

# Impacts of displacement on food security and livelihood: a cross-crisis analysis

To what extent does displacement trigger food insecurity and loss of livelihoods in already deteriorated humanitarian contexts?

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## Context and rationale

53.2 million people were living in internal displacement as a result of conflict and violence in 59 countries and territories as of 31 December 2021. In addition, 5.9 million people were internally displaced by disasters across 84 countries and territories. It means the total number of internally displaced people reached an all-time high of 59.1 million across the world at the end of 2021<sup>1</sup>, equivalent to the total population of a country like Italy. As for 2022, the persistence of conflicts and violence, including the escalation of hostilities in Ukraine, are likely to make 2022 another record-breaking year in terms of internal displacement.

The links between conflict, disasters, food insecurity and displacement are often characterized as complex, but many examples across the globe suggest a pattern. Countries that experience a combination of disaster and conflict displacement crises tend to have the worst levels of food insecurity, as those forced to flee must abandon their livelihoods, seek shelter at displacement sites located far from markets, often become trapped in repetitive displacement and deepening food insecurity<sup>2</sup>: in 2021, the ten countries in the world with the highest number of severely food insecure people (in IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) were also among the ones with the highest number of IDPs.<sup>3</sup>

Building on its experience conducting Multi-Sector Needs Assessments (MSNAs) across different contexts since 2016, IMPACT Initiatives' REACH facilitated this exercise in 20 humanitarian crises in 2022. Using semi-standardised tools for data collection and analysis across different crises, MSNAs aim to inform and update humanitarian actors' understanding of the needs of crisis-affected populations in different contexts, while also providing trends analysis where possible about households' self-reported vulnerabilities, their most pressing needs and the severity of these needs, within each sector and from a cross-sectoral perspective. A key objective of MSNAs is also to understand how needs vary between different population groups, especially Internally Displaced Populations (IDPs), non-displaced populations and returnees, when possible. Based on findings from the 2022 REACH MSNAs, this document aims to provide a cross-crises perspective and explore how food security and displacement relate to each other.

MSNA analyses are based on recognized global frameworks and tools developed by humanitarian actors and technical experts. These tools include the Multi-Cluster/Sector Initial Rapid Assessment (MIRA) and the new Joint Inter-Sector Analysis Framework (JIAF). MSNA frameworks and analysis plans are carefully designed in coordination with all relevant sector and inter-sector stakeholders at the country level, ensuring that stakeholders are able to provide feedback and inputs to contextualize the MSNA methodology to the local contexts. The MSNAs capture information required for sector-specific and inter-sectoral analysis, including data requirements for robust and documented People in Need (PiN) calculations as well as severity analyses. It is important to note that while these MSNAs are intended to be as comprehensive as possible for crisis-wide analysis, both the level of coverage as well as depth of information collected is affected by various contextual factors, specifically i) maintaining an acceptable length of the questionnaire (with MSNAs being primarily a tool for household-level analysis) and ii) having reliable secondary data to be able to locate different population groups on the ground.

## Food insecurity hits displaced population more severely

In most assessed countries, food insecurity was found to be more prevalent among displaced households.

In **Afghanistan**, the triggers of displacement changed since the Taliban retook control of the country in 2021, putting an end to the worst of the fighting. Conflict incidents and associated displacements declined drastically in 2022, to

<sup>1</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Global Report on Internal Displacement 2022, May 2022

<sup>2</sup> WMO, Climate change triggers mounting food insecurity, poverty and displacement in Africa, 19 October 2021; Global Hunger Index, Forced Migration and Hunger, October 2018

<sup>3</sup> World Food Programme (WFP), Global Report on Food Crises 2021, 5 May 2021. Available at [link](#)

around 7,400 as of 30 June, against 723,000 between January and December 2021.<sup>4</sup> Nonetheless, this does not mean Afghanistan is not experiencing one of the world's most acute humanitarian crisis: decades of conflict have converged with COVID-19, natural disasters (including flooding, droughts and earthquakes, which triggered 124,000 displacements between January and June 2022, five times the figure of the whole of 2021)<sup>5</sup> and protracted economic shocks, generating high levels of needs and vulnerabilities across the country. The latter have taken a central role as a reason for displacement. In fact, according to 2022 MSNA data, the severity, and magnitude of needs – across all sectors – have worsened for Afghanis since 2021. Exposure to, and impact of, shocks were almost similarly reported across displaced and non-displaced population groups in 2022, suggesting similar levels of vulnerability irrespective of displacement status, at the noteworthy exception of quality and diversity of consumed food. Based on 2022 MSNA findings, while 55% of host community surveyed households (HHs) were found with poor or borderline Food Consumption Score (FCS),<sup>6</sup> it was the case for 66% of surveyed IDP HHs. To be noted that the proportion of HHs found with a poor FCS score in Afghanistan overall (18%) shows that the country is currently one of the most severe crises when it comes to food consumption gaps contributing to food insecurity, from the 20 contexts assessed through the 2022 MSNAs. In addition, findings show that the use of livelihoods-based coping strategies to meet food needs was commonly reported in Afghanistan. More than one third of HHs, irrespective of displacement status, reported having adopted emergency or crisis-level livelihoods based coping strategies to meet their food needs in 2022 (37% of non-displaced HHs and 38% of IDP HHs).<sup>7</sup>

In **Libya**, the use of negative consumption-based coping strategies to meet food needs was common, irrespective of displacement status, at the noticeable exception of returnees. Almost half of IDP households (46%) were found to have high or medium score based on the reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI)<sup>8</sup> compared to 44% in the host community. This rate is higher for returnees, as 57% of them had a high or medium score, indicating low to medium food consumption gaps. While the situation towards food consumption gaps appears to be less severe in Libya than in Afghanistan, where less than 8% of the surveyed HHs were found with poor or borderline food consumption scores overall, IDPs and returnees appeared to be suffering the most of food consumption gaps. 15% of IDP households and 17% of returnees were found with poor or borderline food consumption scores, against 6% in the host community, based on 2022 MSNA data. In the country, the UN-brokered Ceasefire Agreement signed in October 2020 has carved a path toward stability, followed by the founding of the Government of National Unity in March 2021, which established the groundwork for further improving security conditions in the country.<sup>9</sup> This stabilisation has led to a significant decrease of humanitarian needs and the internal displacement rate, but the impact of the conflict on the lives of citizens in Libya continue to be prevalent, with an estimated 300,000 individuals in need of humanitarian aid, 37% of them being internally displaced and returnees.<sup>10</sup>

In **Colombia**, the data indicates that displaced HHs faced food consumption gaps as half of IDP households (50%) reportedly experienced hunger, against 22% of host-community HHs.<sup>11</sup> Moreover, 27% of IDP households lacked food diversity according to their poor or borderline FCS scores, against 12% of host community HHs. In the South American country, the reported rate of adoption of livelihoods-based coping strategies was also notably higher among IDP households: more than half of them (54%) reported having adopted emergency or crisis-level livelihoods-based coping strategies to meet their food needs; against 30% of the surveyed host community HHs. The country, still affected by violence inherited from five decades of conflict between the Revolutionary Armed Forces of Colombia (FARC), the government, non-state armed groups and criminal organisations, is also highly exposed to natural hazards, particularly floods and landslides. In 2021, 166,000 persons were forced to move internally due to conflict or disasters.<sup>12</sup>

In **Iraq**, food insecurity is no longer a major driver of the long-lasting crisis, as only 5% of the overall population were found with moderate hunger, based on Household Hunger Scale (0.3% with severe hunger) in 2022. Nevertheless, IDP populations living outside of official camps, which constitutes the bulk of displaced persons, continue to face food insecurity in higher proportions than IDP populations living in camp, suggesting the latter have a better access to food than the former, presumably because of a greater availability of aid in camps. Based on 2022 MSNA findings and using the household hunger scale, 15% of IDP households living outside of camps were found with severe or moderate hunger, as opposed to 4% of IDP households living in camps. In the country, conflict and violence triggered 57,000 displacements in 2021, of which the majority was linked to increased ISIL activities as well as intercommunal tensions.

<sup>4</sup> IDMC, "One year on: the Taliban takeover and Afghanistan's changing displacement crisis", August 2022

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> The Food Consumption Score (FCS) is a complex indicator of a household's food security status, as it considers not only dietary diversity and food frequency but also the relative nutritional importance of different food groups.

<sup>7</sup> This was measured through the Coping Strategy Index (CSI), which is an indicator of a household's food security assessing the extent to which households use harmful coping strategies when they do not have enough food or enough money to buy food.

<sup>8</sup> The Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) is a proxy indicator of household food insecurity. It considers both the frequency and severity of five pre-selected coping strategies that the household used in the seven days prior to the survey.

<sup>9</sup> UNOCHA Libya, Humanitarian Needs Overview (HNO) 2022, December 2021

<sup>10</sup> IOM Libya DTM - Round 43, IDP and Returnee Report, July - August 2022

<sup>11</sup> This was measured through the Household Hunger Scale (HHS), which is an indicator to measure household hunger. HHS is collected by asking three questions on potentially experienced food deprivation at household level over the past 4 weeks/30 days.

<sup>12</sup> Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), Global Report on Internal Displacement 2022, May 2022

Iraq has also been facing its worst drought in 40 years, and the resulting increases in water and food prices had a disproportionate effect on displaced population.<sup>13</sup>

In **Syria**, 3% of the overall population was found with moderate hunger, while it was the case for 4% of IDPs living outside of camps and 8% of IDPs living in camps. The rates of adoption of reduced coping strategies, indicative of low to medium food consumption gaps, also showed minor discrepancies across population groups. 78% of IDP households outside of camps reportedly had a high or medium score, based on the rCSI, against 82% of IDP HHs living in camps; and 75% in the host community. Up to the end of 2021, Syria was the world's largest internal displacement crisis in the world, where around 6.7 million people were living in internal displacement. On top of that, the north-east of the country suffered its worst drought in more than 70 years, and water scarcity has increased food insecurity, deepened the humanitarian crisis, and aggravated socioeconomic difficulties, particularly among IDPs.<sup>14</sup> Amongst those IDPs, the ones living camps, informal settlements and collective centres have been experiencing a deterioration of security conditions in 2022.

Over the last ten years, Africa's **Central Sahel** has experienced food insecurity and malnutrition, chronic poverty, indiscriminate attacks by armed groups and subsequent displacement. The area, spanning across Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger, is also one of the world's most vulnerable regions to the effects of climate change, with temperature increases that are 1.5 higher than the global average. With 80 percent of the population depending on agriculture and livestock activities, the changes in rainfall patterns, land degradation, and frequency of drought and floods are threatening livelihoods and exacerbating food insecurity. This, in turn, threatens to increase conflict, instability and more displacement across the region.<sup>15</sup> Since 2012, nearly 2.7 million people have been internally displaced, and more than 920,000 have sought refuge in neighboring countries.<sup>16</sup> According to concurring sources, 12.7 million people are food insecure in Burkina Faso, Mali and Niger.<sup>17</sup>

In **Burkina Faso**, where conflict and violence triggered 682,000 internal displacements in 2021 alone – more than in Mali and Niger combined – displaced populations are noticeably more exposed to having food consumption gaps than non-displaced. Based on 2022 MSNA findings, while 24% of host community surveyed HHs were found with poor or borderline FCS, it was the case for 55% of surveyed IDP HHs. This trend, indicative of a higher prevalence of food consumption gaps for displaced populations, is similar in the two others central Sahelian countries. In **Mali**, 12% of host community HHs were found with poor or borderline FCS, against 21% of IDP households. This ratio was 26% against 45% in **Niger**. Similarly, findings indicate reduced access to food overall for displaced HHs in the three assessed countries. In Burkina Faso, 26% of IDP households were found with severe or moderate hunger, against 12% of host-community HHs. In Mali, 24% IDP HHs were found with severe or moderate hunger, against 12% of host-community HHs. In Niger, this ratio is 56% against 28%.

## Displacement triggers a deterioration in living standards

Displaced people often lose assets when they are forced to flee their home and land. They may also be unable to pursue their former work, leading to unemployment, underemployment or informal work, and a significant drop in income.<sup>18</sup> Based on 2022 MSNA data collections worldwide, the proportion of HHs overall who reported an unstable (unstable/seasonal/precarious), emergency source of income or no source at all was particularly high in Afghanistan (69%) and Iraq (60%). In these two countries, the proportion of displaced HHs reporting the same thing was noticeably higher, with 78% of IDPs in **Afghanistan** and 70% of IDPs in **Iraq** (for both in-camps and out-of-camps).

As displacement separates IDPs from their habitual source of livelihoods and income, creating needs for new source of money, it deteriorates their living standards. This livelihood loss may therefore lead to reduced access to food and difficulty in covering basic needs. This direct effect is particularly striking when looking at the findings in **Colombia**. While the population seemed to have been affected equally by aftermath of the COVID-19, with one out of two households reporting having lost their job in the year prior to data collection, difficulty in meeting basic needs appears to be more common for displaced households. 87% of them reported having faced challenges obtaining the necessary resources to meet their basic needs in the 30 days prior to data collection, against 66% in the host community. The same gap can be observed in **Libya**, where 64% of IDP households reported having had trouble meeting essential needs due to an inability to afford them in the 30 days prior to data collection, against 49% in the host community, as well as in **Syria**, where 80% of IDP households reported having been able to meet household needs only insufficiently or not at all at the time of data collection, against 75% in the host community.

## Conclusion

<sup>13</sup> NRC, "Iraq: Drought crisis destroys income and crops countrywide", 24 October 2022

<sup>14</sup> UN News, "Tens of thousands in northwest Syria lose shelter after floods inundate camps", 27 January 2021

<sup>15</sup> UNHCR, "UN warns of worsening conflict and displacement in Sahel without immediate climate action", 16 November 2022

<sup>16</sup> UNHCR, Sahel Crisis portal, November 2022

<sup>17</sup> World Food Programme (WFP), Food Crisis in the Central Sahel, 27 September 2022

<sup>18</sup> IDMC, "The ripple effect: economic impacts of internal displacement", October 2018

Internal displacement separates people from their land, assets, belongings, workplace, social networks, service providers and consumers. In addition, in their host areas, IDPs often compete with local workers for employment, and their arrival also increases demand for goods and services, which may push up prices. While the crises assessed through this paper are of different nature and severity, 2022 MSNA findings confirm the prevalence of negative outcomes related to food insecurity and livelihood is almost always consistently higher among displaced households than among host community households.

One of IMPACT's key lessons learned from primary data collection experiences in the past has been that by taking a few key steps when it comes to large-scale, household-level quantitative research (e.g. the REACH MSNAs) can go a long way in filling basic information gaps on the needs of different sub-groups of crisis-affected populations. Specifically, the analysis presented in this paper across different crises was possible to a large extent because: i) where relevant and feasible, all REACH MSNA samples are stratified at minimum between IDPs and non-displaced populations; ii) all REACH MSNA household survey tools included a section to capture demographics and basic information of all household members (e.g. sex, age, school enrolment status, livelihood engagement, etc.); and iii) majority of REACH MSNA household survey tools included a set of about 8-10 core globally standardised "good practice" indicators, with questions asked in the exact same way across different contexts.

By conducting these MSNAs under the mandate of the Humanitarian Country Team within each given response, and by making sure it collaborates with Inter-Sector Coordination Groups (ISCG) and Assessment Working Groups (AWG), REACH aims to maximize the use of these findings in the Humanitarian Response Plans (HRPs). Finally, by collecting and analysing household level data through one consolidated tool, MSNAs facilitate inter-sectoral analysis by identifying co-occurrence of sectoral needs across territories and population groups, which allows for instance to compare severity of needs in sectors such as food security and livelihood, between displaced and non-displaced populations, as well as between locations, which enables humanitarian operational actors to better design their response and better target some specific population groups or areas.

## Challenges and solutions for collecting food security data in contexts of internal displacement

Systematic collection of food consumption outcome data to understand consumption gaps and immediate food needs among displaced populations is generally lacking across humanitarian responses. Robust evidence and analysis of contributing factors to these populations' food insecurity, such as food access, availability and utilization is equally sparse and inconsistent.

Although financial and physical access can be extrapolated from data available for an overall population, social access to food is often lacking to capture potential additional cultural and/or protection barriers IDPs might be facing. IDP populations can be atypically reliant on markets to procure food, making them more vulnerable to price fluctuations. Rigorous regional market price monitoring, such as REACH JMMIs,<sup>19</sup> is unfortunately not systematically available either to anticipate and provide evidence on financial barriers in accessing food at regional and local levels where displaced populations might be concentrated.

There is limited research and evidence available on food utilization for IDP populations, specifically the impact of displacement on care practices at household level and intra-household food allocation. Mental health outcomes due to displacement could potentially impact household-level decision-making, affecting main caregivers' care practices and food consumption choices, which in turn impacts nutrition as well as food security status.

There are often data gaps concerning livelihoods activities and abandoned assets during displacement, along with a lack of contextualized understanding of coping strategies and how they might differ from non-displaced populations' typical food consumption and livelihood coping mechanisms. Quantitative and qualitative data on access to social networks, humanitarian assistance or development assistance, including new income-generation activities (ideally carefully embedded in local market systems) is needed to inform improved livelihoods and coping analysis.

Overall, a lack of sex-disaggregated data, and limitations in understanding needs of people with disabilities and of particular minorities are masking the double (triple) burden certain IDP groups might face, and the associated food and livelihoods gaps.

Through its own research experiences, IMPACT has found that these gaps can be addressed in a few different ways:

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<sup>19</sup> Please visit [REACH resource centre](#) to find information products from Joint Market Monitoring Initiatives (JMMI) conducted in many different contexts

- Seasonal food security assessments could more systematically integrate data collection of food consumption and livelihoods outcomes of displaced population. (Such as MSNAs, even if not seasonal).
- Better evidence about seasonal displacement patterns changing over time with increasing compounded shocks due to extreme weather events, insecurity and conflict.
- Understanding further relation between food insecurity as a driver of displacement and vice versa displacement leading to greater food insecurity or loss of livelihoods according to identified key drivers.
- Better livelihoods analysis to understand how displaced population can procure/produce food contributing to food systems or other livelihoods activities in a safe and dignified manner.
- Food systems analysis should consider displaced population as stakeholders to better inform policy interventions taking into account movement intention.
- Evidence on successful programming supporting IDPs only and host communities improving food security and nutrition outcomes.

**About IMPACT:**

IMPACT Initiatives is a leading Geneva-based think-and-do tank which aims to improve the impact of humanitarian, stabilisation and development action through data, partnerships and capacity building programmes. The work of IMPACT is implemented by its three initiatives: REACH, AGORA and PANDA.

REACH, a joint initiative of IMPACT, ACTED and UNOSAT, provides data and analysis on contexts of crisis in order to inform humanitarian action. Within AGORA, IMPACT partners with ACTED to support the stabilisation of crisis-affected areas by promoting synergies between international aid and local response actors. Through PANDA, IMPACT supports aid actors to improve the effectiveness of their programmes through monitoring, evaluation and capacity building activities.

IMPACT teams are present in over 25 countries across the Middle East, Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. The teams work in contexts ranging from conflict to disasters and in areas seeing the effects of displacement and migration.