

Brief

Impacts of Conflict on Markets and Supply Chains in Afghanistan

Context & Rationale

Trade and regional connectivity have long played an important role in Afghanistan. Historically, the country occupied a strategic position along the Silk Road, with major routes passing through cities including Balkh, Herat and Ghazni.[1] Today, as a landlocked country, Afghanistan remains heavily reliant on imports of essential food and non-food commodities, with most goods entering through overland routes and neighbouring countries.

These supply routes are vulnerable to environmental and human-induced disruptions. Heavy snowfall, floods and landslides can temporarily isolate communities, while conflict can result in road closures, infrastructure damage and movement restrictions. For remote communities dependent on limited access routes, such disruptions can significantly affect access to markets, essential goods and services.

The availabile data on prolonged supply chain disruptions in Afghanistan highlighted severe impacts associated with conflict-related disruptions on essential supplies.[2] More recently, in 2026, damage to access routes during Afghanistan–Pakistan hostilities disrupted supply chains to remote areas of Nuristan Province, where some communities experienced severe constraints in the availability of food and non-food items for an extended period of 2 months.

Against this backdrop, WFP and REACH, with support of Taylor Geospatial (TG)[3], are collaborating to enhance the Afghanistan Platform for Understanding Local Shocks in Emergencies (AF-PULSE)[4], into a geoAI-enabled, open-source platform for identifying localized shocks and disruptions. WFP is developing the model, while REACH collected field-level information to verify identified disruptions and assess their impacts on affected communities. This brief combines conflict, market and accessibility data to examine how conflict-related disruptions have affected local markets and supply routes, and to identify factors that may increase communities' vulnerability to such disruptions.

Key Messages

- Conflict affected market functionality through both shop closures and reduced physical access. In areas where insecurity restricted movement, reported market demand decreased. Where markets remained accessible but fewer shops were operating, demand increased, potentially reflecting pressure on remaining vendors and concerns about future shortages.
- Afghanistan–Pakistan border closures disrupted established trade flows and increased pressure on prices and commodity availability. Alternative routes through Iran and Central Asia helped maintain supply flows, but longer transport routes and higher costs contributed to market pressures, including reported increases in the price of key imported commodities such as rice.
- The duration of road closures was a key factor in the severity of localized supply disruptions. Short-term closures mainly disrupted access to markets and services, while prolonged isolation had much greater effects on commodity availability.

Image 1: Kabul , Afghanistan by Staff Sgt. Russell Lee

Taylor Geospatial

World Food Programme

REACH Informing more effective humanitarian action

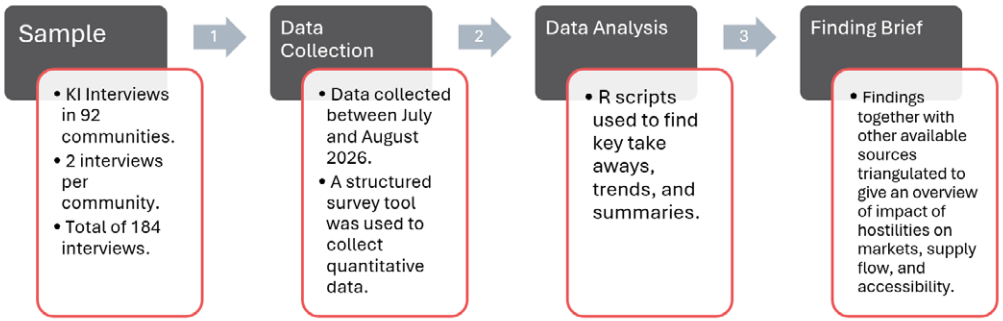
Methodology

The analysis covers areas affected by the 2025–2026 Afghanistan–Pakistan hostilities, including 92 communities[5] across 17 provinces. Primary data were collected through quantitative key informant (KI) interviews conducted between July and August 2026. KIs included merchants, drivers and community members who regularly used the affected roads and were aware of local road conditions, accessibility, supply-route disruptions and market conditions.

Coverage Area:

Provinces assessed	Districts assessed	Communities assessed
17	61	92

Findings from the quantitative assessment were triangulated with available secondary data sources, to complement community-level information and examine patterns in conflict events, road and supply-route disruptions, market accessibility, commodity availability, prices, and market functionality.



Secondary Data Sources:

Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI):[6] Monthly market-level monitoring conducted by REACH Initiative, providing district-level data on prices, commodity availability, market functionality, trader activity, and supply sources. Coverage was expanded in April–May 2026 following the hostilities, and the data were extensively used in this analysis.

Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM):[8] Nationwide, quarterly community-level monitoring covering all districts of Afghanistan, providing data on humanitarian needs and emerging trends across key sectors. HSM data was used extensively to assess the reported impacts of conflict on affected communities.

ACLED – Conflict Data:[7] Event-level conflict data providing information on the location, date, type, actors, and reported fatalities of political violence and conflict events. ACLED data were used to identify and characterise conflict events and contextualise their relationship with reported market and access disruptions.

Limitations

Geographic coverage: The assessment primarily targeted locations identified through ACLED reporting of conflict events. Conflict-affected locations or road disruptions not captured by ACLED may therefore have been missed. To reduce this risk, REACH conducted additional field verification with field teams to identify relevant events and affected locations not initially captured through the secondary data review.

Market-level data: JMMI findings reflect conditions in assessed markets and are not representative of all markets or communities across Afghanistan. The analysis can therefore identify observed changes in assessed markets but has limited ability to capture the wider effects of conflict and supply-chain disruptions beyond the directly assessed areas.

Attribution of market impacts: Changes in commodity availability, prices and demand may be influenced by multiple factors, including seasonality, wider trade dynamics, transportation costs and other market conditions. While the analysis examines patterns occurring alongside conflict and supply-route disruptions, these relationships should not in all cases be interpreted as direct causal effects of the conflict.

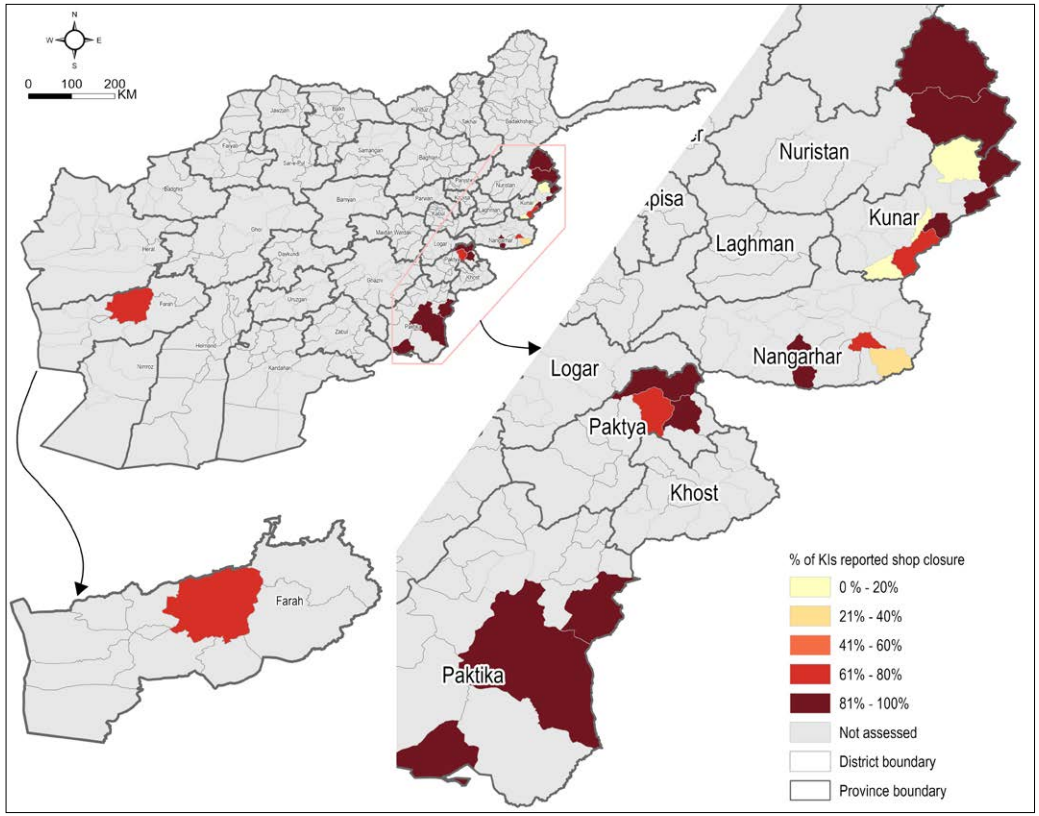
Timing of data collection and recall: The assessment of conflict-related road closures was conducted in July 2026, several months after some of the actual incidents occurred. As a result, the recall period for key informants may have affected the precision of reported information, particularly regarding the timing, duration and severity of disruptions. However, REACH's JMMI data collection in April 2026, shortly after the March hostilities, provided an additional layer of market-level information that helped triangulate findings and improve the overall reliability of the analysis.

Local Market Accessibility and Functionality During the 2025–2026 Afghanistan–Pakistan Hostilities

Afghanistan–Pakistan hostilities during 2025 and 2026 directly affected 61 districts and 92 communities, predominantly in border areas. Available security data indicate that the hostilities primarily involved airstrikes, shelling, and exchanges of gunfire across the border between the two sides.

In addition to casualties and other destructive impacts, the conflict affected both access to markets and local market functionality. Available data from conflict-affected areas show that, in several districts along Afghanistan-Pakistan border, all or most respondents reported that shops had closed as a result of the conflict.

Map 1: % of KIs reported shop closure because of conflict during March and April - JMMI April 2026



Following the conflict incidents in March, conflict-related shop closures were reported across 13 border districts, with particularly serious impacts reported in Paktya, Paktika and Nuristan. However, the relationship between conflict, shop closures and market demand varied considerably depending on whether households were also facing security or movement constraints in accessing markets.

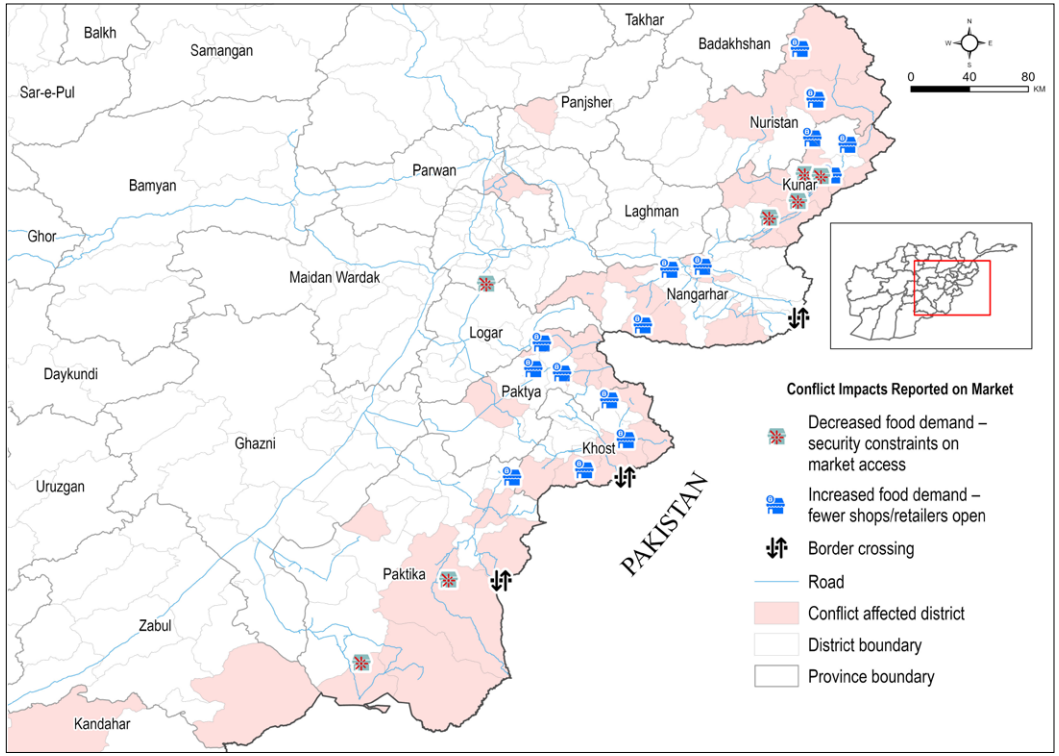
In Kamdish and Barg-e-Matal districts of Nuristan, as well as Jaji and Chamkani districts of Paktya, the number of open shops reportedly declined while demand for food items increased. In several of these locations, security-related difficulties in physically accessing shops were not reported to the same extent. This suggests that where markets remained accessible but fewer shops were operating, demand became concentrated among the remaining vendors. Increased demand may also reflect households' concerns about potential further supply-chain disruptions or future shortages, leading them to seek food and other essential items while they remained available.

A different pattern was observed in parts of Kunar Province. In Asadabad and Sarkani districts, security risks and conflict-related movement constraints affected households' ability to access markets (Map 2). In these locations, demand for food items reportedly decreased. This suggests that lower observed market demand during periods of conflict does not necessarily indicate lower household needs. Instead, households may have been unable or unwilling to reach markets because of security concerns.

Overall, the findings point to three interrelated dimensions of conflict-related market disruption. First, conflict can directly reduce market functionality by forcing shops to close. Second, conflict can reduce market accessibility when insecurity or movement risks prevent households from safely reaching functioning markets. Third, where markets remain physically accessible but the number of operational shops or expected supply is reduced, demand may increase, potentially reflecting both concentration of purchases among fewer vendors and household concerns about future shortages or supply-chain disruption.

The interaction between these dimensions helps explain the different patterns observed across conflict-affected districts. Where insecurity substantially restricted movement, market activity and reported demand tended to decline. Where households could still reach markets but shop availability had decreased, demand could instead increase. This highlights that the effects of conflict on markets cannot be understood through shop closures alone: physical accessibility, market functionality, and household responses to anticipated supply constraints need to be considered together.

Map 2: Conflict Impact on Market Accessibility and Functionality - JMMI March 2026



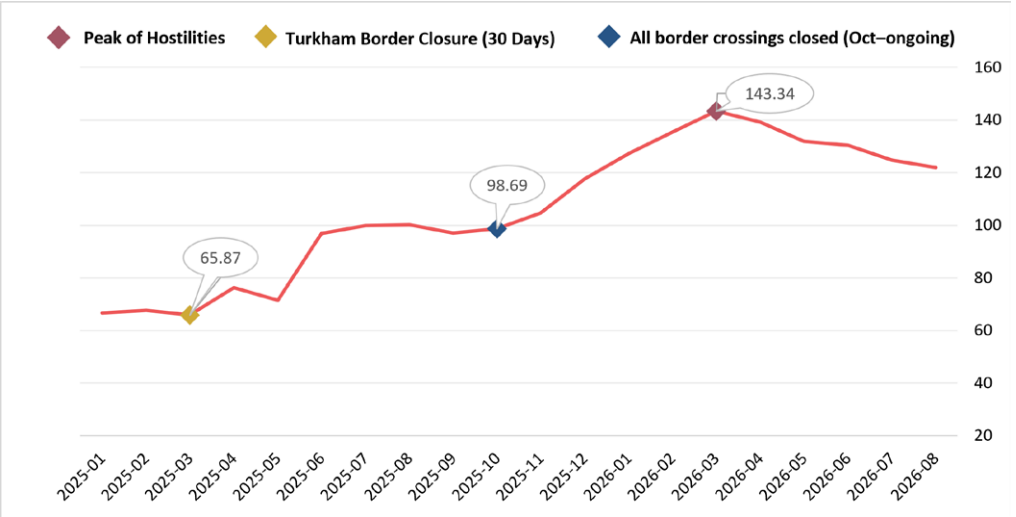
Conflict-related disruptions to cross-border and local supply chains

The late 2025 and 2026 Afghanistan–Pakistan hostilities resulted in the closure of key border crossings and disrupted the movement of goods between the two countries. Given the importance of Pakistan as one of Afghanistan's main trade routes, the border closures affected the availability and prices of some imported commodities. The disruption also affected Afghan producers and traders who traditionally relied on Pakistani markets for agricultural exports.

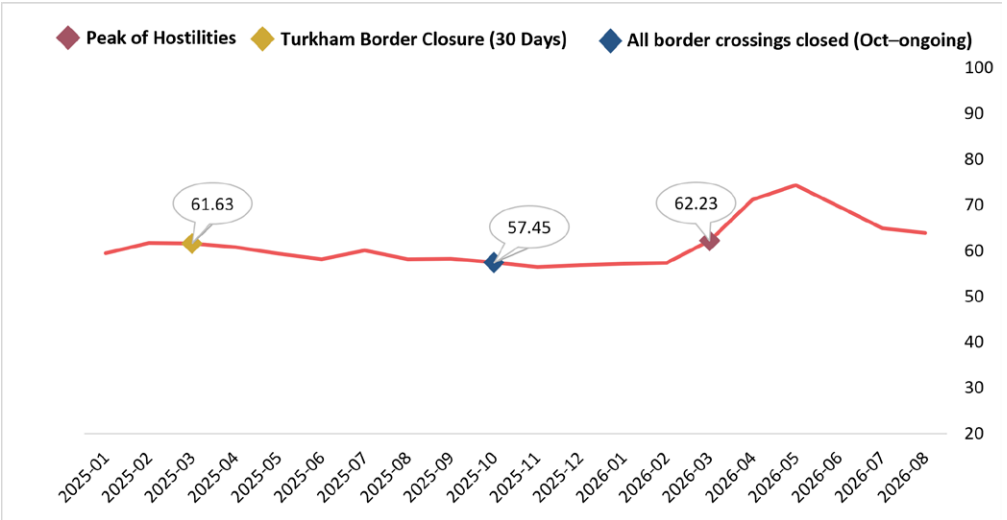
Following the Afghanistan–Pakistan border closures since October 2025, some trade flows shifted towards Iran and Central Asian countries as alternative routes.[9] While these alternatives helped maintain the flow of imports and exports, the longer transport routes and associated costs placed additional pressure on commodity prices and contributed to challenges in market accessibility and the availability of some goods.

Rice, one of the main food commodities imported from Pakistan, provides an example of these effects. Following the border closures and associated supply-chain disruptions, rice prices increased significantly, illustrating how disruption to established trade routes can translate into higher prices in domestic markets.

Graph 1: Average rice price evolution during 2025 - 2026 (AFN/Kg) - JMMI



Graph 2: Average sugar price evolution during 2025 - 2026 (AFN/Kg) - JMMI

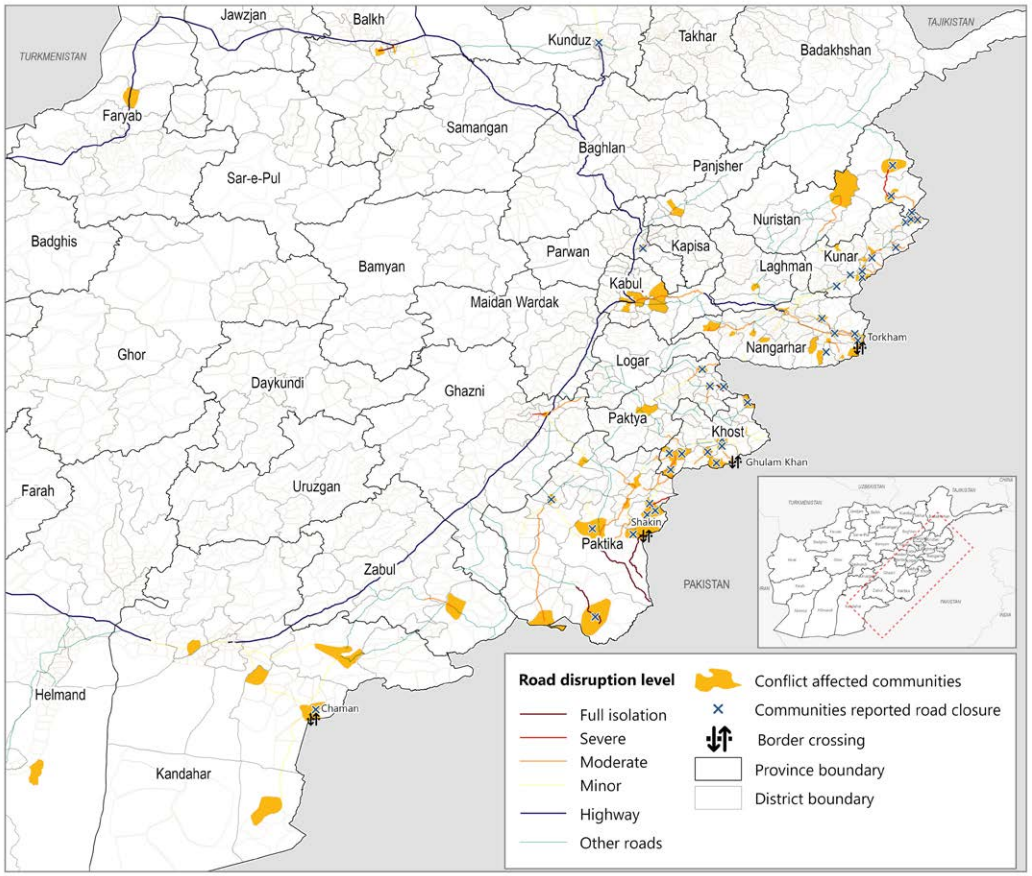


Localized supply-route disruptions

Beyond the closure of international border crossings, conflict during late 2025 and the first and second quarters of 2026 resulted in road damage or closures affecting 39 communities across 28 districts. The severity and duration of these disruptions varied considerably, with some roads reopening relatively quickly while others remained disrupted for up to two months.

During the March 2026 hostilities, approximately seven communities in Paktika Province were completely cut off due to conflict-related road damage. Severe road disruptions were also reported in Kunar, Paktya and Nuristan provinces. The most prolonged disruptions were observed in Nuristan, where access constraints affecting some communities continued for almost two months.

Map 3: Communities reporting road closures during 2025 - 2026 because of conflict



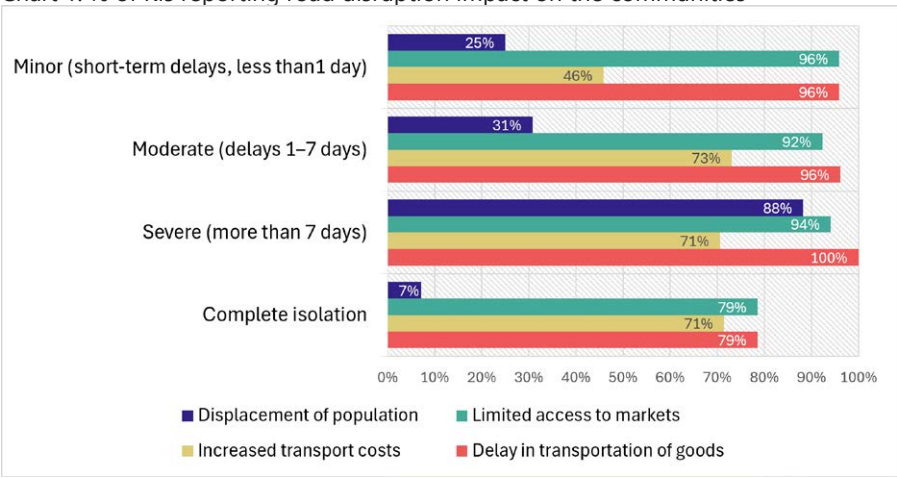
Impact of localized road closures

The findings indicate that the impact of localized road disruptions depended considerably on both the duration of the closure and the ability of affected communities and supply networks to cope with or adapt to the disruption. Across all levels of disruption, road closures affected the movement of goods and access to markets. Limited market access and delays in the transportation of goods were among the most consistently reported consequences, while increased transportation costs were also common.

Except in Nuristan, available reporting did not indicate prolonged road closures in the affected communities. Although these disruptions affected access to markets and services, major changes in commodity availability or prices were generally less evident than in locations experiencing prolonged disruption. This suggests that where routes reopen relatively quickly, or where communities can access alternative markets or supply routes, local markets may be better able to cope with temporary disruptions before they result in more severe commodity shortages

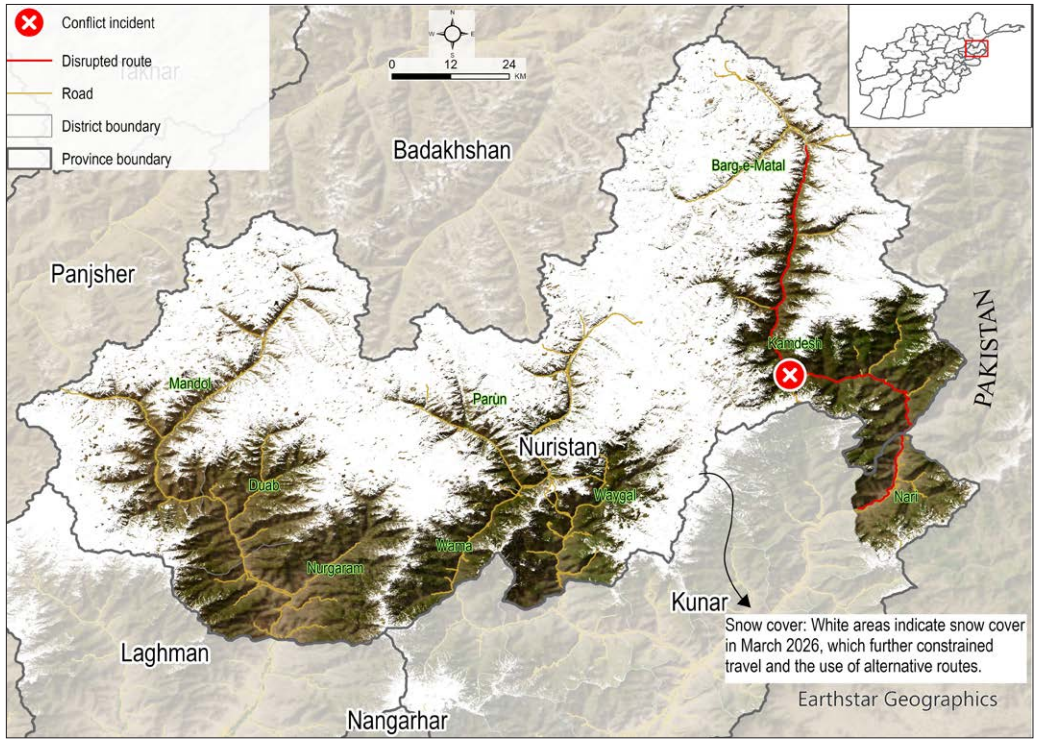
The consequences became more pronounced as disruptions persisted. Population displacement increased from 25% among KIs reporting minor disruptions and 31% among those reporting moderate disruptions to 88% among those experiencing severe disruptions lasting more than seven days. This suggests that prolonged closures can have consequences beyond temporary market and transportation constraints. However, displacement was considerably less frequently reported among communities experiencing complete isolation, indicating that displacement may also depend on factors such as security conditions, alternative routes and households' ability to leave affected areas.

Chart 1: % of KIs reporting road disruption impact on the communities



The effects of prolonged disruption were particularly evident in two districts of Nuristan Province, where key supply routes remained disrupted for approximately two months. The prolonged interruption constrained the movement of goods and was accompanied by severe shortages in local markets. Essential commodities reported as completely unavailable included wheat flour, rice, sugar and sanitary items. These impacts were compounded by the remote and mountainous geography and limited availability of alternative routes.

Map 4: Supply chain disruption in Nuristan province - March 2026



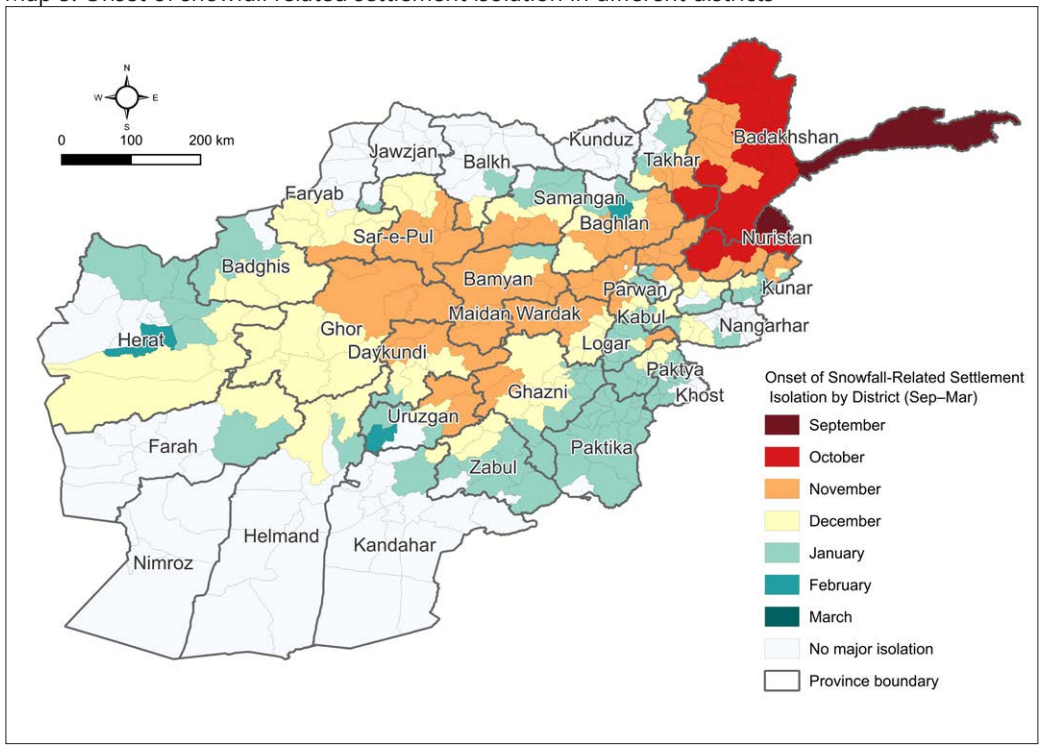
Overall, the findings suggest that the duration of road disruption is an important factor influencing the severity of supply-chain impacts, but duration alone does not determine the outcome. The availability of alternative routes, degree of isolation, seasonal accessibility and existing road conditions also influence whether a road closure develops into a more significant supply-chain disruption.

Community Vulnerability to Supply-Route Disruptions

Limited alternative supply routes: Communities in remote and mountainous areas often have few alternative routes connecting them to main markets or neighbouring provinces due to geographic and environmental constraints. As a result, communities with fewer alternative routes are more vulnerable when their primary supply route is disrupted. Kamdish and Barg-e-Matal districts in Nuristan provide a clear example. Both districts depend heavily on the main supply route through Kunar Province, and disruption of this route resulted in prolonged isolation and significant constraints on the movement of essential goods.

Winter conditions: Heavy snowfall further increases the vulnerability of remote and mountainous communities to supply-route disruptions. During winter, many secondary and tertiary roads can become difficult or impossible to use by vehicles, while severe conditions can also restrict movement by foot or with pack animals. In Nuristan, snow coverage further amplified the impact of the main supply-route closure, as communities were unable to use alternative routes towards neighbouring provinces because these routes were also blocked or inaccessible.

Map 5: Onset of snowfall related settlement isolation in different districts



REACH's analysis of settlement isolation in Afghanistan could complement the GeoAI model by helping identify periods when communities are seasonally isolated and therefore at greater risk from supply-route disruptions. Combining information on seasonal accessibility with disruption data could help distinguish locations where alternative routes are realistically available from those where the closure of a primary route may result in prolonged isolation.

Road conditions: Existing road infrastructure also influences communities' ability to withstand supply disruptions. According to HSM data collected in June 2026, approximately 27,00 of the total 3,362 communities reported having no access to concrete or asphalt roads, of which around 19,00 reported having access only to earthen roads. Poor road conditions can increase transportation times and costs and make the movement of goods less reliable. These constraints become particularly important during winter and rainy seasons, when unpaved roads may become difficult or temporarily impossible to use.

Taken together, these factors suggest that the impact of a supply-route disruption depends not only on the duration and severity of the closure, but also on the availability of alternative routes, seasonal accessibility and existing road conditions. These vulnerability factors could therefore help the GeoAI model identify communities where a road disruption is more likely to result in prolonged isolation or significant supply constraints.

Endnotes

1 World Bank, Afghanistan the Journey to Economic Developement, March 1978
2 United Nation, Economic and Social Council, March 1998
3 Taylor Geospatial (TG)
4 WFP , AF-PULSE

5 Community: In this study, a community corresponds to the REACH Basic Services Unit (BSU). BSUs are defined as economic and geographic service units, each of which represents multiple settlements and populations with access to similar or the same service facilities and humanitarian needs.

6 REACH Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI)
7 REACH Humanitarian Situation Monitoring (HSM)
8 Armed Conflict Location & Event Data Project(ACLED)
8 Afghanistan Trade Shifts From Pakistan To Central Asia & Iran, Says World Bank

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).