

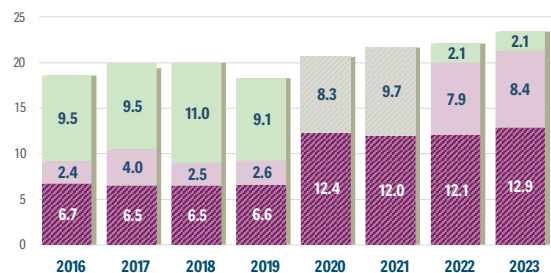
ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY | Step deterioration of the economic situation, localized conflict and assistance cuts amplified acute food insecurity.

PEAK 2023 (AUGUST–OCTOBER)

 **12.9M** people or 55% of the population faced high levels of acute food insecurity. Of them, 2.1 million were IDPs in camps.

Acute food insecurity levels remained as high as 2022 as the economic situation continued to deteriorate amid a surge in conflict that led to more displacement. Accelerating currency depreciation and rising prices of essential goods gravely affected households' purchasing power.

Peak numbers of people (in millions) by categories of acute food insecurity, 2016–2023



Source: HNO/HRP.

A protracted major food crisis A low-income country, the Syrian Arab Republic has been included in all GRFC editions as a major food crisis and one of the ten largest food crises in terms of numbers of people for the last seven years.

The number of acutely food-insecure people increased from 6.5 million in 2018 and 6.6 million in 2019 to 12.4 million (60 percent of the population) by November 2020. This was due to protracted and intensifying conflict leading to further displacement, high unemployment and increasing food prices but also to a change in methodology for the Food Security and Livelihoods Assessment.


Since 2020, the percentage of acutely food-insecure people has remained persistently high at more than half of the population due to the continuation of hostilities and compounding effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, adverse weather events, regional fragility and macroeconomic instability.


DRIVERS OF THE CRISIS 2023–2024

 **Economic shocks** Accelerating currency depreciation in 2023, coupled with fuel scarcity, fuel price increases and rising transportation and freight charges, contributed to rising prices of both imported and domestically produced food (FAO-GIEWS, January 2023; WB, summer 2023).

By December 2023, the cost of living (measured by the Minimum Expenditure Basket) had more than doubled for a family of five since December 2022 and quadrupled in just two years. The government's almost complete removal of fuel subsidies in September was expected to add to the cost-of-living crisis, especially during the winter (FAO & WFP, October 2023). The rising cost of agricultural inputs reduced the area planted and crop yields (FAO, 2023).

 **Conflict/insecurity** The intensity of the conflict has gradually declined over recent years, allowing aid agencies to operate in northern areas albeit in highly risky conditions. However, air strikes, shelling, raids and arrests, particularly in areas of mixed or contested control near frontlines, still hinder people's access to livelihoods and key services (Insecurity Insight, October 2023) and impede humanitarian access. In October 2023, the Northern Syrian Arab Republic and Deir-ez-Zor governorate witnessed the most significant escalation of hostilities since 2019, resulting in the displacement of over 120 000 people (HNO 2024, December 2023).

 **Natural disasters** The earthquakes that hit northern areas in February 2023 uprooted hundreds of thousands of families and severely damaged infrastructures already weakened by the conflict. They caused temporary but widespread economic and trade disruptions, and delays in delivering humanitarian assistance (WB, summer 2023). Many families lost their main breadwinner due to death or injury, at a time when the economic situation was already dire (HNO 2024, December 2023).

 **Weather extremes** During the 2022/23 season, farmers and livestock herders faced erratic temporal distribution of rainfall, heatwaves and wildfires. Although wheat production was higher than the drought-stricken 2022 harvest, it remained 29–35 percent below the pre-conflict 1986–2012 average (FAO, July 2023). The water crisis in the northeast – linked to three years of decreasing rainfall – significantly impacted livelihoods, diminished incomes for agricultural workers, decreased yields and contributed to higher food prices (REACH, November 2023).

DISPLACEMENT

 **7.3M** forcibly displaced people by 2023

 **6.6M** IDPs

 **0.6M** refugees and asylum-seekers

Source: H NAP 2023.

Source: UNHCR Nowcasted estimate, December 2023.

ACUTE MALNUTRITION

0.4M children under 5 years old with acute malnutrition in 2023

0.3M MAM


0.1M SAM

0.5M pregnant and breastfeeding women with acute malnutrition




Source: HNO 2023.

Source: HNO, 2023.


 **Recurrent disease outbreaks, waterborne diseases, a prolonged drought and water crisis, vaccine-preventable illnesses and food insecurity are contributing to increased acute malnutrition levels.** Latakia governorate reported an Emergency-level acute malnutrition prevalence of 10 percent (HNO 2024, December 2023).


According to a 2022 SMART survey conducted in nine northwestern districts in Aleppo and Idlib governorates near the Turkish border, the prevalence of GAM increased from 2.5 percent in 2021 to 3.3 percent in 2022 and the prevalence of SAM from 0.4 percent to 0.9 percent (SMART 2022).

DRIVERS OF ACUTE MALNUTRITION 2023–2024

 **Inadequate services** In the Northeast Syrian Arab Republic, small communities and informal sites, cut off from water networks, have limited access to safe and affordable drinking water due to the ongoing water crisis. Populations often rely on untreated water sources and inadequate sewage systems, increasing the risk of waterborne disease, especially cholera (REACH, November 2023).

Communities in the Northwest were already experiencing a cholera outbreak, overwhelmed health facilities and harsh winter weather when the earthquake hit in February 2023. Access to health services and sanitation further deteriorated in areas heavily affected by the earthquake (WB, summer 2023).

 **Inadequate practices** An Extremely Critical 4.6 percent of children aged 6–23 months receive a Minimum Acceptable Diet (down from 10.9 percent in 2021) and 36 percent of children aged 6–59 months are anaemic (SMART 2022), which is considered a moderate public health problem. With only 39 percent of pregnant and breastfeeding women having Minimum Dietary Diversity, maternal nutrition is also a concern. In women aged 15–49 years, 52.7 percent reportedly suffer from anaemia, which is considered a severe public health problem (Nutrition Cluster, Save the Children & UNICEF, February 2023; SMART 2022).

 **Lack of food** Food security factors – linked to market disruptions and reduced mobility, destruction of cropland, and high inflation that disrupts household consumption patterns and impacts the affordability of a healthy diet – are driving malnutrition.