The number of people facing high levels of acute food insecurity is the largest in eight years of GRFC reporting

Up to 65.2M people or 23% of the analysed population in IPC Phase 3 or above, in 2023 in eight countries

42.69M of them are in six countries with IPC analyses

Angola | Burundi | Djibouti | Ethiopia | Kenya | Somalia | South Sudan | Sudan

21.0–22.49M of them are in two countries with FEWS NET analyses

Ethiopia (19.0–19.99M) and Uganda (2.0–2.5M)

Eight countries with data by early August 2023

Of the ten countries in the region that were selected for inclusion in the GRFC 2023, eight have data available for 2023 that met GRFC requirements – Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan and Uganda – while no data are available for Eritrea and Rwanda (refugees).

Acute food insecurity overview

East Africa’s escalating regional food crisis is driven by the devastating impacts of the conflict in the Sudan since April 2023 as well as a difficult recovery from the unprecedented drought in the Horn of Africa in tandem with widespread economic shocks, weather extremes and ongoing conflicts in Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan.

As of early August 2023, up to 65.2 million people or 23 percent of the analysed population in eight countries were estimated to face high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above), the largest number in eight years of GRFC reporting. All the countries except Ethiopia had similar levels of acute food insecurity as a result of the conflict in Sudan and the unprecedented drought in the Horn of Africa in 2023.
Djibouti met the criteria for being defined as major food crises with at least 1 million people or 20 percent of their population in IPC Phase 3 or above.

At regional level, the number of people in IPC Phase 3 or above increased by 15 percent between 2022 and 2023, while the population analysed increased by 6 percent between the two years. The share of the population in these phases increased marginally from 22 percent to 23 percent.

Comparable data for 2022 and 2023 is available for all countries except Ethiopia, where the source changed from the Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) to FEWS NET, and Kenya. Ethiopia still has the region’s highest numbers of people facing high levels of acute food insecurity.

The Sudan is experiencing the biggest global increase in the magnitude and prevalence of acute food insecurity. Burundi, Djibouti and Somalia are also among the GRFC countries with major increases since 2022. In South Sudan, the number of people facing high levels of acute food insecurity remains similar to 2022.

However, the severity of acute food insecurity decreased in Somalia and in South Sudan where the populations in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) are lower than in 2022.

Five of the eight countries – Burundi, Djibouti, Ethiopia, Somalia and the Sudan – have new peak numbers based on analyses for 2023 released since the publication of the GRFC 2023 in May, while for Kenya, South Sudan and Uganda the projections from 2022 are used.1

Five countries with new 2023 peak numbers (since March 2023)

Burundi

In Burundi, 2.3 million people, or 19 percent of the population, were estimated to face high levels of acute food insecurity during the April–May 2023 minor lean season, of whom 105 000, or 1 percent of the population, were expected to be in Emergency (IPC Phase 4). The 65 percent increase compared to the 2022 peak of October–December, when 1.4 million people were in IPC Phase 3 or above, is one of the highest increases globally and stems from continued deterioration in households’ purchasing power due to high fuel prices and high levels of inflation, as well as delayed rainfall followed by floods. The number of people in IPC Phase 3 or above was expected to increase to 1.2 million or 9 percent of the population, from June–September 2023, with all livelihood zones classified in Stressed (IPC Phase 2) during the harvest period (IPC, May 2023).

Djibouti

During July–December 2023, 285 400 people are expected to be in IPC Phase 3 or above, corresponding to 34 percent of the population – one of the largest increases globally compared to the same period in 2022, when 192 200 people, or 16 percent of the population, were estimated to be in these phases. The severity of acute food insecurity is projected to increase, with the number of people in IPC Phase 4 estimated at 100 100 (8 percent of the population) up from 12 400 (1 percent of the population), driven by rising food prices, high unemployment and floods. Seasonal factors are expected to exacerbate the situation in July–December, including intense heat and lower supply of animal products (IPC, June 2022).

Ethiopia

The FEWS NET analysis of People in Need (PIN) estimated that 10–19.99 million people were in need of urgent food assistance during the peak period of acute food insecurity in July 2023 (FEWS NET, July 2023). The food insecurity situation in Ethiopia varies from region to region. In general, below-average Kiremt rains in some areas are expected to limit income from crop sales as well as labour opportunities compared to a typical year. While conflict in the north and drought in the south and southeast have subsided, the erosion of livelihoods during these protracted shocks have hindered the pace of recovery of food and income sources. Households in both areas face great difficulty in producing or purchasing food (FEWS NET, May 2023).

October–December’s Meher harvest in key producing areas in the west and some recovery of livestock production during the Deyr/Hageya rains in the same period in southern agropastoral areas should see the population facing high levels of acute food insecurity decrease to 9.0–9.99 million by December 2023 (FEWS NET, July 2023).

Somalia

Levels of acute food insecurity remained high in Somalia in April–June 2023, with 6.6 million people or 39 percent of the population in need of urgent humanitarian food and livelihood assistance. This is an 18 percent increase (corresponding to 988 900 people) since October–December 2022, due to the lingering impact of the severe drought that spanned from late 2020 to early 2023, prices remaining above the five-year average in most markets and conflict in the areas surrounding BURHAKABA and Baidoa continuing to displace tens of thousands of people (IPC, April 2023).

Of the population in IPC Phase 3 or above, 1.85 million were estimated to be in Emergency (IPC Phase 4). However, areas at Risk of Famine in January 2023, including agropastoral communities in Burhakaba district (Bay region), and IDPs in Mogadishu and Baidoa settlements, are no longer at risk following a significant scaling up of humanitarian assistance, declining food prices and improved access to income-generating opportunities due to a better-than-expected performance of the October–December 2022 Deyr rainy season. This corresponded with a significant decrease in the number of people facing Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) from 214 100 in October–November 2022 to around 40 400 in April–June 2023.

The Sudan

The eruption of conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RAF) on 15 April 2023 has led to a severe deterioration in the Sudan’s pre-existing acute food insecurity crisis. During July–September 2023, 20.3 million people are estimated to face Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above), representing 42 percent of the analysed population. This is a rapid and dramatic increase (74 percent) over the same period in 2022, when 11.7 million (24 percent of
the analysed population) faced high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC, August 2023).

The population facing IPC Phase 4 has grown faster than the overall population facing acute food insecurity, having more than doubled from 3.1 million or 6 percent of the population in 2022 to 6.3 million people or 13 percent of the total population in 2022.

In states with active conflict at least half the population are in IPC Phase 3 or above including West Darfur (62 percent), Khartoum and South Kordofan (both 56 percent) and Central Darfur, East Darfur and South Darfur (all with 53 percent) (IPC, August 2023).

Ag Geneina town in West Darfur state is the worst affected, with 65 percent of the population expected to face IPC Phase 3 or above. Between October 2023 and February 2024, the situation is projected to improve, with 15 million people or 31 percent of the population facing high levels of acute food insecurity but these projections are still worse than the peak estimates of 2022 (IPC, August 2023).

Drivers of the crisis, 2022–23

Weather extremes were the primary driver of acute food insecurity in Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia and Uganda.

Though rains improved significantly across many areas during the first half of 2023, recovery from the prolonged drought across the Horn of Africa, which began in 2020 and lasted until early 2023, is expected to be slow. Pastoralist populations, mainly in southern Ethiopia, northern and eastern Kenya and Somalia (FAO-GIEWS, July 2023) face prolonged livelihood recovery periods despite better pasture. The March–May rainy season was characterized by dry spells and heavy rainfall episodes that caused flooding in key cropping areas of southern Somalia, marginal agricultural areas of southeastern and coastal Kenya, and Uganda, translating into poor production in those areas (FAO-GIEWS, July 2023).

During the June–September 2023 rainy season, below-average rainfall is forecast for central Ethiopia, northern and southern South Sudan, western Eritrea, western Kenya, eastern Uganda and northeastern Sudan. Wetter-than-usual conditions are expected over southeastern Ethiopia, northern and coastal areas of Somalia, and pockets of the Sudan and of South Sudan.

The current El Niño increases the likelihood of above-average rains during the Deyr/short rains in October–December in drought-affected areas of the Horn of Africa. These may support drought recovery through better pasture for livestock and good yields for second season crops that are harvested from December but they also increase the risk of flooding (FSNWG, June 2022). Below-average rains are forecast over western parts of the region through September, including Ethiopia.

Conflict/insecurity Fighting in the Sudan from mid-April 2023 has heavily impacted food security through severe disruption of markets, livelihoods, transport and trade, and lootings of food stocks. It has reduced access to services including health and nutrition and severely impeded humanitarian access (IPC, August 2023).

It has displaced 895 000 people to neighbouring countries and 2.7 million people were newly internally displaced (UNHCR, August 2023; IOM, DTM, July 2023). Already vulnerable border communities in South Sudan have experienced additional pressure as a result of newly displaced populations (OCHA, May 2023; OCHA, July 2023).

Conflict constrains the production of staple crops, with high prices and shortages of inputs, including fuel, seed and agrochemicals and labour expected to severely constrain cereal planting and production (FAO-GIEWS July 2023). As a result, staple crop production is expected to be below average, further constrained by inadequate rains (IPC, August, 2023).

Livestock producers face constraints to access grazing zones, water, feed and pasture due to insecurity. These challenges are likely to be exacerbated by forecast below-average main season rainfalls. Insecurity and market disruptions limit herders’ access to their usual markets, while the risk of animal looting has forced many herders to sell their animals at unfavourable prices due to reduced domestic demand (IPC, August, 2023).

In the Tigray region there has only been a marginal recovery following the end of the conflict due to the severity and length of the conflict that eroded households’ assets and coping mechanisms, as well as affected the labour market and agricultural systems. Household access issues and aid diversion has meant that many households have not received assistance (FEWS NET, May 2023).

An outbreak of violence in Las Caanood, Somalia, in the first quarter of 2023 led to internal displacement and around 100 000 people crossing the border into Ethiopia (UNHCR, May 2023).

Economic shocks were considered the primary driver in Burundi, Djibouti and South Sudan, and a major driver in all countries of the region.

High food inflation rates in East Africa have had particularly adverse consequences on food security, as households allocate high proportions of their expenditure to food purchases (FAO-GIEWS, July 2023).

In the Sudan, conflict has negatively impacted households’ purchasing power and while inflation has not been tracked regularly in 2023, it was projected to have passed 200 percent in June. The WFP local food basket cost increased by 11.4 percent between May and June 2023 and by 27.3 percent year-on-year (WFP, July 2023).

The conflict in the Sudan is expected to aggravate economic shocks in neighbouring countries. Breaks in the food supply chains have increased the prices of food and commodities in the northern counties of South Sudan, reducing household purchasing power (OCHA, May 2023).

Since the beginning of the Sudan crisis, food prices in areas bordering the Sudan have increased by 20–84 percent (OCHA, June 2023).

In Ethiopia, the further reduction of fuel subsidies in May led to more than a 10 percent increase in fuel prices compared to previous months, further increasing transportation costs and contributing to high staple food prices (FEWS NET, May 2023).

Nutrition overview

The already acute malnutrition situation among young children and pregnant and breastfeeding women has deteriorated over the past two years exacerbated by weather extremes in the Horn of Africa and insecurity and conflict, mostly recently in the Sudan as well as in Ethiopia and Somalia. According to estimates produced in seven countries prior to the current conflict in the Sudan – Burundi, Djibouti, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, the Sudan and Uganda – about 7.68 million children under 5 years old are estimated to be suffering from wasting in 2023, of whom 1.78 million are severely wasted.

An estimated 1.89 million pregnant and breastfeeding women (PBW) are acutely malnourished in 2023 in these countries – although no PBW malnutrition data for 2023 are available for Somalia. Albeit limited due to the ongoing conflict, recent estimates and assessments indicate a severe deterioration of the nutrition situation in the Sudan and among Sudanese refugee populations. See following page: Focus: Conflict in the Sudan.
Focus | Conflict in the Sudan

Since 15 April 2023, armed conflict between the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF) and the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) has had devastating consequences across the Sudan and parts of neighbouring countries.

Conflict started in cities across Northern and Khartoum states, and spread across the Darfur and Kordofan regions, with the most severe clashes occurring in the capital Khartoum and Ag Geneina town in West Darfur. Attempts to halt the conflict and reduce its impact on civilians have not succeeded in quelling the violence. As conflict continues, it is drawing out pre-existing tensions along tribal, ethnic and socioeconomic divides, particularly in Darfur (UNHCR, June 2023).

As a result of the conflict, an additional 8.6 million people in the Sudan are facing high levels of acute food insecurity, a 74 percent increase since the 2022 peak, bringing the total to 20.3 million people (42 percent of the population) in IPC Phase 3 or above during July–September 2023 (IPC, August 2023).

The humanitarian situation is worsened by the lack of humanitarian aid in the region, and repeated looting of warehouses containing humanitarian supplies (IOM, June 2023).

The Sudan is facing major challenges to import and produce its food requirements

As a result of reduced foreign currency reserves and local currency depreciation, import and export activities have declined, with many companies involved in trading activities not functioning.

The Sudan imports around 85 percent of its annual wheat requirements, with over 50 percent originating from the Russian Federation and about 20 percent from Ukraine. The consequences of the war in Ukraine as well as conflict in the Sudan and weakened national currency have significantly disrupted wheat imports (IPC, August 2023).

The massive destruction of major food processing factories, particularly flour factories in Khartoum, and the disruption of supply chains and trade routes across the conflict-affected areas will continue to negatively affect food availability in markets in 2023. Wheat, sugar, fuel and other imported goods have difficulty moving from the east to conflict-affected areas of the west.

There is a significant risk to domestic food production as insecurity limits access to fields and the availability of key agricultural inputs. Intercountry violence could limit pastoral movements to access water, markets and pasture, impacting pastoralist livelihoods.

A mass displacement crisis within the Sudan and neighbouring countries

In just three months – by early August 2023 – over 3.5 million people have been displaced by the fighting, of whom 2.7 million have been internally displaced and 855,500 have crossed international borders (UNHCR, August 2023; IOM DTM, July 2023).

The conflict is aggravating one of the world’s biggest pre-existing displacement crises – even before the conflict, the country was already hosting the sixth highest number of IDPs among all GRFC food-crisis countries (3.8 million by the end of 2022) (HNO 2022).

Since April 2023, the majority of IDPs (74 percent) have fled from Khartoum state followed by South Darfur, North Darfur, West Darfur, Central Darfur and North Kordofan. The highest proportions of IDPs have been displaced to River Nile, Northern, White Nile and Sennar states (IOM, July 2023).

Most IDPs live in host communities (69 percent), with the remainder living in rented accommodation, formal camps, improvised/critical shelters, schools and other public buildings, and open area informal settlements (IOM, July 2023).

New arrivals in South Sudan consist predominantly of returnees. They have been using a limited number of river-based routes and transit to communities already facing high humanitarian needs, including Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels of acute food insecurity, particularly in the Greater Upper Nile region (REACH, June 2023). New arrivals reported that food was their priority need (UNHCR, May 2023) but it has been difficult to access due to limited livelihood opportunities and rising food prices.

In Ethiopia, food assistance has struggled to keep pace with the number of arrivals (IOM, July 2023).

As highlighted in figure 2.3, Chad has been the most frequent destination for refugees fleeing the Sudan since the latest conflict began, hosting approximately 229,200, followed by Egypt and South Sudan. In contrast to other countries, returnees comprise most of the arrivals in South Sudan (UNHCR, July 2023).

Recent changes in Egypt’s policies require Sudanese nationals to obtain a visa, challenging free movement between the two countries and leading to people being stranded in a no mans land (between the Sudan and Egypt). According to IOM, they face dire conditions, without access to food, water, sanitation and hygiene (WASH) services, or proper shelter, including shade (IOM, May 2023).

This multi-faceted crisis risks being further compounded by forecasted weather extremes, including above-normal rainfall increasing the risk of flooding in the northern areas of North Darfur, parts of South Kordofan, and Blue Nile, Sennar, and White Nile states. This could lead to more displacement, further limit humanitarian access to these regions and affect agricultural production (IOM, June 2023).

An additional strain on fragile border areas

The crisis affects communities on both sides of the Sudan’s borders as refugees, asylum seekers and returnees are concentrating in areas with high levels of acute food insecurity in the Central African Republic, Chad and South Sudan (IPC, May 2023; CH March 2023; IPC, November 2022). Competition over scarce resources risks fuelling tensions between displaced populations and host communities.

Rapid assessments suggest that the price of commodities, such as sugar and millet, have almost doubled in border areas of northern Central African Republic that typically rely on cross-border trade with the Sudan (OCHA, June 2023).

In eastern Chad, rapid assessments conducted in May found that sorghum prices had doubled, limiting food access for both refugee and host households (UNHCR, May 2023). Since the beginning of the conflict, food prices in border areas of South Sudan increased by 20–84 percent (OCHA, July 2023).

In Chad, returnee populations have congregated in spontaneous locations near the border that lack essential goods and services, including food (IOM DTM, June 2023).

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In Ethiopia, food assistance has struggled to keep pace with the number of arrivals (IOM, July 2023).
A further shock to an already alarming nutrition crisis

Prior to the current violence, the wasting situation in the Sudan was among the worst of the food crises covered by the GRFC 2023 (FSIN and GNAFC, May 2023) and has been progressively deteriorating over the past years. In 2022, the prevalence of wasting among children under 5 years was equal or above the 15 percent ‘very high’ WHO threshold (OCHA, June 2022).

The ongoing conflict is expected to exacerbate the drivers of child wasting and maternal acute malnutrition, including poor access to healthy diets, inadequate child and maternal feeding practices, limited health services and poor WASH conditions. It is also driving high food prices and impeding agricultural production, contributing to inadequate food intake and dietary diversity.

Nutrition assistance to young children is being hampered and nutrition monitoring interrupted, making it difficult to understand the evolving nutrition situation or react to any newly emerging needs. Conflict has interrupted provision of lifesaving prevention-of-malnutrition assistance, which prior to the conflict targeted about 2 million children under 2 years (OCHA, December 2022). The projections provided by the Sudan HNO 2023, made before the conflict, indicated 3 million children under 5 years were expected to be affected by wasting in 2023, up from 2.26 million in 2022, with the number of severely wasted children increasing from 0.56 million in 2022 to 0.61 million in 2023, representing a 9 percent increase. In addition, about 1 million pregnant and breastfeeding women were expected to be acutely malnourished in 2023 (HNO 2023, November 2022).

The HNO projections were revised upward due to the effect of the conflict on markets, food systems, health and nutrition services, provision of government services and humanitarian assistance. The revised 2023 Humanitarian Response Plan (May 2023) projected a 30 percent increase in the number of children suffering from wasting in hotspot areas, an increase of 15 percent in states hosting large IDP populations and 10 percent elsewhere in the country (OCHA, June 2022).

Very high levels of malnutrition among populations on the move

Needs for food and basic social services including essential nutrition assistance among refugees in the Sudan and in neighbouring countries, mostly among women and children under 5 years, were already high pre-conflict. A Standardized Expanded Nutrition Survey (SENS) conducted among refugees in May 2022 indicated that 16–19 percent of children under 5 years in White Nile’s ten resettlements were suffering from wasting, above the 15 percent ‘very high’ WHO threshold, while in Gedaref’s four settlements, the prevalence ranged from 8–14 percent, considered ‘medium to high’ by WHO thresholds (UNHCR, November 2022).

Refugee and returnee populations who fled the Sudan after the onset of the conflict and have sought refuge in the Central African Republic, Chad, Ethiopia and South Sudan had Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) measurements indicating levels of wasting above the 15 percent ‘very high’ WHO threshold for all countries except Ethiopia. The situation was the most severe in the Renk transit centre of South Sudan and border points of Chad, which recorded a wasting prevalence of 26 percent and 25 percent respectively, including also the highest percentages of severe wasting, with 7.5 percent and 6.1 percent respectively. In border crossing points of the Central African Republic, 16.9 percent of children under 5 years were affected by wasting, according to MUAC measurements. See figure 2.6.

In the Kurmuk and Metema transit centres in Ethiopia, the prevalence of severe wasting is notably high. It also points to the need for nutrition partners to sharpen preparedness and response plans for a nutrition crisis within the Sudan once the conflict abates.

While no assessment of the nutrition situation in country is possible, the state of individuals assessed at border screenings, the pre-conflict nutrition crisis, and continued deterioration of all nutrition drivers at a national scale suggests a poor outlook for those in the middle of the conflict who lack access to food, nutrition and basic social services.