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Anticipated effects of drought on malnutrition drivers

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Aim

The report aims to provide an overview and analysis of the current and anticipated impacts of drought in Somalia on the drivers that cause malnutrition, such as food insecurity, displacement, disease outbreaks, and conflict.

Scope

This report covers all of Somalia, including its autonomous regions, with a focus on drought-affected pastoralist and agropastoralist areas. It highlights the southern regions (Bakool, Bay, Gedo, and Lower Shabelle), which are expected to receive below-average rainfall during the Deyr season (October–December 2025); central regions (Banadir, Galgaduud, Hiran, Middle Shabelle, and Mudug); and northern regions (Awdal, Bari, Nugaal, Sanaag, Sool, Togdheer, and Woqooyi Galbeed), which experienced a poor Gu rainy season (April–July 2025).

Methodology

The report is based on a secondary data review, non-public sources, and key informant interviews with stakeholders at national and regional levels.

INFORMATION GAPS

- There is little to no information about remote clans and ethnic minorities.
- There is limited disaggregated data on groups that may be more vulnerable to the effects of drought and malnutrition, such as children, pregnant women, people with disabilities, and older people.
- The lack of mortality surveillance data and limited data on the rate of loss to follow up for malnutrition patients impede a comprehensive knowledge of and the response to prevent deaths across the country (KII 16/10/2025).
- There is limited information on northern Somalia, where the upcoming drought is predicted to be less severe compared to the rest of the country. The north is also likely to be affected, however, and is still recovering from poor Gu rains (KII 10/10/2025).

CRISIS OVERVIEW

Somalia is currently experiencing its 2025 Deyr rainy season, which typically occurs from October–December and plays an important role in Somalia's food and water security (FEWS NET accessed 21/10/2025). Seasonal forecasts anticipate below-average Deyr precipitation and above-average temperature between October–December, which is expected to aggravate the drought (SMN 20/09/2025; ICPAC accessed 29/09/2025). These anticipated precipitation and temperature anomalies are partially attributed to the combined effects of La Niña, which started in October 2025, and the negative phase of the Indian Ocean Dipole (IOD), another interannual climate variability phenomenon, which is expected to persist until the end of 2025 (FAO 06/10/2025; NOAA 03/11/2025; WMO 20/10/2025). The combination of La Niña and the negative IOD between October–December typically causes severe drought in the Horn of Africa (ICPAC 29/06/2025).

By July 2025, 2.5 million people across 26 districts were estimated to be moderately or severely impacted by drought, with all northern regions severely hit. In Somaliland only, more than 650,000 people have been affected (OCHA 18/08/2025). Forecasted below-average 2025 Deyr rains are likely to worsen drought conditions in the north, and extend their impacts to additional areas across central and southern Somalia.

The IPC estimates that 1.85 million children aged 6–59 months are expected to suffer acute malnutrition and need urgent treatment between July 2025 and June 2026, representing nearly half of all children in this age group in Somalia. This includes approximately 421,000 cases of children likely to suffer severe acute malnutrition (SAM) and 1.43 million children likely to suffer moderate acute malnutrition (MAM), representing a 12% increase in global acute malnutrition and a 5% increase in SAM compared to the same season last year. Notably, around 65% of the total acute malnutrition burden is concentrated in southern Somalia (IPC 23/09/2025).

Between June–September, 18 of the 47 assessed areas around the country were classified to face Emergency (IPC Phase 4) food insecurity (IPC 23/09/2025). This is further aggravated by protracted conflict and other factors related to scarce resources, which have led to displacements and the loss of 1.4 million livestock, severely undermining livelihoods and food security (WFP 08/04/2025; UN 26/02/2025). By September, the peak of the lean season in pastoral areas, food security had deteriorated across most of northern and central Somalia (FEWS NET 16/10/2025). The most affected areas were central Somalia (Galgaduud, Hiran, and Mudug), northern Somalia (Jeeh, Marooi, and Sahil) and southwest Somalia (Bakool, Bay, and Lower Shabelle) (IPC 23/09/2025).

The prolonged drought poses a serious threat to the food and nutrition security of communities already struggling amid armed conflict (FAO 26/02/2025). A below-average Deyr season can directly influence the food security, nutrition, livelihoods, and wellbeing of millions of people throughout the country (SONNA 05/09/2025).

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KEY MESSAGES

- **Somalia's protracted drought crisis is driving widespread malnutrition.** Somalia is experiencing a prolonged and complex crisis, with drought as the primary driver of escalating humanitarian needs. By October 2025, an estimated 6.9 million people remained in need, with 6.37 million people's needs left unmet. The drought, compounded by conflict, displacement, and economic instability, is intensifying food insecurity and malnutrition, with below-average rainfall expected to aggravate conditions further into early 2026 (KII 10/10/2025; KII 16/10/2025; UNICEF 02/11/2025).
- **The southern and central regions face the greatest impact.** Drought intersects with conflict and displacement in the hardest-hit regions (Bakool, Bay, Galgaduud, Gedo, Hiran, Lower Shabelle, and Mudug), leading to acute food insecurity and rising malnutrition rates (ICPAC accessed 20/10/2025).
- **Food insecurity worsens as drought undermines livelihoods.** An estimated 4.4 million people are projected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse food insecurity through January 2026. Failed rains, crop losses, and soaring food prices are eroding livelihoods and purchasing power, leaving families unable to meet basic food needs (FEWS NET 03/09/2025; IPC 23/09/2025).
- **Malnutrition has reached critical levels among children.** The drought's impact on food and water availability has led to alarming levels of child malnutrition. Between July 2025 and June 2026, 1.85 million children under age five are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition, including 421,000 with SAM (FEWS NET 03/09/2025; IPC 23/09/2025).
- **Water scarcity and disease outbreaks compound malnutrition.** The drought has left over 5.2 million people without access to safe water, triggering outbreaks of cholera, diarrhoea, and measles. These health crises further weaken vulnerable populations, especially children, and aggravate malnutrition. Health facility closures because of funding cuts are limiting access to essential care. Between January–July 2025, nearly 6,600 cases of cholera and acute watery diarrhoea were reported, with 300,000 people lacking sufficient water access (NRC 18/08/2025).
- **Humanitarian funding is critically low.** The 2025 Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan (HNRP) is only 21% funded, forcing key organisations, such as the WFP and Save the Children, to scale down operations. This is severely affecting food and nutrition services, data collection, and long-term crisis monitoring (KII 15/10/2025; KII 10/10/2025; WASH Cluster 09/08/2025).
- **Displacement is intensifying the pressure on urban areas.** Drought and conflict continue to displace communities, with many facing hunger, water shortages, and inadequate shelter. New waves of displacement, particularly from Lower Shabelle, are straining already overstretched host communities in Mogadishu and surrounding regions (UNHCR 26/09/2025; Radio Ergo 29/09/2025; FEWS NET 03/09/2025; IPC 23/09/2025).

- **The drought is linked to economic and conflict risks.** Somalia's rain-fed agriculture and pastoral livelihoods are under threat from prolonged dry conditions, increasing food and water insecurity. This is likely to lead to greater displacement and resource-based conflicts as competition over scarce resources intensifies. Pastoral households are especially vulnerable in early 2026 (SONNA 05/09/2025; KII 10/10/2025).

ANTICIPATED SCOPE AND SCALE OF DROUGHT

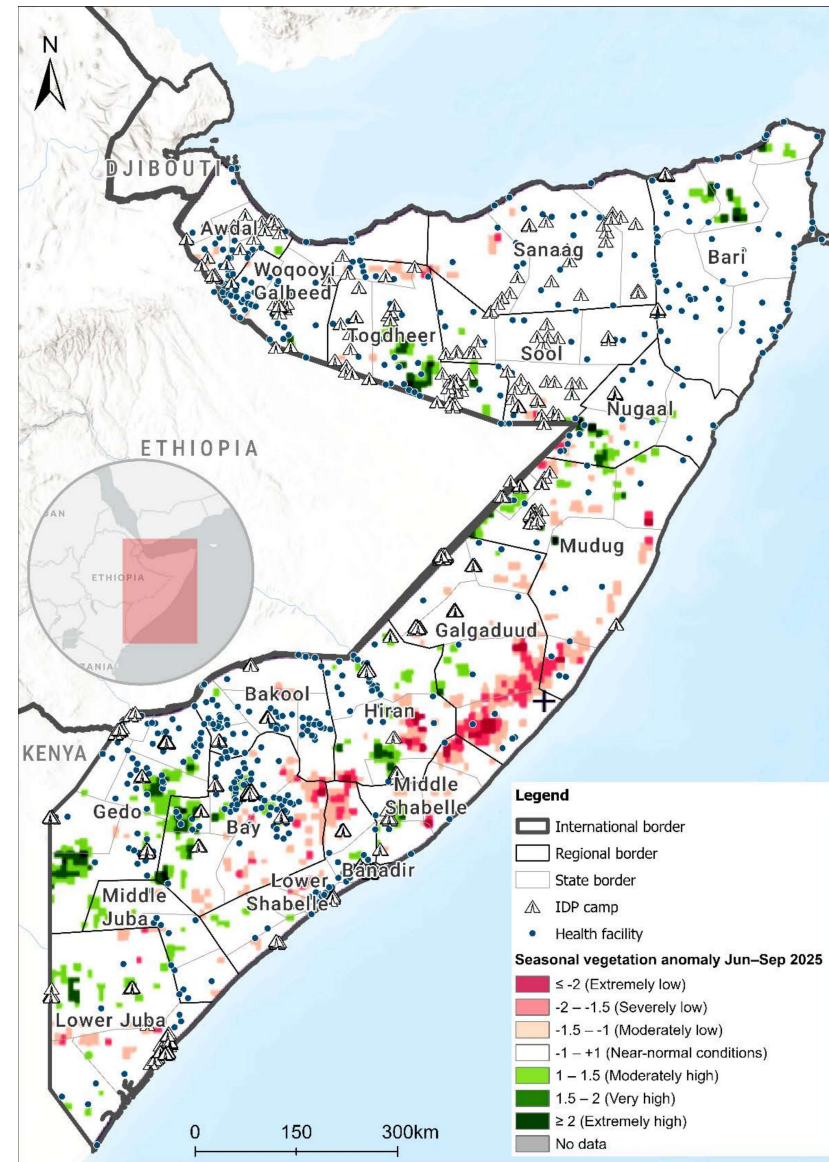
By 14 October 2025, La Niña conditions were present and forecasted to persist until the end of February 2026 (NOAA 03/11/2025). La Niña typically causes below-normal rainfall across the eastern parts of the Greater Horn of Africa region during the October–December season. The negative phase of the IOD is expected to intensify the impact of La Niña, as the combination of these phenomena has been linked to severe droughts in the past (IGAD 29/06/2025).

Between October–December, temperatures across much of East Africa are projected to be above average. In Somalia, this rising heat will likely worsen agricultural drought by increasing heat stress and evapotranspiration (the process by which water moves from the earth to the air through evaporation, and transpiration (the water lost from plants)). As a result, soil moisture loss will likely accelerate, worsening water stress and further affecting crop yields, livestock health, and drinking water supply (ICPAC accessed 29/09/2025; SONNA 05/09/2025; USGS 12/06/2018). The 2026 Jilaal dry season, which runs from January to mid-March, is expected to be unusually hot and dry, likely contributing to the depletion of pasture and water supplies (FEWS NET 16/10/2025).

Despite the below-average seasonal precipitation outlook, localised flooding is likely during the Deyr rainy season (October–December), especially in Banadir, Hirshabelle, Jubaland, and Southwest regions. Riverine areas of Middle Shabelle and Hiran could also experience floods, and flash flood episodes remain possible from short-lived but intense storms, particularly in urban centres such as Belet Weyne, Kismayo, and Mogadishu (FAO 06/10/2025). These weather events may limit physical access for humanitarian operations (OCHA 15/10/2025).

Map 1 shows the distribution of health services, IDP camps, and areas that experienced seasonal vegetation anomalies in September 2025 based on the Intergovernmental Authority on Development's Climate Prediction and Applications Centre seasonal vegetation anomaly index. Seasonal vegetation anomaly is used to detect and monitor the impacts of environmental stress factors, especially plant water stress caused by drought, on vegetation growth and productivity. The map indicates that central Somalia was already experiencing severe vegetation stress in September, especially in Galgaduud, Hiran, and Middle Shabelle, as well as parts of Bay, Lower Juba, and Lower Shabelle regions. These areas are expected to receive poor Deyr rains, which may further worsen crop and pasture conditions. Vegetation stress could spread to other central and southern regions of Somalia, which are also forecasted to experience below-normal Deyr rainfall between October–December.

Map 1. Drought-affected areas, health service presence, and IDP camp locations (September 2025)



Sources: ACAPS using data from ICPAC (accessed 31/10/2025); WHO (accessed 31/10/2025); CCCM Cluster (accessed 31/10/2025)

KEY GEOGRAPHIC AREAS TO MONITOR

An estimated 887,000 people live in areas currently classified as severely affected by drought across 16 districts. An additional 1.6 million people are in areas moderately affected by drought across 26 districts. Assessments and reports highlight central and southern Somalia's exposure to drought, aggravated by conflict (IPC 29/09/2025). The northern areas are also likely to be affected, but information is relatively scarce since most reports focus on central and southern Somalia.

Southern Somalia (Bakool, Bay, and Lower Shabelle)

By September 2025, food insecurity had reached critical levels across southern Somalia, with 29% of the population in Bay, 15% in Bakool, and 15% in Lower Shabelle facing IPC 3+ conditions (IPC 29/09/2025). Anticipated below-average Deyr rains in these largely riverine and agropastoral areas, alongside escalating insecurity, are worsening the situation. The non-state armed group (NSAG) Al Shabaab launched a major offensive in February 2025, regaining territory in central and southern Somalia, with Lower Shabelle witnessing some of the heaviest clashes. Military operations, including air strikes in March, killed 23 civilians – including 14 children – near Bagdad village in Lower Shabelle (War on the Rocks 03/06/2025; HRW 2025; Hiiran 25/03/2025; CFR 15/09/2025). Insecurity-induced displacement is set to continue as Al Shabaab intensifies operations and government control weakens in the region.

In Bay region, drought has been the primary driver of displacement. Between 11–15 October, more than 1,500 new arrivals were recorded, reflecting the strain of prolonged dry conditions on livelihoods and access to basic resources. Throughout 2025, displacements have totalled nearly 81,900 people in Bay, nearly 14,900 in Lower Shabelle, and more than 11,100 in Bakool. Most of the displaced population are living in camps and informal settlements, where overcrowding and limited services continue to heighten their vulnerability. By 22 October, displaced people's most significant needs were food (62%), drinking water (14%), shelter (9%), and livelihood support (8%) (IOM accessed 24/10/2025; IOM 22/10/2025).

In Lower Shabelle, where 90% of the population depends on agriculture and pastoralism, short-term improvements from above-average Gu rains (April–June) were reversed by poor Xagaa rains (June–August), reducing leading vegetation cover to below 60% of the long-term average by late August (Horn Observer 29/01/2025; FEWS NET accessed 31/10/2025). The combined effects of drought, displacement, and conflict affect household food access and dietary quality. Reduced crop and livestock production lowers the availability of milk, cereals, and other nutrient-rich foods, while high market prices limit affordability. Overcrowded IDP sites with inadequate water and sanitation increase the risk of acute malnutrition.

Jubaland (Gedo, Lower Juba, and Middle Juba)

In 2025, at least 61,800 people were displaced in Gedo, nearly 13,400 in Lower Juba, and nearly 3,200 in Middle Juba (IOM accessed 24/10/2025). Recurrent displacement, coupled with prolonged dry conditions and insecurity, has strained limited resources, disrupted food production, and reduced access to health and nutrition services (WFP 25/09/2025).

Jubaland is likely to experience worsening food insecurity and malnutrition during the Deyr 2025 season, as below-average rainfall is expected to drive crop failure, livestock losses, and increased displacement. The Juba River, the region's main water source, has already seen markedly low rainfall and soil moisture, resulting in poor off-season crop and livestock production. Conflict between Al Shabaab, Jubaland state forces, and the Federal Government has further disrupted livelihoods and weakened governance structures, limiting the delivery of basic services. The areas most severely affected include Middle and Lower Juba, where dry conditions, recurrent conflict, and restricted humanitarian access converge, leaving pastoral and riverine communities at heightened risk of acute food insecurity and malnutrition (FEWS NET 16/10/2025 and 03/09/2025; SONNA 05/09/2025; GGA 14/01/2025; WFP 25/09/2025).

Central Somalia (Banadir, Galgaduud, Hiran, Middle Shabelle, and Mudug)

Central Somalia faces a heightened risk of food insecurity and malnutrition as below-to-near-normal Deyr rains are expected to bring limited relief, with drought likely to persist in many areas despite possible localised flooding along weak riverbanks of the Juba and Shebelle Rivers. Prolonged dry conditions, heat stress, and pasture and water shortages are expected to continue in non-riverine zones, undermining crop and livestock production (FAO 06/10/2025).

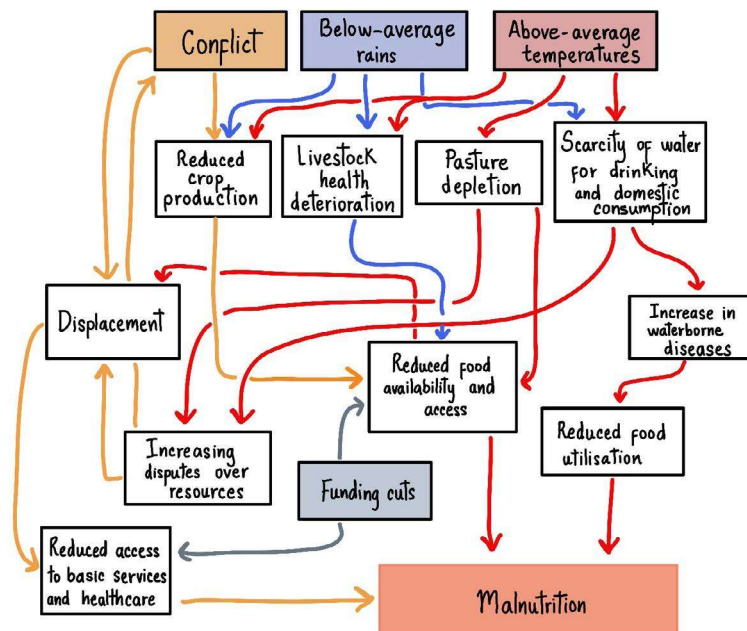
Until September 2025, displacement levels remained high, with Banadir hosting over one million IDPs, followed by Mudug (116,000), Hiran (59,000) and Galgaduud (56,000) (UNHCR 16/10/2025). Between 11–15 October, drought-related displacements were reported in Banadir, Hiran, and Middle Shabelle. Conflict, particularly in southeastern Mudug, also drives mass displacement as clashes between government forces and Al Shabaab force pastoralist and farming families to flee to overcrowded camps lacking food, water, and basic services (Radio Ergo 08/03/2025). Prolonged drought, recurring displacement, and limited access to assistance are driving a steady deterioration in nutrition outcomes across the central regions, with global acute malnutrition rates expected to rise above seasonal averages, particularly among displaced populations (IPC 23/09/2025).

Northern Somalia (Awdal-Somaliland, Bari, Nugaal, Sanaag-Somaliland, Sool, Togdheer, and Woqooyi Galbeed-Somaliland)

Unlike much of Somalia, localised areas in Puntland and the northeast are expected to receive near-normal Deyr rainfall (SONNA 05/09/2025). That said, normalised difference vegetation index data indicates the worst vegetation conditions on record for this period across northern Somalia, forcing many pastoralists in the northwest to move livestock into Ethiopia in search of pasture and water (KII 10/10/2025). Acute food insecurity is projected to affect at least 21% of people in northern and central pastoral zones between October–December (FEWS NET 16/10/2025; IPC 29/09/2025).

Persistent clashes among separatist groups, including the Somaliland National Army, Puntland Security Forces, and other NSAGs, continue to destabilise the region and disrupt livelihoods. The combination of poor pasture conditions, livestock losses, and insecurity has severely reduced household food access and income. With weakened coping mechanisms and limited humanitarian reach in contested areas, northern Somalia is a key region to monitor for rising malnutrition, particularly among pastoral households facing prolonged food and livelihood stress (Black Agenda Report 23/04/2025; ACfSS 18/02/2025; TWP 09/02/2025; ADF 28/01/2025; MOD accessed 23/10/2025).

Figure 1: Main drivers of Malnutrition during drought in Somalia



ANTICIPATED EVOLUTION OF MALNUTRITION DRIVERS

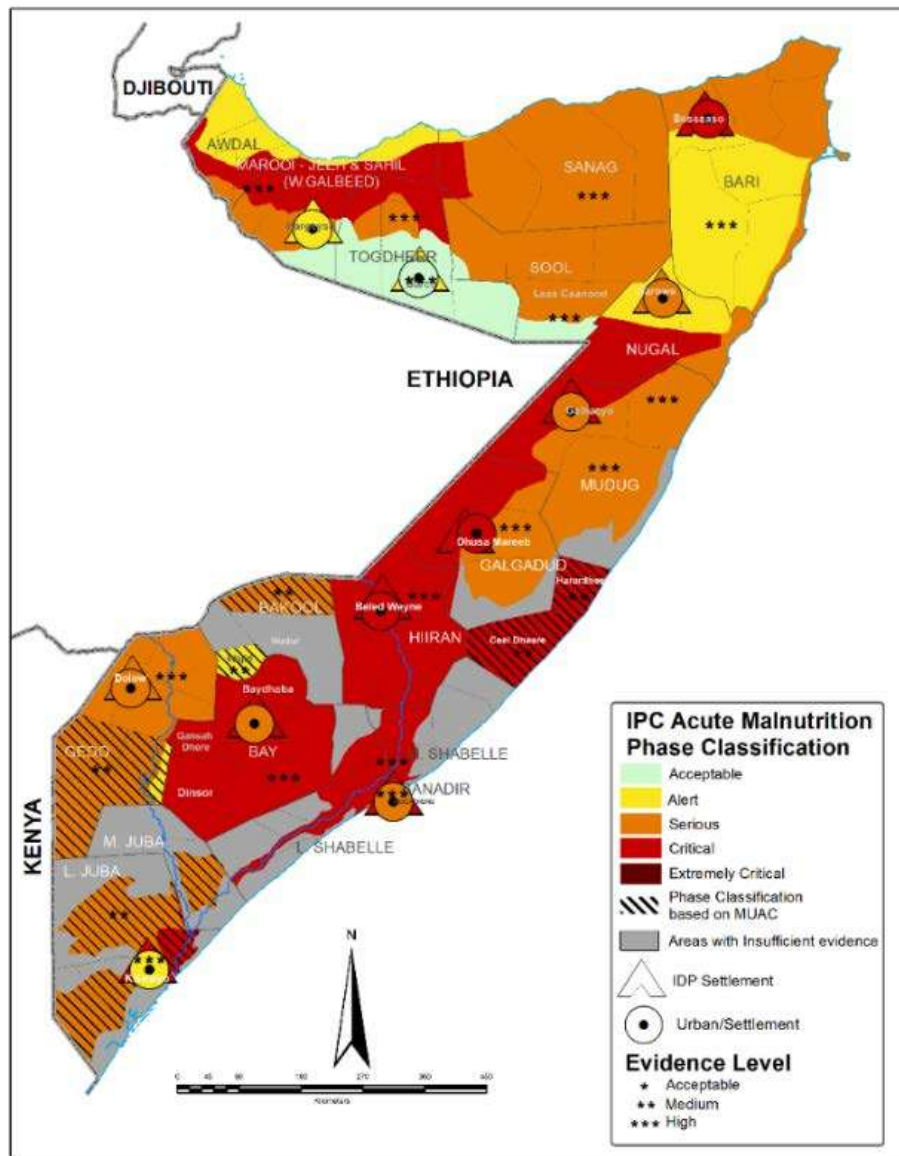
Food and livelihood insecurity

Food inflation in Somalia in 2025 has eroded purchasing power, making staples unaffordable. By May, food prices were almost 5% higher than in the previous year. In early 2025, the livestock-to-cereal terms of trade, which measures how much cereal can be bought by selling one animal, had already fallen by 29% compared to 2024, reducing pastoralists' ability to secure essential food supplies (FAO 02/04/2025). In 2025, consumer price inflation, which measures changes in the retail prices of key goods and services, rose by 8.3% in Hirshabelle state (south-central Somalia) and by 8% in Southwest state (southern Somalia), outpacing the national average by May (NBS accessed 27/10/2025). In August, Somaliland experienced a sharp drop in goat prices, driven by a seasonal surge in sales and poor livestock body conditions caused by below-average Gu rains and extended dry spells. This decline has reduced pastoralists' purchasing power and affected their livelihoods (Logistics Cluster 29/08/2025).

While food and non-food commodity prices remained relatively stable across most regions in September, this was largely owing to post-harvest cereal supplies following an above-average Gu harvest in the southern areas (WFP 30/09/2025; GEOGLAM 02/10/2025). The prices of locally grown sorghum and maize may increase in areas experiencing poor Deyr harvest between January–February 2026, similar to what happened in Baidoa and Burao markets in early 2025, where sorghum prices rose by 25% and 40%, respectively, compared to the previous year (FAO 02/04/2025). Rural and pastoral communities continue to face significant challenges recovering from previous droughts. Recurrent dry spells hinder herd recovery, reduce livestock productivity, and force many households to transition to alternative livelihoods or depend on humanitarian assistance (KII 10/10/2025).

The projections of below-normal Deyr rainfall suggest limited possible pasture regeneration and potential disruptions to usual livestock migration routes, likely resulting in reduced livestock productivity and income, which increases food insecurity and malnutrition risks for pastoral communities (ICPAC accessed 29/09/2025). Below-average precipitation is also likely to reduce yields across rain-fed production areas around the country. Secondary Deyr crops account for about 40% of the total annual cereal output in central and southern regions, playing a vital role in sustaining food security (FAO 02/04/2025).

Map 2. Malnutrition situation across Somalia (July–September 2025)



Source: FSNAU (04/09/2025)

Food insecurity will continue to be a major driver of malnutrition in the next six months and beyond. Food insecurity across most parts of Somalia is expected to deteriorate until January 2026 because of successive below-average rainfall seasons (FEWS NET accessed 31/10/2025; IPC 29/09/2025). The impacts of high food inflation, reduced purchasing power, limited livelihood recovery, and below-average rainfall are expected to aggravate malnutrition across the country in the coming months. The deterioration of food security conditions will likely increase acute malnutrition cases among children under five, pregnant and lactating women, and other groups at risk of malnutrition. Regions including Bakool, Bay, Hirshabelle, Lower Shabelle, and Southwest, as well as parts of Somaliland, are at heightened risk, where declining food access, livelihood erosion, and poor dietary diversity converge. Relapse among children previously treated for acute malnutrition is also likely, given the impacts of prolonged food insecurity and reduced household resilience (King et al. 01/2025).

People may lack knowledge of weather forecasts and early warning systems, increasing their vulnerability to shocks (KII 16/10/2025). The lack of accessible explanations and culturally relevant framing contributes to a disconnect between global climate discourse and regional perceptions – probably most acute in rural areas where access to information on climate change and its impacts is insufficient (KII 17/10/2025). Marginalised clans in remote areas often experience limited awareness of available services and aid resources (KII 16/10/2025).

Health access

According to the 2025 HNRP, around 28% of the population needed health services at the start of the year, but drought-related shocks are likely to have further overstretched an already fragile healthcare system (OCHA 22/01/2025).

Strained and under resourced health services: health facilities are under significant strain caused by infrastructure damage, medical staff shortages, limited clean water and electricity, and unreliable vaccine cold chains (Health Cluster 09/10/2025). About eight hospitals, 40 primary healthcare facilities, and 16 mobile teams operated by six INGOs had temporarily suspended services in 21 districts by August (OCHA 18/08/2025). In May, Save the Children reported that aid cuts had forced the closure of a third (about 47) of their nutrition services, with at least 55,000 children losing access to life-saving nutrition services (STC 24/07/2025). Although it is not explicit whether all the aforementioned health centres offered malnutrition treatment services, it is highly probable these services were provided alongside other maternal and child healthcare. The treatment of all types of malnutrition requires a combination of outpatient – for less severe cases where patients attend on a regular basis for assessment and to access therapeutic food for administering at home – and inpatient services, for very serious or complex cases. Service closures or suspensions are likely to directly contribute to malnutrition rates, reduce surveillance and diagnoses, and require people to travel further for more limited services.

Increased disease burden and weakened immunity: the drought has intensified water and sanitation challenges, increasing exposure to infectious diseases. Between May–August 2025, Somalia reported 497 diphtheria cases – 914% higher than the 49 cases reported in 2024. The country has also reported cases of measles, whooping cough, cholera, and severe respiratory infections, with about 60% of all cases affecting children under five (*The Guardian* 19/08/2025; *Reuters* 19/08/2025; WHO 26/09/2025). This comes as a result of a lack of safe drinking water, increased, lack of immunisation, and shortage of medical supplies. Somalia remains one of the countries with the highest number of zero-dose vaccinated children in sub-Saharan Africa (STC 24/07/2025). The limited vaccination coverage and the lack of timely access to healthcare have contributed to rates of malnutrition (KII 16/10/2025; KII 10/10/2025). Recurrent illnesses also weaken children's immune systems, reduce nutrient absorption, and increase metabolic demands, all of which worsen acute malnutrition. At the same time, compromised immunity makes malnourished children more susceptible to infections, creating a vicious cycle of disease and undernutrition (Defeat DD 20/06/2025; Hussein et al. 23/10/2025).

Impact on maternal and reproductive health: the limited availability of health centres forces pregnant and lactating women to walk long distances in unsafe conditions to reach care. Climate-induced stress, food insecurity, and lack of shelter place women at heightened risk of gender-based violence (GBV), malnutrition, and preventable maternal and newborn complications (UNFPA 27/07/2025). Inadequate prenatal care and poor maternal nutrition directly contribute to low birth weight, preterm births, and stillbirths (UNICEF accessed 30/10/2025).

Excess mortality and child health: between January 2022 and June 2024, the drought in Somalia resulted in over 71,000 excess deaths, with roughly 41% of these fatalities occurring among children under five years old. Although data was not disaggregated by cause of mortality, the findings suggest that in South-Central state, because of the compounding effects of insecurity and access constraints, the effects of drought on mortality were more severe than in areas projected to face similar food insecurity rates (FSNAU 22/01/2025). Some data indicates that the child mortality rate in Somalia is among the highest in the world. One in seven Somali children die before they turn five, with 137 deaths per 1,000 live births, with the worst rates in areas in the southern and central parts of the country (Malin et al. 24/02/2025).

Lack of malnutrition surveillance countrywide: most surveillance information is focused only on specific regions, with comprehensive nationwide malnutrition-related mortality data lacking (KII 16/10/2025). Fragmented state-level reports expose major gaps in the health response (KII 16/10/2025; KII 15/10/2025). This stems from the complexity of tracking malnutrition-related deaths; many cases occur outside health facilities, and outpatient follow-ups often fail to distinguish between patients lost to follow-up and those who have died.

Somalia's health and nutrition surveillance systems also remain weak after decades of conflict and insecurity, which limit access for aid organisations and monitoring teams, especially in remote regions or areas under armed group control. Government systems are fragile and heavily reliant on NGO-led services. Routine data is collected on paper at health facilities and later entered into the Government's digital health platform, DHIS2, by district health management information system officers, although they cover only 30–42% of districts and majority public facilities. Many areas lack functioning health centres altogether, resulting in major data gaps. Data quality is further undermined by staff shortages, poor ICT capacity, limited internet access, and duplicate reporting. The absence of detailed case-level data and the irregular publication of national statistics further hinder analysis and decision-making (Mohamed et al. 06/08/2025; WHO 2022).

Mental health and indirect nutritional effects: there is little recent information on mental health, but in past climate shocks, mental health issues have increased, particularly for women and girls. These include increased rates of anxiety, hypertensive disorders in pregnancy, preterm and low birthweight deliveries, and stillbirths, especially in displacement settings where health systems are overstretched (UNFPA 27/07/2025). These conditions not only endanger maternal health but also heighten the risk of malnutrition among infants and mothers.

WASH access

Escalating WASH crisis could aggravate malnutrition. In 2025, Somalia continues to face a mounting WASH crisis that threatens to deepen existing malnutrition levels, particularly among displaced and drought-affected populations. By January 2025, approximately 5.2 million people, representing nearly 27% of the total population, were in need of WASH services (OCHA 22/01/2025). The failure of the March–April Gu rains, coupled with forecasts of below-average Deyr rainfall, has further reduced water availability and compounded already severe drought conditions (IFRC 05/10/2025; ICPAC accessed 22/10/2025; SONNA 05/09/2025). Urban water systems are under increasing strain, while rural areas face extensive well and borehole failures (NRC 18/08/2025). In southern regions, the drying of key rivers such as the Juba and Shabelle has worsened shortages, while in the north and east, less than 30% of people have access to safe water (Aweis Ali et al. 26/09/2025; OCHA 01/10/2025). In October, water prices tripled because of drought, from USD 2 to USD 6 per 160L barrel, forcing households to limit consumption and heightening dehydration and disease risks (OCHA 01/10/2025).

Limited WASH access undermines both food utilisation and nutrient absorption, increasing susceptibility to waterborne diseases such as acute watery diarrhoea and cholera, which are among the leading causes of malnutrition-related morbidity and mortality in children. In displacement sites, where open defecation and poor hygiene practices are widespread,

the likelihood of the outbreak of diseases such as cholera is high (Radio Ergo 21/10/2025 and 17/10/2025; Health Cluster 09/10/2025). The compounding effects of food insecurity, inadequate WASH infrastructure, and disease transmission create a vicious cycle that worsens nutritional outcomes, especially among children under five, pregnant and lactating women, and people living in drought-affected rural areas (DEH/SHF 01/08/2025).

Conflict

Conflict and insecurity remain critical drivers of malnutrition in Somalia. Persistent violence, territorial control by NSAGs, and access constraints continue to disrupt livelihoods, markets, and the delivery of essential WASH, health, and nutrition services. Populations in Bakool, Bay, Hiran, and Lower Shabelle are the most affected, as insecurity limits access to services. Clashes between Somali forces and allied militias on one side and the NSAG Al Shabaab on the other – particularly in areas such as Afgooye district (Lower Shabelle) and surrounding rural areas – have created an environment of persistent insecurity that restricts civilian movement and limits safe passage (SMN 01/04/2025; War on the Rocks 03/06/2025).

In Somalia, climate change and conflict are deeply interconnected. Al Shabaab leverages its control over water and natural resources to levy taxes on herders and farmers, exerting significant pressure on nearby communities. During drought periods, the group intensifies its control by manipulating access to scarce water supplies to enforce compliance and punish resistance. This dynamic worsens the vulnerability of already stressed populations, affecting humanitarian access and undermining community resilience (ICG 10/12/2024). The group has also actively obstructed government and humanitarian operations by targeting food deliveries and water sources while expanding its taxation and livestock confiscation systems in areas under its control (CFR 15/09/2025).

In Mogadishu, business owners face double taxation, required to pay levies both to the Federal Government and to Al Shabaab – a trend mirrored along major trade routes in southern Somalia (TNH 25/09/2025). This practice not only increases financial strain and prices but also constrains mobility, particularly for pastoralist and agropastoralist communities already affected by drought, who are often unable to access pasture or water because of threats of violence or armed checkpoints. The proliferation of checkpoints and road controls by armed groups also inflates transport costs, disrupts supply chains, and isolates vulnerable communities, restricting access to feed, fodder, and essential relief commodities (PeaceRep 21/03/2024; EUAA 11/08/2023).

Beyond Government-insurgent confrontations, intercommunal violence over grazing land and water points has intensified in several regions, and these disputes are likely to worsen under continued drought conditions (allAfrica 28/09/2025; Hiiraan 18/01/2025; Reuters 10/06/2024). In central and southern Somalia, recent crop assessments indicate that the combined effects of conflict, flooding, and restricted access to farmland have led to poor Gu harvests, further weakening household food security (GEOGLAM 02/10/2025).

The intersection of insecurity and climatic shocks is accelerating the depletion of household coping mechanisms, resulting in rising morbidity, displacement, and deteriorating nutrition outcomes. The long-term impacts are also socioeconomic; chronic malnutrition among children hampers cognitive development and school performance, leaving youth more susceptible to recruitment by armed groups, as they perceive few alternative livelihoods or educational opportunities (NYT 17/10/2025; EUAA 26/05/2025; Regilme & Spoldi 18/06/2024).

During periods of drought, protection risks increase, and the risk of GBV rises sharply. As water and other essential resources become scarce, women and girls are often forced to travel longer distances to access water and basic services, increasing their exposure to sexual violence (UNFPA 31/12/2022 and 19/03/2021; CARE 14/10/2022). In 2025, an estimated 2.7 million women and girls in Somalia are considered at risk of GBV, with over 70% of rural areas lacking adequate services to prevent and respond to such violence (UNFPA 27/07/2025).

Displacement

Conflict and drought have driven internal displacements across the country. IDPs represent over 25% of the total estimated number of children requiring treatment for acute malnutrition in the country (IPC 29/09/2025). Between January–July 2025, at least 244,000 people were displaced across Somalia, the majority in Lower Shabelle because of conflict. By 29 September, nearly all displacement sites across the country were classified in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) conditions for food insecurity.

During periods of drought, displacement tends to rise, especially towards riverine areas where water remains available. Between January–September 2025, approximately 40,000 people were displaced by drought, with significant spikes in January and March. The highest arrivals of displaced populations in September were recorded in the districts of Bossaso in Bari (1,686 people), Doolow in Gedo (679 people), and Dhahar in Sanaag (562 people), spanning the country. Drought is second only to conflict as a driver of displacement, accounting for around 28% of displacements in September and 14% across the year to date (UNHCR 16/10/2025).

Competition for scarce resources and basic services is expected to intensify, straining regional coping capacities and public infrastructure. Displacement influxes heighten the risk of conflict over control and access to key resources such as water points, grazing land, and other pastoral assets. The movement of people away from their homes also disrupts agricultural activities, including harvests, and limits access to essential livestock resources such as water and pasture. As a result, livestock productivity declines, affecting food availability and contributing to poorer dietary quality and overall nutritional outcomes (KII 16/10/2025; KII 17/10/2025; IRC 10/12/2024).

Population displacement is expected to rise, with more people relocating from remote regions to urban areas in search of better employment opportunities and improved living conditions (KII 17/10/2025). Regular displacement also challenges the humanitarian response, as it is difficult to track the exact number of people in need and their locations (IPC 29/09/2025). Overall, the sustained displacement crisis will continue to drive high levels of acute malnutrition in informal settlements and conflict-affected regions, where access to food, healthcare, and safe water remains severely constrained.

Coping strategies

In the absence of preparedness measures and drought-resilient livelihood options, people use a range of coping strategies. Some rely on collective support, while others adopt potentially harmful strategies that heighten protection and malnutrition risks.

Remittances have become an essential source of income for many families, particularly during drought (TNH 30/09/2025). In 2023 alone, Somalis abroad sent home USD 1.7 billion – more than the Somali Government's budget for that year (and the USD 1.1 billion funding received by international aid organisations). By 2018, an estimated 40% of Somali households received remittances; that percentage is likely to be higher in 2025 (TNH 30/09/2025; Majid et al. 09/2018). Remittances are sometimes distributed among families and have become a community-level coping system that reduces the risk of displacement and destitution during times of drought (TNH 30/09/2025). Development of financial infrastructure in the country remains slow, however, and the absence of formal correspondent banking relationships with those of diaspora communities hinders the direct transfer of funds between banks. People tend to rely on mobile money companies, but this could have limitations, such as the ability to transfer only limited amounts of money or limitations on places to withdraw money (WB 11/07/2025; TNH 30/09/2025; Majid et al. 09/2018).

People are highly dependent on loans and credit to access basic resources during drought. External cash assistance, delivered by the aid system, has proven to be helpful not only to repay debts in a timely manner but also to establish creditworthiness among area businesses. Participation in savings groups and village savings and loan associations has helped communities build small reserves that become vital for sustaining livelihoods during ensuing crises (Mercy Corps 09/06/2023).

People are pushed into relying on unsafe water sources – usually groundwater – to meet the water supply demand. Unfortunately, groundwater sources are vulnerable to contamination from animal carcasses and poor waste management practices (NRC 18/08/2025; Healing Waters 18/09/2023). This increases the risks of disease and malnutrition.

Children are forced to engage in informal labour to support their families and as a consequence are forced to drop out of school because of a lack of money or displacement. Both boys and girls as young as eight often work in the agricultural, hospitality, or construction sectors. Other income opportunities involve more informal labour, such as collecting charcoal and firewood (NRC 30/01/2023). Children engaged in such work (instead of studying in school) expend more energy but often do not consume enough to meet their existing or increased nutritional needs. Working children may also often miss regular meals or rely on cheap, low-nutrient food. As a consequence, both their mental and physical development are stymied, and they are at increased risk of malnutrition.

The lack of economic resources during drought also forces many families to withdraw girls from school as they can no longer afford fees and frequently prioritise boys' education. Linked to this, child marriage has become a coping mechanism with negative consequences for struggling families, viewed as a source of income or reduced household burden. It exposes the girl to the dangers of physical and sexual abuse, malnutrition, and an elevated risk of maternal and neonatal mortality because of unwanted and high-risk pregnancies (UNFPA 31/12/2022 and 19/03/2021; CARE 14/10/2022).

In households with multiple children, some families opt to send some children to live with relatives, such as aunts or uncles, to reduce the burden of food insecurity and ensure their basic needs are met (KII 17/10/2025). It is unclear what the full implications of this may be, although where resources are scarce in relative families, there is a risk that those with the least social capital may be at a disadvantage.

HUMANITARIAN CONSTRAINTS

Access constraints

Between July–September 2025, 50 humanitarian access incidents were reported across Somalia, mainly in southern and south-central Somalia, including violence against aid workers, movement restrictions, military activity, interference in operations, blocked access to aid, and physical environmental challenges such as road damage. Most incidents were reported in Kismayo (Lower Juba), Beledxaawo and Luuq (Gedo), Bulo Burto and Moqokori (Hiran), and Banadir regions (OCHA 15/10/2025).

Armed conflict, NSAGs, military operations, and aerial strikes are the primary factors limiting access and humanitarian activities in Somalia. These severely restrict access, especially in conflict-affected regions (OCHA 15/10/2025 and 13/04/2025; The EastAfrican 16/04/2025).

Many roads in Somalia are in precarious conditions, making large parts of the country difficult to access, especially during the rainy season. This severely hinders humanitarian operations, delaying aid delivery, especially to rural communities (WB 29/09/2022). Between July–September, main supply routes in Bulo Burto (Hiran) and Adale (Middle Shabelle) became severely constrained; roads and water sources were blocked, impeding aid delivery and pastoralist mobility; and more than 20 health facilities were closed following NSAG territorial attacks (OCHA 15/10/2025). Air delivery is often used to reach populations in areas presenting access difficulties (such as inaccessible roads) but also faces significant challenges, as many airstrips are either inaccessible or in need of urgent rehabilitation, and the high cost of air operations limits the frequency and scale of deliveries (Logistics Cluster 19/03/2025).

In Bakool, Al Shabaab maintains a strong presence, exerting control over many rural areas, blocking humanitarian access, imposing taxation on aid, and restricting movement. Because of the prevalence of security threats from NSAGs and government forces, civil unrest, the risk of kidnapping, and the absence of routine consular services, the US maintains a policy of recommending that foreigners not travel to Somalia (US DOS 14/05/2025). Between July–September 2025, government security forces issued several registration requirements to operate or travel to and within the country, causing travel permit delays or increased security scrutiny on NGOs along key supply routes (OCHA 15/10/2025). This highlights the extreme access constraints and operational risks facing international humanitarian responders, potentially limiting the deployment of foreign staff and the scaling-up of aid operations in critical areas.

HUMANITARIAN RESPONSE CAPACITY

The Somali Government and humanitarian organisations have been urged to enhance early warning systems and drought response initiatives to assist drought-vulnerable communities (SONNA 05/09/2025). This is despite work by the Somali Government to strengthen its capacity to manage drought through initiatives such as Early Warning for All, Climate Risk and Early Warning Systems, and the Somali Red Crescent's Early Action Protocol, which collectively promote the dissemination of early warnings, facilitate cash transfers, and support water infrastructure rehabilitation (UNDRR 31/12/2024; WRI 18/04/2023; IFRC 25/03/2025). These measures help reduce food insecurity and prevent malnutrition by protecting livelihoods and water access. The Green Climate Fund's USD 95 million project aims to restore degraded land and improve water systems, indirectly supporting nutrition by enhancing agricultural resilience (ICG 10/12/2024).

Somalia faces multiple challenges in implementing adaptation plans and policies. Limited coordination among institutions and financial constraints, such as the absence of investment strategies and dedicated national funds for climate adaptation, reduce capacity at both national and state governance levels (WRI 18/04/2023). Conflict also hinders essential drought adaptation initiatives, such as solar-powered irrigation and climate-resilient agriculture, restricting their effectiveness and reach (ICG 10/12/2024). Another layer of complexity involves the discrete approaches taken by self-declared autonomous regions such as Somaliland. On 22 July, Somaliland declared a national emergency in response to severe drought affecting several regions, especially Awdal and Salal in the west. The autonomous regional government immediately launched emergency relief operations to deliver essential supplies – such as food, clean water, and medicine – to the communities most affected by the prolonged lack of rainfall (Hiiraan 22/07/2025).

Despite progress, major gaps remain in effectively reaching and supporting communities (KII 16/10/2025). A recent study from Somaliland found that early warning systems are only partly functional, with weak coordination, delayed information sharing, and limited public awareness – especially among women and less-educated groups – reducing the timeliness of drought responses and increasing malnutrition risk (Omer et al. 14/10/2025).

Since January 2025, humanitarian operations across the country have faced significant reductions following the cuts to USAID and other donor funding. By late October 2025, the HNRP was funded at only 21.4% (OCHA accessed 21/10/2025). The US has sent an average of USD 450 million a year in humanitarian assistance to Somalia over the past decade. In the 2025 fiscal year, which ended 30 September, about USD 128 million was sent to Somalia (NYT 17/10/2025). By early September, this shortfall had led to cutbacks in food assistance and a reduction in the number of operational sites for outpatient therapeutic programmes and targeted supplementary feeding programmes – falling from 775 to 629 and 617 to 300.

sites, respectively, during the first three quarters of 2025 (FEWS NET 16/10/2025). The health system is also heavily reliant on foreign aid; the Government contributes just 4% of all health spending in the country, foreign donors cover 60%, and the rest is a shortfall or remains unfunded (NYT 17/10/2025).

As a result of funding cuts, the number of people who receive emergency assistance from the WFP is expected to go down from 1.1 million in August to just 350,000 in November. This makes essential food assistance available to less than one in every ten people who need it. The WFP's MAM programmes are also facing reductions, with just 180,000 children still receiving nutrition treatment. The organisation leads the largest humanitarian operation in Somalia, supporting over 90% of the country's food security response, but there is a deficit of USD 98 million to sustain operations for 800,000 people through the lean season (when food is less available) until March 2026 (WFP 15/10/2025; UN 03/10/2025; Reuters 03/10/2025). While the WFP's MAM programmes are already reduced, the shortage is also severely affecting the response to the most dangerous form of malnutrition, SAM, which is coordinated by UNICEF. SAM treatment capacity (outpatient therapeutic programme and stabilisation centres) is projected to decline by 18%, leading to a 7% reduction in SAM cases reached. This occurs as targeted programmes will reach only 50% of the MAM caseload, creating a scenario where the cycle of disease and malnutrition driven by the lack of safe water and low immunisation will increase morbidity and mortality (UNICEF accessed 30/10/2025; UNICEF 02/04/2025).

Several organisations, such as Save the Children and the International Medical Corps, have been forced to close many of their nutrition centres, leaving over 300,000 children at risk of acute malnutrition (NYT 17/10/2025; STC 14/05/2025; The Guardian 19/08/2025). In 2024, Save the Children was operating 128 community health facilities across Somalia. It had to close 47 of them in March 2025 because of the international suspension of funding (NYT 17/10/2025).

This reprioritised target of 1.3 million people in the HNRP covers roughly 20% of the 5.98 million people in need, leaving over 4.6 million without support under the current plan. Limited resources have forced aid organisations to scale down activities and concentrate assistance on the most vulnerable groups in the hardest-hit locations. As a result, only 32 of the country's 90 districts have been targeted for support, based on assessed vulnerability and access constraints. Between January–March 2025, food and cash support reached an average of one million people each month. This coverage declined to around 850,000 people between April–June, before increasing slightly to 960,000 in July (IPC 29/09/2025; OCHA 31/07/2025).