**Historic Famines**

The following is a table of ‘Great Famines’, defined as those with an estimated death toll of 100,000 or more, between 1870 and 2022, along with a small number of well-known famines with a lower death toll. The list is regularly updated as new research is included.

Note: Mortality estimates marked \* are minimum numbers or ongoing crises. Mortality figures in brackets do not meet the threshold of 100,000 deaths. There are many additional famines of a scale lower than this threshold not included in the list.

**Table of Historic Famines, 1870-2022**

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Date** | **Location** | **Estimated excess deaths** | **Causes**  |
| **“Late Victorian Holocausts” and other famines in colonial India 1870-1914** |
| 1873-74 | India (Bihar) | 100,000+ | Drought-triggered crises, background of colonial dispossession/exploitation and absence of relief |
| 1876-78 | India (Madras, southern India, Bombay) | 6,100,000 |
| 1888-89 | India (north Bihar) | 250,000 |
| 1896-97 | India (Madras, Bombay Deccan, Bengal, Central provinces) | 5,500,000 | El-Nińo droughts, background of colonial dispossession/exploitation, inadequacies of newly-introduced ‘famine codes’ |
| 1899-1901 | India (Bombay, Central Provinces) | 1,000,00 |
| 1906-07 | India (Central Provinces) | 250,000 | Drought, background of colonialism, ‘famine codes’ more effective |
| **Famines in China 1870-1912** |
| 1876-79 | China (Shanzi, Henah, Shandong, Zhili) | 9,000,000 | Drought, weakness of government, legacy of war and colonial disruption |
| 1897-1901 | China (north) | 1,000,000 | El-Nińo drought, weakness of government |
| **Famines, mass starvation and catastrophes in the “Scramble for Africa” and its aftermath** |
| 1885-1908 | Congo Free State | 4,700,000 | Belgian policy of forced labor, forced displacement |
| 1888-92 | Sudan (*Sanat Sita*) | 1,500,000 | War, pillage & requisitioning, forced displacement by Mahdist state in context  |
| 1888-92 | Ethiopia (*Qifu Ken*) | 1,500,000 | Epizootic rinderpest, war, pillage and requisitions,  |
| 1896-1900 | East Africa | 100,000+ | Drought and rinderpest In the context of British and German colonial conquest  |
| 1899-1902 | South Africa (Boer War) | (75,000) | British scorched earth and concentration camps |
| 1904 | German South West Africa | (80,000) | Genocide of the Herero and Nama |
| 1905-07 | Tanganyika (Mau Mau) | 300,000 | German policy of scorched earth, forced displacement, possible genocide |
| 1910-13 | Somali peninsula | 100,000+ | British ‘pacification’ and lawlessness of colonial conquest, pillage |
| **Date** | **Location** | **Estimated excess deaths** | **Causes**  |
| 1913-14 | West African Sahel | 800,000 | Drought, incapacity of colonial state to provide relief |
| 1913-14 | Sudan | 100,000+ | Drought, incapacity of colonial state to provide relief |
| **Other famines 1870-1915** |
| 1870-12 | Persia (Iran) | 500,000 | Triggered by drought, in the context of colonial disruption |
| 1876-19 | Brazil (northeast) | 500,000 | Drought, neo-colonial exploitation |
| **Mass starvation of the Armenians and other minorities in the Ottoman Empire** |
| 1894-16 | Armenians  | 100,000+ | ‘Hamidian’ attacks on Armenians; forced displacement  |
| 1912-23 | Greeks and Assyrians | 200,000  | Forced relocation by Ottoman government, wartime controls |
| 1915-16 | Armenians | 400,000 | Genocide, forced starvation, forced marches |
| 1919 | Armenia | 200,000 | Legacy of war, forced displacement, state weakness |
| **Famines associated with American empire** |
| 1895-98 | Cuba (US-Spanish war) | 155,000 | Counterinsurgency, scorched earth, concentration camps |
| 1899-1902 | Philippines | 775,000 | Counterinsurgency, scorched earth |
| **Mass starvation associated with World War One** |
| 1914-16 | German East Africa  | 300,000 | War, pillage, scorched earth |
| 1914-18 | Serbia and the Balkans | 1,000,000  | War, forced displacement, internment  |
| 1915-18 | Austria-Hungary (Galicia) | 465,000 | War, requisitions, (Russian occupation) |
| 1915-18 | Greater Syria | 500,000 | War, blockade |
| 1917-19 | Germany | 763,000 | Blockade  |
| 1917-19 | Persia | 455,200 | War, requisitions, occupation, economic crisis |
| **Russian and Soviet famines 1890-1933** |
| 1891-12 | Russia | 275,000 | Drought, economic crisis, epidemics |
| 1918-20 | USSR (northern Russia) | 4,000,000 | Economic crisis, failure of markets, war |
| 1921-22 | USSR (southern Russia & Ukraine) | 5,200,000 | Civil war, procurement, drought, epidemics |
| 1931-33 | USSR (Southern Russia) | 1,500,000 | Government policy: food requisitions and collectivization |
| USSR (Ukraine, Holodomor) | 3,000,000 | Initially: food requisitions and collectivization; later: targeted starvation, genocide (disputed) |
| USSR (Kazakhstan) | 1,500,000 | Government policy: food requisitions and collectivization, possibly genocide |
| **Famines in China in the warlord era** |
| 1920-21 | China (Henan, Shanxi, Shandong and Zhili) | 500,000 | Drought, conflict, weakness of government |
| 1928-30 | China (Gansu, Shanxi, Henan, Shandong and Zhili) | 10,000,000 | Drought, locusts, conflict, displacement and collapse in government capacity due to war |
| 1929-30 | China (Hunan) | 2,000,000 | Drought, conflict, collapse in government capacity |
| **Date** | **Location** | **Estimated excess deaths** | **Causes**  |
| **Famines and mass starvation in Asia associated with World War Two** |
| 1934-37 | China (Sichuan) | 5,000,000 | Drought, war, displacement and requisitions |
| 1937-45 | China (Henan, Hebei, Shandong) | 5,000,000  | Chinese nationalists’ destruction of dams, floods, Japanese requisitions, mass displacement |
| 1941-45 | Starvation of Japanese soldiers | 1,400,000 | Failure of rationing, destruction of infrastructure, exhaustion of local food supplies |
| 1942-45 | Indonesia (Java) | 2,400,000 | Japanese occupation, requisitioning |
| 1942-44 | India (Bengal) | 3,000,000 | British war policy of requisitioning, economic extraction, typhoon flooding, relief failure |
| 1944-45 | Vietnam  | 1,000,000 | Typhoon flooding, Japanese requisitioning, French economic policy |
| **Germany’s *Hungerplan* (all in the context of genocidal plan)** |
| 1940-45 | Poland  | 900,000 | Forced starvation: concentration camps, forced labor, requisitions |
| 1941-44 | Soviet PoWs | 3,300,000 | Forced starvation in POW camps, slave labor |
| Siege of Leningrad | 1,000,000 | Siege |
| Ukraine, western Russia & Belarus | 9,000,000 | Forced requisition, forced displacement, scorched earth, slave labor |
| **Other famines and starvation in Europe during and after World War Two**  |
| 1939-42 | Spain | 200,000 | Francoist autarky, Allied blockade, legacy of the civil war |
| 1941-47 | USSR (under Soviet control) | 1,100,000 | Forced labor, extreme food rationing, mass relocation |
| 1941-44 | Greece  | 300,000 | German requisitions, destruction, Allied blockade |
| 1944-45 | Dutch ‘Hunger Winter’ | (23,000) | German flooding, food crisis, Allied blockade |
| 1945-47 | Eastern Europe (displaced & stateless persons) | 250,000 | Forced displacement, lack of relief  |
| 1946-47 | USSR (Moldova, Ukraine, Russia, Belarus) | 1,100,000 | Requisitioning, drought, impact of war |
| **Post-War Communist Famines in Asia** |
| 1958-62 | China (nationwide) | 36,000,000 | Government policy: collectivization and requisitions; response/relief failure |
| 1975 | China (Henan) | 230,000 | Floods, failure of relief |
| 1975-79 | Cambodia | 1,210,000 | Khmer Rouge policies: collectivization, enforced starvation, extermination |
| 1995-97 | North Korea | 330,000 | Floods, drought, failed economic policies |
| **Other 1970s Famines in Asia** |
| 1974 | Bangladesh | 1,500,000 | Floods, legacy of civil war, US cut off in food aid |
| 1975-79 | East Timor | 103,000 | Indonesian counterinsurgency |
| **Date** | **Location** | **Estimated excess deaths** | **Causes**  |
| **Post-colonial Famines in Africa** |
| 1958 | Ethiopia (Tigray) | 100,000 | Drought, relief failure, chronic vulnerability to famine |
| 1969-70 | Nigeria (Biafra) | 1,750,000 | Blockade, war, mass displacement |
| 1969-74 | Sahel (Mauritania, Mali, Niger) | 101,000 | Drought, economic marginalization |
| 1973-74 | Ethiopia (Wollo, Ogaden) | 200,000 | Drought, feudalism, chronic vulnerability to famine, relief failure |
| 1980 | Uganda (Karamoja) | (35,000) | State failure, pillage of livestock |
| 1981-85 | Mozambique  | 300,000 | Counterinsurgency, rebel pillage, drought |
| 1983-85 | Ethiopia (Tigray, Wollo, southern & eastern areas) | 800,000 | Drought, counterinsurgency (north), economic policies (southern and eastern areas), forced resettlement |
| 1984-85 | Sudan (Darfur, Kordofan, Red Sea) | 240,000 | Drought, failed economic policies |
| 2002 | Malawi | (3,000) | Drought, relief failure |
| 2005 | Niger | (40,000) | Drought, relief failure |
| **Humanitarian emergencies, complex catastrophes and war-famines in Africa and the Middle East**  |
| 1988 | Sudan (south and IDPs) | 250,000 | War: scorched earth, pillage, forced displacement, siege, relief failure  |
| 1991-93 | Somalia | 240,000 | War: scorched earth, forced displacement, pillage  |
| 1992-94 | Sudan (Nuba Mountains, Upper Nile) | 225,000 | War: scorched earth, forced displacement, pillage, siege, relief failure, genocide (against Nuba) |
| 1998-89 | Sudan (Bahr al Ghazal) | 100,000 | War: scorched earth, forced displacement, pillage |
| 1998-2007 | Democratic Republic of Congo (eastern) | 290,000 | War, forced displacement, state collapse, pillage |
| 2003-05 | Sudan (Darfur) | 200,000 | Counterinsurgency forced displacement, genocide (disputed)  |
| 2003-06 | Uganda (Acholi areas) | 100,000 | Counterinsurgency, pillage |
| 2011-12 | Somalia (south-central) | 258,000 | Drought, war, economic crisis, relief failure |
| 2012-23\* | Syria | 100,000\* | War, siege, destruction of essential infrastructure |
| 2014-18\* | South Sudan | 193,000+ | War: scorched earth, forced displacement, pillage |
| 2016-19\* | Nigeria (Boko Haram war) | 340,000 | Counterinsurgency, siege, requisitioning |
| 2016-21\* | Yemen | 223,000 | Blockade, war, mass displacement, economic crisis  |
| 2020-23\* | Central African Republic | 100,000\* | War, state failure |
| 2021-23 | Ethiopia (Tigray) | 336,000  | Forced starvation, siege, destruction of essential infrastructure |
| 2023-24\* | Sudan | -- | War, pillage, destruction of infrastructure, mass displacement, relief failure |