

# UNPRECEDENTED ACUTE HUNGER AFFECTS MILLIONS OF PEOPLE IN CAMEROON

December 2023

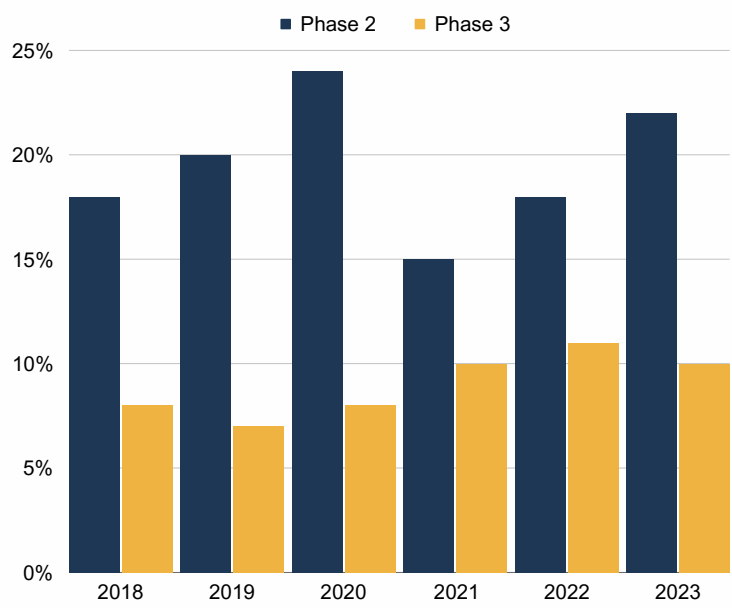


Photo: Pouhe Patricia/NRC

## Food Security trend in Cameroon

*"I am living with 11 family members including my 3 children and my wife. Since we were forced to flee our village in 2018, it is difficult to get even white rice to eat, and with 11 people in our small house, it is unbearable",* says Booba, a 37-year-old internally displaced man from Belo division in the Northwest region of Cameroon.

The past years have seen a deterioration of the humanitarian situation, putting further strain on an already stretched humanitarian system, especially with the impact of COVID-19 in 2020, as millions of businesses have had to shut down either temporarily or permanently. In this increasingly fragmented and polarized context, civilians pay the highest price. It is imperative to always protect civilians and ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches all people in need in a timely, safe, and effective manner.



Evolution of the food security situation in Cameroon 2018 - 2023 Source : WFP Global Report on Food Crises

In Cameroon, the continuous high levels of insecurity in the Northwest and Southwest regions, the persistence of NSAG incursions in the Far North, the rise in conflicts over natural resources (water, pastures, etc.), and floods (in the Far North, North and West) continue to have a severe impact on food security. According to the recent results of the Cadre Harmonisé (October 2023), 10.6% of people are facing acute food insecurity in Cameroon, which represents 2,940,807 persons. In addition, the Mid-Year Update for the 2023 [Global Report against Food Crises](#), reveals that 22% and 10% of the population are respectively in phase 2 and 3 of acute food insecurity in 2023\*. This represents a significant increase, given that in 2022 only 11% of the population was in phase 2, and 10% in 2021.

From June to August 2023, 2.36 million people were projected to face Crisis or Worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) conditions in Cameroon, reflecting 9% of the analyzed population. Not to mention that as of December 2023, the prevalence of crisis or above-crisis level food-based coping strategies in Cameroon was 36,96%, while prevalence of insufficient food consumption, poor and borderline food consumption score in Cameroon, was 40.07%. As conflict and insecurity is a main driver of acute food insecurity, the situation is precarious in the Northwest and Southwest regions, plagued by a socio-political crisis, and in the Far North, North, Littoral, West and East regions, where internally displaced persons and refugees put a strain on household stocks, and on productive resources of host households.

## Food-based coping strategies

Due to the deterioration in livelihoods, the worst affected households are likely to be forced to adopt negative coping mechanisms:

**In the Far North region**, many households are resorting to unsustainable coping mechanisms such as borrowing and selling remaining productive assets to pay for essential non-food expenses such as school fees or medical care. 117,738 refugees and people who have been displaced by conflicts and floods have reported not being able to produce food or access humanitarian food assistance. As a result, they are likely 992 094 people which continue facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes. Added to this is the fact that some people are forced to steal other people's crops, creating mistrust, and reinforcing violence within communities;

**In the Northwest and Southwest regions**, the crisis has put the resilience of affected communities at risk, reinforcing their already limited ability to meet basic needs in terms of food or education. In terms of acute food insecurity, 508 480 people continue to be in crisis situation (IPC phase 3). In addition, the declining value of household incomes and the lack of opportunities for agricultural activities due to the lack of access to land are forcing many is putting many households' self-reliance at risk;

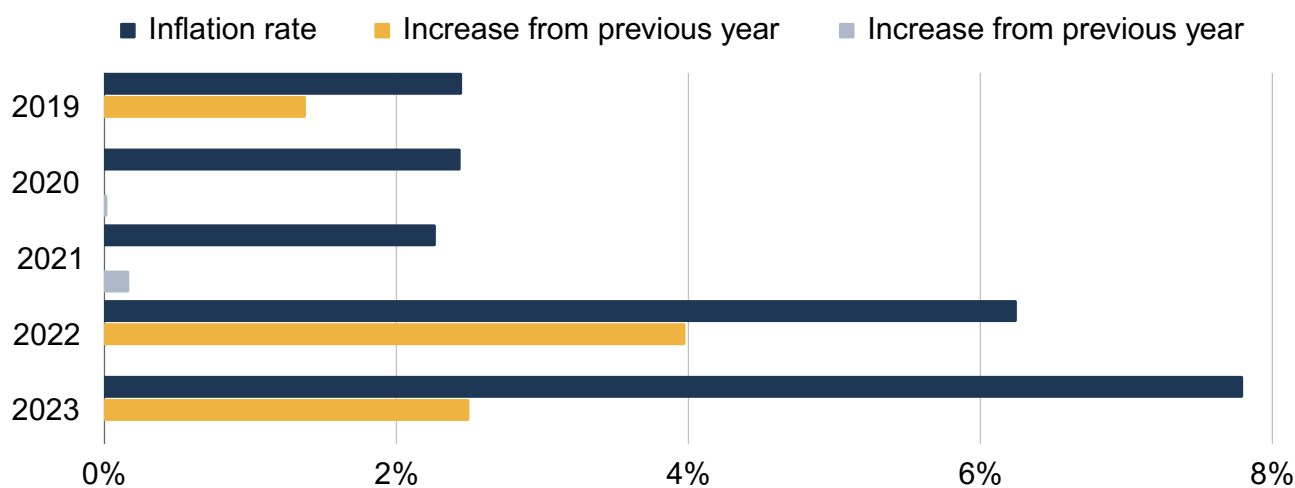
**In the East region**, the food insecurity situation has been greatly impacted by the influx of Central African refugees. In addition to this, the WFP' ration cuts, implemented since 2022, put the affected population, especially women and children, in a highly vulnerable situation, increasing their exposure to food insecurity and malnutrition, and with risk of exacerbating conflicts in fragile localities where refugees and host communities share limited resources and services.

In all those crisis contexts, the general protection situation is worsening, movement and access to land are severely restricted, inter-community tensions rising, protection risks for women and children significantly worsening, and more families are forced to adopt harmful coping mechanisms. Women are more likely to become victims of sexual violence, more children are taken out of school, girls forced into early marriage, and young men forcibly recruited. At the same time, humanitarian organisations are struggling to effectively respond to these shocks. This is particularly the case for early warning and anticipatory action, which is essential to reduce the cross-cutting impact of repeated crises, not only on food security but also other important areas such as health and sanitation.

## Inflation-trends

According to the National Institute of Statistics (INS), Cameroon's inflation rate rose to an average of 7.8 percent by August 2023, compared to 6.3 percent in August 2022. This rate exceeds the three percent threshold set by the Central African Economic and Monetary Community (CEMAC).

\*Differentiation between different levels of severity of acute food insecurity, classifying units of analysis in five distinct phases: (1) Minimal/None, (2) Stressed, (3) Crisis, (4) Emergency, (5) Catastrophe/Famine



Evolution of inflation rate in Cameroon 2019 - 2023  
Source : <https://www.macrotrends.net/>

Despite the government's efforts to control inflationary pressures, including a ban on grain exports since December 2021, food prices increased by an average of 13.3 percent during the same period and continue to be the main driver of high inflation in Cameroon. Prices of imported food commodities such as rice, wheat, and edible oil continued to rise throughout the country, surpassing the previous year's and even the five-year average. The most recent data (FEWS NET Cameroon Food Security Outlook October 2023 - May 2024) shows that as of September 2023, prices of sorghum and maize in Maroua, Mora, Kaele, and Yagoua markets for example, were more than 50 percent higher than last year and close to 70 percent higher than the previous five-year average. Similarly, corn prices in Buea, Bamenda and Kumba were 10% to 19% higher than last year, and well above the five-year average.

**In this context, it is crucial to invest more in early warning and preparedness, including anticipatory action, to mitigate the impact on vulnerable populations at the same time to revise with communities and technical services the agricultural seasonal calendar in Far North and Northwest and Southwest regions. Suggested action includes cash assistance, strategic livestock destocking, vaccinations, or seeds distribution. Despite an increasing acknowledgement of the link between food insecurity and climate change, efforts to support those worst affected are still insufficient.**

## Recommendations

- 1 - Government should increase the budget allocated to National Response Plan** through the mobilization of national financial resources dedicated to humanitarian response and monitor the implementation of this plan with a transparent and inclusive mechanism;
- 2 - Government should sustain and support monitoring of food and nutrition insecurity and early warning and response systems**, especially in hard-to-reach areas, and monitor availability of local and national food stock like rice or maize banks, by setting up and making operational the system for preventing and managing food and nutritional crises in Cameroon;
- 3 - Government should develop and implement timely emergency programs to provide immediate food and nutritional assistance to food and nutritionally insecure populations** (phases 3 to 5) to save lives and prevent the risk of malnutrition among children in the poorest households in the countries concerned, particularly those affected by civil insecurity and/or economic crisis;
- 4 - Humanitarian donors should maintain their financial support, through flexible and multiyear fundings for a multi-sectoral response**, while requiring the inclusion of risks mitigation into all programs and reinforcing durable solutions and links between humanitarian and development programs. In particular, increase support to protection activities by prioritizing cross-cutting elements such as access to housing, land and property;
- 5 - Development donors must increase their support to address the root causes of the crises**, including by prioritizing investments in early warning, preparedness and anticipatory action. Humanitarian aid alone cannot solve these crises nor build towards durable solutions.