

PAKISTAN'S PERSISTING FOOD SECURITY WOES

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(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)



FOOD SECURITY

According to World Population Review estimates, Pakistan's current population stands at approximately 235 million and counting.¹ Its birth rate (22 births/ 1000 people) is one of the highest in the world. Furthermore, Pakistan's growth rate (population) is about 2.1% higher as compared to other countries in the region.

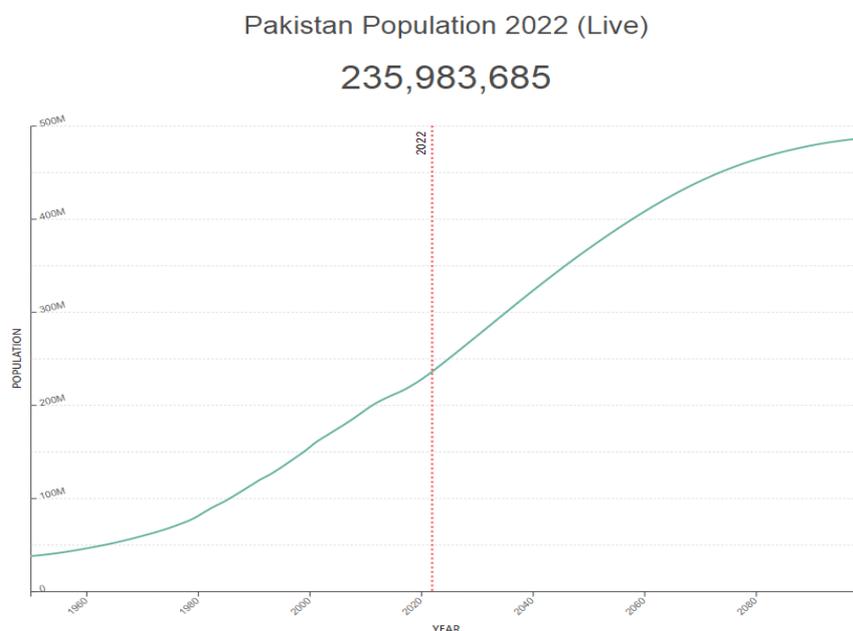


Figure 1.0: Pakistan's Population Live 2022 (WPR)

1 Pakistan Population 2022 (Live), World Population Review, accessed on September 02, 2022. <https://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/pakistan-population>

It is projected that Pakistan's population will cross the threshold of 360 million (367.8 million) by year 2050. With a total land area of 770,880 km², Pakistan's population density is 287/km².² This is an alarming figure given Pakistan's burgeoning population, limited resources and territorial area.

The surging population has put overwhelming pressure on multiple national systems such as water, sanitation, health, education, transport etc. which are crumbling under it. However, the system that is facing the most stress is Pakistan's food system. The country is facing an acute food insecurity which is predicted to worsen in the coming months.

The situation has been made worse by the devastating torrential rains and the subsequent floods that have swept the country since mid-June. Large swaths of farmland is now under water. One-third of the country is now flooded. Crops and stockpiles have been washed away, rice and cotton crops have been damaged, along with kitchen staple vegetables such as tomatoes and onions.³

Economists estimate the direct crop loss due to flood damage in Pakistan to be worth \$2.3 billion.⁴

Even before the havoc wreaked by the recent floods, Pakistan was facing a serious food crisis and the country was experiencing a wheat shortage of about 2.6 million tonnes.⁵

Despite dwindling strategic food stockpiles/ reserves in the country, rising inflation (27%), steep rise in food items' prices (5x rise in cost of tomatoes, 3x rise in cost of onions over last month), combined with the destruction of vital crops and increasing uncertainty/ threats to wheat plantation in the coming month of October, there seems to be a serious lack of urgency to address the challenge of food shortage in the short term and food security of the country in the long term by the competent authorities and leadership.

The impacts of climate change, combined with various other non-traditional challenges such as water scarcity, environmental degradation and population explosion have adversely affected food

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- 2 "Pakistan", Worldometer, accessed on September 02, 2022.
[https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/pakistan-population/#:~:text=Pakistan%202020%20population%20is%20estimated,\(and%20dependencies\)%20by%20population.](https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/pakistan-population/#:~:text=Pakistan%202020%20population%20is%20estimated,(and%20dependencies)%20by%20population.)
 - 3 Mangi & Dilawar, "Pakistan's Food Security Threatened by Massive Flooding", TIME, published on August 31, 2022. <https://time.com/6209889/pakistan-food-floods/>
 - 4 "Deadly floods swamp farms in Pakistan, flushing away crops", The News, published on September 01, 2022.
<https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/987211-deadly-floods-swamp-farms-in-pakistan-flushing-away-crops>
 - 5 Mangi & Dilawar, "Deadly Floods Inundate Farms in Pakistan, Flushing Away Crops", TIME, published on August 31, 2022.
<https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2022-08-31/deadly-floods-inundate-farms-in-pakistan-flushing-away-crops>

security of Pakistan in multiple ways ranging from low yields, destruction of crops to increase in the country's agricultural import bill and revisions in the government's international procurement intentions for upcoming months.

Developments in the international arena such as the Russia-Ukraine War further added to Pakistan's problems with food and fertiliser imports completely halting due to the ongoing hostilities, price hikes and disruption of global supply chains.⁶

In March 2022, the Government of Pakistan forecast for wheat production for 2022/2023 was at 26.4 million metric tonnes (MMT) which was 3.6 lower than 2021/2022 owing to decline in harvested areas and low yield. Rice production was forecasted at 9 MMT while corn production at 8.9 MMT.⁷

However, these estimates had to be revised only after 3 months in July 2022. Wheat production forecast remained unchanged (26.4 MMT) while its import was increased from 2 to 2.5 MMT for the same time period. Due to water shortages in key producing areas, the rice production forecast was reduced from 9 to 8.6 MMT.⁸

Now with the lurking food shortage in Pakistan, question arises about what is the government doing in this regard.

In the first week of July this year, the federal government approved a plan to import 1 million tonnes of wheat from private parties through international competitive bidding.⁹ Two orders/ contracts were awarded for 500,000 tonnes each for wheat amounting to \$258 million and \$220 million respectively.

The government had instructed the TCP to import 3 MMT of wheat with 2 MMT to come through Government-to-Government (G2G) and 1 MMT via open international tendering. Till July, Pakistan

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- 6 Muhammad Taimur Fahad Khan, "Russia-Ukraine Grain Export Deal & its Significance for Global Food Security", Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), Issue Brief, published on August 23, 2022. <https://issi.org.pk/issue-brief-on-russia-ukraine-grain-export-deal-its-significance-for-global-food-security/>
 - 7 Asmat Raza, "Grain and Feed Annual Report - Pakistan", US Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agriculture Service, Post-Islamabad, Report Number PK2022-0006, published on March 22, 2022. https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Grain%20and%20Feed%20Annual_Islamabad_Pakistan_PK2022-0006.pdf
 - 8 Asmat Raza, "Grain and Feed Update Report - Pakistan", US Department of Agriculture, Foreign Agriculture Service, Post-Islamabad, Report Number PK2022-0008, published on July 01, 2022. https://apps.fas.usda.gov/newgainapi/api/Report/DownloadReportByFileName?fileName=Grain%20and%20Feed%20Update_Islamabad_Pakistan_PK2022-0008.pdf
 - 9 Munawar Hasan, "Pakistan gets offer in 300,000T wheat import tender", The News International, published on July 20, 2022. <https://www.thenews.com.pk/print/975052-pakistan-gets-offers-in-300-000t-wheat-import-tender>

was facing wheat shortage of 4 MMT and till now only 1 MMT has been arranged via open tendering (2 contracts) as mentioned earlier.

In June, the government mentioned that it was stressing to import wheat from Russia and it was even in talks with the Russian authorities for wheat imports of 2 MMT at affordable rates.

However, the G2G talks between Pakistan and Russia fell through due to disagreement over the rate of per tonne price of wheat.¹⁰ There's still a shortage of 3 MMT of wheat in the country with the government scrambling for new wheat sources/ suppliers.

Ukraine was a great source of wheat for Pakistan till the Russian invasion of the country in late February this year. But despite the war, a landmark grain deal was signed between Russia and Ukraine brokered by Türkiye and the UN on July 22, 2022 which allowed Ukraine to export grain via its 3 Black Sea ports to the international market.¹¹

Pakistan can capitalise on this opportunity and place an order or sign a deal for wheat import with Ukraine in order to address its wheat shortage and mitigate its food insecurity problem. Upon inquiry from the relevant official sources privy to this matter, it was revealed to the author that no such deal was either discussed or underway between Pakistan and Ukraine for the import of Ukrainian grain (wheat).

Bangladesh, on the other hand is set to import 500,000 tonnes of wheat from Russia, supply of which will take place in January next year.¹² The country had already acquired 100,000 tonnes of wheat from India, despite the Indian ban on grain exports as the former acquired letter of credit (LC) before the ban came into force in May.

Conclusion

With the increasing demand of primary food products, particularly wheat & rice in Pakistan, it is the need of the hour to conclude grain import deals immediately. Although there is a trend of wheat

10 Shahzad Paracha, "Govt decides against importing wheat from Russia", Pakistan Today Profit, published on August 31, 2022.

<https://profit.pakistantoday.com.pk/2022/08/31/govt-decides-against-importing-wheat-from-russia/>

11 Muhammad Taimur Fahad Khan, "Russia-Ukraine Grain Export Deal & its Significance for Global Food Security", Institute of Strategic Studies Islamabad (ISSI), Issue Brief, published on August 23, 2022.

<https://issi.org.pk/issue-brief-on-russia-ukraine-grain-export-deal-its-significance-for-global-food-security/>

12 Ruma Paul, "Bangladesh set to import 500,000 T of wheat from Russia", Reuters, published on August 28, 2022.

<https://www.reuters.com/article/bangladesh-russia-wheat/update-1-bangladesh-set-to-import-500000-t-of-wheat-from-russia-sources-idUKL1N30407E>

prices decreasing globally but due to the volatility of the global food market at the moment, this trend cannot be relied upon for long.

Pakistan should make the most of the opportunity of grain imports offered by the Russia-Ukraine grain export deal.

Damages to Pakistan's food supplies due to floods have to be rectified carefully which has resulted in boosting Pakistan's food import needs and resultantly increased pressure on the global agricultural market that is already in stress. The floods have also posed serious threats to the wheat planting in the coming month of October which can result in disrupting global grain supply once again which the world is not in a position to afford.

Climate change along with other non-traditional threats such as water scarcity, population explosion and environment degradation pose increasing threats and challenges to Pakistan's food security.

Expeditious redressal of environmental, industrial, administrative and political challenges to Pakistan's food security is required on an emergency basis. The concerned authorities and leadership need to take Pakistan's food security challenges seriously and respond to the threats it faces on a priority basis because it has the potential to become a genuine and overwhelming national security threat if not tackled amicably in time.