulnerabilities and rising internal rural-to-urban migration, could see additional strain on towns already hosting drought-affected households (UNHCR 2023; SOHA 28/07/2025).

## HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

### Access to information

There are several assessments on drought conditions in Kenya, but there is limited information on specific counties, rural communities and their specific needs, and specific groups such as children, people with disabilities, older people, and refugees.

### Access constraints

Heightened insecurity continues to restrict humanitarian access across northern and eastern Kenya. Cross-border attacks by Al Shabaab recently claimed the lives of two Kenyan police officers in Garissa county when a roadside improvised explosive device was detonated while on patrol (AA 19/11/2025; TNV 20/11/2025). The UK Government strongly advises against all travel to areas of Wajir county within 60km of the Somali border, including Tarbaj and Wajir East (except Wajir town), given the persistent threat of Al Shabaab attacks (Govt. UK accessed 26/11/2025). In December 2024, Al Shabaab launched an attack on security forces in Qarsa, Wajir East. The militants claimed killing nine soldiers and injuring 13 others (Eigenrac 12/02/2025). Nonstate armed groups' use of improvised explosive devices targeting security forces increases incidental risks to humanitarian staff and assets, often limiting movement to air operations or armed escorts. In **Mandera** county, repeated cross-border incursions and Al Shabaab attacks have resulted in deaths and disrupted road access to Banisa and Burashum, impeding aid delivery and food supply chains (Nation 29/03/2025; CIEDR 09/07/2025; Defence Web 07/10/2025).

Intercommunal violence and resource-based clashes further constrain access in **Turkana and Tana River** counties (The Star 26/02/2025). In **Turkana East,** banditry attacks and cross-border raids from Ethiopia have displaced households, restricted market activity, and disrupted trade routes. In **Tana River,** longstanding land and resource disputes continue to escalate, particularly in mixed-farming zones, posing potential flashpoints for violence (KECOSCE 14/07/2025; The Star 10/08/2025).

## FUNDING AND RESPONSE CAPACITY

In September, WFP, in collaboration with the Government, activated its Anticipatory Action Plan to mitigate the projected impacts of drought in Wajir and Marsabit counties. The plan focuses on early interventions designed to safeguard household food consumption, nutrition, and health; protect household livelihoods and resilience investments from the adverse effects of drought; and ensure continued access to safe and clean water for both domestic and livestock use. That said, WFP currently faces a funding shortage in Kenya, which may limit its ability to scale up and fully implement the Anticipatory Action Plan and other humanitarian operations (WFP 16/10/2025; The Eastleigh Voice 17/02/2025). Until August, only one organisation (Rural Agency for Community Development and Assistance) was implementing a cash transfer intervention for food assistance (NDMA 14/09/2025 a).

Tana River county has established a County Climate Change Fund to ensure adaptation efforts have legal backing, although the gap between planning and impact remains (Concern 16/10/2025).

## COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

### Inflation and climate shocks

Kenya, like many other African countries, faces significant price volatility driven by climate-related shocks, an unstructured agricultural market, and imbalances between supply and demand. Because the country relies heavily on imported foods such as cereals, global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the war in Ukraine have disrupted supply chains and sharply increased food prices. These rising costs have deep humanitarian consequences, worsening food insecurity and placing additional strain on vulnerable households (IFPRI 13/06/2022; Kunyanga et al. 10/01/2023; Ng'ang'a et al. 29/09/2025). Consumer prices were up by 4.6% in annual terms in October. There were higher price pressures on housing, water, electricity, gas and other fuels, and transportation (Focus Economics 31/10/2025). The prices of sugar, maize, and beans remain stable, but consumers are paying more for fresh produce. In October, tomato prices climbed by 1.2%, while cabbage and potato prices rose by 1.4% and 1.6%, respectively (The Star 01/11/2025). According to recent studies, Kenya reports the highest prices for healthy food baskets compared to other countries in the region (ATNi 06/11/2025). This affects people's purchasing power and is likely to worsen their capacity to access the full minimum food basket and essential items during drought.

### Humanitarian aid and funding cuts

The year 2025 has been marked by a considerable reduction and, in many cases, complete suspension of humanitarian and development programmes. Governments including Germany, the UK, and the US have cut contributions to global health, refugee, food, education, and other relief initiatives (Chatham House 16/10/2025). These reductions have had severe consequences, particularly across Africa and in drought-affected regions where communities rely heavily on aid to cope with environmental hazards.

Particularly, the USAID reductions have aggravated the effects of persistent droughts in Kenya and significantly constrained humanitarian responders' capacity to assist affected communities. Kenya ranks seventh globally among the countries most affected by these funding cuts (The Kenya Times 04/04/2025). Climate-related programmes that the US deems non-lifesaving have been suspended, disrupting early-warning systems for drought, food insecurity, floods, and health trends. This loss of forecasting capacity has drastically weakened humanitarian preparedness and undermined timely interventions aimed to strengthen community resilience (TNH 25/03/2025). Funding shortfalls have also forced organisations such as the WFP to reduce food assistance for refugees (WFP 22/05/2025). The health sector has been similarly affected. Doctors, nurses, and clinic staff have lost their jobs; some facilities have closed without referral pathways; and prevention services have been interrupted (UNAIDS 13/03/2025). In a context of severe drought and rising humanitarian needs, the withdrawal of these systems and services sharply heightens the risk of displacement, food insecurity, and excess mortality.

## CRISIS DRIVERS

### Environmental degradation

Environmental degradation in Kenya is caused by deforestation and unsustainable land use, resulting in soil erosion, water pollution, and biodiversity loss, leading to desertification. As desertification intensifies, it threatens millions of people and sharply reduces land productivity. The drought situation has further worsened soil degradation and lowered per-capita food production (Ivy Panda 15/03/2024; UNCCD 2020). About 75% of Kenya's soils are below sustainable quality levels, indicating that much of the country's land no longer has the essential properties needed to support long-term farming or healthy ecosystems. As a result, the soil becomes depleted, microbial life is disturbed, and crops are left more susceptible to pests and diseases (HBS 27/02/2025).

### Geographic conditions and consecutive failed rainy seasons

More than 80% of Kenya's land is classified as arid or semi-arid because it receives relatively little annual rainfall, with only a small fraction (around 6.6%) being arable land. This large share of dry areas makes the country highly vulnerable to drought conditions (IUCN accessed 12/11/2025; CRU 07/08/2024).

Between 2020–2023, the Horn of Africa, which includes Ethiopia, Kenya, and Somalia, experienced six consecutive rainy seasons with no rain – one of the longest and most severe droughts on record (UNHCR 28/02/2023; The Elephant 29/09/2023). Kenya is currently experiencing an intensifying drought, which has become more severe in the last quarter of 2025. When the October–December rains fail, people vulnerable to drought can quickly shift from stable conditions to severe hardship (IFRC 08/10/2025). The frequency of droughts in the Tana Basin has climbed; what was once a once-in-ten-years event arrives roughly every five years at present (Concern 16/10/2025).

La Niña has resulted in drier conditions in East Africa, including Kenya. During a La Niña event, cooler-than-normal Pacific Ocean waters change wind and weather patterns, reducing moisture flow from the Indian Ocean into Kenya. This leads to delayed, lighter, or shorter rains, increasing the risk of drought, especially in the October–December season (The Eastleigh Voice 06/09/2025; FEWS NET 04/09/2025).