

Somalia expected to avert Famine, but the risk of Famine remains credible

The delivery of humanitarian assistance to millions of Somalis, coupled with higher rainfall totals in the 2022 *deyr* season compared to the past two seasons, will most likely avert Famine (IPC Phase 5) in Somalia through June. High levels of assistance, including not only food assistance but also health, nutrition, and WASH interventions, has undoubtedly saved lives and prevented the complete collapse of local livelihoods amid the ongoing, unprecedented, three-year drought. However, the protracted drought has nonetheless claimed the lives and livelihoods of far too many people, and an anticipated [sixth consecutive below-average rainfall season](#) from April to June 2023 is expected to continue to suppress household food and income. As a result, [at least 6.5 million people](#), including households in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5), still need humanitarian assistance to prevent hunger and mitigate the further erosion of their livelihoods. Furthermore, the [risk of Famine \(IPC Phase 5\) remains credible](#) through at least June in agropastoral areas of Burhakaba district of Bay Region and among the displaced populations in Baidoa and Mogadishu. To ensure the risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) ends, donor governments and humanitarians must sustain high levels of multi-sectoral assistance through late 2023.

Following the failure of the 2021 *deyr* rains and 2022 *gu* rains, Somalia witnessed an alarming increase in acute malnutrition and mortality levels, driven by severe hunger and exacerbated by cholera and malaria outbreaks. While all three criteria for a Famine declaration were not met in 2022, levels of mortality among children under five did breach the Famine (IPC Phase 5) threshold in Baidoa and Mogadishu in October. This finding, coupled with the key assumptions of poor-to-failed 2022 *deyr* rains from October to December, a sixth below-average rainy season in early 2023, and a scale-down in food assistance due to insufficient funding led the Somalia IPC Technical Working Group to [project that Famine \(IPC Phase 5\) would occur](#) among rural and displaced populations in Baidoa and Burhakaba districts and Mogadishu in April-June 2023. Fortunately, however, this scenario is not materializing as predicted, based on evidence collected in December and analyzed in January/February.

Critically, humanitarians continued to deliver food aid to 4-5 million Somalis (nearly 25-30 percent of the total population) per month in November, December, and January. Nearly 1.5 million recipients were located in Bay Region and Mogadishu, where Famine was projected. Overall, humanitarians have reached 5.5 million people per month, on average, across Somalia since July – up from two million people in the first quarter of 2022 and three million people in the second quarter of 2022 (Figure 1). Most aid has been delivered via cash transfer, allowing recipients to not only spend the funds on food, water, and other basic needs for survival but also rebuild their coping capacity, such as by purchasing seeds and fodder for crop and livestock production or paying down the debts they had accumulated since the drought started in 2020. Additionally, Nutrition Cluster partners scaled up services to treat 1.4 million children with severe or moderate acute malnutrition in 2022, and WHO and UNICEF vaccinated [2.31 million children against measles](#) in November 2022 and launched a campaign to vaccinate [nearly one million people against cholera](#) in January 2023. Looking forward, humanitarians plan to reach up to 6.2 million people with food assistance through March, but only 2.7 million people from April to June, based on current funding.

At the same time, rainfall deficits during the 2022 *deyr* season were relatively less severe than initially forecast in several areas, leading to a reduction in the size of harvest shortfalls and marginal improvement in livestock health. The 2022 *deyr* rains indeed brought a fifth consecutive season of below-average rainfall to Somalia, with the largest deficits concentrated in parts of Gedo, Middle Shabelle, Togdheer, and Bay regions, including Burhakaba and parts of Diinsoor districts. However, the rains were reasonably sufficient to support some crop growth and temporarily alleviate water and pasture scarcity in many areas. Most notably, in Baidoa district, cumulative rainfall was only 20 percent below the long-term average, compared to

What is a Famine declaration?

Famine (IPC Phase 5) is declared when at least 20 percent of the population in a given area **currently** has an extreme lack of food, resulting in extremely critical levels of acute malnutrition (≥ 30 percent of children under five) and significant levels of mortality attributed to starvation and/or the interaction of malnutrition and disease (≥ 2 people per 10,000 dying per day).

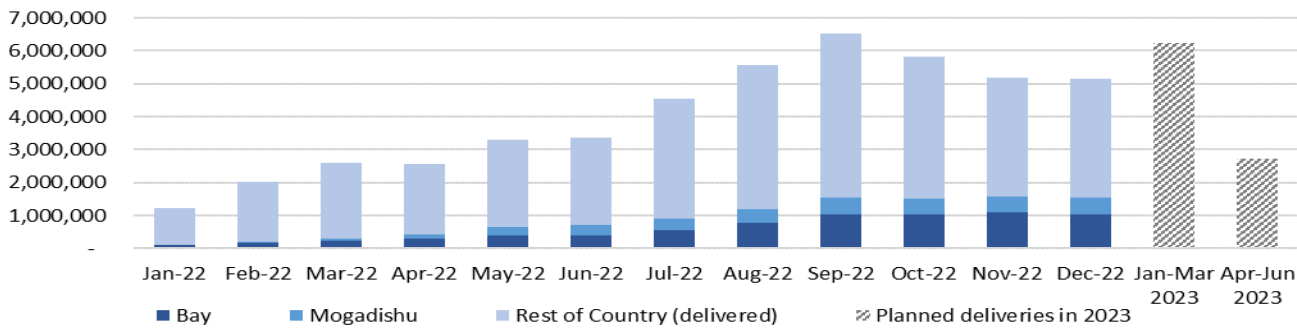
What is a Famine projection?

Based on current information and the mostly likely evolution of food security conditions, Famine (IPC Phase 5), as defined above, is expected to occur **in the future**.

What is a risk of Famine?

A country faces a risk of Famine when Famine (IPC Phase 5) is not the most likely outcome, but there is a credible, alternative scenario in which it would occur. The most likely and alternative scenarios are both underpinned by assumptions about the evolution of food security conditions in the projection period.

Figure 1. Number of people who have received or will likely receive food assistance in Somalia, Jan. 2022 – June. 2023



Source: Food Security Cluster distribution reports and plans

the 55 percent deficit recorded in the 2021 *deyr*. While far from enough to drive full recovery, the rains encouraged displaced households to split and send able-bodied family members back to plant or labor on the farms of better-off and upper-middle-income households. As a result, the 2022 *deyr* harvest in January performed relatively better than in recent seasons, at 32 percent below the 25-year average compared to the 50-60 percent deficit of the past three seasons. The gains in pastoral areas are more modest, particularly in the arid central and northern regions. While the rains supported some improvement in livestock body conditions and small ruminant reproduction, over 3.8 million livestock had already perished between July 2021 and April 2022 and, as of December, average herd sizes among poor households had declined by 30-70 percent compared to baseline across Somalia. Many pastoralists have become destitute and, among those who still own livestock, the minimally positive effect of the rains will not manifest until the birthing and milk production cycle begins in May.

Stocks from the 2022 *deyr* harvest, coupled with the 10-month declining trend in global food prices and the impact of cash assistance on local market dynamics, have also led to a sharp decline in staple food prices in January, leading to a slight rebound in household purchasing power in Somalia. In Baidoa (Bay Region) and Qoryoley (Lower Shabelle), the prices of sorghum and maize have fallen from the record highs reached in July (around 19,500 SOS/kg) to around 10,500-13,000 SOS/kg in January. In Mogadishu, the price of maize and vegetable oil fell by nearly 30 percent over the same period. While the food price crisis within Somalia has subsided, prices remain unaffordable for much of the population. Staple cereal prices still range from 10-70 percent above average across all key reference markets, including in Baidoa and Mogadishu, where sorghum and maize prices were still 50-65 percent above the January average.

While Famine (IPC Phase 5) is no longer assessed to be the most likely scenario, the humanitarian emergency in Somalia is far from over. Although the severity of hunger, acute malnutrition, and mortality outcomes has been alleviated in some areas – especially in northern Bay, Lower Shabelle, Bakool, and Lower and Middle Juba regions – the Somalia IPC assesses that at least 6.5 million people (nearly 40 percent of the population) still need urgent food assistance amid ongoing and planned deliveries. Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) outcomes, which are indicative of large to extreme food consumption gaps and elevated levels of acute malnutrition and mortality, are still expected in several agropastoral areas of Bay, Hiiraan, Middle Shabelle, and Togdheer regions; coastal pastoral areas of Mudug and Galgaduud regions; and camps of internally displaced people in Baidoa, Mogadishu, and Garowe. In addition, a rapid escalation in conflict is driving Emergency (IPC Phase 4) in Laascanood of Sool Region. With the next rainy season also forecast to be below average, household food and income from crop and livestock production will remain low through the next harvest in July 2023, and the July-September dry season will also be harsh. Households in areas facing the deepest rainfall deficits remain at risk of further erosion of livelihoods, destitution and displacement, and loss of life.

Rural households in Burhakaba and displaced households in Baidoa and Mogadishu remain among the population of highest concern, with a high share of the population in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and some households in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5). There remains a credible risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) in these areas. Famine (IPC Phase 5) would be likely if the April-June 2023 rains perform very poorly and result in crop failure in southern Bay Region, and if humanitarians are unable to reach households in these high-priority areas with sufficient food assistance, whether due to physical access constraints, logistical barriers, or the marginalization of certain groups. The risk that assistance does not reach households in need is already elevated given the anticipated scale-down in assistance in the second quarter of 2023. To end the risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5), as well as the likelihood of further destitution and death associated with prolonged Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes, humanitarian aid must be sustained at current levels until at least late 2023.

Recommended Citation: FEWS NET and FSNAU. Somalia Food Security Alert, February 28, 2023: Somalia expected to avert Famine, but the risk of Famine remains credible, 2023.