

Drought Snapshot

February 2026 | Kenya

Key Messages

- The first weeks of 2026 have shown an alarming situation unfolding in parts of Kenya as drought conditions intensify. While the 2024 short rains already underperformed and limited recovery in the Arid and Semi-Arid (ASALs), **the 2025 short rains were reportedly poorer in both amount and distribution**,¹ further constraining water availability, pasture regeneration, and crop production. The updated food security and nutrition classifications and projections from the latest IPC workshop - which took place in early February - are due to be published in the coming weeks. Forecasts of below-average rainfall and persistent livelihood pressures suggest a likely deterioration in acute food insecurity and acute malnutrition, potentially similar to 2022 drought conditions.
- According to National Drought Management Authority (NDMA), approximately **3.3 million people in Kenya are in need of humanitarian food assistance**,² up from 2.2 million people in 2025.³ This sharp deterioration is largely attributed to the failure of the short rains season, which resulted in poor pasture and water recharge, reduced crop production, and declining livestock productivity.
- Despite intensifying drought impacts, the **humanitarian response is increasingly constrained due to a decline in funding**. As a result, assistance in vulnerable counties has declined, leaving affected populations more exposed to ongoing climatic shocks. The Kenyan government has appealed for approximately KES 13 billion to address the food security crisis affecting millions of people across the country.⁴

Context

Kenya continues to face escalating climate-related shocks. Consecutive below-average short rains have worsened drought conditions across the ASALs, further straining livelihoods and household resilience. A comparison of the 2024 and 2025 October–December short rains seasons in terms of cumulative rainfall, vegetation conditions, and surface water availability indicates worsening performance in 2025. This is characterized by below-average rainfall, deteriorating pasture conditions, and increasing water stress, contributing to rising humanitarian needs.⁵ Consecutive poor short-rain seasons over the past two years have significantly compounded livelihood losses and slowed recovery across ASAL areas. This conditions have worsened food insecurity and malnutrition rates in the region. This comes at a time when humanitarian aid is increasingly constrained.

Some climate-related programmes that were not classified as lifesaving were suspended, which has affected early-warning systems, reducing the ability of humanitarian organizations to support preparedness and resilience.⁶ These factors are undermining recovery efforts and risk reversing recent gains, while also weakening households' ability to cope with future shocks.

In addition to this piece providing a snapshot of the drought, REACH has recently published maps providing an overview of drought severity in [Isiolo](#), [Mandera](#), [Samburu](#), [Wajir](#), [Marsabit](#), and [Turkana](#) counties, as well as country-wide [precipitation](#) and [drought severity](#) maps.

Growing Population in Need

~2.2 million people in need in 2025³

~3.3 million people in need in 2026²

¹ The short rains season (October–December) is one of Kenya's two main rainfall seasons and contributes approximately 30–40 percent of annual crop production, particularly for short-cycle crops such as maize, beans, green grams, and sorghum. It is also critical for pasture regeneration, water recharge, and livestock productivity in ASALs.

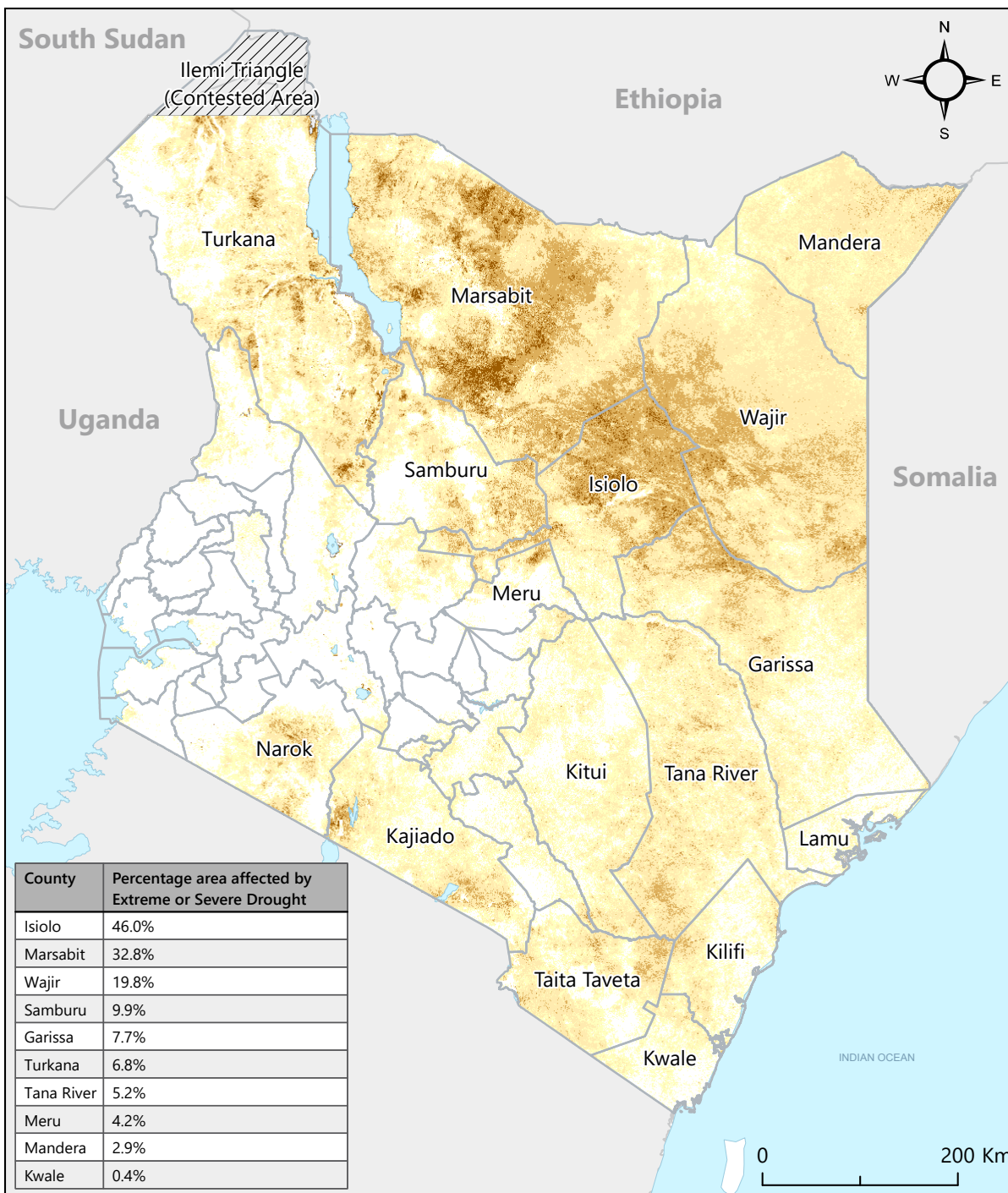
² NDMA, [Drought Update](#), January, 2026

³ IPC, [Integrated food security phase classification](#), March 2025

⁴ Kenyan News, [Government appeal](#), December, 2025

⁵ ACAPS, [Anticipated impact of drought conditions in Mandera, Tana River, Turkana, and Wajir counties](#), November, 2025

⁶ ACAPS, [Anticipated impact of drought conditions in Mandera, Tana River, Turkana, and Wajir counties](#), November, 2025



**Drought Severity (VCI)
October-December 2025**

- Extreme Drought
- Severe Drought
- Moderate Drought
- Mild Drought
- No Drought

- County Boundaries
- Water Bodies

Data sources:

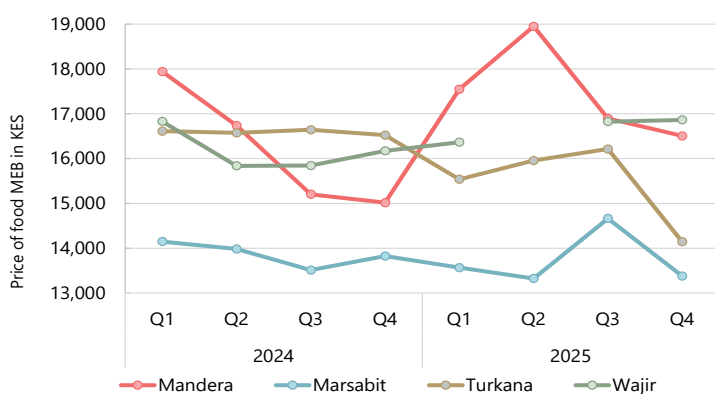
VCI: Calculated based on MODIS MOD13Q1 NDVI (250m, 16-day), NASA, in Google Earth Engine (Jan. 2026).
 Administrative Boundaries: Humanitarian Data Exchange (HDX)
 Basemaps: Natural Earth, Esri
 Coordinate System: GCS WGS 1984

The map shows that extreme and severe drought conditions are widespread across Kenya's ASAL counties, with the most pronounced impacts observed in the northern and eastern regions. A substantial proportion of these areas has vegetation under drought-induced stress, including signs of drying and reduced vegetation productivity, likely driven by significant moisture deficits.

Declining household food access and purchasing power

Available data and analysis from recent months indicate deteriorating conditions, particularly with respect to food security and malnutrition. Recent early-warning projections estimate that between 3.0 and 3.49 million people are expected to require humanitarian assistance between November 2025 and May 2026.⁷ This aligns with NDMA’s estimate of 3.3 million people needing food support. These findings underline the persistence and intensification of food insecurity across the ASALs, reflecting cumulative climatic shocks, limited household purchasing power, and slow recovery from previous drought cycles.

One of the key factors contributing to food insecurity is the erosion of household income, particularly in pastoral communities that primarily rely on climate-sensitive livelihood activities. Declining purchasing power, driven by high food prices, continues to constrain households’ ability to meet basic food needs. This is reflected in elevated - though fluctuating - Minimum Expenditure Basket (MEB)⁸ costs for food, indicating persistently high prices of essential food commodities that strain household budgets and increase the risk of food insecurity. For example, prices of food commodities in Mandera fluctuated significantly over 2024–2025. Compared to Q4 2024, prices rose by 16.8% in Q1 2025 and 8.0% in Q2, before declining 10.8% in Q3 and 2.1% in Q4 2025. These quarterly fluctuations reflect both seasonal supply changes and possible impact of drought. Generally, Q4 2025 prices were 10.2% higher than Q4 2024, highlighting the persistent stress on households and markets caused by consecutive poor rainfall seasons.

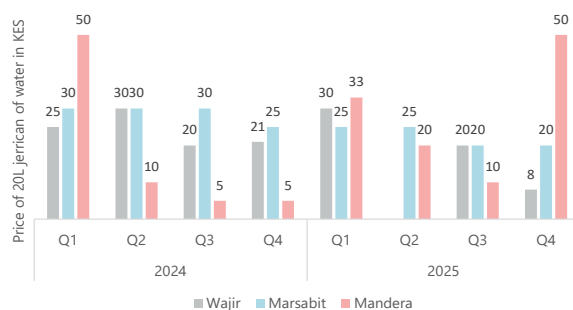


Trends in Food MEB Prices in (KES) across selected ASAL counties, 2024–2025⁹

Strain on health, nutrition, and WASH systems in drought-affected communities

According to the 2025 long⁹ and short rains analysis,¹⁰ drought-affected counties continued to report a high disease burden across drought affected areas, with outbreaks of water and vector-borne diseases linked to contaminated water sources and weakened WASH infrastructure. Cholera outbreaks were reported. At the same time, cases of malaria, dysentery and Kala-Azar (visceral leishmaniasis) outbreaks were recorded, prompting emergency health responses. These health impacts are closely linked to worsening water scarcity, as dry conditions have significantly reduced access to safe water across the ASALs counties through depleted surface water sources, declining borehole yields, and increased distances to functional water points. As a result, households face longer water collection times and rising water costs, further straining already fragile livelihoods.¹¹

The reliance on distant water points, with 87% of ASAL counties reporting an increase in the trekking distance to access water for domestic use¹² combined with high temperatures and the need to store water for several days, increases the risk of WASH-related diseases. This situation also places a substantial burden on household time and labor, particularly for women and children. Disease outbreaks undermine infant and young child feeding practices and impair nutrient absorption, thereby elevating the risk of acute malnutrition among children under five years, and have likely contributed to the persistently concerning nutrition situation in the ASALs.¹³



Price trends of 20 litres of water in (KES) across selected ASAL counties, 2024–2025⁹

The price of a 20-litre jerrican of water in Mandera rose nearly tenfold from KES 5 in Q4 2024 to KES 50 in Q4 2025, reflecting the severe stress on water availability during this drought season. Government and humanitarian partners have scaled up water delivery to affected communities in Mandera County.¹⁴

⁷ Few's Net, [Kenya Food Security Outlook](#), October, 2025
⁸ REACH, [Joint Market Monitoring Initiative \(JMIMI\) Dashboard](#)
⁹ IPC, [2025 long rains analysis](#), September, 2025
¹⁰ IPC, [2025 short rains analysis](#), March, 2025
¹¹ WHO, [Health and nutrition crises in Kenya](#), January, 2026
¹² NDMA [Drought update](#), January, 2026
¹³ UNICEF, [Child nutrition and the climate crisis](#), December, 2023
¹⁴ The Star, [Drought pushes Mandera into alarm phase](#), January, 2026

Coping with resource scarcity through migration and support

Poor rainfall performance has reduced water and pasture availability across the ASALs, prompting many pastoral households to migrate in search of these resources to sustain their livestock and livelihoods.¹⁵ This mobility, while a traditional coping strategy, has increased pressure on remaining rangelands and water points, sometimes generating tensions within and between communities as they compete over scarce resources. These disputes have occasionally disrupted livelihoods, led to loss of lives and threatened community cohesion. An increase in inter- and intra-community tensions has been reported, particularly along the Turkana–Ethiopia border and in Marsabit and Lamu counties.¹⁶ Concurrently, livestock movements from Mandera to Wajir are placing additional strain on scarce grazing and water points, increasing the likelihood of conflict over diminishing natural resources.¹⁷

In addition to migration in search of water and pasture, many communities in Kenya’s ASALs have turned to government and humanitarian support to cope with the impacts of prolonged drought, with cash assistance under the Hunger Safety Net Programme (HSNP) providing an important safety net for vulnerable households.¹⁸

The HSNP programme has generally increased in response to rising needs, reflecting both the growing severity of drought impacts and the expanding number of households requiring assistance. During the peak of the prolonged drought between 2020 and 2023, cash support under the HSNP was scaled up, reaching tens of thousands of vulnerable households with emergency cash transfers. For example, in 2022 the government disbursed over KES 667 million to support drought affected communities in four ASAL counties, reaching around 149,699 households with regular and shock-responsive cash transfers.¹⁹ As rainfall improved in 2023 and parts of 2024, emergency scale-ups were reduced and the programme focused more on routine transfers, reflecting some recovery in food security and livelihood conditions.

However, the poor performance of the 2024 and 2025 short rains, compounded by high food prices and deepening livelihood stress, has driven an increase in HSNP assistance once again. In December 2025 and January 2026, the HSNP disbursed between KSh 778 million²⁰ and KSh 870 million to support approximately 133,000 drought-affected households across eight ASAL counties.²¹ These renewed increases in both the coverage and total cash transfers highlight the growing need, as drought conditions persist. While the HSNP and other humanitarian actors continue to play a critical role in supporting vulnerable households and mitigating food insecurity, humanitarian funding cuts are increasingly undermining coverage and effectiveness, leaving many at risk populations with reduced or no access to aid support.

Number of ASAL Counties by Drought Phase (Normal, Alert, Alarm), 2024–2025 (NDMA)

Phase	2024	2025
Alarm	0 counties	1 county
Alert	3 counties	9 counties
Normal (worsening)	6 counties	13 counties
Normal (stable)	10 counties	0 counties
Normal (improving)	4 counties	0 counties

As counties transition from Normal to Alert and Alarm phases, household coping strategies shift from adaptive and preventive measures - such as drawing on savings - to crisis-level responses. These include migration, which intensifies in both scale and distance as households move toward better-off areas in search of pasture and water. At this stage, reliance on external assistance, including cash transfers, food aid, and emergency water trucking, becomes essential rather than complementary.

ABOUT REACH

REACH Initiative facilitates the development of information tools and products that enhance the capacity of aid actors to make evidence-based decisions in emergency, recovery and development contexts. The methodologies used by REACH include primary data collection and in-depth analysis, and all activities are conducted through inter-agency aid coordination mechanisms. REACH is a joint initiative of IMPACT Initiatives, Acted and the United Nations Institute for Training and Research - Operational Satellite Applications Programme (UNITAR-UNOSAT).

¹⁵ ACAPS, [Anticipated impact of drought conditions in Mandera, Tana River, Turkana, and Wajir counties](#), November, 2025
¹⁶ The Standard, [Drought fuels tension at Kenya-Ethiopia border](#), January, 2026
¹⁷ The Star, [Drought pushes Mandera into alarm phase](#), January, 2026
¹⁸ NDMA, [Hunger Safety Net Programme \(HSNP\)](#)
¹⁹ NDMA, [Drought resilience](#), May, 2022
²⁰ NDMA, [Cushion for vulnerable households](#), February, 2026
²¹ allAfrica, [Support Drought-Hit Families](#), January, 2026