Quarterly Markets Overview - Spotlight on Supply

December 2025 | Afghanistan

Key Messages

- Essential goods markets seem to have remained broadly functional, with most food, fuel, and non-food items consistently available and only limited, localized, or seasonal availability constraints observed.
- Market supply seems to have absorbed repeated shocks through domestic wholesale networks, stockholding, and shifts toward alternative supply routes, allowing availability to be maintained despite drought, border closures, and transport disruptions.
- Declining household purchasing power, rather than market supply, is likely to be the primary constraint to access, leaving economically vulnerable households unable to meet essential needs even where goods remain available.

Context & Rationale

Over the past year, Afghan markets have operated under the combined pressure of climatic shocks, economic contraction, population movements, and evolving trade dynamics. Against the backdrop of declining humanitarian assistance and weakened household purchasing power, this analysis examines the extent to which market supply has remained functional and responsive to seasonal pressures and shocks, and whether the availability of essential items has been maintained during a period of heightened vulnerability.

To better understand these dynamics, this overview analyses the availability of essential goods in markets across Afghanistan. Looking further into how supply chains function, it provides insights into how resilient supply has been over past 12 months through November 2025 to trade disruptions, aid suspensions, and seasonal dynamics.

This brief forms part of a series of quarterly markets briefs. The themes alternate between the current focus on availability of goods and resilience of markets, with the second theme being affordability of goods and access of consumers to essential commodities.

Methodology Overview

Primary data comes from the Joint Market Monitoring Initiative (JMMI), an assessment conducted by REACH through the Cash Working Group (CWG) and its partners. The JMMI is a monthly assessment in which vendor key informants (KIs) are purposively selected from markets across Afghanistan. The KIs are interviewed using a structured questionnaire which asks about the availability and prices of essential goods in the KI's location, as well as providing insights into market functionality. The brief includes JMMI data from November 2024 through November 2025 but occasionally draws on previous years for seasonal comparisons. The most recent dataset can be accessed here, and the corresponding dashboard can be found here; for more information on the methodology, please see the Terms of Reference here.

Note that due to the key informant methodology and reliance on purposive sampling, the JMMI data does not accurately portray conditions in all markets. Instead, it provides an indication of conditions in assessed markets.

In addition to the JMMI, this brief includes data from various secondary sources. These fill information gaps and aid in contextualizing the data. The full list of sources used can be found in the endnotes.

Availability of Essential Goods

In November, the majority of vendors reported that essential food and non-food items were widely available in their stores. Supply constraints (i.e. limited availability) were reported for some items, however. Among food commodities, only salt was identified by more than one tenth of vendors as facing availability restrictions. Its median price has increased by more than 50 percent since November of last year, possibly reflecting supply disruptions associated with restrictions on imported salt .[1]
For non-food items, reported constraints were primarily concentrated on WASH-related goods, including sanitary pads, toothbrushes, toothpaste, and safe water. These findings may partially reflect the impact of recent border closures. However, they may also be influenced by lower demand, particularly in rural areas, where households often rely on alternative, unmonitored sources. Whole of Afghanistan Assessment (WoAA) data indicate that only a small proportion of the population depends on bottled water, and while toothbrushes and toothpaste seem to be widely available, they may be less preferred than local alternatives such as miswak.[2]

Availability of Fuels

Ahead of the winter season, fuel markets remained largely functional at the national level. Diesel, petrol, and LPG were almost universally available, with very few stockouts reported. Fuel prices, which rose following the introduction of government regulations on low-quality fuel imports that temporarily constrained supply, also eased toward the end of the year as sourcing shifted toward increased imports from Central Asia.[3]

Coal availability has improved since the end of the previous winter and does not currently represent a major constraint. Although reports of limited availability have increased, complete stockouts have declined, indicating manageable seasonal tightening rather than acute scarcity. Firewood is more concerning. Despite relatively stable prices, unavailability has increased, suggesting affordability-driven access constraints. This is most evident in locations such as Herat, where vendors report that some households are already unable to afford firewood.[4] As winter demand peaks, reduced access to firewood may increase reliance on coal, potentially tightening coal markets later in the season and heightening risks for poorer households unable to stockpile fuels in advance.

Seasonal Items

Winter jackets appear to show seasonal availability constraints, with vendor reports indicating that complete unavailability becomes more common toward the end of winter. While prices tend to increase ahead of the season, limited data make it difficult to assess whether vendors systematically stock up in advance or reduce restocking once winter begins. This pattern suggests that households unable to purchase early may face increasing difficulty accessing winter clothing as the season progresses.

The most exposed households are likely those with limited purchasing power who cannot buy winter items early or absorb seasonal price increases. Poor households, returnees, displaced populations, and families in colder areas are particularly at risk, as they are more likely to delay purchases until winter conditions worsen, when availability is already constrained. In these contexts, market presence does not equate to access, and without targeted support, vulnerable households risk entering the coldest months without adequate winter clothing, with implications for health and coping capacity, which news outlets already describe in provinces like Badghis.[5]

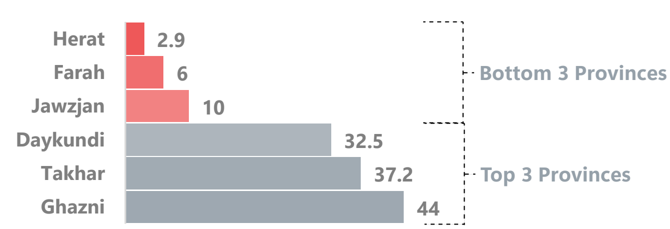
Items most often reported as completely unavailable (% of vendors) in November 2025

1	Coal	13%
2	Water	11%
3	Firewood	7%

Stocks

Stock levels appear generally adequate at the national level, with vendors reporting more than ten days of stock for essential items, and longer coverage for coal and firewood in many locations. Overall, vendors expect to be able to restock before stocks are fully depleted.
However, subnational vulnerabilities are clear and consistent across surveyed items. Coal stock buffers are thin in some provinces, notably Badghis and Herat, where stocks are reported at only a few days, potentially increasing sensitivity to winter demand spikes or transport disruptions. Firewood stocks are similarly low in Uruzgan, reinforcing concerns around localized heating fuel access. Winter jackets show particularly limited buffer capacity in Samangan, Uruzgan, and Badghis, averaging only seven to eight days of stock. Given the highly seasonal nature of winter NFIs, this may indicate limited margin to absorb demand once winter conditions intensify.

Top and bottom 3 stock buffers (in days) for firewood



Supply Chains

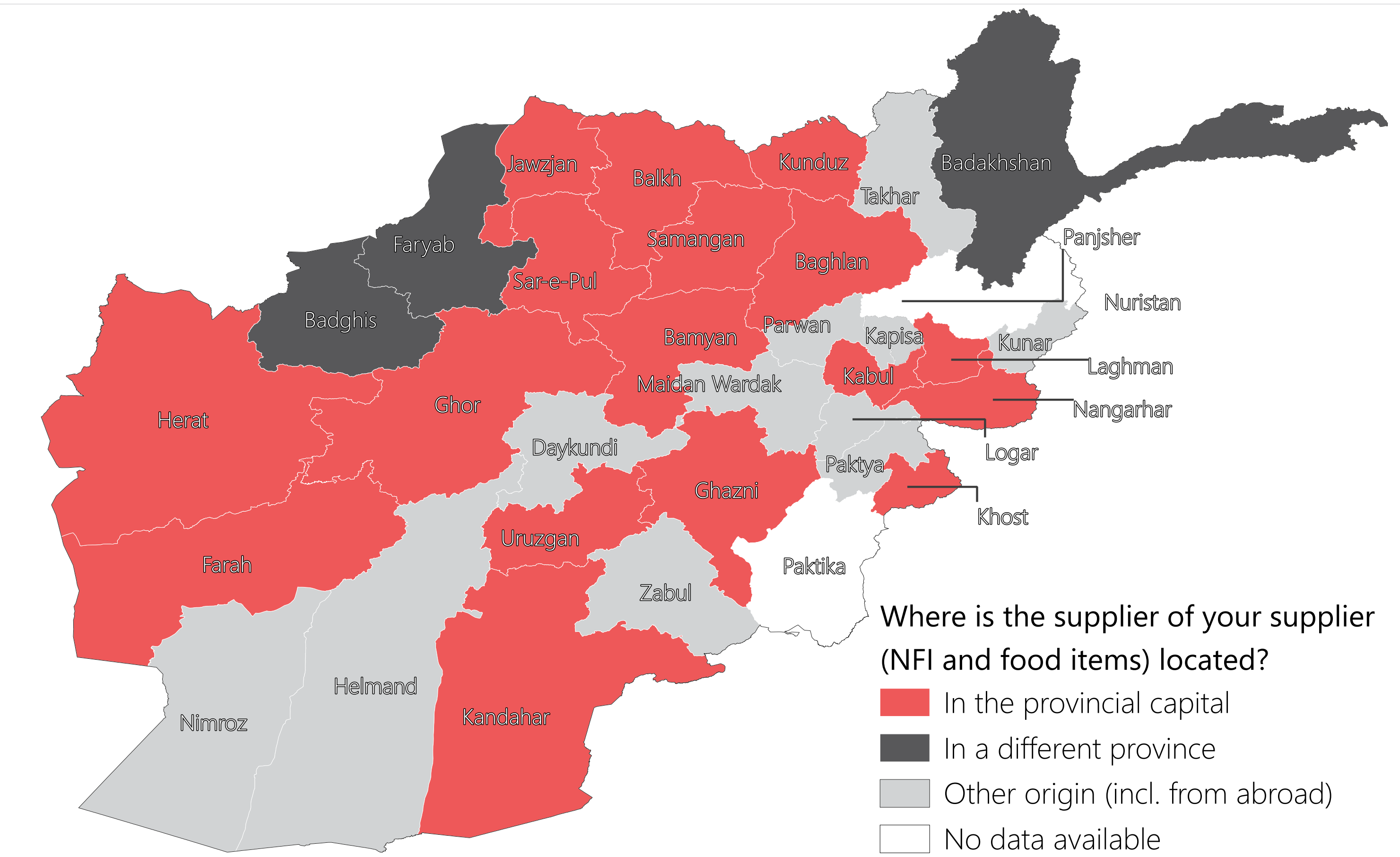
Few Vendors Rely on Direct Imports

Survey responses from vendors over the past year show that supply chains for both food and non-food items in Afghanistan are largely domestic and organized around internal wholesale markets. Most vendors report sourcing from within the country, most commonly from provincial capitals, with a substantial share also sourcing from other provinces and, in some cases, from the same district. Some vendors also rely on cross-border sources, but direct imports are relatively rare at the retail level, indicating that most imported goods enter the country upstream and are redistributed domestically before reaching local markets.

Most Upstream Suppliers Are Also Domestic

Supplier-of-supplier data point to the same structure. Even further up the supply chain, goods are most often sourced from provincial capitals or other locations within Afghanistan rather than directly from abroad. This indicates that provincial capitals act as aggregation and redistribution hubs, concentrating supply before it moves onward to district markets. At least for assessed markets, supply chains therefore seem to be centralized around a limited number of urban wholesale nodes, rather than relying on widespread direct cross-border sourcing by retailers.

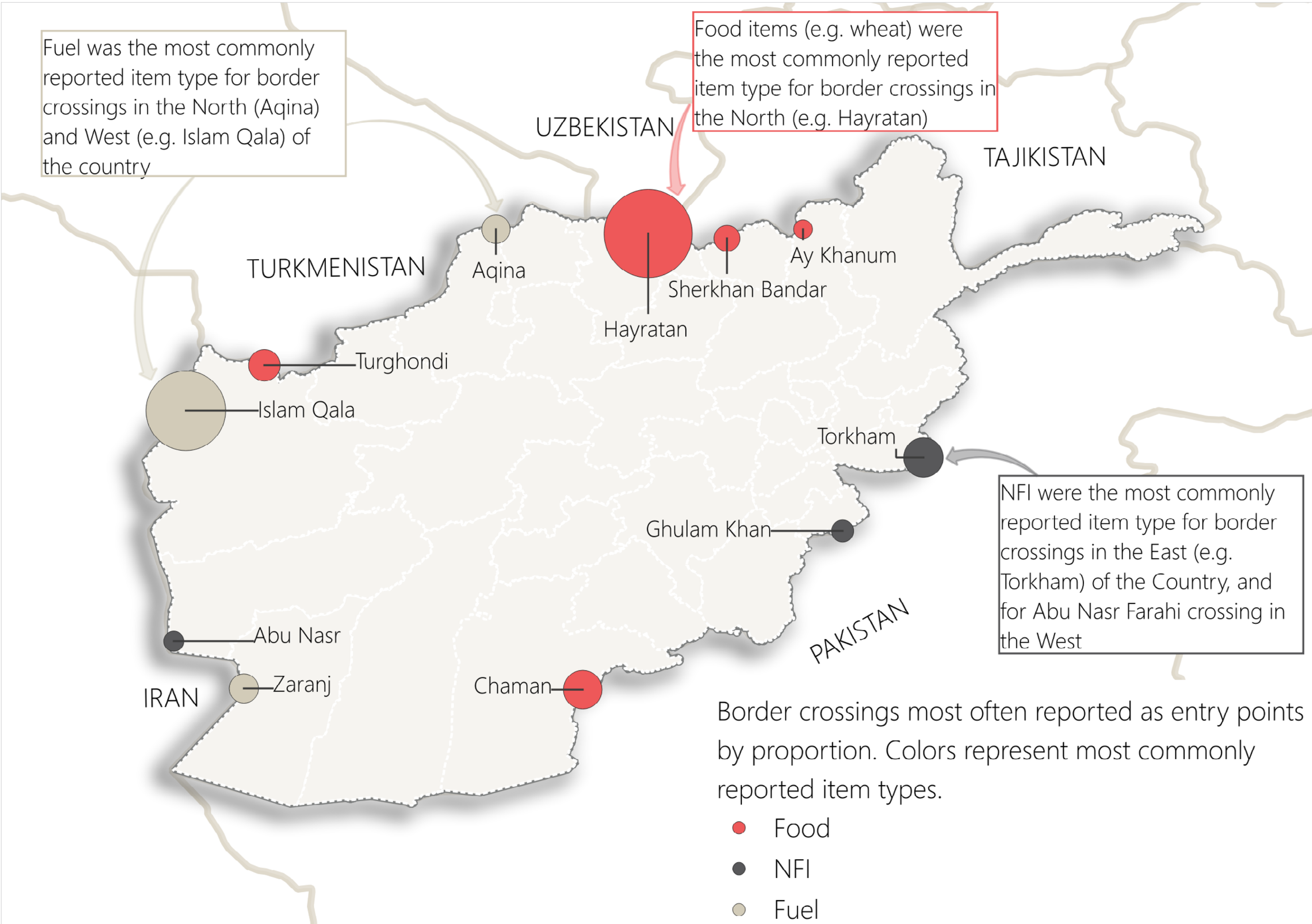
Map 1: Most commonly reported supplier of supplier location per province (JMMI, November 2024-2025). Note that due to JMMI sampling findings here should be considered indicative.



Mapping out where vendors' direct imports were most commonly reported to enter the country from since November 2024 (see Map 2) highlights that northern crossings are more closely associated with food items and eastern and western crossings with non-food items and fuel. As this reflects only direct imports, it does not capture the full extent of import dependence at market level or items not covered by the JMMI, but it helps identify which entry points are most relevant for specific commodities.

For JMMI data, this implies that the full effects of border closures are unlikely to appear immediately in vendor-level survey responses. Impacts are more likely to be observed with a delay, once reduced inflows begin to affect stocks, prices, or availability at provincial wholesale hubs and then filter down to local markets, particularly in more remote areas or those with limited alternative supply routes. The next section therefore draws more heavily on secondary sources to better contextualize other trends affecting Afghan markets.

Map 2: Most commonly reported border crossings by proportion (size) and dominant item type (color) for surveyed vendors since November 2024. Note that due to JMMI sampling proportions and dominant items per border crossing should be considered indicative, and for items covered by the JMMI only.



Shocks

A Fifth Year of Drought

Prolonged drought has significantly reduced domestic food production in Afghanistan, increasing reliance on imports while weakening household resilience. With 2025 marking the fifth consecutive year of drought, farmers experienced sharply reduced harvests, contributing to a forecasted grain gap of up to 3 million tonnes after the July harvest.[6] While imports are required even in years of adequate production, wheat prices increased following the harvest, although vendor reports suggest that imports have at least partially filled the supply gap. Despite this, drought is likely to undermine households' ability to meet food needs through both own production and income generation. Agriculture remains a central pillar of livelihoods, accounting for roughly one third of food consumption nationally and just under half of household income according to WoAA, with dependence even higher among rural households.[7] As a result, drought is likely to disproportionately affect rural livelihoods, especially in areas where reliance on agriculture for income or own production is particularly high, such as the Northeastern, Central Highland, and Southern regions.[8]

At the same time, the outlook for the coming months remains bleak. Seasonal forecasts indicate that precipitation is expected to be below average, affecting winter wheat planting and suggesting that drought impacts on own production are likely to persist, if not intensify.[9] This is consistent with the latest IPC Acute Food Insecurity (AFI) analysis, which indicates that around one quarter of the population is currently facing Crisis-level food insecurity, with conditions expected to deteriorate further during the winter lean season in the months ahead.[10]

On top of this, the cost of mitigating drought impacts is far beyond the reach of most affected households. FAO estimates that the per-household cost of lifesaving interventions to protect livelihoods ranges from around USD 170 for cash and certified wheat seed to USD 220 for cash and livestock feed for livestock-keeping households, equivalent to roughly two thirds or three quarters of the November 2025 Minimum Expenditure Basket, respectively.[11] This indicates that self-recovery is effectively impossible for households already in need of assistance, even before accounting for seasonal forecasts.

Earthquakes

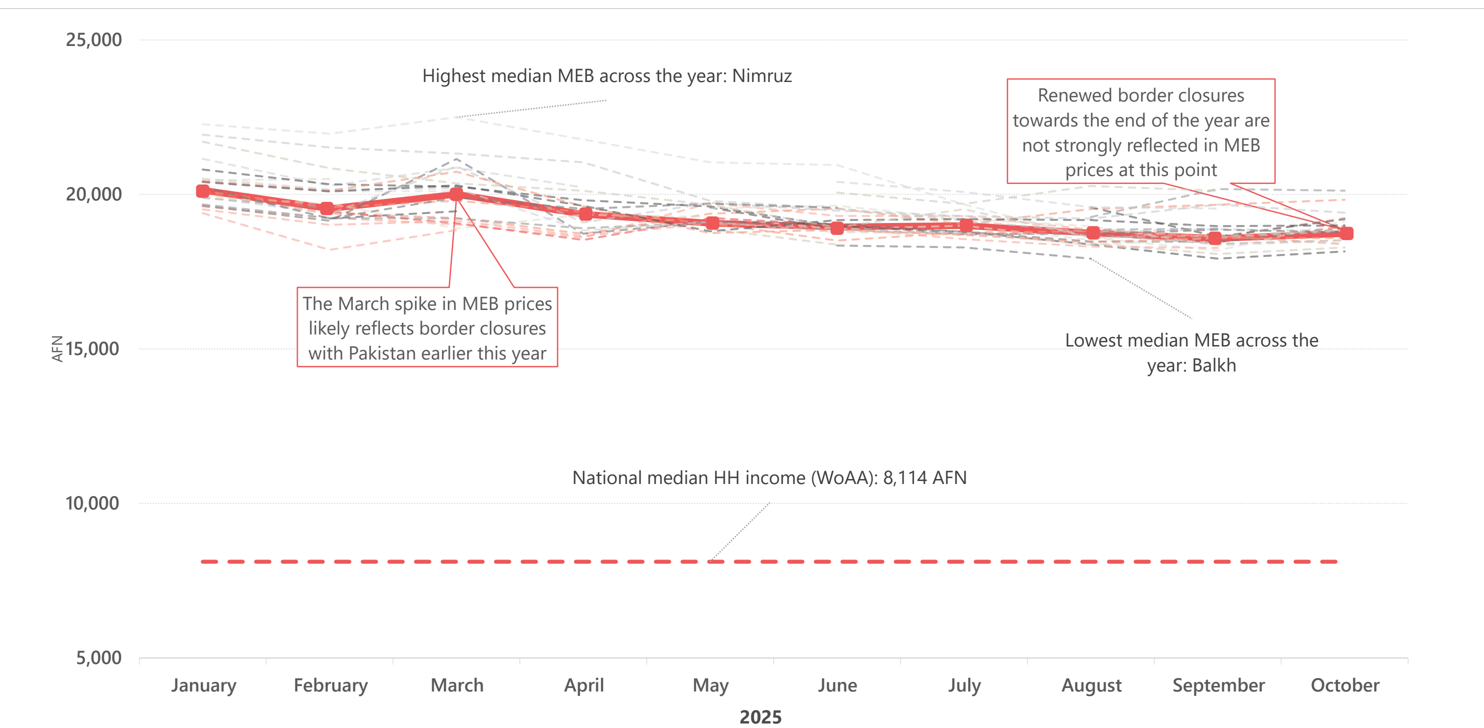
In addition to drought, two earthquakes in 2025 further eroded household resilience, particularly in agriculturally dependent areas. Beyond human casualties, the August earthquake in the Eastern region caused widespread destruction of housing and agricultural assets, disrupting livelihoods and essential services. The World Bank estimates direct economic damage at just over one percent of Afghanistan's 2023 GDP, with most losses concentrated in Kunar and Nangarhar, likely constraining households' ability to access essential items even where market supply remains present.[12]

A second earthquake in November affected parts of Balkh and Samangan, areas already severely impacted by drought and reliant on rainfed agriculture. FAO reports indicate that around one third of households in northern rainfed areas experienced catastrophic post-harvest losses and widespread distress sales, pointing to compounding shocks that further limit households' capacity to afford and access essential goods.[13]

Continuing Economic Hardship

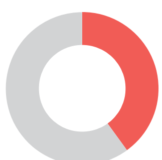
Economic conditions remain fragile and are being further strained by reductions in humanitarian assistance, the impacts of which were detailed in earlier JMMI analysis.[14] Fewer than three percent of the population currently receive food assistance, and coverage is expected to decline further.[15] Against this backdrop, WoAA data point to widespread household-level economic distress, with roughly three quarters of households nationally reporting negative coping strategies such as borrowing, reducing health expenditures, or drawing down savings.[16] These pressures are particularly pronounced among female-headed households and recent returnees, who are more likely than average to rely on borrowing and cut health spending, while having less scope to sell productive assets or reduce agricultural inputs. This leaves many households highly exposed to even modest increases in the prices of essential goods. Income and expenditure patterns reinforce this vulnerability, with the median monthly household income standing at around 8,100 AFN nationally, below the October JMMI median MEB, while in Ghor median income of roughly 4,500 AFN falls even below the cost of the food basket alone. At the same time, households report average monthly expenditures that exceed income, with food accounting for the largest share by a wide margin, followed by rent and other frequent non food needs. With most resources already absorbed by food purchases (around 65%), limited room remains to absorb price shocks or maintain spending on other essential items, suggesting that market availability alone does not translate into effective access for a large share of households.

Figure 1: Median MEB prices (AFN) in 2025. Dotted lines represent provinces (except where otherwise indicated), while red indicates national-level prices. MEB prices come from JMMI data, HH income data from the 2025 WoAA.



Returnee Influx and Rising Housing Prices

Mass deportations and returns from neighboring countries have added further strain to already fragile urban markets. By late 2025, more than 2.6 million Afghans had returned from Iran and Pakistan, sharply increasing population pressure in major urban centers.[17] This sudden influx has contributed to a housing shortage in cities such as Kabul and Herat, where rents reportedly doubled compared with the previous year.[18] WoAA household expenditure patterns suggest that shelter already represents a significant share of household spending, and rising rents therefore directly undermine affordability for essential goods. Recent returnees and poorer urban renters are particularly affected, facing higher housing costs alongside weaker income opportunities, especially for unskilled labor.[19] Together, these dynamics further constrain household purchasing power and access to essentials, even where markets remain supplied.



At a national level, median HH expenditure for rent represents **40%** of median HH income.

Border Closures

Fuel prices, which had increased earlier in the year amid geopolitical tensions, appear to have stabilized by late 2025, returning to levels observed earlier in the year, likely reflecting the resumption of fuel imports from Iran.[20] At the same time, renewed tensions with Pakistan have led to periodic closures of key crossings such as Torkham and Spin Boldak/ Chaman, again disrupting the flow of certain goods and posing risks to market availability despite attempts to shift supply lines towards other neighbouring countries.[21] Disruptions have also affected pharmaceutical supply chains following a ban on medicine imports from Pakistan, which previously supplied around half of the market. Replacement imports from India are reportedly underway, but effects on prices and availability remain uncertain.[22]

Temporary disruptions to domestic transport have also occurred. These include the brief closure of the Salang highway for maintenance in October, a critical corridor linking northern and southern markets, which may affect availability or contribute to price increases with a lag in regions reliant on interregional trade.[23] These risks are partially offset by Afghanistan's increasing trade orientation toward northern neighbors and Central Asia, alongside new trade agreements and planned investments in cold storage infrastructure. Over time, these developments could improve the availability of domestically produced food items, though impacts are unlikely to be immediate.[24]

Currency Fluctuations

In late 2025, the Afghani strengthened slightly against the U.S. dollar and other major trading partner currencies, improving the local currency cost of imports.[25] This likely helped ease some price pressure on imported essentials such as food, fuel, and medicines, supporting market supply. At the same time, Afghanistan's lower inflation compared to neighboring countries meant that this currency appreciation did not reduce competitiveness or push up domestic prices.[26] While these trends may have helped stabilize markets, any benefits for households were likely limited by low incomes and ongoing economic stress, meaning affordability of essential goods remains a concern.

Conclusion

Overall, markets for essential goods in Afghanistan remain largely functional, with most items available despite significant seasonal pressures and multiple shocks over the past year. Markets have largely continued to function, but households face compounding pressures from drought, earthquakes, weak incomes, and high essential expenditures that reduce their ability to afford what is available. However, resilience is uneven and increasingly constrained by thin stock buffers, localized supply disruptions, and declining household purchasing power, meaning that market availability does not consistently translate into effective access for vulnerable populations. As winter conditions intensify and economic and climatic pressures persist, even relatively small disruptions to supply or prices could have disproportionate impacts on households with limited coping capacity.

Endnotes

1 Xinhua News Agency. Afghanistan achieves self-sufficiency in salt production, bans import. July 2025.

2 *While little data oral health practices in Afghanistan exists, a number of studies as recent as this year have engaged on this topic with Afghans resettled to other countries, see* Frontiers in Public Health. Oral health practices among Afghans resettled abroad. 2025.

3 WFP. Afghanistan Monthly Market Report Issue 66. November 2025.

4 TOLOnews. Herat Residents Struggle with Rising Fuel Costs as Winter Sets In. December 2025.

5 AMU TV. Families in Badghis struggle as winter sets in. November 2025.

6 FAO GIEWS. Afghanistan Country Brief. 2025.

7 REACH Afghanistan. Whole of Afghanistan Assessment. 2025.

8 REACH Afghanistan. Whole of Afghanistan Assessment. 2025.

9 USGS FEWS NET. Afghanistan Early Warning Product 603. 2025.

10 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. Afghanistan IPC Country Analysis. December 2025.

11 FAO. Afghanistan Worsening Drought Urgent Call for Assistance. 2025.

12 World Bank. Global Rapid Post-Disaster Damage Estimation (GRADE) Report. September 2025.

13 FAO. Afghanistan Worsening Drought Urgent Call for Assistance. 2025.

14 REACH Afghanistan. JMMI Quarterly Situation Overview. April 2025.

15 Integrated Food Security Phase Classification. Afghanistan IPC Country Analysis. December 2025.

16 REACH Afghanistan. Whole of Afghanistan Assessment. 2025.

17 UN OCHA. Afghanistan Humanitarian Needs and Response Plan 2026. 2025

18 Arab News. Influx of Afghan returnees from Pakistan, Iran fuel Kabul housing crisis. 2025.

19 ReliefWeb. Afghanistan Monthly Market Report Issue 66. November 2025.

20 ReliefWeb. Afghanistan Monthly Market Report Issue 66. November 2025.

21 Reuters. Afghanistan shifts trade to Iran route to avoid Pakistan closures. November 2025.

22 Afghanistan International. India Pledges Long-Term Pharmaceutical Support For Afghanistan. December 2025.

23 Ministry of Public Works Afghanistan. Announcement regarding closure of Salang Highway. October 2025.

24 Ariana News. Afghanistan grants five year tax exemption to boost cold storage investment. December 2025.

25 World Bank. Afghanistan Economic Monitor. October 2025.

26 World Bank. Afghanistan Economic Monitor. October 2025.