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FAO-WFP early warning analysis of acute food insecurity hotspots

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Integrated actions for lasting solutions

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Acronyms

CARI	Consolidated Approach to Reporting Indicators of Food Security
CH	*Cadre Harmonisé*
COVID-19	Coronavirus disease 2019
ECLAC	Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
EVD	Ebola Virus Disease
FAO	Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
FEWS NET	Famine Early Warning Systems Network
FSNAU	Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit
GDP	Gross Domestic Product
GRFC	Global Report on Food Crises
HRP	Humanitarian Response Plan
IDEA	Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance
IDP	Internally displaced persons
IGAD	Intergovernmental Authority on Development
ILO	International Labour Organization
IOM	International Organization for Migration
IPC	Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
ISAS	Institute of South Asian Studies
NGO	Non-governmental organization
NOAA	National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration
NSAG	Non-state armed group
NUS	National University of Singapore
OCHA	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
R4V	Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela
RRP	Regional Response Plan
SANEM	South Asian Network on Economic Modeling
SOFI	The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World
UN	United Nations
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
WASH	Water, Sanitation and Hygiene
WB	World Bank
WFP	World Food Programme

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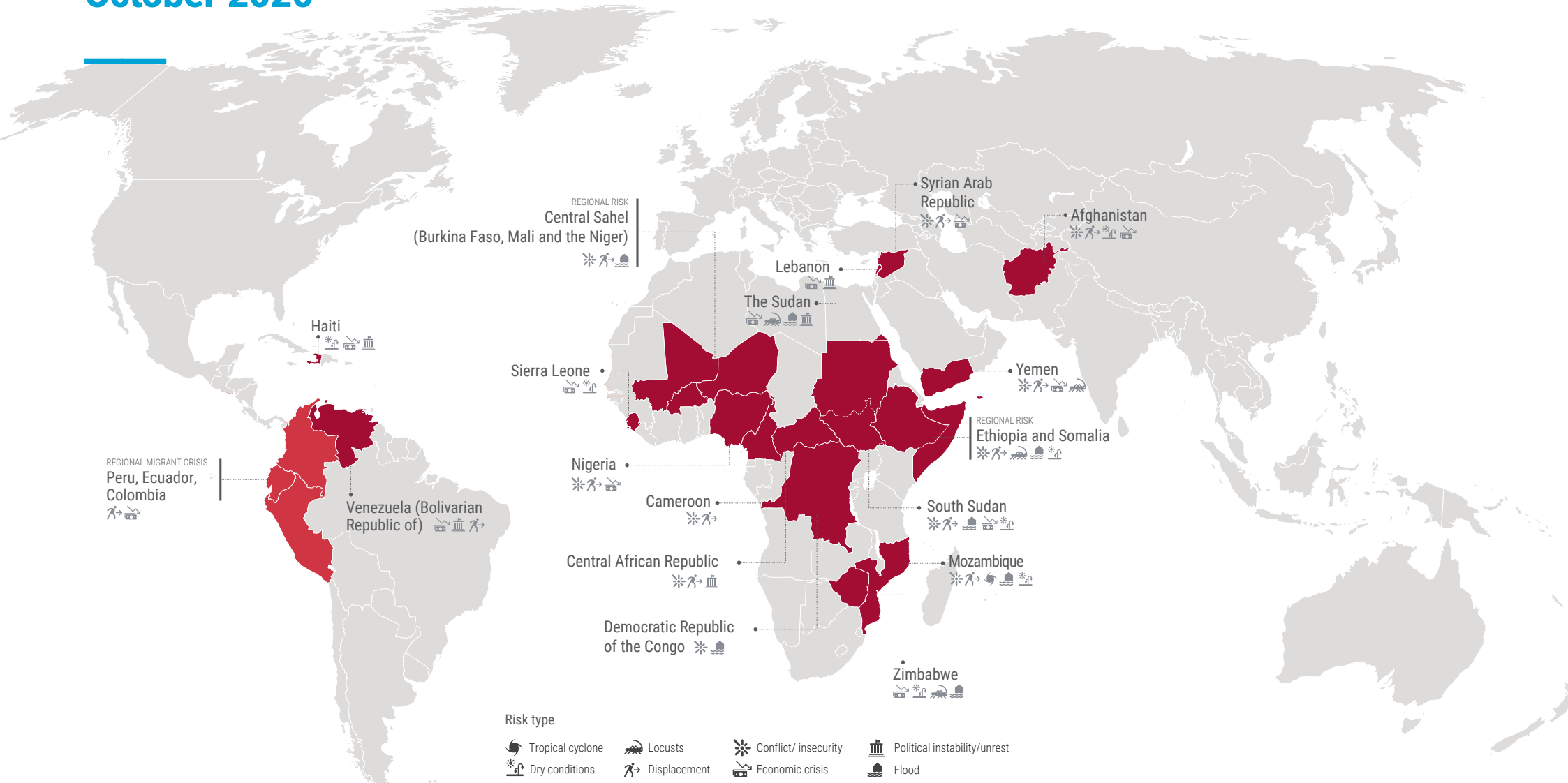
Map of acute food insecurity hotspots
October 2020



In Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, the alert is raised only in relation to the Venezuelan migrants hosted in these countries.

Source: FAO and WFP, October 2020. Map conforms to United Nations World map, October 2020.

Introduction

As acute food insecurity levels appear to be reaching new highs globally, also as a result of the socio-economic fallout of measures imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19, this joint FAO-WFP report aims to raise an early warning on 20 countries and situations - called hotspots - that, starting from already significant levels of acute food insecurity in early 2020, are facing the risk of a further rapid deterioration over the next months. Through a forward-looking analysis on potential evolutions of food insecurity drivers, this report aims to inform urgent action to safeguard the most vulnerable communities in the countries covered.

Already in 2019, 135 million people were facing a food crisis or emergency (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) in 55 countries and territories, while an additional 183 million were classified in Stress conditions across 47 countries, with a risk of further deterioration.[1] This was largely a result of conflict and insecurity, weather extremes, economic shocks or a combination of them.

According to the 2020 Global Report on Food Crises – September 2020 update, the COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these pre-existing and on-going drivers, mainly by causing economic activities to decline, which in turn led to income loss and reduced household purchasing power, and a multitude of food-system wide shocks.[2] While the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 are differentiated and not equally severe in all contexts, the latest evidence shows that between March and September 2020, high acute food insecurity has deepened in most of the 27 countries analysed in the update of the 2020 Global Report on Food Crises.[3]

In the next three to six months, 20 countries and situations shown on the map are likely to face potential spikes in high acute food insecurity, driven by multiple overlapping drivers, and require urgent attention. Yemen, South Sudan, northeastern Nigeria and Burkina Faso have areas of extreme concern whose populations, partially or completely cut off from humanitarian assistance, have reached a critical hunger situation following years of conflict and other shocks. In these areas, any further deterioration over the coming months could lead to a risk of famine.

The hotspot countries and situations were selected through a consensus-based analytical process shared by FAO and WFP, based on a selection of parameters:

- Assessed levels of recent or current food insecurity and malnutrition with a focus on acute food insecurity – and deterioration in comparison to pre-COVID-19 times;
- Three to six month projections of acute food insecurity situations based on analysis of primary and secondary drivers: economic shocks, adverse climate conditions and weather shocks, conflict and insecurity, political instability, diffusion of plant pests and animal diseases, and the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19 (including direct impact, such as that caused by border closures, travel restrictions, limits to mobility; and indirect impact caused by decline in global demand, reduced Foreign Direct Investments, aid and remittances, and current indebtedness levels, amongst others).
- Presence of natural hazard risks, economic risks and conflict risks that are likely to drive food insecurity levels further up either by having a direct impact on food insecurity (such as unforeseen climatic shocks) or an indirect one (for example, increased internal displacement);
- Dependence on commodity exports, food imports and remittances;
- Planned and ongoing agricultural activities during the October-December period and existing or likely disruptions by impacts of COVID-19-related restrictions;
- Presence of particularly vulnerable or at-high-risk populations including women, Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), refugees, migrants and asylum seekers, and others;
- Presence of operational and humanitarian access constraints.

The main sources of data for Crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity (current and projections) are the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and the *Cadre Harmonisé* (CH). For countries where IPC/CH analyses were not conducted and where no recent analyses were available, estimates of the number of people in acute food insecurity were primarily derived from the Famine Early Warning Systems Network (FEWS NET) IPC-compatible analysis, WFP assessments using CARI methodology or Humanitarian Needs Overviews.[4]

The report is divided into four sections: an overview of recent trends of high acute food insecurity; an overview of upcoming trends in the 20 hotspots including countries of highest concern; an outline of the latest socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19-related restrictions on acute food insecurity; an analysis of the dynamics at play in the hotspots; and a list of recommendations that should be urgently implemented to mitigate or prevent the further deterioration of acute food insecurity.

The cut off date for the analysis contained in this report is 30 October 2020.

This report is part of a series of analytical products produced under the Global Network Against Food Crises initiative to enhance and coordinate the generation and sharing of evidence-based information and analysis for preventing and addressing food crises. In September, the Food Security Information Network (FSIN) in collaboration with the Global Network, have published the *2020 Global Report on Food Crises: September 2020 update, in times of COVID-19*, available at https://www.fsinplatform.org/sites/default/files/resources/files/GRFC2020_September%20Update_0.pdf.

Recent trends in high acute food insecurity

While in many countries COVID-19-related restrictions have been progressively lifted, allowing economic activity to resume, analyses carried out between March and September 2020 show a deterioration across 27 countries affected by food crises last year that now have between 101 and 104.6 million people facing a food crisis or emergency (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above).[5]

Although there are comparability challenges,[6] in 2019 the number of people classified in IPC/CH Phase 3 or above in these 27 countries was around 97.6 million.

For eight out of the 10 countries experiencing the worst food crises (IPC Phase 3 and above) in 2019 – **Afghanistan**, **the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti, northern Nigeria, South Sudan, the Sudan and Yemen** – updated acute food insecurity assessments are available which were conducted after the COVID-19 pandemic started. As of mid-2020, in these eight countries, around 74 million people were classified as facing a food crisis or emergency (IPC Phase 3 or above). More than 15.3 million people across 7 of these countries were classified in emergency acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 4).

With 21.8 million people in high acute food insecurity from July to December 2020, the Democratic Republic of the Congo recorded the highest number ever registered for a single country. While the 40 percent increase since the same period last year (15.6 million) can partly be attributed to the 11 percent increase in the population analysed in 2020, there is still a significant rise in the prevalence of acutely food insecure people in need of urgent assistance – up from 26 percent in June–December 2019 to 33 percent between July and December 2020.

In the Sudan, a record 9.6 million people were highly acutely food insecure and in need of urgent assistance in mid-2020. Although the numbers are not directly comparable to 2019 because of the inclusion of West Darfur, when comparing the same areas, an additional 2.5 million people were found to be in Crisis or worse food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above).

Across Haiti, northeastern Nigeria and South Sudan, an additional 5 million people were facing a food crisis or emergency (IPC Phase 3 or above) by mid-2020, compared to the 2019 peak.

In Yemen, the 2020 analysis only covered the southern provinces of the country. For that part of the country, the data pointed to a potential deterioration in the situation with a projected increase in the number of people in IPC Phase 3 and above from 2 million in February-April 2020 to 3.2 million in July-December 2020. According to the pre-COVID-19 analysis in 2019, the total number of highly acutely food insecure people in Yemen at national level was expected to exceed 17 million in 2020.[7]

Upcoming trends in high acute food insecurity: focus on 20 hotspots

Looking at the next months, 20 countries and situations have potential for acute food insecurity to deteriorate further. They all have more than one driver of acute food insecurity at play, interlinked or mutually reinforcing, be they economic shocks, weather extremes, conflict/insecurity, political instability, diffusion of plant pests and animal diseases or the socio-economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic.

FAO and WFP have assessed the likely evolution of the most salient drivers and their combinations, and the potential effects on acute food insecurity levels in the coming months.

Here is an overview of key findings and trends for developments in the next months:

- **A further expansion and intensification of violence**, displacing more civilians and disrupting food systems and markets, is likely to drive more people into high acute food insecurity in parts of Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Mozambique, the Niger, northern Nigeria and South Sudan. As of October 2020, some have already over one million people in emergency acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 4): Afghanistan (3.3), the Democratic Republic of the Congo (5.7) and South Sudan (1.7). In addition, there are more than 11 000 people in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe) in parts of Burkina Faso. Due to violence, in Cameroon the number of people in high acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 and above) has doubled from last year reaching 2.1 million between June and August 2020.
- **Macroeconomic crises further exacerbated by the socioeconomic impacts of COVID-19-related measures** are going to be particularly concerning in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and for Venezuelan migrants in neighbouring countries, as well as Haiti, the Sudan, Lebanon and Zimbabwe. A combination of economic shocks and the effects of irregular rains is projected to push the number of people in high acute food insecurity in Haiti to over 4 million through February 2021.
- **The effects of worsening economic conditions, inflation and long-term conflict are combining** in Yemen and the Syrian Arab Republic: in the Syrian Arab Republic, the number of people in emergency acute food insecurity has already doubled over the last year; in Yemen, a pre-COVID-19 analysis found that the number of people in high acute food insecurity is expected to exceed 17 million this year, up from the 15 million in 2019.
- **Weather extremes**, in several parts of the world, caused by the ongoing **La Niña event**, are likely to lead to erratic rainfall and below-average, short rainy seasons in East Africa, affecting in particular Somalia and Ethiopia.

- In Ethiopia, the number of people in high acute food insecurity is projected to reach 11 million (IPC Phase 3 and above) by June 2021. Furthermore, above-average rainfall and possible floods will affect southeast Asia as well as parts of Southern Africa including Mozambique. In the Sudan, the impact of floods amidst the ongoing economic crisis is likely to aggravate projections of 6.4 million people facing a food crisis or emergency (IPC Phase 3 and above). In Sierra Leone, erratic rains combined with economic shocks are driving a further deterioration in food security, with latest (pre-COVID-19) estimates indicating 1.3 million people in IPC Phase 3 and above – a situation ten times worse than in the past three years.
- **Transboundary threats such as desert locusts** are threatening to exacerbate food insecurity and further undermine livelihoods across East Africa and Yemen. In Southern Africa, a recent African Migratory Locust outbreak has been reported.
- Crisis-affected populations are not getting the humanitarian assistance they need due to **access constraints**,[8] with Yemen and the Syrian Arab Republic facing the highest challenges. Constraints remain very high in parts of Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, while Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, Ethiopia, the Niger and the Sudan are experiencing high constraints.

The table below provides the latest available data on high acute food insecurity in 19 of the 20 hotspots (except Lebanon due to lack of data) as of the 1st of November and where possible the forecast data for 2021.

	LATEST ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY EVIDENCE AVAILABLE (MILLIONS)				FORECAST ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY FOR 2021 (MILLIONS)	
	TIME PERIOD	POPULATION IN IPC/CH PHASE 3	POPULATION IN IPC/CH PHASE 4	POPULATION IN IPC/CH PHASE 3 OR ABOVE	TIME PERIOD	POPULATION IN IPC/CH PHASE 3 OR ABOVE
Afghanistan	June-November 2020	7	3.3	10.3		
Burkina Faso	June-August 2020	2.8	0.5	3.3 (including 11 300 people in CH Phase 5		
Cameroon*	June-August 2020	1.9	0.2	2.1		
The Central African Republic	September 2020-April 2021	1.5	0.4	1.9	May-August 2021	2.3
The Democratic Republic of the Congo	July-December 2020	16.1	5.7	21.8	January-June 2021	19.6
Ethiopia	October-December 2020	5.9	0.8	6.7	January-June 2021	11
Haiti	August 2020- February 2021	3.1	0.9	4	March-June 2021	4.4
Mali*	June-August 2020	1.2	0.1	1.3		
Mozambique (Cabo Delgado,Tete, Maputo and Matola)**	June-November 2020	0.6	0.04	0.64		
The Niger*	June-August 2020	1.9	0.1	2		
Nigeria (Adamawa, Borno and Yobe)	June-August2020	3.6	0.7	4.3		
Sierra Leone*	June-August 2020	1.2	0.1	1.3		
Somalia	October-December 2020	1.7	0.4	2.1		
South Sudan***	May-July 2020	4.7	1.8	6.5		
The Sudan	October-December 2020	5.7	0.7	6.4		
Syrian Arab Republic***	April 2020	8.3	1	9.3		
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)***	July-December 2019	7	2.3	9.3		
Yemen (South)	July-December 2020	2.3	0.9	3.2		
Zimbabwe****	October-December 2020			5-6		

* Pre-COVID analysis

**Maputo and Matola, 2 districts in Cabo Delgado and 5 districts in Tete.

*** Data source from WFP assessments using CARI methodology

**** IPC-Compatible analysis carried out by FEWSNET

Countries of highest concern: factors leading to a risk of famine

Within the hotspot countries and situations, in some areas of Yemen, South Sudan, northeastern Nigeria and Burkina Faso, parts of the population are experiencing a critical hunger situation with extreme depletion of livelihoods, insufficient food consumption and high acute malnutrition.

These areas are characterized by a high percentage of the population classified as facing emergency acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 4) and, in the case of Burkina Faso, households already in IPC Phase 5 (Catastrophe), who are experiencing famine-like conditions.

Although each context is different, such conditions usually form in areas of countries with high pre-existing structural vulnerability and high levels of acute food insecurity, where a 'perfect storm' of drivers combine such as conflict, socio-economic shocks, breakdown of markets and livelihoods, natural hazards and limited or high constraints to access to humanitarian assistance.

These drivers may further aggravate the situation in these areas, causing widespread deaths, acute malnutrition and starvation, and an irreversible loss of livelihoods. Urgent humanitarian action is needed to avoid further deterioration and a risk of famine.

Access is a critical issue, since humanitarian assistance is often the major mitigating factor in such acute hunger contexts. In parts of Yemen, South Sudan, northeastern Nigeria and Burkina Faso, populations are partially or completely cut off from humanitarian assistance.

How the situation will evolve in these areas of special concern will depend on a number of key factors which need to be closely monitored.

In **Yemen**, the expansion of conflict and related access issues, the deepening economic crisis and rising food prices could further exacerbate an already critical food security situation, particularly in Al Jawf, Marib, Amran and Al Mahwit governorates where a significant part of the population entirely depends on humanitarian assistance for survival.

In **South Sudan**, the latest IPC analysis projected around half a million people in IPC Phase 4 (25 percent of the population) in Jonglei State by July 2020. Critical factors which will determine how the situation will evolve include conflict dynamics and humanitarian access, especially in the most concerning flood-affected areas; further rainfall from October onwards; as well as continued commitment of donors to support life and livelihood saving humanitarian assistance.

In **northeastern Nigeria**, the currently ongoing main harvest is crucial to improve access to food in the most food-insecure areas. While there are indications of good production prospects, concerns remain for conflict-affected areas, and in particular parts of Borno State where access to humanitarian assistance is heavily constrained.

In **Burkina Faso**, the latest *Cadre Harmonisé* analysis from July 2020 confirmed two provinces (Soum and Oudalan) in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), with over 11 000 people already in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5), against a background of a significant deterioration of food security and fast and widespread conflict-related displacement and access issues. Factors which will determine how the situation evolves include humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas, further displacement in response to violence and insecurity, harvest outcomes and further possible COVID-19-related restrictions among others.

Explanatory note

Famine is the most severe type of hunger, and accordingly, it is the most extreme phase of the IPC scale. As per the IPC definition, famine occurs in areas where: "at least one in five households has or is most likely to have an extreme deprivation of food. Starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical levels of acute malnutrition are or will likely be evident. Significant mortality, directly attributable to outright starvation or to the interaction of malnutrition and disease, is occurring or will be occurring."[9] As such, famine classification and projections are subject to a rigorous technical process at country level which is validated by an external Famine Review Committee led by international food security and nutrition experts.

The information contained in this section should therefore not be interpreted as a statement that famines are imminent in these countries. The purpose of this section is to highlight those situations where specific factors are contributing to a risk of famine should certain conditions persist.

It is important to note that talking about the risk of famine does not mean that famine is the most *likely* scenario in these contexts but that it is a *possible* outcome. Given the severity of these situations, an understanding of the key drivers and how they may deteriorate over the forthcoming period provides critical early warning information which can support a scale-up of monitoring efforts as well as advocacy and interventions to curb further deterioration.

Within the framework of the IPC, work has been initiated to define technical parameters and processes to better identify countries and areas facing a risk of famine.

At this early stage, the following context-specific parameters are tentatively being considered, among others, to work towards the identification of contexts facing a risk of famine: prevalence of IPC Phase 4 in the population, constraints to humanitarian access and co-presence of compounding shocks to food security.

Socio-economic impacts of COVID-19-related measures on acute food insecurity

Following the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, the global recession and disruptions to food supply chains have been impacting livelihoods and food security, raising particular concerns in countries already facing food crises and for the most vulnerable population groups including women, IDPs, refugees, migrants and asylum seekers. Among the different dimensions of food security[10], access to food has been the most impacted due to the income losses and macroeconomic shocks caused by the COVID-19 pandemic and the measures introduced to curb its spread.

The world economy is projected to contract by 4.4 percent in 2020. This is the result of a combination of factors including a global reduction in working hours (estimated by the International Labour Organization to be equivalent to 495 million full-time jobs[11]); a large drop in remittances;[12] a steep fall in demand for goods and services; and the strain put on government resources by the need to support the most vulnerable and lift economies. However, the impact is not equal across regions, with East Asia and the Pacific projected to see a relatively limited 1.7 percent contraction, and Latin America and the Caribbean facing a forecast contraction of 8.1 percent.[13]

The World Bank estimates that between 88 and 115 additional million people will be pushed into extreme poverty in 2020 under a baseline scenario of a 5 percent contraction of global growth, the worst reversal on the path towards global poverty reduction in at least the last three decades.[14] Strained government revenues and high debt levels are raising concerns about the sustainability of social protection programmes.

While the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) expect a gradual recovery of the world economy to begin in 2021, (forecasting global growth at 5.2[15] and 5.0[16] percent respectively) a few aspects of the pandemic-induced economic downturn are likely to persist in the long term.

Economies relying on exports of oil and gas – the prices of which are not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels in the foreseeable future[17] – as well as countries facing major debt crises are particularly unlikely to bounce back quickly.

In terms of food availability, while markets and food supply chains worldwide have largely stabilised after the initial disruptions caused by the effects of COVID-19-related restrictions, structural deficiencies in countries with food crises have translated into more substantial impacts on agricultural production and other parts of the food supply chain. The impacts vary in intensity across contexts and depend on factors such as timing of the cropping cycle in relation to the timing of restrictions as well as the degree to which countries rely on other countries for labour, inputs and the sale of crops. Concerns over production prospects in some of the main cereal-exporting countries also contributed to recent increases in global food prices. The FAO Food Price Index had increased for four consecutive months as of September 2020, when it recorded a 5 percent increase compared to its value in the same month of 2019.[18]

Finally, the political stability and national security implications of the pandemic have also surfaced in the second half of 2020, with potential negative repercussions on food security, particularly where governments are fragile or in transition, or where there are ongoing peace talks or recent peace agreements. The pandemic has affected electoral calendars worldwide. As of October 2020, at least 73 countries had postponed national and subnational elections or referendums due to COVID-19-related restrictions.[19] In numerous countries, new restrictions are likely to generate increased potential for unrest and instability, particularly in contexts with long-standing political, economic and ethnic fault lines.

Regional and Country Overviews

WFP/Hugh Rutherford

Latin America and the Caribbean

At a time when food insecurity in the region was already increasing, the combined impact of COVID-19-related restrictions and the global economic downturn is anticipated to result in an 8.1 percent GDP contraction[20] – the worst recession in the region in a century. In 2019, 18.5 million people were already facing a food crisis or emergency in Central American Dry Corridor countries, Haiti, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, and among the Venezuelan migrant populations living in Colombia and Ecuador.[21] In 2020, the number of people without an income has risen from 26 million before the pandemic to 41 million (as of July 2020), with severe effects particularly in the informal sector.[22]

Around 28 million additional people are projected to fall into extreme poverty (to 96 million in total), and 45 million into poverty (to a total of 230 million) in 2020.[23]

WFP remote surveys show that in Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and Nicaragua food consumption levels have worsened since the pandemic, with severe food insecurity reaching 2.2 million as of September 2020 compared to 1.4 million in 2019.[24] An above-average rainfall forecast presents favorable conditions for a postrera harvest cycle, but high levels of precipitation may also cause floods and landslides, that could lead to crop losses.[25]

Haiti

Key drivers of food insecurity: irregular rains, persisting economic crisis and instability

COVID-19-related restrictions have exacerbated an already high acute food insecurity situation, reducing availability of and access to food, and increasing negative coping strategies. Against a backdrop of political tensions likely to exacerbate insecurity and lead to unrest, the economic crisis – including significant inflationary pressure – is likely to continue.

The IPC analysis conducted in September 2020 estimates the number of people facing a food crisis or emergency between August 2020 and February 2021 at approximately 4 million people, up from 3.67 million in the October 2019-February 2020 analysis.

A further increase to 4.4 million is projected between March and June 2021, coinciding with the lean season.[34]

Below-average and irregular rains since March have negatively affected the yield of the spring maize growing season, leading to losses of approximately 20 percent.[35] This will reduce the supply of local products to markets, and is likely to lead to above-average prices.

Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) and Venezuelan migrants in neighbouring countries

Key drivers of food insecurity: deepening economic crisis in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela; COVID-19-induced economic recessions in countries hosting Venezuelan diaspora

Six years on, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela's deep economic recession is expected to further worsen, with projections for a 25 percent GDP contraction in 2020.[26] Coupled with hyperinflation caused by currency depreciation (loss of 99 percent of value since 2018), this has had a drastic impact on food availability and people's purchasing power.[27] Around 9.3 million Venezuelans,[28] a third of the total population, were assessed as food insecure and in need of assistance, with 2.3 million severely food insecure and 7 million moderately food insecure in 2019.[29]

Additional international sanctions on diesel exports[30] might further aggravate the already critical gasoline shortage and hinder the distribution of humanitarian aid and essential goods.

Social unrest is prevalent, and protests could intensify in the coming months owing to severe fuel shortages.[31]

Food insecurity is on the rise amongst the almost 5.5 million[32] Venezuelans who emigrated within the region, mainly to **Colombia, Peru and Ecuador**. Levels of severe food insecurity have increased in August 2020 to a total of 9.6 million across the three countries (3.3 in Colombia, 2.0 in Ecuador and 4.3 in Peru), up from 7.7 million in June,[33] and Venezuelan migrants are among those hardest hit due to their disproportionate reliance on informal jobs, exclusion from social safety nets and lack of support networks.

East Africa

The unprecedented overlap of shocks including floods, a desert locust upsurge, economic challenges and the socio-economic consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic – compounded in some contexts by persisting conflict – is exacerbating food insecurity and severely eroding livelihoods. This is threatening to undo development gains that took years to build.[36] The number of highly acutely food insecure people could increase by 73 percent by the end of 2020– from 24 million pre-COVID-19, to 41.5 million.[37]

A forecast below-average October-December rainy season, mainly over parts of Burundi, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, Tanzania and Uganda, is likely to affect secondary-season cereal crops to be harvested from February 2021, as well as the demand for agricultural labour, staple food prices, and, in pastoral areas, the wellbeing of livestock.

This will likely lead to an increase in the number of people facing a food crisis or emergency and could jeopardize the already fragile security situation and exacerbate intercommunal violence in Burundi, Ethiopia, Somalia and South Sudan.

Ethiopia and Somalia

Key drivers of food insecurity: poor rainfall forecast potentially affecting crops and livestock production; political tensions; insecurity; economic downturn; desert locust upsurge

Both in Ethiopia and Somalia, already high levels of acute food insecurity are likely to be exacerbated by poor forecasts for the October-December Deyr-Hageya rainy season, together with civil unrest, growing insecurity and the economic fallout of the COVID-19 pandemic, which includes declining incomes and rising inflation. Heavy flooding, landslides and conflict have resulted in large population displacements in 2020.[38]

In Ethiopia, between July and September, an estimated 8.5 million people were projected to be facing Crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity, including about 1.4 million in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) in the seven pastoral and agro-pastoral producing rural areas. After a slight improvement due to the seasonal harvests, the food insecurity situation is projected to deteriorate further, with about 11.1 million people expected to be facing Crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity in these areas from January to June 2021.[39] In Somalia, up to 2.1 million people are expected to face food consumption gaps or depletion of assets through December 2020 in the absence of humanitarian assistance.[40] This figure represents almost 20 percent of the total population and is more than 80 percent higher than early 2020 estimates.

The forecast below-average Deyr-Hageya rains will hinder recovery from the devastating livestock losses caused by the 2017 drought in pastoral areas of southern and eastern Ethiopia (Somali, Oromia and parts of the Southern Nations, Nationalities, and Peoples' Region [SNNPR]), and will likely lead to below-average harvests in agro-pastoral areas of southern and central Somalia.[41] This would represent the second consecutive poor agricultural production, as crops from the previous season (April to June) in some areas have been affected by flooding, losses caused by desert locusts and a lower-than-normal planted area.

In Somalia, Gu main season cereal production, accounting for about 60 percent of the total annual output, was estimated to be 40 to 45 percent below the long-term average as a result of severe flash flooding and river overflows in April. Dry weather conditions for the remainder of the rainy season, a high incidence of pests and persisting insecurity hindering farming activities further affected yields and could negatively affect livestock production, food availability and purchasing power in central and northern pastoral areas, further aggravating acute food insecurity and malnutrition in the absence of sustained food assistance.[42]

The effect of these multiple consecutive hazards could exacerbate inter-communal conflicts over resources and atypical migrations in areas including Ethiopia's south-western Oromia, Somali and SNNPR regions and the central and southern regions of Somalia.

South Sudan

Key drivers of food insecurity: conflict; consecutive natural shocks; deteriorating economic situation; severe constraints to humanitarian access. If these factors continue to deteriorate, this would lead to a risk of famine in parts of the country

The cumulative effects of severe flooding, conflict, worsening economic conditions and prolonged asset depletion continue to determine high levels of acute food insecurity in South Sudan. A total of 6.48 million people (55.4 percent of the population) were projected to face a food crisis or emergency in 70 Counties (37 in Crisis and 33 in Emergency) across all states between May and July 2020, including 1.7 million in emergency acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 4).[43]

Jonglei State is an area of extreme concern due to conflict and two consecutive years of floods – especially in Uror, Pibor, Ayod, Duk and Twic East Counties – as well as constraints to humanitarian access.[44] According to IPC projections for the period of May and July 2020, there were 500 000 people in emergency levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 4) in the State. Should the situation deteriorate further, these areas may be at risk of famine.

However, substantive humanitarian presence in the country could cushion against such a worst-case scenario, coupled with prospects for rainfall to subside and the start of the green harvest.[45]

Armed conflict and insecurity in Jonglei, Warrap, parts of Lakes, and Central and Eastern Equatoria, continue to cause significant displacement, disrupting harvesting activities, market access and food assistance delivery, and resulting in livestock losses. The number of new displacements triggered by conflict and violence rose sharply in the first half of 2020, amounting to almost 90 percent of the 259 000 recorded for the whole of 2019.[46]

Conflict between government and non-signatory groups to the peace deal could escalate in the coming months in the Equatorias, restricting free movement and disrupting livelihoods. Constraints to humanitarian access remain very high.[47]

A general economic slowdown induced by COVID-19-related restrictions may further contribute to food insecurity. While local movement restrictions have been eased, domestic trade flows, business and day labour activity remain below normal.[48] Further, the protracted plunge of oil prices, the exhaustion of foreign currency reserves,[49] the rapid depreciation of the national currency and the consequent increase in food inflation[50] are reducing people's purchasing power, with a negative impact on food security.

West Africa and the Sahel (including the Central African Republic)

Food insecurity across West Africa and the Sahel has risen dramatically due to increasing conflict and the impact of COVID-19-related restrictions. Some 22.1 million people were projected to be facing a food crisis or emergency (CH Phases 3-5) in the June-August 2020 lean season period, compared to 14.1 million the same time period in 2019.[51] In the Central African Republic, 1.9 million people are in Crisis or worse levels of acute food insecurity.

In conflict hotspots such as the Central Sahel, the Central African Republic and northern Nigeria, civilians are increasingly affected by violence and conflict with rising levels of displacement,[52] likely to further intensify in the context of multiple upcoming elections.

Alongside conflict, COVID-19-related restrictions have also had a considerable impact on access to and availability of food, with farmers struggling to access markets and agricultural inputs, and border closures disrupting transhumance and livestock markets for pastoralists.

Cameroon

Key drivers of food insecurity: rising tensions ahead of December regional elections; intensified activity of armed groups in the Far North and Northwest regions

Cameroon faces multiple complex emergencies, mainly in the Far North, Northwest and Southwest regions, where a resurgence of violence since November 2017 has led to massive population displacements[53] and is the main driver of food insecurity. During the 2020 lean season, the number of people facing a food crisis or emergency doubled in comparison to last year,[54] reaching 2.1 million people, and is expected to increase further, potentially reaching 4.9 million.[55] In the Far North, ongoing insecurity was compounded by heavy rainfall in early September, causing crop loss and population displacement.

In 2020, about 6.2 million people have been in need of humanitarian assistance, a third of which is due to the socio-economic fallout of COVID-19.[56] In the Southwest anglophone regions, anti-government and pro-independence protests might lead to further displacement and challenges to livelihoods. Nearly 970 000 people were displaced within the country as of December 2019,[57] and over 80 000 new IDPs were registered in the first half of 2020 due to conflict across the Far North, Northwest and Southwest regions, which corresponds to almost three times the number of newly displaced in the whole of 2019.[58] Humanitarian access constraints remain a challenge in the Northwest and Southwest regions.

The Central African Republic

Key drivers of food insecurity: worsening insecurity; economic impact of COVID-19-related restrictions

A total of 1.9 million people are expected to be facing a food crisis or emergency (IPC Phase 3 or above) between September 2020 and April 2021, including 408 000 people in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) – a deterioration compared to the same time last year.

In addition, about 1.7 million people are in Stress (IPC Phase 2) with some of them at risk of sliding further into high acute food insecurity should the current situation persist.[59] An upsurge of violence has caused further displacement of populations, especially in the prefectures of Ouham Pendé, Nana-Mambéré and Mambéré-Kadei,

with almost 690 000 people estimated to be internally displaced as of August 2020.[60]

Tensions in the run-up to elections planned for December 2020, could worsen the security situation.[61] COVID-19-related restrictions have affected trade flows and food prices, further exacerbating existing vulnerabilities.

In urban areas, jobs and income-generating activities have fallen by 26 percent, driving poor food consumption.

Ongoing economic challenges induced by COVID-19-related restrictions are anticipated to continue affecting food availability and access, instigating high food prices and the loss of income-generating activities.

Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger)

Key drivers of food insecurity: conflict and violence; economic repercussions of COVID-19-related restrictions; climatic shocks. Should the situation further deteriorate, this would lead to a risk of famine in parts of Burkina Faso.

Having led to a 62 percent spike in deaths (4 660 in the last six months) and the displacement of 1.5 million people in just one year, rising conflict and violence, coupled with the economic consequences of COVID-19-related restrictions and recurrent climatic shocks, are the key drivers of food insecurity across the three countries.[66] With one million displaced people, Burkina Faso is the West African country with the most rapid and highest increase of IDPs this year,[67] followed by Mali (287 496) and the Niger (265 522).[68]

In Burkina Faso, 3.3 million people are facing a food crisis or emergency, doubling from the end of 2019.[69] Soum and Oudalan provinces – classified in Emergency (CH Phase 4), with over 11 000 people already in CH Phase 5 (Catastrophe) – are areas of extreme concern due to a significant deterioration of food security since 2019, as well as fast and widespread violence-related displacement and access constraints. Should the situation deteriorate further, these areas may be at risk of famine. High acute food insecurity affects 2.7 million people across the Niger[70] and 1.3 million in Mali,[71] well above the long-term average.

Daily armed confrontations and attacks leading to forced displacements have considerably limited access to agricultural fields, markets and pastures, and may have affected livestock movement. Coupled with climate hazards, such as localized flooding and dry spells, this is having strong localized effects on prospects for the 2020-21 agro-pastoral season. Moreover, late season floods have extensively affected the three countries, leading to crop damage, and loss of livelihoods and livestock.

Humanitarian access has become increasingly problematic across the three countries, with very high constraints in Mali and high constraints in both Burkina Faso and the Niger.[72]

Nigeria

Key drivers of food insecurity: spreading violence across northern states; economic impacts of COVID-19-related restrictions; low oil prices. If these factors further deteriorate, this would lead to a risk of famine in some areas of Borno State

About 8.7 million people were projected to face a food crisis or emergency (CH Phase 3 and above) across 16 northern states and the Federal Capital Territory (Abuja) in June-August 2020.[73] More than half of these were in Borno, Adamawa, Yobe and Kano, corresponding to 5.8 million people. This was 5 percent more than the 4.3 million people projected for these four states in the March 2020 CH analysis, and well above the five-year average for the same period.[74]

The economic effects of COVID-19-related restrictions – including a decline in remittances – and low global prices for oil, which accounts for 50 percent of the country's revenue, are hitting the Nigerian economy hard, with real GDP expected not to return to pre-crisis levels before 2023 or 2024.[75]

Widespread violence continues across the country's north. The epicentre remains the northeast, where, as of August 2020, insecurity has left 2.2 million people internally displaced, with a likely further increase of up to 250 000 in the next months. Abadam, Guzamala, Kukawa and Marte in Borno State are areas of extreme concern due to a combination of violence and heavy constraints to humanitarian access. Should the situation deteriorate further, these areas may be at risk of famine.

Violence is increasingly spreading to the northwestern and central-north regions, where deep-rooted intercommunal strife is driving a humanitarian crisis of its own right, with nearly 600 000 displaced as of July 2020.[76] Humanitarian access remains limited, like in other parts of the country.

Sierra Leone

Key drivers of food insecurity: economic factors; consequences of COVID-19-related restrictions; potentially negative harvest forecast

The food security situation in Sierra Leone continues to deteriorate as a consequence of a worsening economic context, due to the combination of the fall in demand for mining commodity exports,[62] currency depreciation and rise in food prices. This has been compounded by the effects of COVID-19-related restrictions, and by the potentially negative harvest forecast for the second half of 2020.

March 2020 CH figures projected that around 1.3 million people would face a food crisis or emergency in the June–August period [63] – a tenfold increase in food insecurity levels registered in the past three years.

On top of this, pandemic containment measures – which have recently been eased with economic activities going back to normal[64] – have reduced income opportunities both in urban and rural contexts, while at the same time affecting food systems and hindering farmers during the main agricultural season.

Farming activities have also been affected by erratic rainfall distribution and below-average precipitation.[65] The combined effect of previous disruptions caused to livelihoods and farming activities, and the negative outcome of the rainy season, could result in further increasing food insecurity in late 2020.

Southern Africa

Across the region, natural hazards, structural macroeconomic challenges, an African Migratory Locust outbreak, insecurity, conflict and the impacts from COVID-19-related restrictions – including a slowdown in economic activities and a fall in remittances – are overlapping with the peak of the lean season (November 2020 to January 2021), threatening to further deteriorate already high levels of acute food insecurity. An estimated 51 million[90] people in the 13 Member States of the Southern African Development Community, are reportedly food insecure,[91] representing a 25 percent increase compared to 2019.

While food supply chains have remained functional, COVID-19-related border closures and movement restrictions, combined with reduced harvests in some countries, have led to above-average food prices and hindered food access.

While regional climate outlooks provide good prospects for the upcoming agricultural season, localized flooding might occur in the coming months. There is a potential risk of heavy rainfall associated with the southern Indian Ocean cyclone season (October to May with peak in early 2021) in parts of Mozambique and Madagascar, and locusts are threatening crop production and the food security of millions of people in Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe.[92]

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

Key drivers of food insecurity: conflict, insecurity and economic impacts of COVID-19-related restrictions

The IPC analysis issued in September 2020 confirmed that the Democratic Republic of the Congo has the highest number of food-insecure people globally, with 21.8 million identified as facing a food crisis or emergency and in urgent need of assistance (IPC Phase 3 or above), including 5.7 million people in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) between July and December 2020.[77] The highest numbers were registered in Ituri, North Kivu, South, Kivu, the Kasais and Tanganyika regions. A high prevalence of acute malnutrition is also observed in the country, with about 3.8 million children under 5 projected to be in Global Acute Malnutrition in 2021.

Insecurity and armed conflict have caused the displacement of 6.6 million people nationwide, constituted an obstacle for farming activities, and are among the primary drivers of food insecurity, which is likely to continue increasing in conflict-affected areas, especially during the current agricultural season.[78] Along the Ubangi river, the earlier-than-normal high river levels and rainfall forecasts in September indicate a high likelihood of flooding in October and November.

Nationwide, measures imposed to contain the spread of COVID-19 have significantly reduced the purchasing power of vulnerable households, particularly in urban areas, with a marked drop in economic activities,[79] especially in retail trade. Farming communities experienced reduced access to inputs due to border closures.

The complexity of the humanitarian crisis is further compounded by a new Ebola virus outbreak in the Equateur province, along with low levels of funding and challenges securing humanitarian access to all populations in need.[80]

Mozambique

Key drivers of food insecurity: growing insecurity in northern areas; agricultural production shortfalls; economic impacts of COVID-19-related restrictions

The number of people facing a food crisis or emergency was projected to reach almost 1.7 million in the period between October 2019 and February 2020,[81] marking a deterioration since last year.[82] The latest analysis of seven districts in Tete and Cabo Delgado provinces estimates that during the lean season between October and November 2020, the number of people facing a food crisis or emergency will increase to 285 000 people.[83]

Escalating insurgency is driving food insecurity in the northern Cabo Delgado province, which has the second-highest rate of chronic malnutrition in the country[84] and where the number of displaced people is estimated to have tripled compared to early 2020, reaching more than 300 000 as of September.[85] The situation could worsen in the coming months with the potential spread COVID-19, further displacement and access constraints.[86]

High acute food insecurity is also a concern in other parts of the country, including southern and central provinces, where production shortfalls have had negative impacts on access to food.

In these areas, Crisis outcomes (IPC Phase 3) are expected to emerge with the start of the lean season in October.[87] The October to May cyclone season, with its peak in early 2021, could further increase the number of people in need of humanitarian assistance.

Given Mozambique's dependence on food imports and primary commodity exports, COVID-19-related restrictions have caused swings in food prices.[88] Further, persistent high-indebtedness levels constrain the country's fiscal capacity to react to domestic and external crises.[89]

Zimbabwe

Key drivers of food insecurity: soaring food prices; reduced crop production; economic downturn

Zimbabwe is experiencing a widespread acute food insecurity crisis as a result of a combination of factors including consecutive poor agricultural seasons, ongoing macro economic challenges (with food inflation at more than 977 percent as of July 2020[98]) and the impacts of COVID-19-related restrictions. About 5-6 million people were estimated to face a food crisis or emergency in rural areas between October and December 2020, with an additional 2.2 million people in urban areas in early 2020.[99]

Food insecurity is likely to worsen in the upcoming months with the approach of the lean season, which is likely to be earlier and harsher as a consequence of the below-average 2019-2020 harvest.

The below-average seasonal rains, which ended earlier than normal in 2020, also affected livestock conditions.[100]

The ongoing economic difficulties, exacerbated by the pandemic, the African Migratory Locust outbreak and the impact of the two consecutive seasons of below-average cereal harvests on households' incomes are likely to constrain the most vulnerable farmers' capacity to take advantage of the predicted favourable rainy season.

Near East and North Africa

The main challenge to food security in the hotspot countries in the region is access to food, predominantly due to conflict and violence. Out of the 52 million chronically undernourished people in the region, 34 million live in conflict-affected countries.[93] Conflict has caused the displacement of 11.7 million people in the region, in addition to 2.7 million refugees.[94] Declining oil prices[95] – which are not projected to rebound to pre-pandemic levels in the foreseeable future – and a sharp drop in tourism and remittances[96] are leading to widespread macroeconomic imbalances and fiscal constraints.

The IMF predicts that, as a consequence of COVID-19 and related restrictions, regional growth will be negative by 5.1 percent in 2020.[97] Job losses due to COVID-19-related restrictions have been particularly widespread in the informal economy upon which IDPs, refugees and migrants depend on to survive.

Due to their pre-existing fragilities as a result of conflict and economic downturn, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, Yemen and the Sudan have been particularly hit by the pandemic and its socio-economic repercussions.

Lebanon

Key drivers of food insecurity: ongoing economic crisis; impact of COVID-19-related measures

The current economic and financial crisis, characterized by rampant food inflation (367 percent increase year-on-year) and currency depreciation, was further aggravated by the impact of COVID-19-related restrictions and the devastating blast in the port of Beirut on August 4th 2020, leading to the rapid worsening of food insecurity for both the vast refugee population and poor Lebanese households, and increased access constraints for humanitarians. By September 2020, the number of people in need of food assistance reached 2 million, almost doubling since 2019.[101] The situation is likely to worsen further over the next months,[102] with the World Bank estimating that 45 percent of the Lebanese population would fall into poverty, while 850 000 individuals, equivalent to 22 percent of the population, would become extremely poor.[103]

In August 2020, the Central Bank declared that it will be unable to continue supporting the import of subsidized goods, including food and medicines.[104] According to WFP estimates, the planned removal of import subsidies is expected to put an unbearable strain on households' purchasing power, with the price of bread potentially multiplying by 1.5 to 3 and that of fuel by 4.5.[105] Finally, due to an ongoing political deadlock,[106] a rapid external intervention to financially support the Lebanese state appears unlikely, as major donors have linked support to the implementation of political and economic reforms.[107]

The Sudan

Key drivers of food insecurity: flooding; macroeconomic crisis; political uncertainty

During the projected period from October to December 2020, an estimated 6.4 million people are expected to experience a food crisis or emergency. Over 720 000 individuals are projected to be in Emergency levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 4).

This projection, however, does not take into account the full impact of massive recent floods[126] which, according to preliminary data, have affected almost 600 000 farming and pastoral households.[127] Over 10 million people are now at risk of contracting water-borne diseases and 4.5 million are exposed to vector-borne diseases, a 100 percent increase compared to April 2020.[128]

To compound the situation, desert locust swarms have laid eggs in eastern Sudan, and a further increase might occur during the winter along the Red Sea coastal plains.[129]

The implementation of the recently signed Juba peace agreement remains challenging amidst center-periphery tensions and rising intercommunal violence in Red Sea, Kassala[130] and Darfur, with insecurity increasing also in Gezira and South Kordofan.[131] As a result, 39 000 people were newly displaced in the first half of 2020.[132]

The country is also suffering from skyrocketing inflation, reaching 212 percent year-on-year in September,[133] and a protracted economic crisis, exacerbated by the effects of COVID-19-related restrictions. These have affected the agricultural value-chain, with farmers and agro-pastoral communities among the most impacted groups. The economy is unlikely to improve over the short-term, which will contribute to high levels of food insecurity.

The Syrian Arab Republic

Key drivers of food insecurity: rapidly worsening economic conditions; ongoing conflict

Food security in the Syrian Arab Republic has deteriorated considerably over the last year. In April 2020 the total number of food-insecure people was projected at 9.3 million, up by 1.4 million from September 2019 estimates,[108] with severe food insecurity doubling to over one million in the same period.[109] The most at-risk vulnerable groups include 6.5 million IDPs[110] and over 28 000 refugees.[111]

The ongoing deterioration of the macroeconomic situation is likely to continue in the coming months, exacerbated by sanctions, the financial crisis in neighbouring Lebanon, the impact of COVID-19-related movement restrictions,[112] and unprecedented depreciation of the Syrian pound. This, combined with increasing difficulties in financing imports, has led to unprecedented shortages and spikes in food and fuel prices.[113]

As no easing of sanctions and no external support are in sight in the next months, the downward spiral is likely to continue, further aggravating the food security situation.

Below-average rainfall could also negatively affect the main wheat sowing that typically begins in October, already impacted by increased prices of inputs such as seeds and fertilizers. In addition, October's devastating fires in the North-West have destroyed large swaths of cultivable land and are estimated to have caused 25 000 new displacements.[114]

The security situation remains volatile, with the possibility of localized conflict, signs of further mobilization in the North-West, and low-intensity clashes and civil unrest in the South.[115] The Syrian Arab Republic is currently assessed as having extreme access constraints for humanitarians.[116]

Yemen

Key drivers of food insecurity: conflict; access constraints; economic crisis. If these factors further deteriorate, there would be a risk of famine in areas such as Al Jawf, Marib, Amran and Al Mahwit governorates

Yemen remains the world's largest and most complex humanitarian crisis to date. According to the December 2018 IPC analysis,, 15.9 million people were facing a food crisis or emergency despite ongoing humanitarian assistance in December 2018-January 2019.[117] According to a pre-COVID-19 analysis, the number of people facing high acute food insecurity in the country was expected to exceed 17 million in 2020 according to FEWS NET.[118] According to an October 2020 Acute Malnutrition analysis covering 133 districts, over half a million children under 5, and more than a quarter of a million pregnant and nursing women are expected to suffer from acute malnutrition in 2020, with a significant deterioration between August and December.

In nearly all districts of the country, there are populations in Emergency acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 4) who depend on humanitarian assistance. Al Jawf, Marib, Amran and Al Mahwit governorates are areas of extreme concern due to the expansion of conflict and related access issues, the deepening economic crisis and rising food prices. Should the situation deteriorate further, these areas may be at risk of famine.

The two major drivers of food insecurity are an ongoing economic crisis, with severe local currency depreciation[119] and food prices (up by 140 percent from pre-war levels[120]), and the longstanding conflict. COVID-19-related restrictions remain a compounding factor mainly due to their impact on work opportunities, incomes and remittances.

Shifting frontlines have already resulted in new displacements and humanitarian access challenges are likely to persist.[121] Sporadic escalation could occur in new frontlines and the risk of oil spill from the Safer tanker could also result in the disruption of access to Hudaydah port in the Red Sea as well as significant spikes in the cost of fuel and food.[122]

Desert locusts present another challenge.[123]

The Yemen Humanitarian Response Plan has received only around 42 percent of the funding requested in 2020,[124] and 15 of the United Nations' 41 major humanitarian programmes had to be reduced or shut down with 30 more facing cuts in the coming weeks.[125]

Asia and the Pacific

The socio-economic fallout of COVID-19-related measures, conflict, extreme weather events and natural hazards are the main drivers of food insecurity in the Asia-Pacific region. Increasing poverty is a concern, particularly in those economies in Asia which are characterized by widespread informal labour, dependence on remittances as well as tourism.[134]

Severe monsoon floods in some parts of Asia in 2020 have caused fatalities and damage in Pakistan and affected more than 5 million people in Bangladesh. Expected above-average rainfall, especially in the Pacific and South-East Asia, could increase the risk of flooding, landslides and crop damage in low-lying areas.

Some countries are expected to experience drier than average conditions between October 2020 and January 2021, which could lead to reduced crop yields and potential crop losses in some areas of Afghanistan and some Pacific Island states.

Violence has escalated in Afghanistan, Myanmar and between Armenia and Azerbaijan in 2020, continuing to cause displacement.

The Democratic People's Republic of Korea has been excluded from the hotspot list due to minimal evidence. However, concerns remain about vulnerability to food insecurity due to the economic constraints resulting from efforts to contain the COVID-19 pandemic.

Afghanistan

Key drivers of food insecurity: conflict; economic impact of COVID-19-related measures in urban centres

Armed conflict and economic stressors, including widespread unemployment and price hikes, are likely to continue to drive food insecurity in Afghanistan, with the effect of COVID-19-related restrictions as a compounding factor. The number of people facing a food crisis or emergency has increased from over 10.2 million in September 2019 to over 10.8 million in April 2020, including over 3.4 million people in emergency acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 4).[135]

The number of people in crisis acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3) is expected to increase in January 2021 as the lean season progresses, with the Central Highlands worst affected.[136]

An analysis conducted in September 2020 indicates that 61 percent of Afghan households are under stress because of increasing levels of debt required to meet food needs. This was due primarily to the impact of multiple shocks, including COVID-19-related restrictions and reduced access to agricultural inputs.

Urban areas of Herat, Kandahar, Daykundi, Nangahar and Balkh face a food crisis (IPC Phase 3) as a result of below-average labour opportunities and above-average food prices linked to COVID-19-related restrictions. Precipitation in the 2020-2021 rainy season is currently forecast to be significantly below average, which could affect wheat production in 2021.[137]

Fighting between Afghan National Security Forces and non-state armed groups has significantly increased since early 2020 and has been further escalating as intra-Afghan peace talks have started in Doha. In August 2020 itself, several days of fighting forced over 64 000 people to flee their homes in Kunduz city and villages across Khanabad and Imam Sahib districts, including over 27 050 people that required immediate humanitarian assistance.[138]

Strategic recommendations

Food security in the 20 hotspots identified in this report is likely to deteriorate over the next three to six months due to different, and often simultaneous, drivers including conflict, climate hazards, economic shocks and the compounding socio-economic effects of the COVID-19 pandemic and related restrictions. The following actions are strongly recommended to save lives and protect livelihoods of the most vulnerable populations and prevent further human suffering.

Strategic Recommendation 1: Guarantee access and promote conditions of peace in conflict-affected hotspots

Today, the overwhelming majority of people facing a food crisis or emergency (IPC/CH Phase 3 and above), and indeed the highest levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phases 4 or 5), are in countries with protracted insecurity and conflict. Conflicts devastate agricultural production, market functionality and livelihoods, undermine resilience and directly impact household income, food consumption and access to food.

The majority of countries with the highest absolute numbers of people in high acute food insecurity also report varying degrees of access constraints. Concerted effort by all relevant partners is needed to ensure the full protection of affected populations and allow humanitarian workers not only to safely reach those in need, but to stay and deliver.

Securing access, safeguarding civilian infrastructure essential for the survival of populations, and expanding humanitarian action is critical for all conflict-affected hotspot countries (Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Cameroon, the Central African Republic, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Lebanon, Mali, Mozambique, the Niger, Nigeria, Somalia, South Sudan, the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen) and is of particular urgency in the four countries with areas identified as at risk of famine (Yemen, South Sudan, northeastern Nigeria and Burkina Faso), where humanitarian assistance is a lifeline for millions of people.

It is imperative that:

- humanitarian actors are granted protection and space to negotiate with all actors, in line with international humanitarian law and humanitarian principles, to secure safe access to reach populations, stay and deliver;
- dialogue with armed groups and security forces is strengthened to safeguard humanitarian response and to facilitate access to food, medical care and other critical means of survival by civilian populations;
- capacities of humanitarian actors are reinforced in context analysis and actor mapping, and in community-based acceptance approaches to secure and maintain access;
- risks of exceptional measures are assessed collectively, to ensure the principle of humanity; and
- supply corridors for the movement of essential needs into and within a country are unimpeded.

In turn, preventing food crises requires conflict resolution and supporting prospects for peace. Ensuring activities that protect and promote livelihoods, community assets and market functionality are conflict-sensitive and designed through proven community-based participatory planning approaches, is essential to doing no harm and contributing to prospects for peace and stability in affected communities.

Strategic Recommendation 2: Promote anticipatory action, proactive preparedness in areas affected by or at imminent risk of climatic shocks, through strengthened partnerships and support to government systems, including national disaster management

Anticipatory action systems are designed to systematically link forward-looking risk analysis with rapid financing and action protocols to ensure that once early warning 'triggers' are reached, actions can be taken to protect people ahead of impacts. Such systems result in much earlier interventions and lessen humanitarian costs.

Key anticipatory actions include, among others: the distribution of specific agricultural inputs to prevent and mitigate foreseen climate shock impacts on food production; cash transfers to ensure that vulnerable populations can protect themselves ahead of shocks; livestock protection activities, in particular ahead of drought; and strengthened and continuous surveillance, early warning and control of pests and diseases. Further vital preparedness measures may include assessing operational capacities; acting early to address operational gaps; beneficiary pre-registration or integration with national social protection systems; prepositioning of food, especially if increases in displacement are foreseen; updating joint baseline assessments and analyses; and ensuring that the resources required are identified and seized.

Anticipatory actions are a priority for the Horn of Africa to mitigate the impacts of desert locusts and forecast below-average rains for the October-December season. This would include providing short-cycle and drought-tolerant seeds, as well as fodder to smallholder farmers in drought-prone areas; animal health services to pastoral and agro-pastoral communities; and supplementary livestock feed to pastoral communities who lost their grazing reserves to desert locusts.

Across Southern Africa, it is critical to ensure a timely distribution of agricultural inputs, such as seeds and fertilizers, to support vulnerable farmers during the main cropping season starting in October-November.

This is particularly important in Zimbabwe, where more than half of the farmers face difficulties in accessing seeds due to high prices and unavailability in the local markets, both linked to the shortage of foreign currency which hampers the import of agricultural inputs.

In both the Horn and Southern Africa, providing food security assistance alongside agricultural inputs can maximize impact. Ensuring access to predictable markets for farmers will remain a priority, especially amidst the COVID-19 economic fallout which could impact demand.

In other regions, La Niña conditions are expected to lead to higher than average rainfall and risk of flooding, for example in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, north-east South America and parts of Southern Africa are at risk of flooding during the next months. Anticipatory actions for flooding include, among others, cash distributions to allow people to evacuate their families and livestock, support to farmers for early harvest of crops, and the provision of storage containers to safeguard seeds and agricultural assets.

In Haiti, a country prone to shocks such as hurricanes, earthquakes, floods and landslides, it remains crucial to strengthen government capacity and increase partners' contingency food stocks, as available stocks cover food needs for one month only.

Continuous surveillance of the desert locust pest, with rapid control operations as required, is a priority for hotspot countries such as Ethiopia, Somalia, the Sudan and Yemen. In Yemen, control operations are hindered by access issues.

Strategic Recommendation 3: Promote recovery, resilience and inclusivity through systems-based approaches including investing in food and social protection systems for the most vulnerable

As the impact of COVID-19-related measures on the global economy contributes to increasing food insecurity, it is crucial to invest in flexible, shock-responsive national social protection systems to protect the most vulnerable and mitigate additional medium and longer-term needs.

Social protection cushions the impact of hunger, poverty and vulnerability on the most at-risk population groups by enabling them to absorb and adapt to risks and by preventing the adoption of negative coping strategies (i.e. selling productive assets or disinvesting in human capital) that would push them into more extreme poverty. In turn, inclusive and effective social protection systems can promote conditions and prospects for stability. Therefore, it is crucial to strengthen national social protection systems by ensuring continuity in service delivery and the possibility to expand coverage on the basis of early warning signals, as well as to build on national social protection systems to improve the targeting and delivery of anticipatory actions.

More broadly speaking, the complex challenges highlighted in this report can only be effectively and sustainably addressed with further investments in food systems that ensure that the most vulnerable populations are prioritized. FAO and WFP are adopting a more integrated approach to strengthening food systems, supporting national governments and partners in identifying and addressing food system risks and disruptions to protect and sustain their function.

Alongside actions identified under Strategic Recommendation 2, opportunities to recover and stabilize food systems include promoting linkages between local production and markets (especially relevant in hotspot countries affected by economic risks, conflict and reduced access to fuel), advocating that borders remain open (especially relevant for import-heavy landlocked countries), and where possible leveraging the humanitarian footprint to help stabilize food systems through local food purchases and cash transfers. Regular and predictable cash-based transfers may be especially relevant given the impact of COVID-19-related restrictions on the flow of remittances and on urban communities.

Investing in food and social protection systems is relevant for all the countries covered in this report. For example, in Afghanistan, it is vital to support women farmers, smallholders and sharecroppers to access unconditional assistance and cash for work to rebuild their livelihoods. In addition, it is recommended to extend social protection systems to IDPs who cannot return to their communities of origin due to conflict.

In Nigeria, there is a need for strengthening and expansion of the federal and state-level social protection system to ensure households have access to food and basic needs while supporting workers, farmers and agri-businesses to resume activities and foster productivity following COVID-19-related restrictions, with a particular focus on vulnerable population sub-groups such as women, youth (65 percent of the population), persons with disabilities and displaced persons who are disproportionately affected by the socio-economic impact of the pandemic.

In order to address the impacts of COVID-19-related restrictions and to anticipate the expected needs outlined in this report for Somalia, it is recommended to scale-up, horizontally and vertically, unconditional cash transfers to rural households to cover their immediate food needs.

Strategic Recommendation 4: With real-time food security monitoring already covering most of the hotspot countries, it will be important to highlight the need to sustain these investments beyond the current crisis situation.

In highly volatile and emerging risk contexts, close and continuous monitoring, including through real-time and remote modalities, is crucial to ensure a better common and shared understanding of food security contexts and the factors contributing to vulnerability, to inform evidence-based anticipatory action and preparedness. Investing in data collection, sharing and utilization should be prioritized to ensure that risk factor changes are rapidly identified, measured against commonly agreed trigger levels, and anticipated through concerted efforts. This includes strengthened mechanisms for monitoring the agricultural season and production.

Data collection and analysis of food security, including key supplier and consumer markets, should be carried out regularly and disseminated widely to ensure risk-informed decision making, the

continual alignment between preparedness and investment levels and to address the evolving nature of key risks in the context.

This requires a strengthened collaboration between all stakeholders and a joint approach to analysis, programming and monitoring that builds a greater recognition of the multi-dimensional nature of hunger.

Setting up and enhancing existing risk monitoring is a priority in all hotspot countries. This is especially valid for countries showing a critical deterioration, for example Yemen and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, and for those approaching the key agricultural production seasons which may be impacted by La Niña-induced adverse weather conditions, such as in East and Southern Africa. While nationwide continuous real-time monitoring has been expanded in 2020 in a number of the countries highlighted in this report, there is an opportunity to extend this vital data platform in Lebanon, South Sudan, the Sudan, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and surrounding countries.

To this end, securing dedicated resources to deliver on this strategic recommendation is a continuous challenge. For example, of the USD 10 million requested under the COVID-19 Global Humanitarian Response Plan for real-time food security monitoring, funds allocated currently cover only USD 4.2 million.

Strategic Recommendation 5: Ensure adequate, timely and flexible funding to enable anticipatory action, preparedness and sustain critical humanitarian assistance

As states and partners invest in social protection systems, livelihood and food assistance for the most vulnerable, they are faced with increasing difficulties in securing necessary resources amidst the global COVID-19 crisis.

Meanwhile, more than 10 months into the year, funding against humanitarian response plans (HRP) globally is as low as 36.4 percent, and among the 20 hotspot countries and situations identified in this report, the average level of funding is even lower. Insufficient funds have a devastating impact on the food security of the most vulnerable, affecting not only the livelihood interventions required to mitigate hunger and promote stability, but also life-saving food assistance. For example, in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, where the latest IPC shows the world's largest burden of hunger, the 2020 HRP is covered at only 26 percent, and refugees receive only some 75 percent of their required food needs.

Wherever possible, flexible funding should be encouraged to support food security partners in channelling funds where they are most needed, including to anticipate rapidly-evolving needs identified through early warning and real-time monitoring.

Response plan/appeal overview for 2020

RESPONSE PLAN/APPEAL	REQUIRED (US$M)	FUNDED (US$M	COVERAGE (%)
Lebanon Flash Appeal 2020	354.9	114.9	32.4%
Mozambique COVID-19 Flash Appeal	68.1	19.4	28.5%
Afghanistan HRP	1,131.1	452.1	40.0%
Burkina Faso HRP	424.4	201.1	47.4%
Cameroon HRP	390.9	152.0	38.9%
The Central African Republic HRP	553.6	314.3	56.8%
The Democratic Republic of the Congo HRP	2,069.1	539.4	26.1%
Ethiopia HRP	1,437.8	493.9	34.4%
Haiti HRP	472.0	77.8	16.5%
Mali HRP	474.3	176.9	37.3%

The Niger HRP	516.1	225.9	43.8%
Nigeria HRP	1,080.4	449.4	41.6%
Somalia HRP	1,009.9	618.7	61.3%
South Sudan HRP	1,899.9	823.5	43.3%
The Sudan HRP	1,633.4	751.2	46.0%
Syrian Arab Republic HRP	3,817.5	1,743.2	45.7%
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of) HRP	762.5	127.6	16.7%
Yemen HRP	3,382.7	1,432.0	42.3%
Zimbabwe HRP	800.8	180.6	22.5%
Cabo Delgado Province Mozambique Other	35.5	27.9	78.6%
Lebanon COVID-19 Other	136.5	63.6	46.6%
Sierra Leone COVID-19 Other	62.9	12.6	20.0%
The Democratic Republic of the Congo Regional RRP	638.7	30.6	4.8%
Horn of Africa and Yemen RRP	76.5	0.3	0.3%
South Sudan Regional RRP	1,341.0	72.7	5.4%
Syria Regional RRP	5,996.0	1,706.6	28.5%
Venezuela Regional RRP	1,407.6	429.5	30.5%

Source: OCHA Financial Tracking System data, 27 October 2020)

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Global Network
Against Food Crises

FAO and WFP are the founding members of the Global Network Against Food Crises, together with European Commission for International Cooperation and Development (DG DEVCO) and European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (DG ECHO). The Global Network seeks to better link, integrate and guide existing programmes and policy processes to sustainably address the root causes of food crises along the Humanitarian-Development-Peace (HDP) nexus.

Within the Global Network's approach and framework, FAO and WFP together with relevant partners have established a coordinated monitoring system for food security, livelihoods and value chains in order to identify and inform critical anticipatory actions.

This report is the first joint FAO-WFP early warning analysis of food insecurity hotspots and is part of a series of Global Network's analytical products contributing to the generation and sharing of consensus and evidence-based information for preventing and addressing food crises.

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