



World Food
Programme

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Food security under pressure

How the Middle East crisis is impacting vulnerable countries

The escalation of geopolitical tension in the Middle East since February 28, 2026 has profound implications for global food security.

In an early projection released in March, WFP estimated that 45 million people would fall into acute food insecurity should oil prices remain around USD 100 per barrel through the end of June. Other partners have warned of broad implications for the global food system in the short and medium term, due to the crisis' impact on supply chains and energy and fertilizer markets.

Unfortunately, almost three months into the conflict, the scenario is beginning to materialize. The price of West Texas Intermediate crude has been above \$100 since March 6 on average. While globally food prices - as measured by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) Price index - only have seen a slight increase so far, substantial food price rises are already being felt in fragile countries.

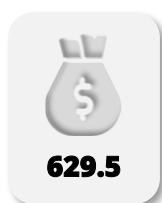
To better ascertain country level food security dynamics, WFP worked with local partners to conduct three case studies in May in Afghanistan, Somalia, and Sri Lanka. We selected these countries because they reflect diverse geographies, different income levels and varying degrees of exposure to the Middle East conflict (see Figure 1). We leveraged existing or recently collected household data complemented by secondary data, applied econometric modelling and consulted key informants.

The findings indicate that the crisis is generating significant spillovers, particularly through fuel, food price and income shocks and trade disruptions. As these factors interact with pre-existing vulnerabilities they quickly translate into visible impacts on food security and livelihoods.

The case studies highlight how these impacts converge and lead to worsening affordability, macroeconomic stability, and, in the case of

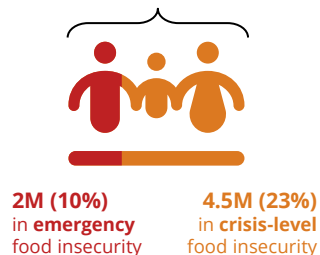
Somalia

GDP per capita

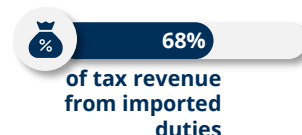


Current US\$, 2024

6.5 million people (33% of the assessed population) **facing severe hunger in 2026**

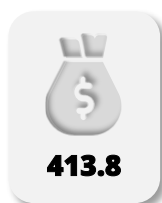


Import and Export Dependencies



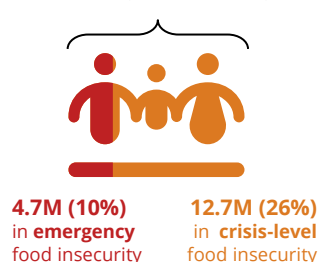
Afghanistan

GDP per capita



Current US\$, 2023

17.4 million people (36% of the assessed population) **facing severe hunger in 2026**



Import and Export Dependencies

Relies on **Pakistan** for

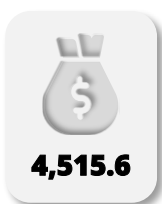


Relies on **Iran** for



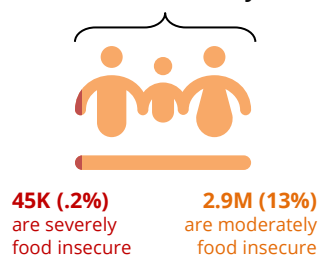
Sri Lanka

GDP per capita



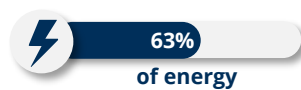
Current US\$, 2024

2.9 million people (13% of the assessed population) **face moderate or severe food insecurity in 2026**



Import and Export Dependencies

Imports



Relies on the **Middle East** for



Figure 1: Characteristics of case study countries

Afghanistan and Somalia, humanitarian outcomes. These impacts are expected to intensify in the coming months, even if the crisis in the Middle East de-escalates.

The studies suggest that the crisis is leading to large increases in vulnerability to food insecurity. Projections for 2026 suggest that an additional 2.5 million people in Somalia could be unable to afford a basic food basket and almost 60 percent of all households unable to afford to purchase essential needs, compared to 47 percent in 2025. In Afghanistan up to 2.3 million additional people could become food insecure in the event of a prolonged closure of the border with Pakistan and an escalation of the Middle East crisis, adding to the 13.8 million who were food insecure

before the crisis. In Sri Lanka, projections indicate that up to 1.3 million additional people may be at risk of being unable to meet their basic food needs, adding to the 4.7 million baseline in 2026.

There is both an expansion and diversification of vulnerability, not merely a deepening among the most food insecure. The studies suggest that new groups may fall into food insecurity as price increases and income losses undermine purchasing power— particularly ultra-poor urban populations and marginalized rural groups such as pastoralists in Somalia.

Extensive dependence on energy and food imports and external trade corridors has left the countries we studied exposed to the effects of the

crisis. In Afghanistan, Sri Lanka and Somalia, impacts include supply chain disruptions and the pass through of higher global energy prices to domestic prices. Governments' fiscal space is constrained by reduced revenue from falling import duties and the burden of high public debt.

The crisis is also straining global humanitarian operations. In the countries we covered, rising delivery costs may lead to a reduction in the coverage of assistance, just as interruptions in aid supplies become more likely. Supply chain disruptions have been severe in Afghanistan, with WFP external transport costs increasing by 2.5 to 5 times and delivery times going from 10 days up to as much as 75 days when using alternative corridors. In Somalia, soaring jet fuel prices are leading to higher operational costs for the United Nations Humanitarian Air Service, which is the only way to safely access to hard-to-reach areas. In Somalia, pipeline breaks for nutritious products are expected in the third quarter of 2026.

At the global level, the humanitarian system faces a double squeeze: rising needs and rising delivery costs, implying coverage gaps. WFP estimates it will now serve 1.5 million fewer people that it originally planned to in 2026. If the conflict continues for six months, more than 9 million people could lose assistance, driven by a combination of higher operational costs and rising local food prices, which also increases the cost of cash-based assistance. In the meantime, funding for WFP operations have also decreased (see Figure 2).

The risks go beyond food security: concern for political stability is legitimate. The combination of a new major economic shock, a historic decline in foreign aid alongside a global economic growth rate that is insufficient to reduce extreme poverty, represents a deeply concerning development for many countries. In Somalia, higher food prices have already led to more tensions and protests. Globally, the increasing number of demonstrations in the second quarter of 2026 underlines the impact of the crisis pointing to increasing popular discontent.

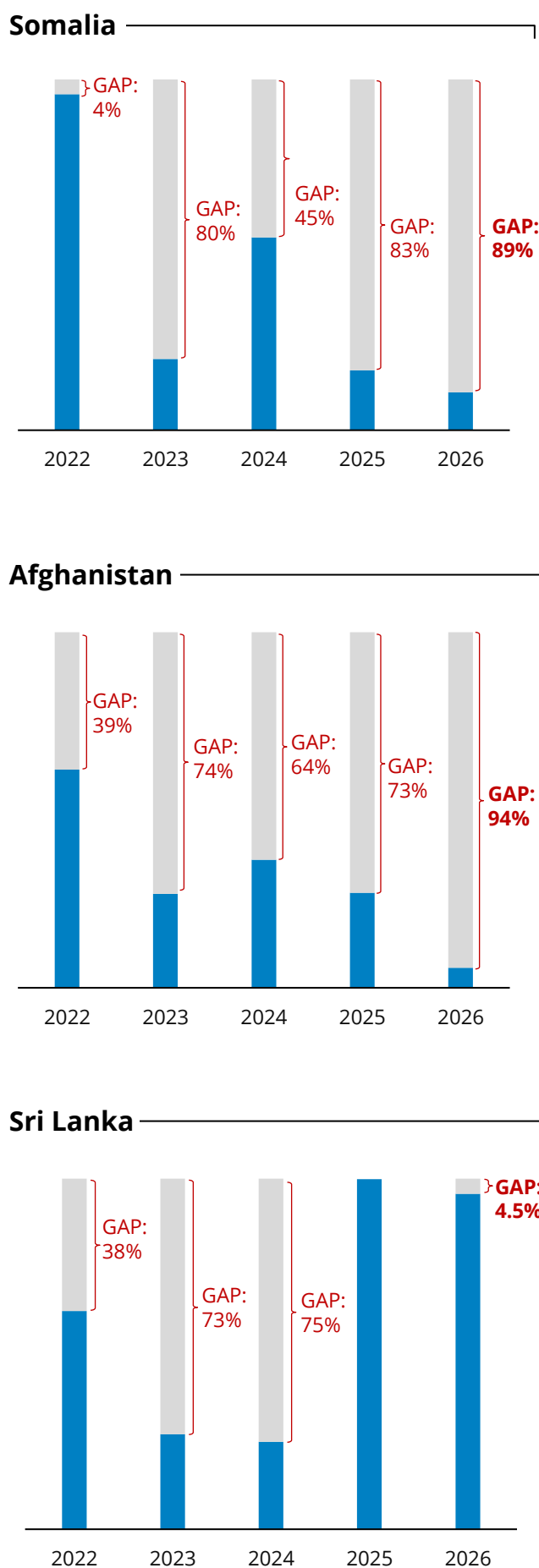


Figure 2. Funding gaps for WFP operations



Recommendations



Strengthen crisis data and information systems

Given the dynamic nature of the crisis, agile market price monitoring and food security assessments are essential to track pass-through from global fuel to local fuel and food prices, and ultimately to household food security. This is critical because assistance must be continuously adjusted to remain adequate to meet essential needs, including through shifts between food and cash and timely updates to the value of assistance provided.



Safeguard critical humanitarian supply chains

To sustain life-saving humanitarian operations, key supply chain enablers should receive targeted, short-term support. This includes the Logistics and Telecommunications Cluster, the UN Humanitarian Response Depot (UNHRD) network, and the UN Humanitarian Air Service (UNHAS).



Support governments to scale and adapt social protection systems

Even before the crisis affected global markets, many low-income economies were already under severe fiscal pressure. WFP should work with governments to strengthen their capacity to target, register, disburse, and account for assistance. In previous crises, safety nets have been scaled up, with targeted, time-bound support used to protect vulnerable households.



Review targeting frameworks

In recent years of funding reductions, humanitarian agencies have rightly prioritized people affected by conflict and displacement. However, an inter-agency discussion is needed on whether and how additional groups affected by economic shocks, including the urban poor, should be explicitly reflected in 2027 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plans.

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