

September 12, 2022

# Pakistan's 2022 Floods and Implications for U.S. Interests

## Overview

In mid-June 2022, at the beginning of monsoon season, heavy rains began flooding areas of Pakistan. Estimates range from double to several times the normal monsoon rainfall. By late August, flooding had worsened to historic and catastrophic levels, reportedly affecting more than 33 million people, injuring at least 13,000 and killing more than 1,300. With more than one-third of the country reportedly submerged, agricultural losses appear to be extensive, affecting housing, infrastructure, and livelihoods. Pakistan's government has estimated the cost of flood damage at \$30 billion and cut its projected annual economic growth for this fiscal year from 5% to 3%.

Successive U.S. Administrations have described a stable, democratic, and prosperous Pakistan as critical to U.S. interests. This crisis may have U.S. security implications. Responding to this disaster is taxing a Pakistani government already struggling with political upheaval, worsening economic and debt crises, unsettled civil-military relations, and rising public discontent. Regional stability and efforts to counter militancy and terrorism are U.S. concerns; both may face negative impacts from the current crises. For example, following 2010 flooding, some banned Pakistani terrorist groups apparently were at the forefront of rural relief efforts and could gain popular support through such activities; Pakistan's government denies that any banned groups are involved in flood relief in 2022. Congress may wish to consider whether or not U.S. assistance in response to the catastrophic floods would serve U.S. interests, including economic and security objectives.

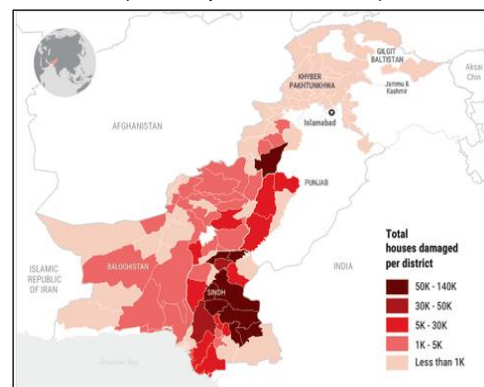
## Flood Damage—Initial Assessments

Pakistan's National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) is the lead federal agency for disaster relief coordination, including relief operations supported by Pakistan's army, navy, and air force. So far, the provinces of Sindh and Balochistan appear most affected (see **Figure 1**). As of September 9, 2022, the NDMA is reporting the following damage due to flooding since June 14, 2022:

- 1,396 persons killed (39% Sindh, 20% Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or KP, 21% Balochistan, 14% Punjab) and 12,728 injured;
- Affected population: more than 33 million (44% Sindh, 28% Balochistan, 13% KP, 15% Punjab);
- Rescued population: 177,265 (43% Punjab, 39% KP)
- Population in official government of Pakistan displacement sites: 663,869 (87% Sindh);
- Livestock deaths: more than 750,000 (67% Balochistan, 27% Punjab);
- Damaged homes: more than 1.7 million (87% Sindh);

- Damaged roads: more than 4,100 miles (39% Sindh, 24% KP, 23% Balochistan); damaged bridges: 269 (40% KP, 26% Gilgit-Baltistan, 23% Sindh).

**Figure 1. Homes Damaged in Pakistan's 2022 Flooding**  
(as of September 1, 2022)



**Source:** U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs.

## Humanitarian Needs

Pakistan's affected populations reportedly are in dire need of relief supplies, including shelter, food, and water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH). Experts say that floods are likely to exacerbate food availability across the country, particularly for those already experiencing food insecurity. More than 600,000 people have taken refuge in official Government of Pakistan displacement sites, but the number of people displaced without shelter is likely much higher. The United Nations (U.N.) reports that, of those displaced, many are staying as close to their homes and the affected areas as possible due to concerns that lack of land ownership documentation could prevent future returns. In many affected areas the humanitarian response has been hampered by damaged roads and bridges. Humanitarian organizations assert that maternal health and protection from gender-based violence are also of concern, as well as an increased risk of vector-borne disease (such as malaria) and water-borne disease (including diarrhea and cholera) along with threats from venomous wildlife such as poisonous snakes. The floods also may exacerbate preexisting outbreaks of coronavirus disease (COVID-19) and other medical conditions, particularly as vaccine campaigns are suspended and access to care is limited.

## National and International Responses

**Government of Pakistan.** Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif said he intends to set up a National Flood Response and Coordination Center to facilitate a multiagency response in coordination with the NDMA. So far, the government has established 147 camps for populations displaced by the floods. Pakistan is planning to provide cash assistance to

those affected, while provincial governments may redirect development funds to flood relief. It also has verified several fund-raising agencies on the GoFundMe website.

**International Responses.** On August 30, 2022, the United Nations issued a Flash Humanitarian Appeal for \$160 million to support an Islamabad-led “Pakistan 2022 Floods Response.” The appeal identifies 5.2 million people particularly in urgent need of humanitarian assistance, including “food, water, sanitation, emergency education, protection and health support.” On a recent visit to Pakistan, the U.N. Secretary-General António Guterres called for “massive” international support. International relief agencies have launched separate funding appeals. International financial institutions reportedly have pledged \$500 million toward Pakistan disaster relief and development, with the vast majority coming from the World Bank and the Asian Development Bank.

## U.S. Response

On August 12, 2022, U.S. Ambassador to Pakistan Donald Blome issued a disaster declaration and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) released \$100,000 in immediate humanitarian assistance. USAID also activated a Disaster Assistance Response Team in Pakistan to assess the impact of the floods and a Response Management Team (based in Washington, DC) to coordinate U.S. government flood response efforts. On August 30, USAID announced an additional \$30 million in humanitarian assistance, stating that U.S. assistance would “prioritize urgently needed food support, safe water, sanitation and hygiene improvements, financial help, and shelter assistance.” From Islamabad on September 9, USAID Administrator Power announced a further \$20 million in humanitarian assistance. Previously in FY2022, USAID also provided \$3 million in Early Recovery, Risk Reduction, and Resilience funding. On September 8, the Department of Defense U.S. Central Command began air operations to transport USAID relief supplies from USAID’s Dubai warehouse to Pakistan to support USAID-led humanitarian response operations.

Bilateral U.S. development assistance to Pakistan—estimated at \$71 million for FY2022, with \$84 million requested for FY2023—is expected to continue, including over \$1 million in grants and project support provided earlier in August, and with programs adapting, in part, to address the long-term impact of the 2022 floods.

## Environmental and Governance Issues

Pakistan suffers from multiple environmental and governance challenges that potentially worsen natural disasters, including flooding. A World Bank *Vulnerability Assessment* found that “Pakistan faces some of the highest disaster risk levels in the world, ranked 18 out of 191 countries by the 2019 Inform Risk Index.” The study estimates Pakistan’s average annual losses to flooding have been around \$1 billion.

In the summer of 2010, the country experienced the most catastrophic flooding in its history until then, a disaster that officially killed more than 1,700 persons, affected more than 20% of the land area and 20 million people, and caused billions of dollars in damage. According to a

*Scientific American* assessment later that year, the scale of Pakistan’s flooding that year was “made worse by a history of deforestation and land-use changes in the affected areas.” Analysts estimate that Pakistan’s tree cover has decreased by at least 80% since its 1947 independence. A 2022 study on “recent global warming as a proximate cause of deforestation” found that Pakistan has the second-highest deforestation rate in Asia.

Poor governance and planning, and lack of political will, also might contribute to Pakistan’s vulnerability to floods. Inadequate water management likely played a role. Following the 2010 floods, the government reportedly failed to implement plans that would have reduced the consequences of future floods by preventing rebuilding in and repopulating of flood-prone areas. Laws barring construction too close to river banks apparently were widely violated.

Pakistan’s climate minister is among those positing a causal link between climate change and recent flooding. Some analyses see Pakistan as especially vulnerable to climate-related extreme weather events. A 2021 report by the World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank identified as a major concern the uncertainty of a warming climate’s changes to glacial melt and extreme precipitation. A 2022 U.N. report on “Pathways to Adaptation and Resilience” projects that, in a “worst-case climate change scenario,” Pakistan could realize average annual economic losses equal to more than 9% of its GDP. Yale University’s 2022 *Environmental Performance Index* gave Pakistan an overall ranking of 176<sup>th</sup> of 180 countries, including 175<sup>th</sup> in “climate change mitigation” (mainly regarding reduction of greenhouse gas emissions).

## Issues for Congress

For more than a decade, Congress has annually enacted security- and human rights-related conditions on bilateral aid to Pakistan, and security assistance was suspended in 2018. Congress may consider whether and if so, how to address the crisis in Pakistan through humanitarian or more strategic long-term assistance amid unprecedented global humanitarian need and competing priorities. Congress could consider whether the United States should provide humanitarian assistance through multilateral channels such as the United Nations or nongovernmental implementing partners, and also monitor how the executive branch allocates such assistance. Bilateral development activities could be aligned more closely with U.S. objectives in Pakistan and also channeled through the government. For all U.S. support, Congress could conduct oversight of the delivery challenges encountered, including access and security conditions in Pakistan, which could undermine the effectiveness of humanitarian operations and development aid; and/or assess the flood disaster responses of the Islamabad government and international donors so as to improve ongoing and future disaster preparedness and prevention activities, and to reduce the harm caused by future flood events.

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**K. Alan Kronstadt**, Specialist in South Asian Affairs  
**Rhoda Margesson**, Specialist in International Humanitarian Policy

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