MOZAMBIQUE

Impact of flooding in Gaza, Maputo, Niassa, Sofala, and Zambezia provinces

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CRISIS IMPACT OVERVIEW

Since 24 December 2025, Mozambique has been experiencing exceptionally heavy rainfall, which, by 25 January, had resulted **in the deaths of at least 12 people** and **affected up to 779,000 others across the country** (INGD accessed 25/01/2026; ECHO 22/01/2026; OCHA 18/01/2026). **Gaza province is experiencing the greatest impact, where over 391,000 people** had been affected by 25 January (INGD accessed 25/01/2026; ECHO 18/01/2026).

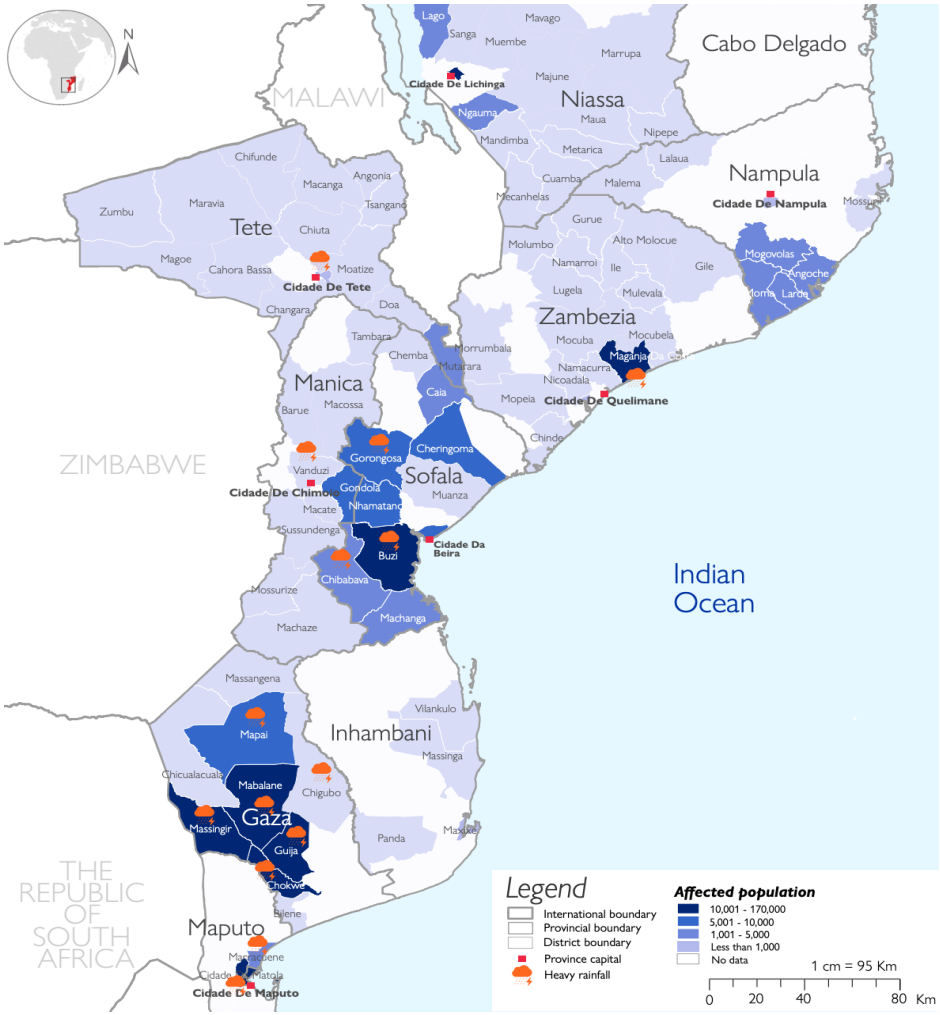
By 25 January, at least 88% (698,000) of the total affected population were in the Gaza, Maputo, Niassa, Sofala, and Zambezia provinces. Of these, nearly 70% were in Gaza's Chókwè, Guija, Mabalane, Massingir, and Xai Xai districts; Maputo's Cidade de Matola district; Niassa's Cidade de Lichinga district; Sofala's Buzi, Cheringoma, and Nhamatanda districts; and Zambezia's Maganja da Costa district. At least 8,000 people had been affected in each district (INGD accessed 25/01/2026).

Flooding triggered widespread shelter, public infrastructure, and farmland impacts, heightening disease and malnutrition risks across affected provinces (ECHO 22/01/2026; Daily Sabah 20/01/2026; UN News 20/01/2026).

On 16 January, the **Government of Mozambique declared a nationwide red alert** to centralise hazard response coordination and mobilise resources across affected provinces. In parallel, the Government formally requested support from the EU and UN, triggering the release of emergency funding and the activation of surge capacity to support the response (CoM 16/01/2026; OCHA 23/01/2026).

By 21 January, the main needs included foods, WASH, emergency shelter, health, shelter, and protection assistance (OCHA 21/01/2026; CCCM Cluster 19/01/2025; DW 17/01/2025).

Map 1. Districts affected by flooding by 21 January



Source: IOM (22/01/2026)

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DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS

Rainy season and climate change

Mozambique experiences its rainy season between October–April, driven by the Intertropical Convergence Zone and frequently intensified by tropical systems forming in the Mozambique Channel, making the country prone to seasonal flooding (CoM 16/01/2026). Over the years, above-average rainfall, cyclones, and upstream river flows from neighbouring countries – such as Zimbabwe – have repeatedly caused rivers, including the Buzi, Limpopo, Pungoe, and Zambezi rivers, to overflow, particularly affecting low-lying flood plains in central and southern provinces (Mulungo 2024; Nganhane et al. 04/2025).

Recurrent flooding during the rainy season has had cumulative impacts on livelihoods and food security as flooding often coincides with the main agricultural calendar, disrupting planting and destroying standing crops (WVI 26/02/2025). Climate variability and change are contributing to more intense rainfall events and increased flood frequency, particularly in river basins with limited drainage capacity and weak flood protection infrastructure (UNFCC 15/03/2023; LDYC 12/2024). Methodology

This report is based on a review of secondary data, the Protection Cluster's Rapid Needs Assessment (RNA), and eight key information interviews with 12 experts and humanitarian responders working on protection, GBV, child protection, and mine action. It also draws on a September 2025 IOM assessment of 659 households in 42 earthquake-affected locations in Chawkay, Dara-e-Nur, Khas Kunar, Kuz Kunar, and Nurgal districts (IOM 22/10/2025).

River basin hydrology and upstream rainfall

Regional river basin flows have been a direct driver of flooding in Mozambique during the 2025/2026 rainy season, reflecting the country's downstream position within several major transboundary river systems (MHEWC accessed 22/01/2026; Aim News 13/01/2026; CRIDF accessed 22/01/2026). Sustained and above-average rainfall across upstream catchments in South Africa, Zambia, and Zimbabwe during December 2025 and January 2026 generated high and persistent inflows into Mozambican sections of the Buzi, Limpopo, Pungoe, Save, and Zambezi rivers, triggering flooding even in areas where local rainfall had been moderate (Independent 16/01/2026; Aim News 13/01/2026).

In the Limpopo River Basin, intense rainfall in December 2025 and January 2026 across South Africa's Limpopo and Mpumalanga provinces caused river levels to surge downstream into Mozambique's Gaza and southern Inhambane provinces, inundating floodplains and prompting evacuations as floodwaters crossed into Mozambique independent of in-country rainfall patterns. In the Zambezi River Basin, heavy precipitation in northern Zimbabwe and southern Zambia led to rapid inflows into the Cahora Bassa reservoir, necessitating water releases to maintain dam safety; these releases directly increased downstream river levels, aggravating flooding in central Mozambique since the end of December (AllAfrica 19/01/2026; Xinhua 15/01/2026; UN News 20/01/2026; Zambezira accessed 22/01/2026). Similarly, persistent rainfall over Zimbabwe's Eastern Highlands resulted in sustained runoff into the Pungoe and Buzi rivers, generating widespread flooding across Sofala province as upstream flows continued to arrive even during short breaks in local rainfall (Independent 16/01/2026; CoM 20/01/2026; Aim News 13/01/2026; NBC News 17/01/2026; The Watchers 17/01/2026).

La Niña conditions

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Climate Prediction Center declared that La Niña conditions are expected to persist until February/March 2026 (NOAA 09/01/2025). La Niña, together with El Niño, is one of the two extreme phases of the El Niño–Southern Oscillation (ENSO) phenomenon – a natural climate variability occurrence characterised by oscillations in the sea surface temperatures of the equatorial Pacific Ocean (NOAA 18/11/2025).

La Niña typically increases precipitation across the Southern Africa region, increasing river discharge across major basins such as the Buzi, Licungo, Limpopo, Pungoe, and Zambezi, raising flood risk in low-lying floodplains and coastal areas (WB 20/06/2025; STC 19/01/2026). La Niña also typically enhances the Southwest Pacific Ocean cyclone season — peaking between January–March — increasing storm risks for Madagascar, Mozambique, and other Southern African coastal countries (WMO 2017; Byaruhanga et al. 02/09/2025; SADC et. Al 11/09/2025). In Mozambique, La Niña typically results in more frequent and intense rainfall episodes during the October–March rainy season, often accompanied by increased tropical storm and cyclone activity in the Mozambique Channel (WB 20/06/2025).

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE

According to the National Institute for Disaster Risk Management (INGD), the current floods are expected to surpass the severity of the floods in 2000, the worst in the country's history (CoM 20/01/2026). Seasonal forecasts for February–April 2026 anticipate above-average precipitation across Mozambique's Tete province and northeast South Africa, likely increasing upstream discharge in the Incomati, Limpopo, Umbeluzi, and Zambezi rivers and keeping flood risks elevated in northern Gaza, Maputo, Sofala, and Zambezia provinces until the end of the rainy season (IRI accessed 23/01/2026). On 21 January, the forecasted arrival of a tropical depression, expected to bring additional rainfall and strong winds of up to 70km/h to areas already affected by flooding, led the National Institute of Meteorology to issue a yellow warning for southern regions. The system was also anticipated to deteriorate sea conditions, with waves of up to 4m likely to affect the coastal provinces of Gaza, Inhambane, and Maputo (CoM 21/01/2026 a). More rainfall is likely to aggravate flooding, increasing risks to housing, livelihoods, critical infrastructure, and access to basic services, eroding people's coping capacities and placing added strain on response resources and capability (OCHA 18/01/2026; WB accessed 25/01/2026).

On 20 January, authorities in Xai Xai, the capital of Gaza province, called for the evacuation of approximately 115,000 people along the Limpopo River, as continued heavy rains are heightening the risk of river overflow (Daily Sabah 20/01/2026; CoM 20/01/2026). By 21 January, according to the National Directorate for Water Resources Management, seven river basins (Buzi, Incomati, Inhambane, Limpopo, Maputo, Save, and Umbeluzi) remained under maximum alert from continued rainfall. With rivers on high alert and continuous rainfall, there is an increased risk of dam releases if reservoirs reach critical capacity. High-volume dam releases are contributing to elevated river levels and downstream flooding, affecting an increasing number of areas across Mozambique and neighbouring countries (CoM 21/01/2026 b; OCHA 21/01/2026).

Mozambican authorities warned on 21 January that the Senteeko Dam in South Africa may collapse. This risk is significant for Mozambique because the dam is located on a tributary of the Incomati River that flows into Maputo province, which has already been particularly affected. Dam collapse would have severe consequences, potentially causing high-magnitude flooding in Maputo (CoM 21/01/2026 c).

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Aim

This report provides an overview of flooding and its humanitarian impacts in Mozambique. The report aims to inform the humanitarian community of both the immediate and medium-term impacts of flooding in Mozambique's most affected provinces and support response operations.

Scope

This report focuses on Gaza, Maputo, Niassa, Sofala, and Zambezia provinces, which are among the areas most affected by flooding. The analysis builds on ACAPS's La Nina Overview – Anticipated Humanitarian Impact between November 2025 and March 2026, which included Mozambique as one of the countries at high risk of humanitarian impact from La Niña-induced precipitation and temperatures anomalies.

Methodology

The report draws on current and historical data on flooding impacts in Mozambique, seasonal forecasts, and a secondary data review. Sources include local and international media, reporting from humanitarian and development organisations, and analysis from research institutions and think tanks. The ACAPS Seasonal Calendar was also used to contextualise seasonal risks and impacts.

Limitations

At the time of writing, access to reliable, timely, and disaggregated data in Mozambique remained limited, particularly regarding the scale and severity of humanitarian impacts. Projecting the impact of further rainfall also involves a high degree of uncertainty, as outcomes depend on multiple factors, including rainfall intensity, duration, and the effectiveness of mitigation and response measures undertaken by communities, authorities, humanitarian responders, and donors.

CRISIS IMPACTS

Shelter and displacement

By 25 January, flooding had affected more than 779,000 people (approximately 167,000 households) nationwide, with at least 17,500 houses damaged or destroyed across the country. Around 90% of the population live in adobe structures, which are susceptible to collapse following prolonged rainfall. In the affected provinces, at least 84,600 houses had been flooded, and 83% of all damaged or destroyed houses were located in these provinces (INGD accessed 21/01/2026; CoM 21/01/2026 a; OCHA 23/01/2026). By 25 January, at least 107,000 people were being hosted in 108 accommodation centres and dozens of temporary displacement sites, including schools and churches. Over 70% of the total displaced population is located in Gaza province, which has also seen some of the largest concentrations of IDPs, particularly in Chiaqualene and Xilembene (CCCM Cluster 19/01/2026; INGD accessed 25/01/2026). By 20 January, information on the conditions and status of IDPs in accommodation centres and temporary sites was not available (INGD accessed 19/01/2026; Daily Sabah 20/01/2026). In Gaza, where more than 40% of the province has been submerged, displaced populations have experienced multiple displacements after floodwaters inundated displacement sites in Chókwè district (Daily Sabah 20/01/2026).

With additional rainfall and flooding forecast in the coming weeks, displacement figures are likely to increase, particularly in low-lying and riverine areas where floodwaters are slow to recede. Further damage to houses is likely to increase pressure on overstretched hosting centres, heightening protection risks and needs for basic services (CoM 21/01/2026 a).

Health

Health facilities have been particularly affected by the floods. By 25 January, at least 242 health facilities had been affected, of which 99 are Gaza, 46 in Maputo, and 11 in Sofala provinces (Health Cluster unpublished; CoM 21/01/2026 a; INGD accessed 25/01/2026). While there is limited information on the operational capacity of health facilities, they are likely to be severely overstretched as a result of the increased number of people requiring care for flood-related injuries and vector-borne (malaria) and waterborne diseases. This strain is also compounded by a cholera outbreak, which is expected to worsen as flooding further degrades water, sanitation, and hygiene conditions. Between 3 September 2025 and 15 January 2026, Mozambique recorded 1,862 cumulative cholera cases and 28 deaths, including at least 1,200 new cases reported during this period (UNFPA 19/01/2026; AfricaCDC 17/01/2026; Beacon 08/01/2026). Children under five, pregnant women, older people, and displaced populations are at heightened risk of contracting diseases because of reduced immunity, mobility constraints, and limited access to healthcare.

Education

By 21 January, flooding had affected 181 schools across Gaza, Inhambane, Maputo, Niassa, Sofala, and Zambezia provinces, disrupting the education of nearly 98,000 students. Gaza province has seen the worst, with 86 schools and 63,000 students affected, accounting for more than half of the total. Infrastructure damage and the continuation of the rainy season increase the risk of prolonged disruptions, potentially affecting the rest of the school year, which typically runs January–November (INGD accessed 21/01/2026; EICLCC 08/12/2025; CCCM Cluster 19/01/2026).

WASH

By 21 January, the operations of at least three water pumping stations had been significantly affected, disrupting water supply systems in Maputo and Gaza provinces (INGD accessed 21/01/2026). Water systems in Matola, Matola Rio, and the towns of Boane (Maputo) and Chókwè (Gaza) were reported to be completely out of service, while the Umbeluzi River water treatment plant, which supplies most of the drinking water to Maputo and Matola cities, was forced to reduce production by approximately 30%. In Niassa province, at least 17 water stations had been damaged in Lago district alone, potentially disrupting access to safe drinking water in a district that has experienced seasonal cases of cholera (AIM News 19/01/2026; CoM 19/01/2026; 360Mozambique 18/01/2026; OCHA 08/01/2026). These disruptions are affecting more than a million people in the Greater Maputo metropolitan area, Gaza and Niassa provinces, and surrounding districts, further aggravating humanitarian needs amid continued flooding and heightened public health risks.

Although no further cholera outbreaks had been reported in affected provinces by 22 January, diseases, including respiratory and waterborne infections, are likely to rise as flooding has compromised water quality and created overcrowded and damp living conditions that favour the transmission of infectious diseases (Health Cluster unpublished). Cholera and malaria, which are endemic to Mozambique, are the most likely to spread; cholera cases have already been increasing since December 2025 (360Mozambique 19/01/2026; UNFPA 19/01/2026).

Livelihoods and food security

Over 70% of Mozambique's population relies on farming as a main source of food and income, and flooding during peak planting season is likely to severely affect livelihoods (FEWS NET 30/10/2025). Millet and sorghum, the country's main staple crops, due for harvest between March–June, were in their early development stages when fields were washed away. Sofala and Zambezia provinces account for significant shares of national millet and sorghum production, with Sofala producing 18% and 12% of the country's sorghum and millet respectively, and Zambezia producing 11% and 9% (USDA accessed 22/01/2026).

By 20 January, the INGD reported over 165,000 hectares of affected farmland, of which over 73,000 hectares had been fully lost, affecting over 111,500 farmers. Over 38,000 cattle deaths were also recorded, along with damage to fishing assets and boats (JN 20/01/2026; OCHA 21/01/2026). More than 50,000 hectares of cropland had been affected across Sofala province, including over 14,000 hectares completely lost, undermining both food availability and household incomes for an estimated 40,000–45,000 households. The most severe impacts have been recorded in Buzi (over 34,000 hectares inundated) and Nhamatanda (approximately 3,200 hectares) districts (INGD accessed 21/01/2026; OCHA 08/01/2026; INGD 15/01/2026). In Maputo province, where over 38,000 hectares of crops had been affected and 10,000 hectares destroyed, losses represent about 15% of areas planted for the agricultural season (Aim News 19/01/2026).

IPC projections point to worsening food insecurity in the lean season (October 2025 to March 2026), with 2.67 million people expected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or above levels of food insecurity, including 170,000 in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), with flood-affected Zambezia and Sofala already among the most food-insecure provinces (OCHA 08/12/2025; IPC 11/09/2025). Although food security was projected to improve following the harvest (from April 2026), crop losses are likely to affect access to food and agricultural labour opportunities in 2026, affecting livelihoods and food security. Affected households are likely to adopt coping strategies with potentially harmful consequences, including selling productive assets or taking on debt, which could further erode resilience to shocks (Lundren and Strandh 19/05/2022).

Protection

Widespread displacement means that protection concerns are rising rapidly. Evacuations are intensifying risks of family separation and child protection concerns, while older people and people with disabilities face additional threats, including reduced mobility during evacuations, limited access to accessible shelters and services, disrupted medical care, and increased exposure to neglect or abuse (OCHA 18/01/2026). Women and girls living in overcrowded or inadequate shelter conditions face heightened protection risks. Limited privacy, insufficient access to essential clothing and hygiene items, and constrained mobility increase exposure to sexual exploitation, abuse, and other forms of violence. These risks are further compounded by the disruption of social and community protection mechanisms. The current emergency aggravates pre-existing vulnerabilities, as affected communities are still recovering from successive natural hazards. At the same time, flooding disrupts the availability of and access to sexual and reproductive health services and gender-based violence prevention and response services (UNFPA 19/01/2025).

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE

The information below may not cover all efforts, particularly local support and community initiatives, given the information gaps and time constraints of the analysis.

Humanitarian constraints

By 21 January, National Road No. 1 to the north and National Road No. 2 to the south, which connect Maputo province to the rest of the country, had been cut off or made impassable by rising water levels. In Gaza province, a section of National Road No. 1 had also been made impassable by flooding resulting from the overflow of the Limpopo River (CoM 21/01/2026 a; Sarawak Tribune 21/01/2026; UN 20/01/2026).

By 21 January, a total of 1,870km of road had been affected, with nearly 450km damaged across Gaza, Inhambane, Maputo, Niassa, Sofala, and Zambezia provinces. Bridges, water systems, and communication towers had also been affected, constraining coordinated response (INGD accessed 21/01/2026). The high number of impassable and destroyed roads is isolating communities, impeding access and relief efforts, and disrupting supply chains (Sarawak Tribune 21/01/2026; OCHA 21/01/2026).

Other challenges for the response include limited evacuation and rescue assets, damaged transport infrastructure, and recurrent urban flooding linked to inadequate drainage systems (UNFPA 19/01/2025). The floods have forced humanitarian organisations to use air transportation, which is more costly. By 21 January, immediate support for evacuation and search-and-rescue operations, including boats, vehicles, fuel, personnel, and logistical assets in line with evolving hydrological conditions, was still needed (OCHA 18/01/2026 and 21/01/2026).

Response capacity

The Government, through the INGD, is coordinating emergency response efforts in Gaza, Maputo, Sofala, Tete, and Zambezia provinces, including evacuations, early warnings, and lifesaving aid, but resources and supplies are insufficient to meet all needs (OCHA 18/01/2026).

Humanitarian supplies are predominantly located in Cabo Delgado, where pre-existing humanitarian needs were concentrated, including newly displaced and returnee populations (OCHA 18/01/2026; CoM 16/01/2026). Such supplies are currently being used to meet needs in northern Mozambique. At the same time, large-scale redeployment efforts are underway, with clusters establishing coordination and operational capacity in Xai Xai, Gaza province, and potentially other regional hubs (OCHA 18/01/2026 and 23/01/2026).

On 17 January, Mozambique authorities requested assistance from the EU and UN (ECHO 18/01/2026; OCHA 18/01/2026). Teams from the Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the UNDAC were deploying on 23 January, in coordination with the Government and UN Humanitarian Country Team (ECHO 22/01/2026).

OCHA issued an addendum to the 2026 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan requesting an additional USD 187 million to address the critical needs of around 620,000 people in southern and central Mozambique from January–June 2026. By 29 December, less than 5% of the required funding for the 2026 plan (USD 348 million) had been mobilised, leaving a substantial pre-existing funding gap (OCHA 23/01/2026 and 29/12/2025; UNFPA 19/01/2025).

COMPOUNDING/AGGRAVATING FACTORS

These are not the direct drivers of the crisis but external factors that may make the humanitarian impacts or the crisis itself more complex.

Conflict in the north

In northern Mozambique, insecurity in Cabo Delgado and the neighbouring provinces of Niassa and Nampula has led to a large displaced population, with thousands fleeing renewed fighting since late 2023; fighting that has intensified at multiple points throughout 2025. The combination of conflict and floods across the country compounds humanitarian needs nationally, aggravating food insecurity, leaving health services severely strained, heightening disease risks, and limiting humanitarian access to regions already under pressure from overlapping crises (UN 07/10/2025; OCHA 22/10/2025, 10/10/2025, and 18/01/2026; Protection Cluster 27/02/2025; Donare 08/08/2025; IOM 09/10/2025).

Drought and food insecurity

A prolonged drought driven by a strong 2023–2024 El Niño event remains a significant compounding factor to this crisis, as it left large populations vulnerable to food insecurity, loss of livelihoods, and weakened resilience just months before the 2025/2026 rainy season floods struck (IFRC 31/10/2025; OCHA 24/12/2025; STC 19/01/2026).

The El Niño-linked drought resulted in below-average rainfall and persistently high temperatures across much of Mozambique between late 2023 and early 2025, with the most severe impacts concentrated in the central and southern provinces. Gaza, Inhambane, Manica, Sofala, and Tete were the worst affected, experiencing prolonged rainfall deficits, recurrent heat stress, and significant pressures on water availability, agricultural production, and livelihoods (IFRC 31/10/2025). Other provinces in northern Mozambique have also been affected by drought, resulting in a total of 37 districts classified as experiencing severe and intense drought conditions and approximately three million people in need of assistance (OCHA 21/08/2024). The drought contributed to failed harvests, drying water sources, and rising food insecurity ahead of the current crisis (IFRC 31/10/2025; OCHA 21/08/2024).

The drought depleted household food stocks, reduced water availability, and weakened livelihoods just before the 2025/2026 floods, increasing vulnerability to subsequent shocks. Households that lost crops or livestock had fewer coping resources when heavy rains and flooding hit, slowing recovery and magnifying humanitarian needs. Drought-induced food insecurity also strained public health and nutrition systems, compounding risks of malnutrition and water-related disease when flood conditions later developed. Because drought impacts persisted into the rainy season, they interacted with flood effects to deepen food insecurity, increase displacement risks, and broaden the scale of the humanitarian crisis (IFRC 31/10/2025; OCHA 21/08/2024; STC 19/01/2026; FAO 27/08/2024).

Cyclone exposure

Mozambique is highly vulnerable to cyclones as a result of its geographic position, especially its long coastline along one of the most cyclone-prone areas of the southwest Indian Ocean. This region experiences a high occurrence of cyclones and tropical storms between October–March (IFRC 04/02/2024). Since 2018, Mozambique has experienced one cyclone per year, with the exception of 2019–2021, when the country was hit by nine cyclones, affecting around 750,000–1.5 million people (OCHA 28/12/2023; WorldData accessed 19/01/2026). This pattern of recurrent shocks has eroded community resilience over time. The current emergency further aggravates pre-existing vulnerabilities, as many affected communities were still recovering from successive natural hazards earlier in 2025, including Cyclones Chido and Dikeledi (UNFPA 19/01/2026).

Their coastal location means that provinces such as Cabo Delgado, Nampula, Sofala, and Zambezia are particularly vulnerable to cyclones. Since 2017, around five million people have been affected by cyclones in Mozambique, mainly in Nampula, Sofala, and Zambezia provinces. Cyclones also represent the natural hazard causing the greatest economic losses in the country (STC 15/12/2024; OCHA 17/01/2025).

Poverty

According to the latest available information, the national poverty rate surged from 48.4% to 62.9% between 2014/2015 and 2022, with seven million more Mozambicans falling into poverty, totalling 20.4 million. This deterioration was driven by the combined effects of the sovereign debt crisis, the COVID-19 pandemic, and recurrent climate-related shocks, including floods and cyclones (WB accessed 19/01/2025; UNICEF 05/2025).

An estimated 22 million people live in rural areas and rely heavily on subsistence agriculture, a livelihood that is repeatedly disrupted by environmental hazards, further aggravating food insecurity and humanitarian needs (WB 04/04/2025; WB accessed 19/01/2025).