

## 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
<b>“Late Victorian Holocausts” and other famines in colonial India 1870-1914</b>			
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-Niño 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
<b>Famines in China 1870-1912</b>			
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-Niño drought, weakness of government
<b>Famines, mass starvation and catastrophes in the “Scramble for Africa” and its aftermath</b>			
1885-1908	Congo Free State	4,700,000	Belgian policy of forced labor, forced displacement
1888-92	Sudan ( <i>Sanat Sita</i> )	1,500,000	War, pillage & requisitioning, forced displacement by Mahdist state in context
1888-92	Ethiopia ( <i>Qifu Ken</i> )	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
<b>Other famines 1870-1915</b>			
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
<b>Mass starvation of the Armenians and other minorities in the Ottoman Empire</b>			
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
<b>Famines associated with American empire</b>			
1895-98	Cuba (US-Spanish war)	155,000	Counterinsurgency, scorched earth, concentration camps
1899-1902	Philippines	775,000	Counterinsurgency, scorched earth
<b>Mass starvation associated with World War One</b>			
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
<b>Russian and Soviet famines 1890-1933</b>			
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
<b>Famines in China in the warlord era</b>			
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
<b>Famines and mass starvation in Asia associated with World War Two</b>			
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
<b>Germany's Hungerplan (all in the context of genocidal plan)</b>			
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
<b>Other famines and starvation in Europe during and after World War Two</b>			
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
<b>Post-War Communist Famines in Asia</b>			
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
<b>Other 1970s Famines in Asia</b>			
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
<b>Post-colonial Famines in Africa</b>			
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
<b>Humanitarian emergencies, complex catastrophes and war-famines in Africa and the Middle East</b>			
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