

Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale

Bilagsnr.:	1020
Land:	Somalia
Kilde:	ACAPS
Titel:	Somalia. Key crises to watch in 2023
Udgivet:	14. april 2023
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	14. august 2023

ABOUT THIS REPORT

Aim: this report provides an overview of four key humanitarian crises across Somalia that are expected to deteriorate or see a significant humanitarian impact during 2023. It aims at informing humanitarian decision-making and programming by anticipating humanitarian needs in different regions of the country.

Methodology: this report is based on the secondary data review of public sources and key informant interviews between February–March 2023. For each crisis context, the ACAPS team collected existing information, mapped out relevant drivers of the crises, highlighted recent developments, and anticipated their probable evolution and potential impact on humanitarian needs over the next months.

Scope: this report aims to highlight current and anticipated crises whose humanitarian impacts are already notorious and will likely be of highest importance in 2023. It does not aim to exhaustively list all the current and anticipated crises affecting Somalia. The selection of the crises was based on contextual knowledge, a close monitoring of the situation, and key informant interviews. The crises in the report are not listed by order of importance or probability.

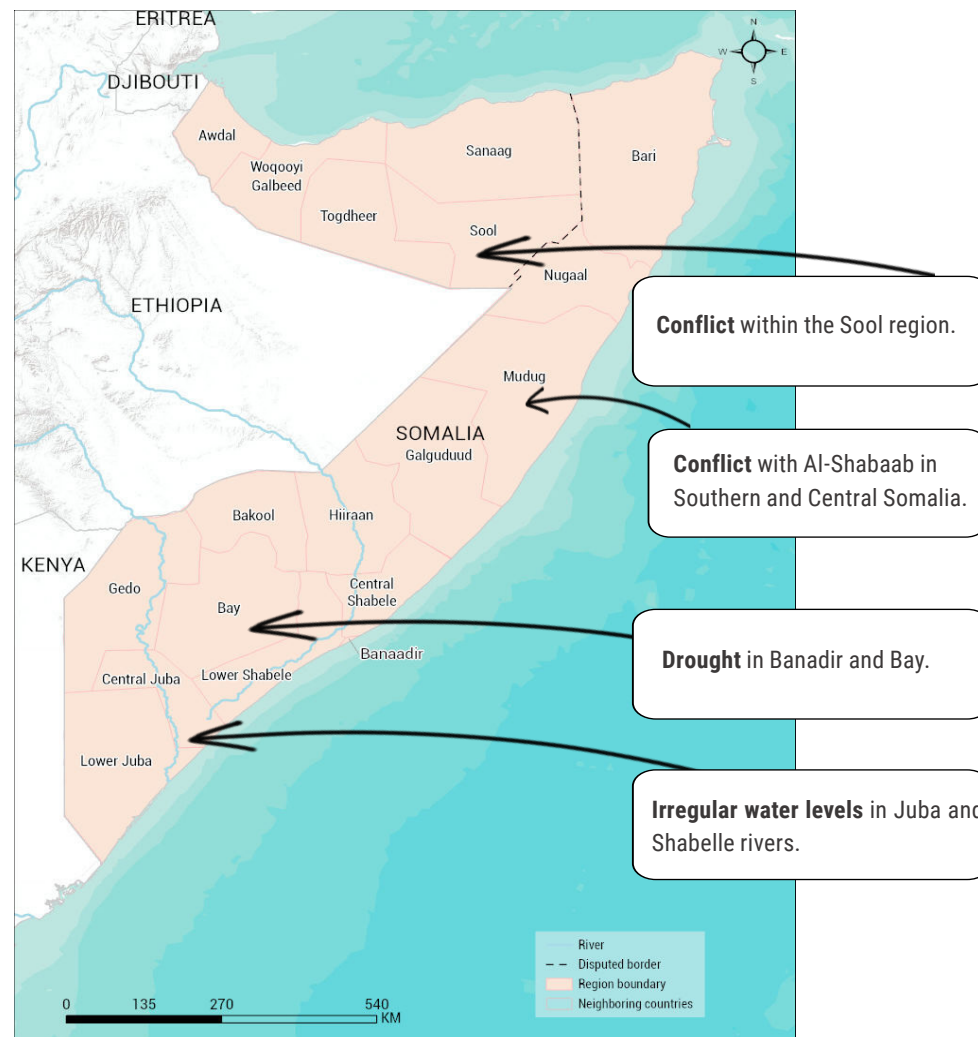
Limitations: the future is inherently complex and uncertain. The outlook sections of this report present potential deteriorations and possible developments of the highlighted crises, considering their specific scope and based on information available as at March 2023. The emergence of new information and the influence of factors not accounted for may invalidate the outlooks. Operational constraints and insecurity hamper data collection in Somalia. This report is limited to the information that is publicly available and complemented by insights from key informants. For some of the crises, it is difficult to accurately estimate the scale of the current and future humanitarian impact.

This report benefitted from support by the H2H Network's H2H Fund.

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Map overview



Source: ACAPS using data from FAO (accessed 04/04/2023)



GENERAL CONTEXT AND HUMANITARIAN SITUATION OVERVIEW

Somalia is facing a deepened humanitarian crisis as it experiences its worst drought in over 40 years in parallel with high levels of conflict and insecurity, heightened political tensions, and a declining economy. Climate change aggravates the issue, leading to more frequent and intense extreme weather events such as floods and contributing to worsening community tensions and socioeconomic vulnerabilities.

Rainfall in Somalia is erratic, and extreme weather events have become more frequent over the past 25 years, with areas that are expected to receive low rains sometimes experiencing heavy storms. The El Niño-Southern Oscillation also contributes to climate variability in Somalia, resulting in interannual and seasonal rainfall variability. The country has two rainy seasons: Gu (March–June) and Deyr (October–December). Performance during the 2022 Deyr season was better than the past four failed rainy seasons that occurred since 2020 (IPC 28/02/2023 a). Regardless, the 2022 Deyr rains still fell short of overcoming the current severe drought. The rains failed to provide sufficient relief to agriculture, the country's largest economic sector that accounts for 75% of its gross domestic product and employs around 72% of its population (WB 28/03/2018; NUPI/SIPRI 11/11/2022). Forecasts of below-normal 2023 Gu rains mean that Somalia is expected to experience an unprecedented sequence of six below-average rainy seasons with heightened humanitarian impacts (FAO 17/03/2023).

The country also experiences long-drawn-out disputes over its territory, including with Somaliland, an unrecognised de facto sovereign state in the north that declared independence in 1991, and Al-Shabaab, a militant group that has been fighting against the Somali Government since its founding in 2006. In August 2022, the President of Somalia declared a 'total war' against Al-Shabaab (CFR accessed 31/03/2023). Since then, the fighting has escalated, and the Government's army has regained territory from the group, which has responded with attacks in Mogadishu and other cities (Al Jazeera 07/03/2023). Despite still controlling certain areas, Al-Shabaab has mostly resorted to guerrilla-like warfare and has been taking advantage of the current drought to advance its operations by attacking relief efforts, destroying critical infrastructure, and imposing taxes on drought-affected communities (NUPI/SIPRI 11/11/2022).

As at February 2023, there were 8.25 million people in need of humanitarian assistance in Somalia (OCHA 09/02/2023). Between January–March 2023, nearly five million people experienced acute food insecurity in the country, including 1.4 million facing Emergency (IPC Phase 4) levels and 96,000 facing Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) levels. The situation is likely to worsen in the coming months as a result of the persisting drought, conflict and insecurity, high food prices, disease outbreaks, and insufficient humanitarian assistance. By June 2023, it is projected that the current numbers will increase to 6.5 million people classified under Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes, of whom 1.9 million people will face IPC 4 and

223,000 will face IPC 5 levels. About 1.8 million children under the age of five are estimated to suffer from acute malnutrition over the course of 2023, and nearly 478,000 of this number will be severely malnourished (IPC 28/02/2023 b).

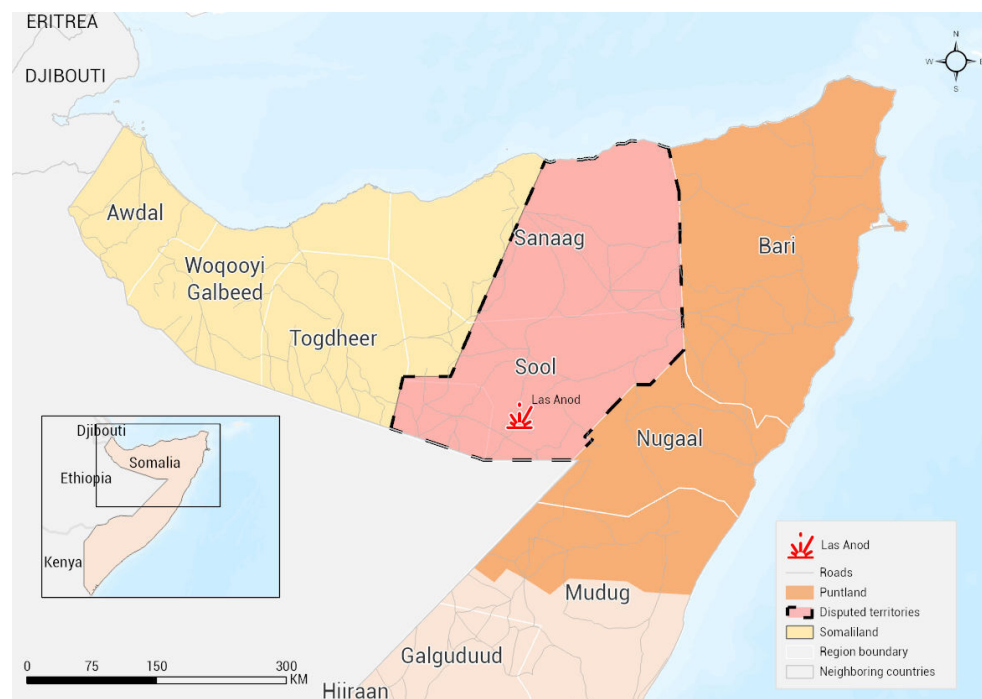
In 2022, it was reported that over 1.8 million people were internally displaced across Somalia, including the nearly 1.2 million displaced by drought conditions and the 600,000 displaced by conflict and insecurity. As at February 2023, conflict, insecurity, and drought had displaced 520,000 more people (UNHCR accessed 20/03/2023).

Poverty in Somalia is deep and widespread. In 2019, an estimated 69% of the population lived below the poverty line. The increase in global prices in part resulting from the Russian war in Ukraine has contributed to reducing people's purchasing power (WB accessed 20/03/2023). The Somali population faces constant shocks to their livelihoods, food security, and wellbeing on multiple and diverse fronts, compounding a complex context that originates several and profound humanitarian crises.

Crisis to watch 1

Conflict within the Sool region

Puntland and Somaliland, including disputed territories



Sources: ACAPS using data from GADM (accessed 04/04/2023); FAO (accessed 04/04/2023)

Context overview

Puntland is a semi-autonomous region in Somalia with a population of 4.9 million people, primarily comprising the Somali ethnic group. The region is relatively stable, and its poverty rate is lower than in other parts of Somalia (WB 06/2017). Puntland is a common destination for Somalis displaced from the southern areas of the country, but the region also experiences the effects of protracted drought and armed conflict, and its coastal areas have gained notoriety for piracy attacks (BBC 01/02/2023). Non-state armed groups, such as Al-Shabaab and the Islamic State of Iran and Syria, control small territories in the northeastern parts of the region and occasionally clash over territorial control (VOA 14/03/2023; The EastAfrican 13/03/2023).

Puntland is currently in dispute with the Federal Government of Somalia over the distribution of political, judicial, and security powers, the use of ports and natural resources, and the right to enter into foreign partnerships. On 9 January 2023, Puntland declared itself independent and dissociated from the Federal Government of Somalia, stating that it would act as an independent state and cooperate with Mogadishu only on humanitarian affairs until the completion of the draft of the federal constitution (Africanews 11/01/2023; ICG 01/2023).

Somaliland is a de facto sovereign state bordering Puntland to the west. The region of 4.5 million people claimed independence from Somalia in 1991 and is experiencing a multifaceted humanitarian crisis characterised by climate-related shocks, communicable disease outbreaks, desert locust invasions, poverty, fragile social protection mechanisms, and armed conflict and insecurity (REACH 20/06/2022). Despite its relative institutional stability – the Republic of Somaliland prints its own currency, issues its own passports, and elects its own Government – the region's aspiration for statehood has received little recognition (Al Jazeera 01/03/2023).

Puntland and Somaliland dispute over political and military control of areas of Sanaag, Sool, and Togdheer regions. These regions fall within Somaliland's boundaries as per the old Anglo-Italian border from colonial times, but the two dominant clans living in the disputed areas belong to the same clan family who consider Puntland their homeland. Violence has occurred in the disputed territories for several times over the past years (EUAA accessed 30/03/2024).

Key drivers of the crisis and recent developments

The most recent escalation is in Las Anod, the capital of the disputed territory of Sool. Somaliland claims the area as part of its original boundaries, while Puntland claims it based on kinship ties with the region's dominant Darod clans. The controlling authority of Las Anod has changed multiple times, with Somaliland forces ousting Puntland forces in 2007 and maintaining control since (SSRC 07/11/2007). That said, the residents of Las Anod, predominantly from the Dhulbahante clan, a subclan of the Darod, have not fully accepted Somaliland's governance over the city, which the Dhulbahante clan also claims as its capital (RVI 13/10/2021).

The current conflict in Las Anod began on 26 December 2022, after the assassination of a local opposition politician sparked anti-government protests across the city. Somaliland's security forces violently intervened, killing several people, and the protests spilled over into January.



Somaliland's troops have since been stationed outside the city, which has remained under the control of a local committee of elders of the Dhulbahante clan (AI Jazeera 20/02/2023).

On 6 February 2023, the Dhulbahante elders announced that they did not recognise Somaliland's administration and wanted to form their own federal state under Somalia, demanding the withdrawal of Somaliland forces from parts of Sool. This announcement escalated tensions and led to heavy fighting between Somaliland troops and local militia from the Dhulbahante clan. Somaliland authorities announced a ceasefire on 10 February, but both parties to the conflict have accused each other of violating it repeatedly (AI Jazeera 20/02/2023; ICG accessed 30/03/2023). As at 27 March, despite international mediation attempts, tensions continued to rise in the region, and the battle for Las Anod persisted, with reports of repeated shelling by the Somaliland forces on the clan-controlled city (Garowe Online 27/03/2023).

Humanitarian impacts

The conflict has resulted in hundreds of deaths and injuries, the loss of livelihoods, and mass displacement. Shelling has targeted hospitals and ambulances, resulting in the death of medical personnel, the shortage of medical supplies, and the forced closure of healthcare units, threatening the population's access to essential care (AI Jazeera 20/02/2023; OCHA 09/03/2023). Over 25,000 school-aged children previously enrolled in Las Anod schools have also lost access to education (OCHA 09/03/2023).

UNHCR estimates that, since the first week of February, the conflict has displaced 285,000 people from their homes, including 185,000 internally displaced and nearly 100,000 people who have sought refuge in Ethiopia's Somali region (UNHCR 19/03/2023). These numbers add to those already internally displaced because of the conflict, which was over 20,000 in December 2022 (France 24 07/02/2023). Women and children are estimated to account for 89% of the displaced population (AI Jazeera 01/03/2023). The majority of people have escaped to neighbouring towns, resulting in overcrowded camps and temporary settlements with increased pressure on already scarce access to basic services, such as food, water, and healthcare (OCHA 09/03/2023). Refugees moving to remote areas of Somali region in Ethiopia face extremely dire conditions, including a severe drought, a cholera outbreak, and very scarce provision of basic services, such as healthcare (WHO 16/03/2023 and 15/03/2023).

The wave of conflict-related displacement comes during one of the worst droughts the region has experienced. More than 200,000 people are estimated to be experiencing crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity (IPC 3 levels or worse) in Sool region as a result of the current drought (IPC 28/02/2023 a). The prices of commodities in the region, such as food, also increased by about 10–15% in just four weeks between February–March, particularly in areas where displaced families are living (OCHA 09/03/2023). Extreme water shortages have been reported in several villages and districts in Sool where newly displaced people

are being hosted, increasing the risk of infectious disease outbreaks (UNICEF/WASH Cluster 14/03/2023). Insecurity is delaying the implementation of humanitarian response programmes in the region and continues to limit humanitarian access to Las Anod (OCHA 02/02/2023 and 09/03/2023).

Outlook

The situation in Las Anod is currently at an impasse, with Somaliland refusing to withdraw its troops from outside the city and the Dhulbahante elders unwilling to negotiate unless the Somaliland troops retreat. Fighting has continued despite the announcement of a ceasefire on 10 February (Ethiopia Insight 20/03/2023; Garowe Online 27/03/2023). The involvement of regional and international entities has failed to attain peaceful results. On the contrary, tensions have increased, with Somaliland accusing the Ethiopian Government of participating and fuelling the conflict in Las Anod (Puntland Post 09/03/2023).

Violence could escalate further in the coming weeks if fighting spreads in Sool region or draws in additional parties from Ethiopia, Puntland, or Somalia (ICG accessed 30/03/2023). If neighbouring clans get involved, the geographic scope of the fighting could also spread to Sanaag region and other areas, extending the humanitarian impacts of the conflict (African Arguments 06/02/2023).

The multiplicity of entities and competing interests makes it extremely difficult to reach a compromise, which means that the fighting could continue for a prolonged time. On the one hand, Somaliland does not want to renounce its claim on Sool region because that would undermine their push for recognition as an independent country. Relevant to this, the conflict could have repercussions on Somaliland's planned elections in 2023. On the other hand, Puntland and the Federal Government of Somalia want to remove Somaliland forces from the disputed territory. Another thing to note is that the Dhulbahante clan's fight for independence from both sides finds uncertain support from the Federal Government, as the clan's success could motivate other clans' struggles for independence in different regions of the country (VOA 06/03/2023). Increasing support from external entities, such as the Ethiopian Government, can further fuel the violence and increase the complexity of future scenarios for peace (Puntland Post 09/03/2023).

The continuation or escalation of the conflict situation will deteriorate humanitarian needs in the city and the region, further increasing the numbers of food-insecure and displaced people. In the April–June 2023 period, more than 270,000 people are projected to face IPC 3 or worse food insecurity outcomes in Sool region alone (IPC 28/02/2023 a). Access to basic services will likely continue to be limited, and overcrowding in temporary shelter locations will increase the risk of infectious disease outbreaks and protection concerns, such as gender-based violence and forced recruitment.

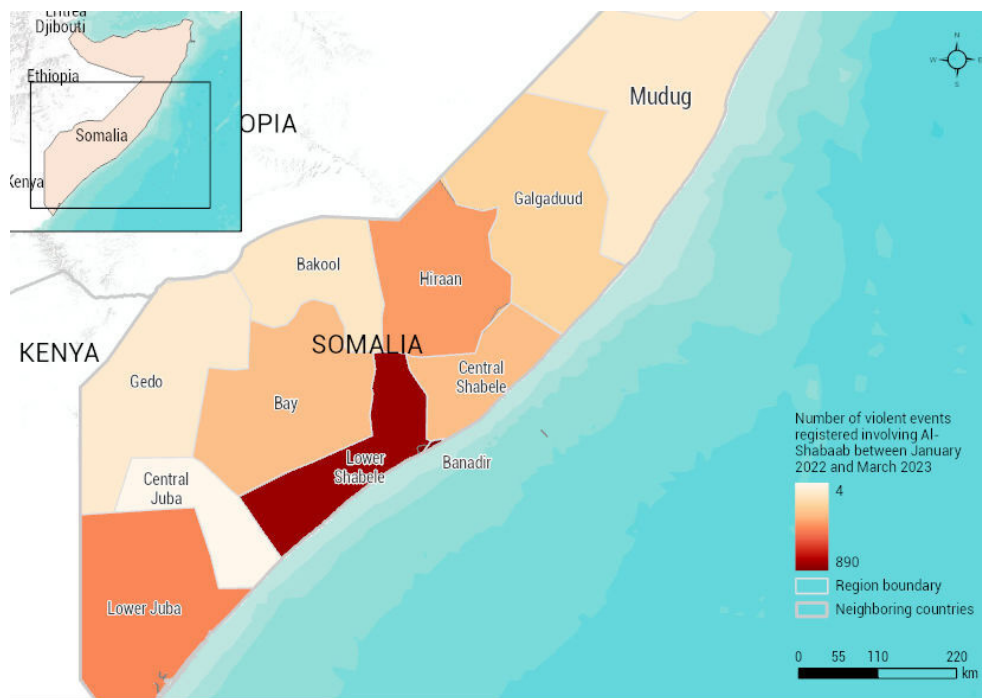
Since the escalation of tensions in December 2022, humanitarian programmes in Sool have been suspended, and staff have been evacuated (OCHA 02/02/2023). Humanitarian operations are not expected to resume in the area until further security guarantees are assured.

Refugees in Ethiopia's Somali region are also expected to face a dire situation with very limited humanitarian support. Humanitarian responders highlight that the remoteness of the area constrains access to the region and to quality information. They have suggested the creation of a new refugee camp, since the area is far from existing camps (DRC 16/03/2023). With the continuation of the impasse in Sool, the extension of current drought conditions, and a non-scaling-up of the humanitarian response, the situation of the populations displaced as a result of the Las Anod conflict is very likely to deteriorate severely and enter protracted displacement conditions in 2023.

Crisis to watch 2

Conflict with Al-Shabaab in Southern and Central Somalia

Violent events involving Al-Shabaab in central and southern Somalia between January 2022 and March 2023



Source: ACAPS using data from ACLED (03/03/2023)

Context overview

Al-Shabaab is an Islamic extremist armed group formed in Somalia in 2006. With a membership estimated to range between 7,000–12,000 individuals, the group holds territorial control over various areas mostly in central and southern Somalia (UN SC 15/07/2022; CFR accessed 30/03/2023; CFR accessed 31/03/2023). Since taking control of the capital Mogadishu in 2006, Al-Shabaab has lost its hold over several cities and regions in Somalia. In response, the group has resorted to increasing violence, including carrying out a series of attacks targeting government-affiliated forces, political figures, and other soft targets, such as

hotels, markets, universities, and government buildings (CFR accessed 30/03/2023; HRW accessed 2021; CFR accessed 21/03/2023).

Until December 2021, Al-Shabaab controlled large parts of central and southern Somalia, including large portions of Galmudug, Hirshabelle, and Southwest states. The African Union Mission in Somalia (AMISOM), a UN-approved peacekeeping mission with strong support from Ethiopian, Kenyan, and US armed forces, has pushed Al-Shabaab out of several territories in Somalia on multiple occasions. Despite these efforts, a lack of long-term consolidation has meant that these successes are often temporary victories, with Al-Shabaab maintaining intermittent control over some territories (CFR accessed 30/03/2023; ICG 21/06/2022; Reuters 07/03/2023). On 1 April 2022, the African Union Transition Mission in Somalia (ATMIS), a military, police, and civilian mission, replaced AMISOM. It is set to hand over security responsibilities to Somali forces at the end of 2024 (ATMIS accessed 28/03/2023).

Currently, Al-Shabaab's territorial control is mainly concentrated in rural areas of central and southern Somalia. Since being expelled from Mogadishu in 2011, Al-Shabaab has concentrated its operation tactics on guerrilla warfare (WM 20/10/2019; TBIGC 19/10/2017). This has allowed the armed group to avoid direct confrontation with AMISOM while consolidating its system of governance, which includes providing basic services and taxing civilians and businesses while recruiting people for its armed operations (Marchal 03/2019; ICG 21/06/2022). Al-Shabaab's governance is based on violent methods. The armed group has carried out multiple assassinations of civilians, indiscriminate attacks, torture, child trafficking, sexual abuse, and forced marriages of members of the communities in which it is present (OHCHR 09/11/2022; UN 05/08/2021). At the same time, it instrumentalises local authorities to varnish the legitimacy of its governance system (Weddegjerde Skjelderup 07/08/2020).

Key drivers of the crisis and recent developments

Federal Government's military offensive: armed conflict in Somalia has particularly intensified since August 2022, after the Somali Government launched a number of counterinsurgency operations against Al-Shabaab in the regions of Hiran and Middle Shabelle in Hirshabelle state (OCHA 08/02/2023 a; ACLED 03/03/2023). These operations followed an announcement of a 'total war' against Al-Shabaab after the armed group killed 21 people and wounded more than 100 during an attack in a hotel in Mogadishu on 19 August (VOA 24/08/2022). The incident resulted in increased clashes between Somali security forces and Al-Shabaab, including the bombing of Mogadishu's Ministry of Education on 29 October that caused 121 deaths, the highest number of fatalities in Somalia in five years (HRW 01/11/2022). Between August–December 2022, there was a 92% increase in fatalities involving Al-Shabaab compared to the January–July period of the same year (ACLED 03/03/2023). The Federal Government's campaign, with support from ATMIS troops, US special forces, and the Turkish army, has started targeting Hirshabelle and claimed that more than 600 Al-Shabaab militants were killed and more than



1,200 wounded in operations between August–November 2022 (The Arab Weekly 16/01/2023; AA 23/11/2022; PBS 15/01/2023). In early 2023, the counterinsurgency operations expanded to new areas, leading to the capture of Al-Shabaab strongholds in Mudug and Galgaduud regions of Galmudug state (ACLED 24/03/2023). In March, the Government announced its plan to launch the second phase of its operations against Al-Shabaab in Jubaland and Southwest states (Garowe Online 20/03/2023).

Political turmoil: from February 2021 to May 2022, Somalia faced a political crisis. The country's former president, Mohamed Abdullahi Mohamed, reached the end of his term on 8 February 2021. Although elections were supposed to take place in 2021, they were postponed until May 2022, and the President stayed in power until their completion. Ultimately, Hassan Sheikh Mohamud won the elections, defeating the incumbent president (Al Arabiya News 16/05/2022). During this period of political turmoil, Al-Shabaab intensified its operations against security forces, government facilities, and public places. Political violence also escalated, and political fighting displaced more than 200,000 people in Mogadishu in April 2021 (OCHA 08/02/2023 a; CFR 13/04/2022). The Government has consistently pledged that combatting the threat posed by Al-Shabaab and restoring peace in Somalia is its main priority. Their position is that the group can be defeated through military means, suggesting a willingness to continue increasing military efforts against the organisation (ICG 21/06/2022; DW 17/05/2022).

End of ATMIS in 2024: ATMIS is set to hand over security responsibilities to Somali forces by the end of 2024 (UN SC 21/12/2022). There are concerns that Somali forces may not be well equipped, trained, and supported to maintain territorial control after that. AMISOM had postponed the drawdown for years because of the same concerns. The Government has pledged to train more than 22,000 troops before it happens (VOA 06/04/2022). That said, the past years have shown that financially sustaining a large army has been a major challenge for the country (ICG 21/06/2022; Somali Dispatch YouTube 27/03/2022; Reuters 11/05/2017).

Clan militias: in Somalia, civilians organise themselves into militias to combat insecurity. Communities, usually structured into clans, acquire weapons and fight armed groups or create rules of behaviour between clans. These militias enjoy some level of social legitimacy because of the role they have played in fighting Al-Shabaab in the past. This role has granted them recognition from both the Somali Government and the international community (Brookings 14/04/2020; UNU accessed 30/03/2023). The 'total war' decreed by the Somali Government has included militias within frontline forces. In 2022, the involvement of clan militias in Somalia's political violence increased by 31%, when compared with 2021. This is explained in part by the fact that many clans and communities are dissatisfied with Al-Shabaab's inflated taxation system and its violent governance (ACLED 03/03/2023; VOA 04/10/2022).

Humanitarian impacts

From January–March 2023, over 630 political violence events and more than 2,200 fatalities were recorded in Somalia, mostly in southern and central Somalia (ACLED 24/03/2023). Increased action resulting from fighting between Al-Shabaab and Somali security forces has posed high threats to civilians. Civilian targeting by Al-Shabaab increased in 2022 by 17% in Banadir, 95% in Lower Shabelle, and 366% in Hiran regions compared with 2021. While Al-Shabaab controlled less territory in March 2023 than in 2022, their attacks against clans and civilians perceived as government supporters have increased (ACLED 03/03/2023). Reported activities against civilians include abduction and indiscriminate killing (VOA 13/09/2022).

Al-Shabaab has amplified its techniques of indiscriminate violence, such as the use of improvised explosive devices, which increased by 49% in 2022 compared with 2021 (ACLED 03/03/2023). With the escalation of violence, the number of civilian casualties in incidents involving explosive weapons increased from 16 in December 2022 to 237 in February 2023 (AOAV 10/03/2023). The most affected districts were Baidoa, Banadir, Belet Weyne, Galmudug, Hirshabelle, and Mudug. Explosive ordnance contamination also poses an economic risk to communities, as they limit access to land and resources and restrict movements, impeding trade. In 2022, children accounted for 80% of all casualties involving mines and unexploded ordnance (OCHA 08/02/2023 a).

Since January 2023, the expansion of the counterinsurgency operations from Hirshabelle has been particularly affecting Galmudug state. The state is both the arrival and departure point with the highest number of displaced people in the country. By February 2023, the region had already seen more than 175,000 people displaced as a result of insecurity, most of them within the state itself. Food is reported as the highest priority need for most IDPs (UNHCR accessed 21/03/2023). Besides displacement, family separations, confinements, abductions, and the destruction of civilian infrastructure have also increased as a result of conflict, severely affecting people's livelihoods and food security (OCHA 08/02/2023 a).

With the increased intensity of violence, the incidence of sexual violence has also increased. In 2021, a report by the UN SG stated that sexual violence had increased by 80% in Somalia since 2019 (UN 05/08/2021). Most of the perpetrators were Al-Shabaab militants or members of clan militias (UNSOM 20/06/2022). The COVID-19-related disruption of education also compounded the impact of insecurity, leading to a large number of girls being forced into marriage or becoming victims of sexual violence in the midst of the conflict (UN 30/03/2021).

The conflict not only threatens the security of the population in the areas where the fighting is taking place but also disrupts food security for neighbouring populations. Attacks by armed groups in Somalia impede transport and increase prices in communities up to 900km away. The prices of some commodities, such as maize, have increased by up to 11% over sustained periods of time because of conflict in other regions (Alfano and Cornelissen 11/2022).



Outlook

Al-Shabaab has proven to be capable of adapting to multiple circumstances. During its more than 15 years of operation, it not only has been a group with a high offensive capability, demonstrated by taking over Somalia's capital, Mogadishu, but has also been capable of retreating to rural areas and acting more defensively in guerrilla warfare fashion (Maruf and Joseph 2018; ISS 08/03/2023). Besides achieving ideological and organisational cohesion, Al-Shabaab has also been able to build clan and family ties in the territories where it is present, creating loyalties that are not easily broken (ICG 21/06/2022; Weddegjerde Skjelderup 07/08/2020). Consequently, the withdrawal of Al-Shabaab and the de facto control that the Somali Government has gained over several territories do not suggest the end of violence. In fact, more targeted attacks on security and government personnel, attacks on public facilities, and indiscriminate violence against civilians are to be expected (ISS 08/03/2023).

The Somali Government's strategic successes over Al-Shabaab have been leveraged on people's dissatisfaction with the armed group's governance regime. The use of clan militias has been central to this (ICG 21/03/2023). That said, the militias' loyalty to the Federal Government and acceptance by the local people are not guaranteed, and some of them have engaged in activities such as taxing communities without providing any services in return and violent conduct towards the population (Brookings 14/04/2020; UNU accessed 30/03/2023). With the retreat of Al-Shabaab, localised intraclan or interclan conflicts over the control of resources are expected to surface (OCHA 08/02/2023 a). The involvement of clan militias in the conflict, particularly those recruited by the Government in Galmudug, Hirshabelle, and Southwest, has also led Al-Shabaab to also recruit local clan members to challenge the legitimacy of the Somali Government and prevent further attacks in its areas of influence, creating a more complex landscape of armed entities (Garowe Online 21/03/2023; ACLED 03/03/2023; Caasimada 04/10/2022).

Given that Al-Shabaab is not yet completely defeated and that the ATMIS is scheduled to end in 2024, the Somali Government has strong incentives to continue advancing their war efforts throughout 2023. The widened theatre of operations to Galmudug and the southern states risks overstressing the limited capacity of the Somali military, which the withdrawal of foreign troops would also severely reduce (ACLED 24/03/2023; Africanews 02/05/2018; War on the Rocks 20/05/2019). Regardless, the Somali President claimed in late February that the Federal Government was ready to win the conflict against Al-Shabaab, and the materialisation of his Government's plans to start a second phase of counterinsurgency operations means that large-scale violence is very likely to continue during the rest of 2023 (Garowe Online 20/03/2023, Noti Merica 21/03/2023; The Times 21/02/2023).

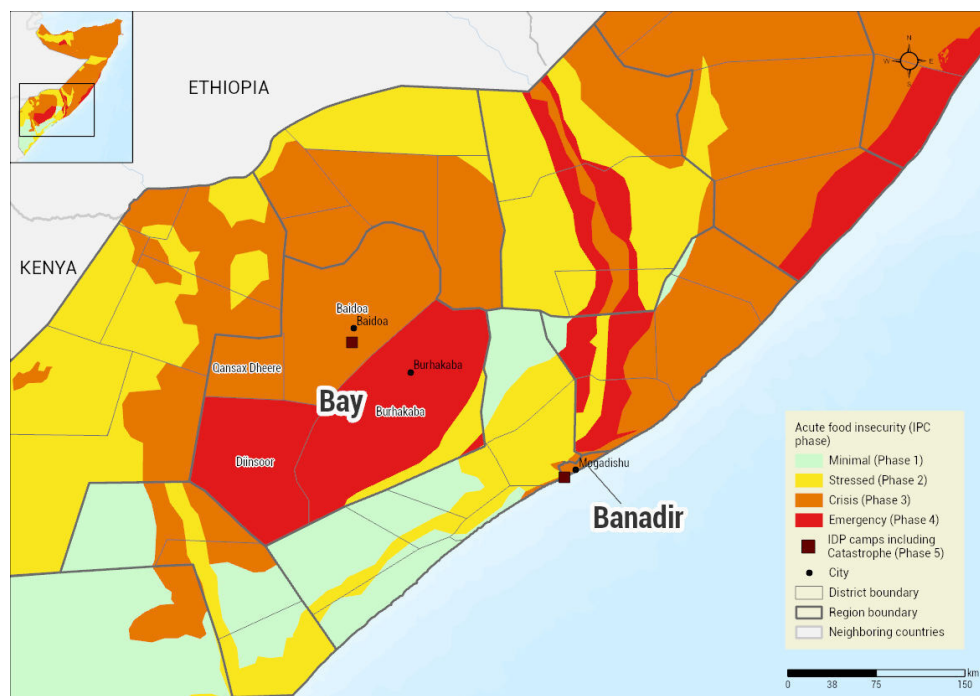
The humanitarian impacts of the conflict are expected to continue at their current high levels or even increase in 2023, as well as expand into different areas of the country, particularly in the southern regions. Violence resulting from the military offensive against Al-Shabaab is expected to displace more than 450,000 people in Somalia in 2023 (OCHA 08/02/2023 a). Mass displacement, coupled with the current severe drought affecting the country, and the continuing restrictions to humanitarian access will increasingly strain already limited resources that serve both the displaced and host populations. This will limit livelihoods, aggravating food insecurity and increasing protection concerns, including sexual and gender-based violence, forced recruitment to armed militias, and the fuelling of local conflicts.



Crisis to watch 3

Drought in Banadir and Bay

IPC's acute food insecurity projections for April–June 2023



Source: ACAPS using data from IPC (28/02/2023 c)

Context overview

In 2022, the drought affected 7.8 million people in Somalia, which represented almost 50% of the country's population (UNFPA 31/12/2022). As at February 2023, nearly five million people were experiencing acute food insecurity, including 1.4 million facing IPC 4 levels and 96,000 facing IPC 5. Food insecurity and acute malnutrition conditions are expected to increase as a result of projected below-average rainfall between April–June 2023, high food prices, increasing conflict and insecurity, infectious disease outbreaks, and insufficient humanitarian response (IPC 28/02/2023 b).

Banadir region is located in the southeastern part of Somalia and covers mostly the same area as the Somali capital city Mogadishu. It is the most populated administrative region in the country with a population of over 2.87 million (EUAA accessed 30/03/2023; IPC 13/12/2022).

Bay, a region with around 800,000 people, is located in Southwest state and comprises four districts, including Baidoa, the administrative regional capital (EASO 02/2016; UN-Habitat 23/03/2023).

Banadir and Bay are two of the most drought-affected regions and currently host the majority of displaced people in Somalia. The convergence of climate hazards and conflict has amplified the displacement of communities towards urban areas. In Bay, the majority of the displaced people are hosted in IDP sites in Baidoa, while in Banadir, the majority of IDPs are hosted in Mogadishu. In both cities, displaced people suffer from the highest levels of acute food insecurity in the country, and mortality levels have been showing a deteriorating trend (IPC 02/12/2022; IPC 28/02/2023 c).

Key drivers of the crisis and recent developments

Rainfall: southern Somalia usually receives more precipitation than the northern regions, but since 2020 the entire country has experienced five consecutive below-average seasons, creating severe drought conditions. In the October–December 2022 Deyr season, most parts of Banadir and Bay regions received lower than average rainfall. While Baidoa and Qansaxdheere districts in Bay received a relatively higher level of rains, overall precipitation in those areas was still below average (FEWS NET 05/01/2023). The rains allowed for an improved access to water, including for agriculture and pasture, slightly alleviating the projected acute malnutrition and food insecurity conditions in parts of Bay and Banadir. Both regions were expecting Famine (IPC Phase 5) food security outcomes if the rains had completely failed (IPC 28/02/2023 a; OCHA 02/02/2023).

Despite forecasts of below-average 2023 Gu rains, as at March, the country was experiencing an early onset of the rainy season, but with a high variation throughout the regions (FAO 28/03/2023; FloodList 27/03/2023; OCHA 08/02/2023 a). Heavy rainfall of over 200mm affected Baydhaba, Dinsoor, and Qansaxdheere districts of Bay region, causing floods (FAO 28/03/2023; FloodList 27/03/2023). The flooding observed in those areas led to the destruction of property and the displacement of close to 3,000 people in the city of Baidoa alone (Crisis24 24/03/2023).

Food inflation: food inflation in Somalia is mainly a consequence of the five consecutive below-average rainy seasons, which have resulted in crop failures and low livestock productivity. The increase in grain and commodity prices is also a result of the rise and instability of international prices, resulting in part from the war in Ukraine (IPC 28/02/2023 b; IPC 02/12/2022).



Since the beginning of 2023, food and water prices have remained above the five-year average, facing high volatility, although there was a decline in food prices in January as a result of declining global food prices, a more favorable Deyr harvest, and an increase in cash assistance from humanitarian responders.

Regardless, food remains unaffordable to the majority of the Somali population. Across key reference markets in most parts of Somalia, including Mogadishu and Baidoa, the prices of staple cereals in February still ranged from 10–70% above the average. Sorghum and maize prices in Mogadishu and Baidoa were 50–65% above the January average (IPC 28/02/2023 b; FEWS NET/FSNAU 28/02/2023).

Somalia's urban poor, particularly in the capital Mogadishu and in Baidoa, particularly suffer from price increases, as their income is heavily spent on food. As at the end of March, the prices of food and NFIs in Mogadishu increased by up to 30% as a result of the increased demand during Ramadan (IPC 28/02/2023 b; WFP 27/03/2023; The Publics Radio 29/03/2023). At the same time, in Bay region, water prices have more than doubled in less than two years, further worsening the acute food insecurity conditions currently felt in the region (OXFAM 22/03/2023).

Humanitarian impacts

Banadir currently hosts the largest concentration of IDPs in Somalia. In 2022, the region received 422,000 displaced people, 70% of whom were displaced by the drought (UNHCR accessed 08/03/2023; OCHA 02/02/2023). At the same time, during the first two months of 2023, Banadir received almost 58,000 IDPs (10% of the total IDPs in the country), mostly in Mogadishu, and Bay received 46,000 displaced people, mostly in Baidoa (UNHCR accessed 29/03/2023). These IDPs, who predominantly live in highly congested informal settlements, lack adequate water and sanitation services. In Bay, only 14% of the IDPs in Baidoa's urban areas have access to latrines, and this number drops to 3% in the rural areas of Buurhakaba district (IOM 12/09/2022; IPC 02/12/2022). IDPs also often face forced evictions, as landowners sell their land when the demand increases, and the increasing food prices have led communities to adopt negative coping mechanisms, such as trading their essential belongings (IOM 28/02/2023; NRC 16/09/2021). IDPs are at very high risk of experiencing acute malnutrition since they mainly depend on humanitarian responders for food. An FSNAU survey conducted in December 2022 classified the IDP sites in Mogadishu and Baidoa as experiencing IPC 4 levels of food insecurity and facing severe malnutrition (IPC 02/12/2022).

Bay and Banadir had more than 1.75 million people experiencing acute food insecurity (IPC 3 or worse), including close to 100,000 facing IPC 5 levels, between January–March 2023 (IPC 28/02/2023 c). The current drought affects IDP and agropastoral communities more severely, particularly in IDP sites in Mogadishu and in Baidoa and Buurhakaba districts in Bay region. The impacts of the drought are potentiated by the fact that those agropastoral communities

and IDPs in urban settings are isolated and marginalised, leading to persistently high levels of acute malnutrition and potential famine-like conditions if humanitarian assistance fails (IPC accessed 30/03/2023; IPC et al. 13/12/2022).

Diseases are also common in drought-affected communities, particularly in Banadir. The region is currently reporting close to 4,000 new cases of acute diarrhoea, which is the highest number in the country, and has reported 273 confirmed cholera cases since January 2023. Banadir is the only region in the country to observe no interruption in cholera transmission since 2022. At the same time, the region is currently reporting the highest number of cases of severe acute respiratory illness. Almost 70% of these cases are among children under five (WHO 08/03/2023).

Humanitarian assistance was scaled up in Somalia in July 2022, reaching almost 5.5 million people across the country every month with food and nutrition support, as well as healthcare and WASH services (OCHA 25/03/2023). In Banadir, where the majority of the IDP population was hosted, humanitarian responders had reached almost 78% of the population with some form of assistance as at November 2022. Food cluster members had reached 53% of the population by December 2022 (OCHA 02/02/2023). That said, the presence of non-state armed groups operating in various regions of Somalia, including Bay and Banadir, have led to a delay in the humanitarian programmes, limiting the response. Despite the counterinsurgency operations of the Federal Government, the threat of attacks by Al-Shabaab remains present, especially in urban centres of Banadir (OCHA 08/02/2023 a; ACLED 24/03/2023).

Outlook

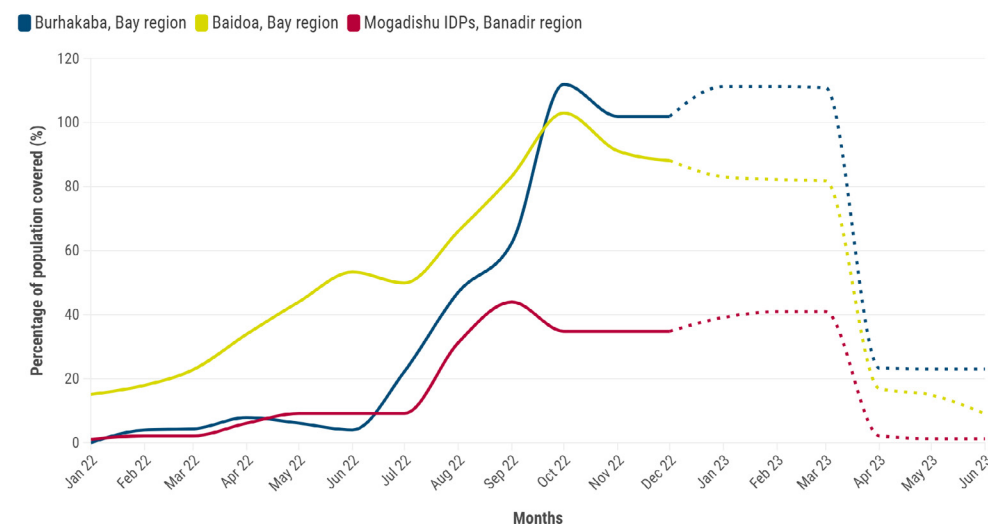
Although the 2022 Deyr rains slightly mitigated the effects of the drought, households in rural areas and IDP settlements in Bay and Banadir, particularly in the capital Mogadishu and Baidoa, will face IPC 5 levels of food insecurity, including possible Famine (IPC Phase 5) outcomes, if the 2023 Gu rains fall below the forecasted levels and humanitarian assistance is not sustained (IPC 02/12/2022; OCHA 08/02/2023 a). In Bay region, almost 750,000 people experienced IPC 3 or worse levels of food insecurity from January–March 2023. Between April–June, this number is expected to increase, with more than 850,000 people projected to face IPC 3 or worse levels of food insecurity, including close to 80,000 facing IPC 5 levels. Nearly one million people in Banadir experienced IPC 3 or worse levels of food insecurity from January–March 2023, including close to 60,000 facing IPC 5 levels. Between April–June, this number is expected to rise to 1.1 million, including a doubling of the number of people facing IPC 5 levels to nearly 120,000 (IPC 28/02/2023 c).

The performance of the April–June Gu rains will determine the levels of crop production and livestock recovery. That said, even if the Gu rains were average, the benefits will not be felt until late May or June. At the same time, even when considering an average rainy season, pastoral systems are unlikely to return to normal levels as a result of the severe depletion of herds.

The low fertility of livestock and animal loss imply slow herd regrowth, especially when considering the very limited restocking or livestock healthcare, vaccination, or fodder programmes in 2022. In any case, forecasts show a high probability that the cumulative Gu rainfall will be within the lowest tercile range, representing another below-average rainy season. Considering such forecasts, crop harvest is expected to be 40–60% below average (IPC 02/12/2022; OCHA 08/02/2023 a).

The current conflict between the Federal Government, clans, and armed groups in the rural parts of Bay region is also expected to have an impact in slowing down farming and pastoral activities (IPC 02/12/2022; OCHA 08/02/2023 a). The situation is compounded by increasing displacement and food and water prices remaining high amid an anticipated reduction in funding for humanitarian assistance (UNICEF 13/12/2022; OCHA 08/02/2023 b). The current level of assistance is expected to suffer a 60–80% decline between April–June if funding requests are not met (IPC et al. 13/12/2022; IPC 28/02/2023 b). According to the Food Security Cluster, humanitarian food assistance is projected to drop during the April–June 2023 period by up to 23%, 8%, and 1% in Buurhakaba, Baidoa, and Mogadishu from 105%, 94%, and 35%, respectively, in October–December 2022, as a result of funding shortfalls (IPC 02/12/2022). If humanitarian assistance is not scaled up or sustained, further acute food insecurity and deteriorated malnutrition levels are expected, with the potential of leading to Famine (IPC Phase 5) food security outcomes in Bay and Banadir regions (IPC et al. 13/12/2022; IPC 28/02/2023 b).

Reported humanitarian food assistance funding in 2022 and projections for 2023, as at December 2022

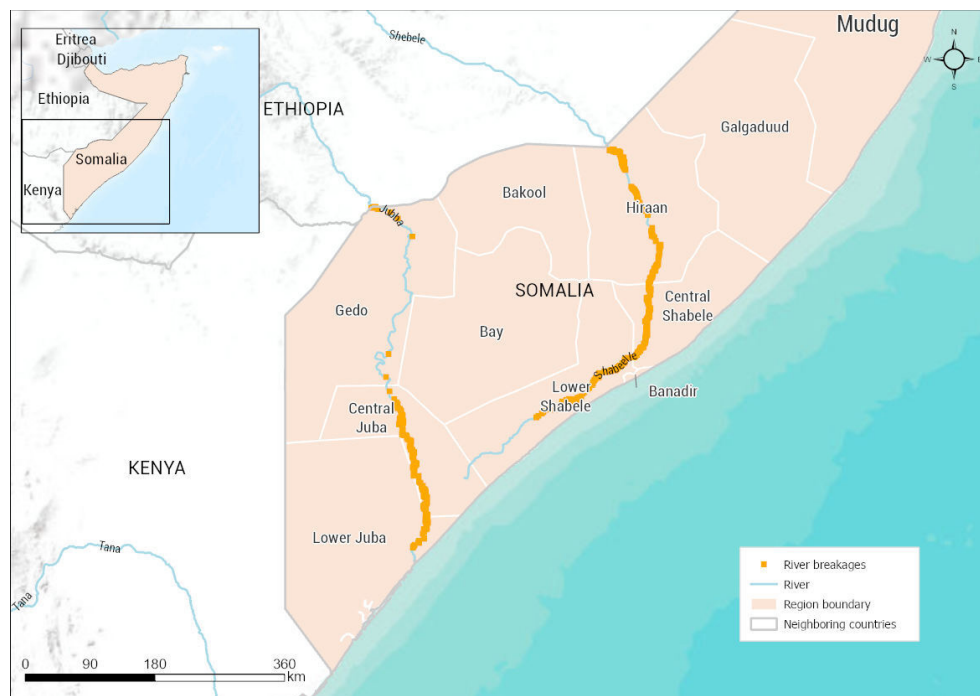


Source: ACAPS using data from IPC (02/12/2022)

Crisis to watch 4

Irregular water levels in Juba and Shabelle rivers

Juba and Shabelle Rivers water basins and river breakages



Source: ACAPS using data from FAO (accessed 04/04/2023)

Context overview

Juba and Shabelle Rivers are the most important rivers in Somalia. The country's two rainy seasons and the El Niño-Southern Oscillation phenomenon contribute to the rivers' water levels, while 90% of their flows originate from Ethiopia (FAO 30/04/2016). Juba and Shabelle Rivers sustain agricultural production in the country since their waters are mainly used for irrigation. The alluvial plains of both rivers are described as the breadbasket of Somalia, as they produce much of the maize, sesame, sugar cane, rice, and a large part of the fruits and vegetables for local markets and exporting (FAO 03/06/2016). Agriculture accounts for about 75% of Somalia's gross domestic product and 93% of its total exports (WB 28/03/2018).

In rural communities in Somalia, particularly around the Juba and Shabelle River Basins, agropastoralism is the main source of livelihoods (OCHA 08/02/2023 a).

Somalia has consistently faced a cycle of droughts that are followed by floods. The prolonged droughts prevent people depending on agriculture from irrigating their soils, impeding crop production and weakening the soil's ability to absorb nutrients in the long term (FAO 25/11/2019). In 2016, the El Niño-associated drought in the Ethiopian highlands, which generate most of the water in Juba and Shabelle Rivers, left both rivers with low water levels and a large stretch of the Shabelle River dry (FAO 30/04/2016). This, coupled with a poor irrigation infrastructure and access restrictions because of the presence of armed groups, meant that despite the region's potential for agricultural production, the following seasons saw low cultivation levels with extended impacts on the country's food security (Abdirashid 2018; FAO 03/06/2016).

At the same time, Somalia experiences flooding, particularly along Juba and Shabelle Rivers, that has increased in severity and frequency over the past years. After a prolonged period of drought, the ground becomes hard and unsaturable, meaning that sudden heavy rainfall or rising river water levels can cause flooding as the water fails to saturate the soil (IRC 14/09/2022). Somalia tends to be affected by rains and floods that significantly affect the country's food production, as they destroy farms, crops, and infrastructure (HO 21/01/2023). Historically, the most recent severe floods were in 2005 and 2006, which resulted in large human casualties and economic damage. Smaller-scale floods have also been repeatedly bringing humanitarian impacts to the region (FAO accessed 30/03/2023).

Key drivers of the crisis and recent developments

The April–June Gu rainy season is typically the main wet season in Somalia. For 2023, weather forecasts predict a high probability of another below-average rainfall during the season over most parts of Somalia, with high variation between regions (OCHA 23/03/2023). That said, the country is currently experiencing an early transition to the Gu season and, in March 2023, heavy rains fell over Gedo region in Jubaland and in areas near the Ethiopia border, leading to a spike in water levels across the entire reach of Juba River. Floods were then experienced in Baardheere district and surrounding areas (FAO 24/03/2023; OCHA 23/03/2023).

While rainfall performance in Somalia is important, large-scale river floods also happen primarily as a result of drainage from catchment areas located in the Ethiopian highlands, which normally experience heavier and more frequent rainfall than in Somalia. Illegal openings on river embankments, made to create outlets for irrigation of water during the dry season, also worsen flooding in Somalia (FAO accessed 30/03/2023). In March 2023, an analysis using satellite imagery revealed 62 open breakage points, 36 on Shabelle River and 26 on Juba River, including 15 overflow points and 39 canal flooding points. The recent flooding occurred in communities with river breakages (FAO 22/05/2018 and 14/03/2023).



Somalia's irrigation capacity has also declined significantly over the last 20 years, mainly as a result of conflict. Farming communities have been displaced, soils have remained unusable for several years, and the infrastructure used for irrigation has been damaged. The majority of the irrigation infrastructure in the country has been reported to be non-functional (FAO 11/11/2019). The lack of water distribution channels and effective water resource management affects the population doubly during a drought: on the one hand, they prevent the limited available water from reaching agricultural areas, and on the other hand, they prevent the water from returning to the rivers after it has been used, further aggravating the drought (IGAD 2019; FAO 25/11/2019).

Humanitarian impacts

The flooding experienced along Juba River led to the loss of lives and the destruction of property and infrastructure. It damaged roads and led to some communities being isolated (FAO 24/03/2023; OCHA 23/03/2023). In the district of Baardheere, floods swept away food storages and wiped out acres of food crops, which has a direct impact on the population's food security, in particular for agropastoral communities (FloodList 27/03/2023; TRT World 25/03/2023). The floods also severely affected IDPs, as some of them were sheltering in overcrowded settlements with low access to essential services. IDP sites in Jubaland and Southwest states suffered various forms of damage, with the flooding severely affecting over 8,000 IDPs. Some IDPs are also facing multiple displacement as a result (Crisis24 25/03/2023; OCHA 23/03/2023). Humanitarian organisations face limitations in entering and operating in the flood-affected areas under the control of non-state armed groups, limiting the response (IRC 13/12/2023).

On the other hand, low river water levels during a drought limit the possibility of irrigating soils, leading to crop failures and the inability to feed livestock, affecting the livelihoods of the majority of the population in the river basin regions, which mostly practice subsistence farming (FAO 25/11/2019; OCHA 08/02/2023 a). Production shortages in the breadbasket of the country also mean that the availability of food items is reduced and food prices increase across the country, affecting communities in more distant regions and contributing to wider food insecurity (OCHA 08/02/2023 a).

Rivers with reduced water levels and flooding water tend to stagnate, leading to an increased concentration of water pollution and waterborne pathogens, heightening the risk of waterborne diseases. It also affects aquatic life, reducing the availability of fish and affecting the livelihoods of fishing communities (CDC accessed 30/03/2023; The Rivers Trust accessed 22/03/2023). Low river levels and contaminated water from flooding also force communities to spend more time walking to find a potable water source. Women and girls are often responsible for fetching water for their families, and they spend about 25% of their days doing this task (UNICEF 29/08/2016). As a result, women often have less access to income-generating work, and some children have even been taken out of school (AAH 18/01/2021;

UNICEF accessed 22/03/2023; UNHCR 29/09/2022). Having to walk long distances, women are also exposed to gender-based violence, assaults, and robberies along the way (Well Aware 06/03/2023).

Outlook

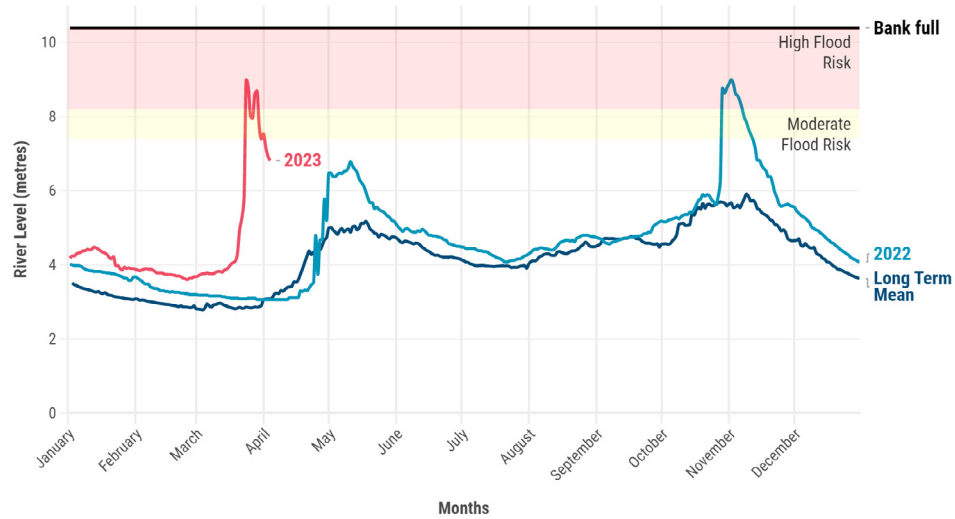
Despite forecasts of a below-average rainy season, the region is experiencing an early transition to the Gu season, meaning that more rainfall is expected in the coming weeks in the Ethiopian highlands and in riverine areas especially along Juba and Shabelle Rivers (FAO 22/03/2023). The rains are expected to intensify in April with the onset progressing northeastwards (FAO 17/03/2023). Water levels in Shabelle River are expected to increase, posing a high risk of flooding in areas such as Belet Weyne. Heavy rains also increase the risk of Juba River breaking its bank, particularly in Baardheere, Jilib, and Saakow, which would cause floods (FloodList 27/03/2023; OCHA 23/03/2023).

In June, rains are likely to subside in most parts of the country (FAO 17/03/2023). The Intergovernmental Authority on Development Climate Prediction and Applications Centre projects depressed rain in most parts of Somalia by June, with warmer than average temperatures (WMO 22/02/2023). Such conditions are expected to extend the cycle of droughts and floods that continuously affects Somalia. The recent flooding within Juba and Shabelle River Basins, which translated into fatalities, displacement, and damage to infrastructure and cropland, was exemplificative of how these events can be rapid and widely destructive, without providing relief from the current drought (OCHA 23/03/2023).

If the forecasts of a below-average 2023 Gu rainfall season materialise for the majority of the season, water levels in Juba and Shabelle Rivers will remain mostly low, worsening the drought conditions and impacts (OCHA 23/03/2023). Areas north of Middle Shabelle are most likely to face below-normal rainfall levels throughout the season. Although Gu season rainfall forecasts do not historically have a high level of predictability, they indicate a high probability that the 2023 Gu rainfall season will be below average (IPC 02/12/2022; OCHA 08/02/2023 a). This would lead to an unprecedented sixth below-average rainy season and low river water levels, with severe humanitarian impacts.

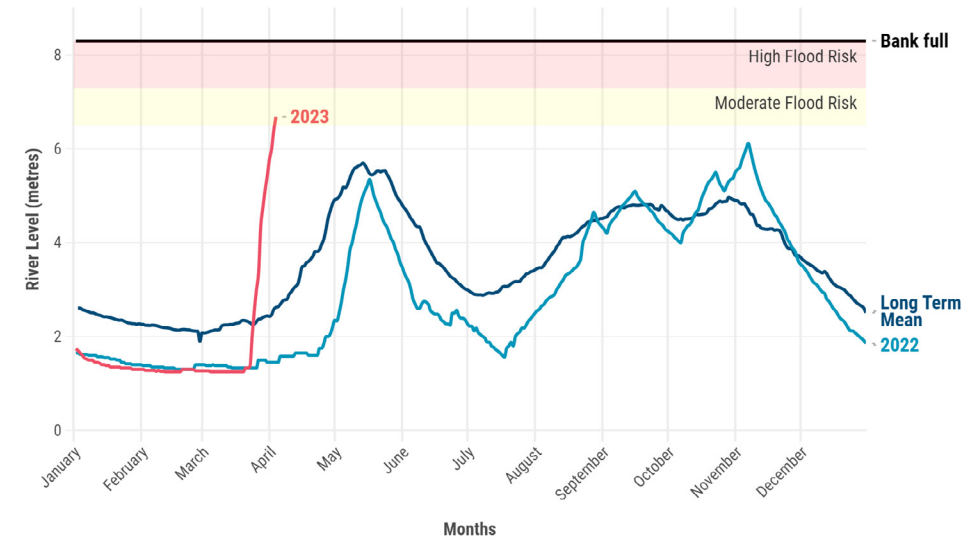
Even in a scenario where rainfall levels are above average, it is not clear if soils are prepared to absorb the nutrients needed to supply crops (FAO 17/03/2023; FEWS NET et al. 03/2023). This would have an impact on agriculture and food production, fuelling food insecurity and displacement. Pastoral migration is also likely to increase, especially in the southern coastline area along Juba River, which receives less rains during the Gu season. Given that these groups are migrating in search of limited pasture and water, resource-based conflicts are anticipated to occur (OCHA 23/03/2023).

Juba River water levels in Baardheere, Jubaland state, in 2022 and 2023



Source: ACAPS using data from FAO (accessed 04/04/2023)

Shabelle River water levels in Belet Weyne, Hirshabelle state, in 2022 and 2023



Source: ACAPS using data from FAO (accessed 04/04/2023)