The floods in Pakistan and the global and EU humanitarian responses

SUMMARY

With a population of almost 236 million, Pakistan is the fifth most populous country in the world. The country has been hit by extreme weather events this year. In March and April 2022, an extreme heat wave hit Pakistan and India. This was followed in June by the heaviest monsoon rains in over a century. The rains left a third of the country under water – an area almost three times the size of Portugal. The damage is significant – over 1 600 people have been killed by the rains, floods and landslides, while over 12 850 people have been injured. It is reported that 7.9 million people have been displaced, including some 598 000 currently living in relief camps. In total, it is estimated that more than 33 million people have been affected. On top of the human tragedy, there has also been considerable material damage: over 805 000 houses have been completely destroyed; over 1.2 million houses have been damaged; the communications infrastructure (including 12 700 km of roads) has been severely damaged; 2 million acres of crops have been adversely affected; and 1.1 million livestock have perished.

Pakistan was one of the countries worst affected by climate change in the 2000-2019 period, and this climate-induced crisis has come on top of an ongoing political and economic crisis. The latter has been caused by loose fiscal policies and international developments (inflation, and food and fuel price increases in the context of the Russian invasion of Ukraine). Much of the blame has fallen on the former prime minister for his government’s handling of the economy; the former finance minister recently resigned as well. Given the above, the domestic, international and EU responses to this climate-induced humanitarian crisis are key to limiting the impact of the catastrophe in a vulnerable and populous region.

Relations between the EU and Pakistan are framed by the EU-Pakistan Strategic Engagement Plan of June 2019, the 2021-2027 Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) for Pakistan and the GSP+ trade preference scheme.
The current climate and flooding crisis in Pakistan

The extreme heat wave that hit Pakistan and India in March and April 2022 was followed in June by the heaviest monsoon rains in over a century. According to the OCHA (United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Aid) situation report No 7 of 24 September 2022, over 1 600 people including 79 children, have been killed by the rains, floods and landslides, while over 12 850 people have been injured since mid-June, including 4 000 children. In total, it is estimated that more than 33 million people out of a population of 236 million have been affected. Over 805 000 houses have been completely destroyed, over 1.2 million houses have been damaged, and 1.1 million livestock have perished. Furthermore, 2 million acres of crops have been adversely impacted. The communications infrastructure has been hard hit, with 12 700 km of roads damaged or destroyed. According to the OCHA situation report, 7.9 million people have been displaced, including some 598 000 people now living in relief camps. The report also mentions rising floodwaters in parts of Sindh and Balochistan, and stagnant or receding waters elsewhere.

On 17 September 2022, the World Health Organization (WHO) raised the alarm about a second disaster in the wake of the floods: outbreaks of waterborne and other diseases, such as gastrointestinal infections, dengue fever, diarrhoea, typhoid and malaria, due to the dirty, stagnant and mosquitos-infected waters. Many analysts, and also the United Nations (UN) Resident Coordinator and Humanitarian Coordinator in Pakistan, have attributed the floods to climate change. They observe that the devastating rains have occurred in a country that has done little to cause global warming, but keeps being hit by it. Others have blamed the absence of governmental measures to prevent construction in flood-prone areas and river beds after the 2010 floods, which resulted in the deaths of almost 2 000 people. Pakistan's Climate Change Minister Sherry Rehman blames the inefficiency of the North-South climate deal: 'There is so much loss and damage, with so little reparations to countries that contributed so little to the world's carbon footprint, that obviously the bargain made between the global north and global south is not working'. Pakistan is on the Germanwatch-compiled list of the ten countries worst affected by climate change from 2000 to 2019, while itself being responsible for less than 1 % of global carbon emissions. Bilawal Bhutto Zardari, Pakistan’s Foreign Minister, declared on 1 September that the cost of the damage would exceed current estimates of US$10 billion, and that the crisis was still ongoing – in the rescue and relief phase.

The domestic, global and EU humanitarian responses

Pakistan's response

The government of Pakistan mobilised the local response by establishing the Prime Minister’s Flood Relief Fund to collect donations in Pakistan and abroad. Despite finding itself in the throes of a serious economic crisis (see text box), Pakistan has also, reportedly, released US$113 million to some 1 million flood-affected households, through the Benazir Income Support Programme (BISP) in Balochistan, Sindh, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa and Punjab, according to the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA).

Pakistan’s economic crisis

Pakistan’s loose fiscal policy, coupled with the international food and fuel price shocks caused by the Russian invasion of Ukraine, has resulted in an unsustainable current account deficit, a significant decrease in the country’s foreign reserves (US$9 billion, about six weeks’ worth of imports) and a 30 % depreciation of the currency. Domestically, annual inflation reached 24.9 % in August 2022. This contributed to the ousting of the prime minister, Imran Khan, and the recent resignation of the finance minister, Miftah Ismail.

Sources: International Monetary Fund, Britannica, and Reuters.
Global response

The 2022 Pakistan Floods Response Plan (FRP), an international humanitarian appeal targeting 5.2 million people, was launched jointly on 30 August by the Pakistan government and the UN. The FRP comprises life-saving response activities worth US$160.3 million, which cover food security, assistance for agriculture and livestock, shelter and non-food items, nutrition programmes, primary health services, protection, water and sanitation, women’s health, education support, and shelter for displaced people. According to the OCHA Financial Tracking System and the European Commission’s DG ECHO, the main donors to the FRP in early September were the United States (US), with US$26.1 million (23.9% of the funding), Australia with US$3.6 million, Canada with US$3.4 million, and the UN Central Emergency Response Fund with US$2.7 million. On 9 September, the US announced an additional US$20 million in humanitarian assistance to support the people affected by severe flooding, as a top-up to a former announcement of US$30 million. Simultaneously, the US Department of Defense began airlifting critical life-saving humanitarian supplies throughout Pakistan. On 19 September, the US announced a further US$2 million in humanitarian assistance, for Afghan refugees. On 1 September, the United Kingdom (UK) announced humanitarian support of up to GBP1.5 million.

EU response

The EU has released €2.15 million in humanitarian funding to support families affected by flash floods, through two components of the EU Emergency Toolbox, the acute large emergency response tool (ALERT), for €1.8 million, on 26 August, and the small-scale tool, for €350 000, on 24 August. On 5 September, the EU released new humanitarian funding of €200 000 for the Disaster Response Emergency Fund (DREF), which is administered by the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies. The EU’s Copernicus satellite service has been activated to collect data to support the assessment of the situation in the most affected areas, notably in the Balochistan and Sindh Provinces (support for first responders on the ground with satellite maps in rapid mapping mode). In addition, as with the devastating floods of 2010 to 2015, which affected over 30 million people, the EU activated the European Union civil protection mechanism (EUCPM), upon request for assistance by the Pakistan government, to channel relief items to flood victims.

Offers of rescue personnel and material received as of 5 September from EUMS included: 300 family tents from Belgium and 300 from Sweden; 83 mobile water pumps, 200 family tents, 1 000 groundsheets, 200 kitchen kits, 400 hygiene kits, a team of 8 doctors and nurses, 4 water pump technicians and a bailey bridge from France; a water purification team and plant from Denmark; Austria also offered equipment. The EUCPM has also deployed an EU civil protection team and a liaison officer to help coordinate the arrival of further aid.
Impact of the flood crisis on Pakistan's foreign policy

Pakistan's reliance on external support for relief and rehabilitation efforts will be heavy, according to an analyst from Oxford Analytica. The flood crisis has become a top priority for Pakistan's Prime Minister, Shehbaz Sharif, who was elected on 11 April 2022 to replace Imran Khan. Pakistan can count on significant aid from major actors, mainly the US, China and the Gulf countries, and from the EU. Constraints on Pakistan-US bilateral ties include the fact that 'each country is close to the other's main rival' (Pakistan is growing closer to China, the main strategic rival of the US and the US is growing closer to India, Pakistan's strategic rival). However, an insistence on pointing to developed countries as those mainly responsible for climate change might weaken the goodwill of the international community to offer Pakistan major support to address the flood crisis. The same Oxford Analytica analyst dashes hopes that the current humanitarian urgency might help improve Pakistan-India relations in the longer term. Pakistan itself does not officially expect the flood disaster to lead to better relations with India, despite the message of sympathy tweeted by Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi. On the fringe of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) summit in Samarkand (Uzbekistan) in mid-September, Pakistani Prime Minister Shehbaz Sharif met with Russian President Vladimir Putin, demonstrating that Pakistan is continuing to maintain a balanced foreign policy, through delicate positioning between Washington and Moscow. Putin reportedly told Sharif that Russian gas supplies to Pakistan were possible, and that part of the necessary infrastructure was already in place.

EU-Pakistan relations

In October 2022, the EU and Pakistan celebrate 60 years of bilateral relations. Relations between Pakistan and the EU are framed by the EU-Pakistan Strategic Engagement Plan of June 2019, which links governance, security and development; the Multiannual Indicative Programme (MIP) for Pakistan 2021-2027 and its €265 million development programmes, mainly for green inclusive growth (€172 million, 65% of the MIP amount) under the NDICI-Global Europe Regulation; and the GSP+ trade preference scheme with the EU.

In the European Parliament, a delegation of the Human Rights subcommittee visited Pakistan from 19 to 21 September 2022, to discuss mainly human rights and trade (GSP+). In that context, they expressed their condolences for victims of the floods and their solidarity with the people of Pakistan. They also stressed that Pakistan must undertake timely reforms and legislative changes on human rights issues. The agenda for the October I plenary session includes a point on the humanitarian situation after the devastating floods in Pakistan and the climate crisis (Council and Commission statement).

DISCLAIMER AND COPYRIGHT

This document is prepared for, and addressed to, the Members and staff of the European Parliament as background material to assist them in their parliamentary work. The content of the document is the sole responsibility of its author(s) and any opinions expressed herein should not be taken to represent an official position of the Parliament.

Reproduction and translation for non-commercial purposes are authorised, provided the source is acknowledged and the European Parliament is given prior notice and sent a copy.


Photo credits: © crystaleyestudio / Adobe Stock.

eprs@ep.europa.eu (contact)

www.eprs.eu (intranet)

www.europarl.europa.eu/thinktank (internet)

http://epthinktank.eu (blog)