FAO-WFP early warning analysis of acute food insecurity hotspots

July 2020

Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

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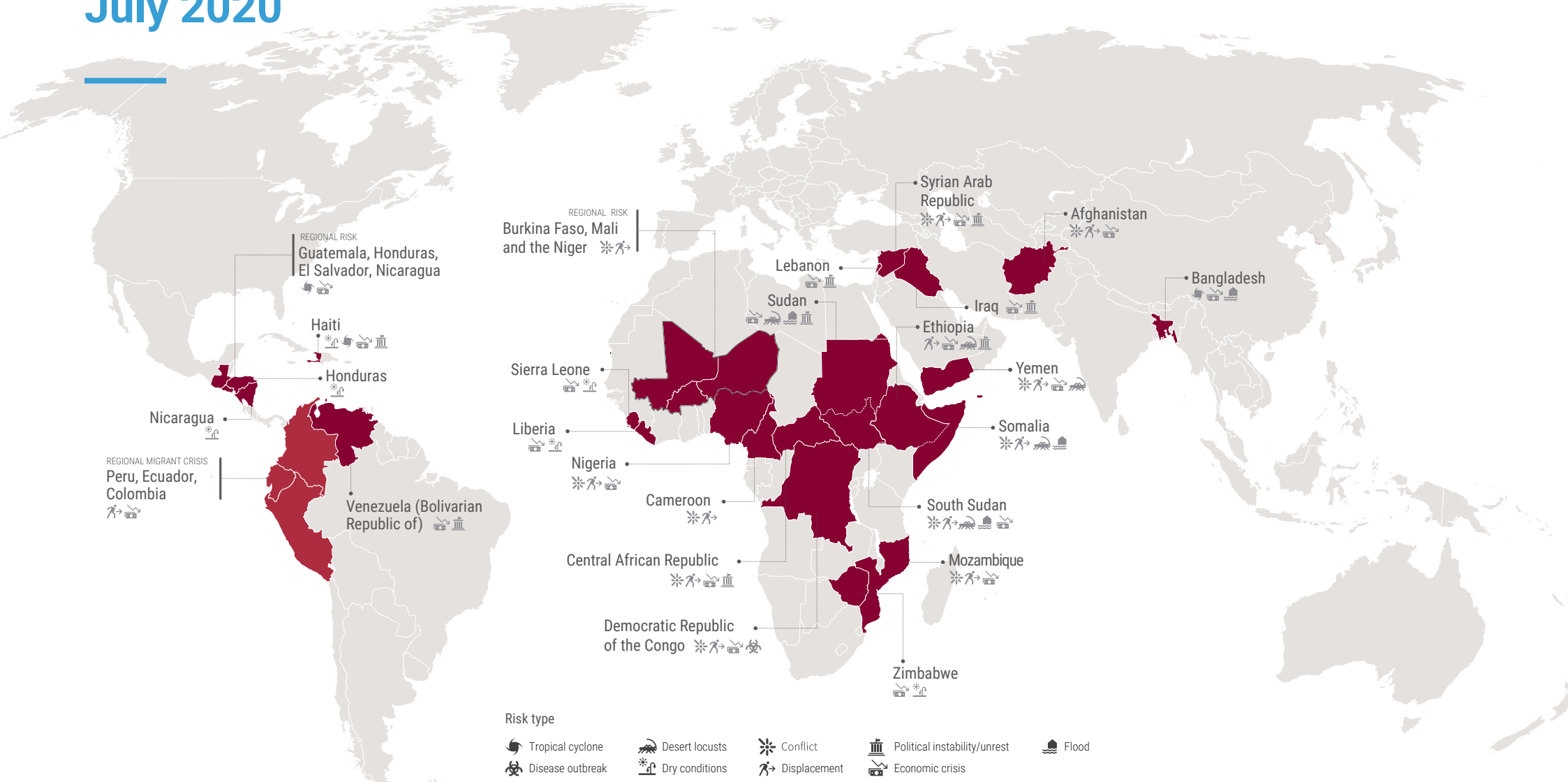

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INTRODUCTION

The COVID-19 crisis unfolds at a time when the number of acutely food-insecure people in the world has already risen over the past four years, largely due to conflict, climate change and economic downturn. According to the latest Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC 2020), in 2019 almost 135 million people across 55 countries experienced acute hunger. Since the onset of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020, these numbers have been further increasing. The UN Secretary General has recently warned about an impending global food emergency.

The secondary effects of the global pandemic beyond the health impact are wide-ranging and affect a large number of countries worldwide. While the evolution of COVID-19 and containment measures remain dynamic and unpredictable, and the medium and longer-term impacts of the crisis are yet to be fully understood, it is already clear that low and middle-income countries will be disproportionately affected.

The World Bank forecasts the deepest global recession since the Second World War and estimates that up to 100 million people across the world will be pushed into extreme poverty (WB 2020). For households in fragile contexts, the pandemic is particularly troubling, as it exacerbates existing vulnerabilities, driving communities deeper into hunger and destitution.

As jobs are lost, the flow of remittances slows down and food systems come under stress or are disrupted, the number of people facing acute food insecurity – the most extreme form of hunger – is going to increase. At the same time, should COVID-19 persist, and unless acute hunger is rapidly addressed and prevented, the world may also see a further rise in chronic hunger, with long-term consequences for hundreds of millions of children and adults. Prior to COVID-19, this trend of increasing chronic hunger had already been confirmed in many of the hotspot countries by the latest State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World Report (SOFI 2020).

This joint FAO-WFP analysis highlights countries that are at risk of significant food security deterioration, and in particular acute hunger and associated malnutrition. The analysis takes into account all major drivers of food insecurity, with a particular focus on the secondary impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. It provides a forward-looking perspective, outlining the likely evolution of impacts over a period of approximately six months, aiming to inform urgent action to safeguard the food security of the most vulnerable communities in these locations.

The hotspot countries were selected through a consensus-based analytical process by FAO and WFP, focusing primarily on the following elements:

- levels of food insecurity and malnutrition prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, with a focus on acute food insecurity;
- projections of acute food insecurity at country level;
- presence of existing compounding shocks and stressors including, among others, economic crisis or political instability, climate conditions, conflict and insecurity, plant pests and animal diseases;
- presence of natural-hazard risks, economic risks and conflict risks in an outlook of six months;
- government capacity to address COVID-19 impacts and severity of containment measures;
- dependence on commodity exports, food imports and remittances;
- planned and ongoing agricultural activities during the July-December period and existing or likely COVID-19 impacts on these activities;
- presence of particularly vulnerable or at-high-risk populations, including displaced populations; and
- issues concerning humanitarian access and operational constraints.

The analysis is based on the latest, available evidence. However, it is important to note that the situation on the ground is fast evolving and will require careful monitoring, as well as updates as more evidence becomes available.

Impacts of COVID-19 are highly context-specific and affect population groups differently. Overall, pre-existing vulnerabilities of population groups are likely to be exacerbated as availability of and access to basic services, employment opportunities, safety nets and resources to protect or rebuild livelihoods are more strained than ever before. Women, elderly people, youth, children, persons with disabilities, indigenous populations, minorities, mobile and displaced populations including refugees, internally displaced persons (IDPs) and poor-labour migrants (international and internal) will likely face even greater challenges as existing formal and informal safety nets and social structures will be negatively impacted by the COVID-19 crisis. The urban poor living in densely populated areas, and households depending on the informal sector (both rural and urban), are expected to be among the hardest hit. For children from already impoverished and food-insecure households, the negative effects of the crisis, including extended school closures and missing out on school meals, could have lifelong effects and further perpetuate the vicious cycle of poverty and inequality. Overall, COVID-19 will have group-specific implications which will need to be closely assessed and monitored to ensure 'no one is left behind'.

The report is divided into three sections. The first is an overview on the main pathways of secondary impacts of COVID-19 on food security, nutrition and agriculture, followed by regional overviews and a focus on hotspot countries. The last section lists strategic recommendations that should be urgently implemented to avoid a large-scale deterioration of acute food insecurity.

COVID-19 pathways of impact on food security

The COVID-19 pandemic has potentially far-reaching and multifaceted indirect impacts on societies and economies, which could last long after the health emergency is over. These could aggravate existing instabilities or crises, or lead to new ones with repercussions on food security, nutrition and livelihoods. This section outlines some of the key pathways of impact through which the pandemic is pushing vulnerable people further into food insecurity.

Pathway 1: Impacts on food access through reduced household purchasing power

The loss in purchasing power due to falling incomes, lost remittances and, in some contexts, higher food prices will disproportionately affect the ability of the urban poor and other market-dependent groups to access food.

- The impact on employment appears to be larger than initially expected, with ILO estimates recently being updated to an equivalent of 400 million full-time jobs lost and a 14 percent reduction in global working hours. In particular, countries with a high share of people employed in the informal sector, high working poverty rates and underperforming social protection systems are at risk of increasing food insecurity (ILO 2020).
- With over two billion people, or 62 percent of all those working worldwide, employed in the informal economy according to ILO data, millions of people face a growing risk of hunger. Earnings for informal workers are estimated to decline by 82 percent, with Africa and Latin America to face the largest decline (ILO 2020). Women and young people are disproportionately affected since they are employed in sectors that are most impacted by the crisis.
- While remittances often serve as an important informal safety net in times of hardship, they typically slow down during a global economic crisis. The World Bank estimates remittances will fall globally by 20 percent in 2020 due the economic impacts of COVID-19 (WB 2020).
- Domestic food prices have increased in many countries since the beginning of the pandemic and might still come under further pressure. A fall in poor countries' export earnings due to plummeting prices for primary commodities (oil, ores, metals) and/or a drastic fall in tourism have put a strain on currencies and driven up food prices, particularly for imported foods. Border closures and suspension of weekly and open-air markets in many countries have led to reduced regional trade and prevented farmers selling their produce, sometimes leading to localized food scarcity and increased prices.

Pathway 2: Impacts on availability of food, agricultural production and food supply chains

The COVID-19 pandemic is having significant – and likely increasing – implications for food production and supply, which is particularly concerning in already fragile settings.

- The smooth functioning of food value chains and the flow of agricultural products are critical to food security and nutrition. However, government measures such as import restrictions and movement limitations, necessary to contain the spread of the virus, have been disrupting entire food chains – from production to processing, packaging, transporting, marketing and consumption – as well as livestock movements, which are critical for the survival of pastoralists.
- Even though food and agricultural commodities are considered in many countries to be essential and are often exempt from restrictions, supply chains have been slowed and disrupted by transport delays, closed markets and export restrictions. These factors particularly affect farmers producing perishable goods, such as fruit and vegetable growers, resulting in waste of agricultural products, reduced wages and negative repercussions on their ability to prepare for the next cropping season.
- Moreover, labour shortages have further disrupted the food chain, with many labourers returning from neighboring countries or urban centres to their original homes in rural areas, awaiting the restrictions to be eased and the risk of infection to be minimized.

- The income of rural households has been decreased due to reduced remittances, limited opportunities for daily labour, closure of local markets and decline in local demand. This constrains their ability to purchase inputs – such as seeds, fertilizers, pesticides, animal feed and treatment – for the next planting season. In addition, due to supply chain disruptions, input prices are increasing in many countries. This dynamic is likely to lead to a vicious cycle of declining production, reduced agricultural labour opportunities and increasing food prices, resulting in negative coping strategies and a further deterioration of food and nutrition security.

Pathway 3: Impacts on government capacities to protect vulnerable populations

Primary and secondary impacts of COVID-19 have overstretched governments' capacities to protect vulnerable populations.

- Due to export earnings from primary commodities and tourism running dry, and ensuing currency depreciation, countries risk not having sufficient means to pay for vital imports or respond to the socioeconomic impacts of the pandemic through measures such as scaling up social protection programmes.
- Countries with already low foreign exchange reserves or high public debt face particular difficulties. With a significant portion of the public budget devoted to servicing debt, it will be a struggle to find the necessary resources to respond to the health and economic impacts of COVID-19 and protect the most vulnerable against destitution and food insecurity.

Pathway 4: Impacts on political stability

Once movement restrictions are lifted and the economic slowdown hits harder, socio-political instability could increase in several countries due to different factors, often combined:

- Aggravation of core socioeconomic grievances with rising levels of unemployment (particularly among the youth), loss of income and livelihoods, increasing poverty, inequalities and food insecurity. This can further exacerbate existing social discontent and fragmentation – especially in countries with pre-existing and compounding economic crises. Analysis indicates that, in the coming months, levels of civil unrest risk being higher and having more destabilizing effects compared to recent years.
- Aggravation of existing political crises, increased fragmentation within ruling elites or new fractures that may increase political instability under heightened pressures from the pandemic and its response. Poor handling of COVID-19 outbreaks may turn public opinion against governments.
- As of 1 July, at least 67 countries and territories in the world had postponed elections due to COVID-19, according to the Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance (IDEA 2020), and a number of countries had implemented measures affecting freedom of expression according to the COVID-19 Civic Freedom Tracker, a collaborative effort between the International and the European Centres for not-for-profit Law, and the UN Human Rights Office.

Pathway 5: Impacts on conflict dynamics

The indirect effects of COVID-19, and the actions taken in response, can contribute to increasing tensions and violence, and also affect the capacities and behaviour of local, national or international actors, which in turn may alter existing conflict and peace dynamics. Under certain conditions, COVID-19 may exacerbate existing drivers of conflict and undermine social and economic resilience. Conflict and violence are amongst the main drivers of food insecurity globally.

- Movement restrictions and border closures continue to affect transhumance and disrupt access to natural resources. Where disputes, tensions and conflicts have previously existed, their frequency and intensity will potentially increase, especially if movement restrictions remain in place for extended periods.
- Non-state armed groups (NSAGs) are using a more permissive security environment as an opportunity to intensify operations and to change tactics towards de-facto control of areas. Capacity to address NSAGs has reduced, with security forces overstretched as they focus on COVID-19 responses, and as states struggle with less resources and other political and socioeconomic challenges. The ability of international coalitions to respond to NSAGs has also been affected due to concerns over infections and refocusing on domestic responses.
- NSAGs may increase recruitment in areas hit hard by high unemployment, attracting more people to the profitable illegal economies under their control. NSAGs may also seek to exploit previous socioeconomic grievances, identity group marginalization and concerns over state legitimacy.
- In ethnically or religiously diverse contexts, specific groups may be blamed for transmitting the virus, be discriminated against or made a scapegoat for outbreaks, increasing intercommunal tensions.
- The demands of the pandemic may divert international attention and resources away from conflict prevention and mediation, reshaping stakeholders' engagement. This may include fewer opportunities for face-to-face diplomatic efforts and temporarily hamper peacekeeping operations if troop deployments and rotations are disrupted by travel restrictions.

Regional overview and country hotspots

Regional overview and country hotspots

Latin America and the Caribbean

In recent years, hunger in Latin America and the Caribbean has been on the rise, after decades of significant reduction, with 18.6 million people in what the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) defines as Crisis levels of food insecurity, or worse, in 2019 (GRFC 2019). In the region, hunger predominantly stems from poverty and not from lack of food. Now, under the impact of COVID-19, the poverty rate could increase from 30.3 to 37.2 percent, with extreme poverty climbing from 11 to 15.5.5 percent, according to the July 2020 UN Policy Brief.

COVID-19-related movement restrictions and external economic shocks are causing a direct loss of employment, livelihoods and purchasing power, particularly affecting workers in the informal labour market who rely on daily income for basic goods and services. These workers represent 54 percent of the labour force (ILO 2020) and over 80 percent in agriculture (ECLAC-CEPAL 2020).

International remittances to the region are expected to decline sharply by 19.3 percent (WB 2020). Supply chain disruptions, gaps in food availability and some increases in food prices are also hampering access to food and severely affecting food systems and food security.

According to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, the impact of COVID-19 will result in a 5.3 percent contraction of the regional economy in 2020, while the World Bank projects a contraction of 7.2 percent (WB 2020). These figures are poised to translate into the region's worst economic and social crisis in decades, and to have a dramatic impact especially on those economies that were characterized by structural fragilities.

Compounding the situation are already existing risk factors, including climate-related shocks. The hurricane season in the Caribbean, running until November, is forecasted with a 60 percent likelihood to be above average (NOAA 2020). Central American countries are also at risk of heavy rains from the northeastern Pacific tropical storm season – as seen recently with tropical storm Amanda triggering flooding in southern Guatemala, El Salvador and Honduras in June. In parallel, in the Dominican Republic, eastern Honduras, eastern Nicaragua, northwestern Venezuela and northern Colombia, the current rainfall deficits are likely to be exacerbated by below-average rainfall expected to continue until the end of cropping seasons.

In **Haiti**, the main rainy season ended in June, and has seen below-average and erratic rainfall, likely reducing agricultural production and resulting in crop losses for another consecutive year. Additionally, the country is likely to face reduced income and purchasing power due to the lack of formal and informal labour opportunities, inflation, decreased remittances, and the closure of the border with the Dominican Republic, which disrupted the livelihoods of many. Political instability and unrest often had a negative impact on economic activities, local markets and humanitarian operations, and may increase further under current conditions.

Production deficits, combined with restrictions of market hours and other food supply chain disruptions, are expected to exacerbate the current inflationary pressure on food prices. The latest IPC analysis (IPC 2019) estimates that nearly 3.7 million people (35 percent of the total population) are in Crisis level or worse (October 2019–February 2020).

According to the Global Report on Food Crises, there were 4.4 million acutely food-insecure people in Crisis level (IPC Phase 3 and above) across Central America (**Guatemala, Honduras, El Salvador, Nicaragua**) in 2019 (GRFC 2019). Movement restrictions and physical distancing measures adopted to contain the spread of COVID-19 have further reduced poor households' sources of income and purchasing power, especially in the informal sector, and remittances have declined significantly. This is set to continue over the coming months, and is likely to result in a continued deterioration of the food security situation. Weather conditions appear favourable for the development of crops in the primera season, which typically ends in September. However, extreme climate shocks, such as tropical storms Amanda and Cristobal, which mainly affected El Salvador, Guatemala and part of Honduras in early June, could have a negative impact on food production.

In **Venezuela**, 9.3 million people were acutely food insecure (IPC Phase 3 or above) and in need of assistance as of July-September 2019 (WFP 2019), making this the fourth-largest food crisis in the world in 2019 (GRFC 2019). The impact of COVID-19 and the related containment measures, combined with the dramatic drop of oil prices, are likely to add to the pre-existing food insecurity, as the purchasing power of Venezuelans continues to deteriorate and imported food items are increasingly expensive.

As of June 2020, there were 5.2 million Venezuelan migrants, refugees and asylum seekers in the region, according to the Coordination Platform for Refugees and Migrants from Venezuela (R4V 2020). Migrants, refugees and asylum seekers are among those hardest hit by border closures, curtailed economic activity, overwhelmed health systems and strained social safety nets. Nearly 500,000 Venezuelan migrants, assessed as already acutely food insecure in Colombia, Ecuador and Peru (WFP 2020), are largely excluded from national social protection and health systems and their livelihood disproportionately depends on the informal sector. The ongoing economic deterioration in the host countries could further impact the livelihoods of migrants and refugees, as well as those of marginalized social groups among host communities, leading to increased poverty and food insecurity and potentially boosting anti-migrant sentiments among local populations. According to Colombian migration authorities, at least 76,000 Venezuelans have reportedly returned to Venezuela since the onset of COVID-19 measures in host countries, while quotas have been established for a maximum number of returnees, leaving many Venezuelans in unsafe and vulnerable conditions at the border.

Regional overview and country hotspots

East Africa

Before the COVID-19 crisis, some 27.6 million people were already acutely food insecure, requiring urgent action (IPC phase 3 or above) across the East Africa region (IGAD regional report, GRFC, 2020). For vulnerable households, purchasing power has sharply declined due to the combined effects of reduced incomes and, in some cases, higher food prices. In addition to COVID-19, the region is facing the worst desert locust outbreak in 25 years, which is threatening food security and livelihoods. The region also saw severe flooding between March and May 2020, that affected nearly 1.3 million people (OCHA, 2020). Households across parts of the region are also still struggling to recover their livelihoods after the effects of recent severe droughts, including in 2017 and the first half of 2019. The combined effect of these multiple challenges is likely to result in a deteriorating food security and nutritional situation. Of particular concern are the 3.3 million refugees and 6.2 million IDPs in the region (WFP 2020), many of whom are highly dependent on external assistance for their food and nutrition needs. Though the largest number of food-insecure people is expected to remain in rural areas, the food security situation in urban areas is a cause for increased concern.

All governments in the East Africa region have imposed physical distancing requirements and movement restrictions due to COVID-19. Additionally, access to agricultural inputs and extension services (technical advice and support to farmers) has been constrained. Activities at wholesale markets have been reduced, with lower-than-usual domestic sale levels and challenges relating to the export of agricultural products and increased food waste. The closure of livestock markets in certain countries, and reduced export demand for live animals from the Middle East, have had negative implications for the incomes of pastoral households and national economies. Similarly, movement restrictions, particularly border closures, have limited access to seasonal migration for agricultural labour, as well as to traditional grazing and water points for transhumant pastoralists. In **Somalia**, a combination of flooding, dry spells, a locust invasion, risk of further conflict escalation and COVID-19 compounds an already fragile humanitarian situation. This threatens to push the country into even deeper food insecurity, with the food-insecure population expected to triple compared to pre-COVID-19 estimates. According to the Food Security and Nutrition Analysis Unit (FSNAU) and the Famine Early warning Systems Network (FEWS NET), 3.5 million people are expected to face acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3+) between July and September 2020, up from 1.3 million people projected for the April to June period at the beginning of the year (FSNAU/FEWS NE, 2020). At the macro level, the Government is projecting an 11 percent decline in GDP through 2020 as reported by OCHA (OCHA, 2020). Somalia is highly import-dependent for food, and prices for staple food commodities continue to rise across the country due to limited availability and high demand. Rising prices on key imported commodities are impacting low-income earners, particularly IDPs and rural communities.

Remittances, received by an estimated 40 percent of Somali households, have dropped by as much as 50 percent as reported by OCHA (OCHA, 2020). COVID-19 challenges, in combination with recent flooding estimated to have displaced 412,000 people (WFP, 2020) and the desert locusts outbreak, are projected to drive reduced output of the main Gu season crops, to be harvested in July, by 20-30 percent

(FSNAU, 2020). Additionally, decreasing demand from the Middle East has reduced livestock exports, which accounts for about 60 percent of export earnings (FAO 2020), by 20 percent during the first quarter of 2020. A further decrease by 30-50 percent is expected due to reduced demand from Saudi Arabia, following the cancellation of the pilgrimage during Ramadan (FSNAU 2020).

In **South Sudan**, the combination of conflict, macroeconomic challenges, a desert locust invasion, natural hazards and COVID-19, overlapping with the peak of the May to July lean season, threatens to further deteriorate already alarmingly high food-insecurity levels. In February 2020 – before the pandemic – the number of severely food-insecure people was projected to be almost 6.5 million for May to July 2020 (IPC 2020). However, given COVID-19 impacts, the actual number of food-insecure people is likely higher. While intercommunal violence continues to be a major challenge, the COVID-19 pandemic risks stalling the implementation of the peace agreement and exacerbating political fractures. On the economic front, COVID-19-related restrictions are exacerbating a pre-existing macroeconomic crisis. In addition, with extremely limited foreign-exchange reserves and heavy reliance on income from the export of crude petroleum, South Sudan is heavily exposed to the reduction in demand and prices of oil. Evidence is emerging on negative impacts of COVID-19 on agricultural production (e.g. limited access to seeds, animal health and vaccination facilities, and labour), and the marketing of crops and livestock, as well as fishing and petty trade and labour opportunities. This, coupled with extremely high and increasing food prices, driven by both the macroeconomic crisis and transportation challenges due to COVID-19-related cross-border checkpoints, will cause a decline in purchasing power. Flooding and desert locusts could also increase food insecurity and malnutrition for some populations, particularly during the lean season. The upcoming rainy season is forecasted to bring a high risk of flooding, especially in the eastern half of the country, already affected by devastating floods in late 2019.

In **Ethiopia**, COVID-19-related mitigation measures, in combination with recent flooding and crop losses caused by desert locusts, will likely result in a below-average secondary season Belg harvest in June-July. Such drivers, combined with instability and insecurity – with increased inter-regional and inter-ethnic tensions and violence, population displacements, macroeconomic challenges, high food prices and vulnerability to COVID-19 impacts on the agriculture exports, tourism and travel sectors (which contributes to nearly half of export earnings) – are expected to cause deteriorating food security, particularly among vulnerable rural and urban populations dependent on labour wages and markets. For pastoralists, incomes will likely fall due to livestock market closures, reduced demand domestically and from abroad, and increased input costs. A total of 8.5 million people were projected to be acutely food insecure as per the IPC analysis prior to COVID-19 (IPC 2020). The Humanitarian Response Plan has been recently revised to include 16.5 million people in need of humanitarian assistance, including urgent food and nutrition support.

Regional overview and country hotspots

West Africa

More than 12.3 million people in 16 countries analysed were estimated to be in Crisis or worse (CH Phase 3 or above) situation in October–December 2019 in the Sahel and broader West Africa region (including Liberia and Cameroon) according to the Global Report on Food Crises (GRFC 2019). In the region, COVID-19 secondary impact compounds already alarming levels of food insecurity, with 19 million people projected to be in high levels of acute food insecurity between June and August 2020, as per pre-COVID-19 estimates (CH 2019). This was already an important increase from 2019, linked primarily to conflicts in Central Sahel and northern Nigeria and the localized impact of climatic hazards, plant pests and economic shocks. Pests such as desert locusts and fall armyworms are threatening to affect the ongoing 2020/21 agropastoral season. Working poverty is high, and commodity market volatility and supply chain disruptions will impact access and availability of food. The COVID-19 crisis coincides with the peak of the lean season, when hunger and malnutrition are most severe, and could drive a further increase of needs.

All the countries flagged in this analysis maintain preventative measures and mobility restrictions, with varying degrees of severity, aimed at reducing the spread of the COVID-19 pandemic. Although, in recent weeks, governments have eased some of the restrictions, most countries in the region are not yet showing a considerable downward trend in their epidemic curves, which may result in a prolonged duration of containment measures. While essential to prevent the spread of the virus, these are expected to have significant secondary impacts on food security and livelihoods unless appropriate and timely interventions are implemented to protect the most vulnerable.

Agricultural activities are reportedly ongoing normally in the majority of countries. However, access to inputs and availability of agricultural labour have been hindered by COVID-19-related containment measures, especially in Chad, Nigeria and Senegal.

Overall, early prospects for the 2020 cropping season still remain uncertain due to persisting insecurity, the effects of COVID-19 and the possible occurrence of desert locusts and fall armyworm infestations.

While rainfall forecasts for the upcoming cropping season are largely favourable for the Sahel belt, rainfall in parts of Guinea, Sierra Leone and Liberia is forecasted to have a very high likelihood (more than 50 percent) to remain below average for the remainder of the agricultural season, which is likely to lead to reduced crop yield and below-average harvest in some areas.

Pastoralists are among the most impacted by the COVID-19 crisis, due to the limited functioning of livestock markets and disruptions to cross-border transhumance caused by border closures, which also increase the risk of conflicts. Daily income-generating activities (small business and petty trade and service) are disrupted in most of the countries. The situation is particularly severe for labourers in the informal sectors as well as for small-scale producers and traders.

Insecurity, in combination with reduced market functionality due to COVID-19, may lead to further price spikes and limited access to food.

The COVID-19 crisis is likely to have severe impacts on countries that rely on the export of commodities. The current decline in crude oil prices will have far-reaching consequences on the capacity of several West African countries, including Cameroon, Chad, the Gambia and Nigeria, to tackle the COVID-19 crisis and implement adequate responses and social safety net programmes.

In **Nigeria**, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to deepen social and economic hardship, further exacerbating an already dire food and nutrition-insecurity situation. COVID-19's rapid spread is putting additional strains on an economy already impacted by the fall in oil prices, further affecting government revenues and foreign currency reserves, and increasing depreciation of the local currency. This is likely to result in a rising cost of living and reduced purchasing power. In northeastern Nigeria, where over 2.5 million people are currently internally displaced (UNHCR 2020), the security situation continues to deteriorate as extremist militants expand activities, while in the northwest of the country insecurity is being compounded by the consolidation of Islamic State and Al-Qaeda affiliates. According to FEWS NET's Food Security Outlook June 2020 to January 2021, it is unlikely that a famine is currently ongoing in inaccessible areas. However, famine could occur if there is a dramatic uptick or shift in conflict that isolates households from typical food and income sources, and humanitarian assistance, for a prolonged period of time.

In **Sierra Leone**, the COVID-19 pandemic is heavily compounding an economic situation already severely affected by months of continuous currency depreciation and rampant inflation, with a drop in external and internal demand curtailing economic activity, and containment measures disrupting domestic supply chains and leading to bottlenecks in the transportation of agricultural products. WFP market monitoring shows that prices of major food commodities have already risen well above their long-term average, and a potential reduction in domestic agricultural production, given a below-average rainfall forecast, in the coming season could lead to further food price increases. Moreover, the 4 million people currently facing Stress conditions (CH Phase 2) are at heightened risk of a further deterioration in food security (CH 2019).

Similarly, the COVID-19 crisis is compounding an already precarious food security situation in **Liberia**, the result of a longstanding economic downturn and soaring food prices – potentially exacerbated by below-average rainfall forecast for the planting season – and currency depreciation. This is particularly alarming since the country largely depends on imports for its food and agricultural inputs. Liberia is also strongly relying on remittances which are plummeting. In addition, smallholder farmers are finding it difficult to access markets due to restrictions, and an acute shortage of fertilizers caused by restrictions has hampered domestic crop production.

The Central Sahel area, and in particular the Liptako Gourma region between **Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger**, is another key hotspot. Internal displacement, driven by insecurity, is at an all-time high in the sub-region.

In 2019, IDP figures rose by 66 percent in Mali, 300 percent in the Niger's Tahoua and Tillabery regions, and a dramatic 1,270 percent in Burkina Faso (GRFC 2019). These figures are set to rise further as a result of expected conflict escalation. Security risks and displacement are now being compounded by COVID-19 restrictions: border and market closures have disrupted food supply, impacting especially nomadic and semi-nomadic pastoralists and leading to price hikes and decreased availability of products in markets, as well as intensifying intercommunal tensions. As a result, food insecurity has risen dramatically, not only for IDPs and host communities, but for the population at large, increasing the need for food assistance, nutrition and livelihood support. This comes at a time when humanitarians themselves grapple with security risks and access constraints.

In **Cameroon**, COVID-19 will have a significant economic impact on vulnerable groups including refugees, migrants, IDPs and host communities, as it drives loss of income, reduces access to markets and contributes to inflation and price increases for imported commodities. Conflict, violence and population displacement continue, with a current estimate of 950,000 IDPs (WFP 2020). A deteriorating security environment is hampering access to affected populations in the North West/SouthWest regions, while increased intensity of Islamic State's West Africa Province (ISWAP) attacks on security forces and civilians in the Far North Region risk causing additional displacements and hamper humanitarian operations. The March Cadre Harmonisé indicated a doubling in the number of food-insecure people (equivalent IPC phase 3 and above) during the 2020 lean season compared to last year. This number is now expected to increase further given the significant economic impact of COVID-19 on vulnerable groups.

Regional overview and country hotspots

Southern Africa

The Southern Africa region experienced normal rainfall only once in the past five cropping seasons. In 2019, repeated extreme climatic shocks resulted in the highest peak in acute food insecurity of the past decade. The situation is aggravated by widespread poverty, chronic malnutrition, macroeconomic shocks in countries like Angola, Zambia and Zimbabwe, and insecurity in northern Mozambique. COVID-19 will deepen and increase poverty and food insecurity. Constrained government resources could lead to a curtailment of public services and diminish response capacities. Critical sectors, such as social protection and social safety nets, are likely to receive diminished support as governments divert resources to the unbudgeted COVID-19 health emergency response. The emerging threat of African migratory locust outbreaks in a number of countries, including Botswana, Namibia, Zambia and Zimbabwe, could exacerbate the situation.

Several countries have implemented a number of restrictive measures to contain the COVID-19 pandemic, including full and partial lockdowns. This is further deepening food insecurity, especially among the most vulnerable communities that have seen their incomes curtailed and coping capacity decreased as consecutive years of below-average rainfall caused reduced agricultural outputs and economic downturns. It is likely that the number of vulnerable people will increase and include groups typically able to cope, such as the urban poor who depend on informal employment, businesses and markets, which are now disrupted by movement restrictions and lockdowns.

The availability of non-farm work, which many rural households rely on to diversify their incomes, is likely to decrease, as are incomes from remittances. While the aggregate regional production in 2020 is expected to increase compared to the low cereal output in 2019, a poor season in some countries will limit production and is expected to lead to a second consecutive below-average annual harvest.

With the main agricultural season expected to start in October 2020, further restrictions on trade and movement, as well as loss of income from secondary jobs, are likely to make it difficult for small-scale farmers to access markets. This will complicate the purchase of essential inputs and the sale of products. In some countries, the lack of manpower and labour might impede preparatory activities from September onwards.

An increase in food supplies in national markets, as a result of the main season harvest, led to seasonal price declines for maize grain and meal products in May. Downward price pressure from the increased seasonal availability has generally outweighed the upward trend emanating from the impacts of COVID-19 lockdown measures, mostly relating to logistical disruptions. Nevertheless, significant currency depreciation against the US dollar, as experienced by several

countries in the region, has resulted in price increases, particularly for imported commodities including inputs like fertilizers and agro-chemicals.

In **Zimbabwe**, the pandemic is impacting an already critical food-security situation resulting from the ongoing macroeconomic crisis and consecutive years of drought, and is likely to result in a further increase in the number of food-insecure people. The country endured one of the driest seasons on record, leading to significant cereal deficits for a second year in a row. The economic impact of the pandemic is already observed through further currency depreciation, inflation (with food inflation standing at 953.5 percent as of May 2020, an increase from 685 percent in January 2020 according to Tradingeconomics), and loss of income and livelihoods – while projections indicate that new COVID-19 cases are still on the rise. Urban food insecurity is expected to rise dramatically with the impacts of COVID-19, and in turn lead to an increase in malnutrition. COVID-19 mitigation measures are causing disruptions in logistics, rising import prices and income losses. Vulnerable pastoralists are significantly affected by disruption to trade routes and market closures.

In **Mozambique**, multiple shocks, such as consecutive droughts in southern provinces affecting last year's and this year's harvests, localized flooding in early 2020, pests, and the effects of cyclones Idai and Kenneth in 2019, caused an acute food-insecurity situation. The country is considered extremely vulnerable to negative economic impacts from COVID-19, considering its dependence on food imports which are now exposed to price fluctuations, and primary commodity exports which are likely to decline and result in lower government revenues and higher food prices. In addition, current COVID-19-related restrictions, coupled with the depreciation of the local currency, are leading to loss of income for many poor urban and rural households, further threatening food security. Moreover, the security situation in Cabo Delgado – the most COVID-19 affected province – is deteriorating rapidly as the insurgency's capabilities increase and their strategy evolves. This suggests further displacements – currently estimated at over 200,000 according to OCHA – and access constraints in the coming months.

Regional overview and country hotspots

Central Africa

While physical distancing and movement restrictions are important elements of government prevention and containment strategies for the COVID-19 pandemic in Central Africa, they might have severe economic and livelihood impacts on the most vulnerable populations, including refugees and IDPs. Furthermore, there is some uncertainty as to the extent to which these measures will be implemented where many people, especially in urban and peri-urban areas, rely on the informal economy for their livelihoods and have no alternative sources of income. In addition, lack of basic services such as electricity, water and sanitation will make further physical distancing measures difficult to enforce, especially among IDP populations.

With the approach of off-season harvest in most countries, COVID-19-induced market closures, movement restrictions and cross-border trade disruptions are likely to limit people's access to markets. As a result, millions of farmers will see their incomes and purchasing power shrink due to declining demand, increased food prices and potential harvest loss. COVID-19 also threatens ongoing efforts to implement the peace and security cooperation agenda, and could exacerbate existing social and political unrest, especially in those countries most vulnerable to food crises.

In the **Central African Republic**, the security situation continues to deteriorate as armed groups increasingly violate a fragile peace agreement signed in early 2019, in a trend that is likely to escalate leading up to presidential elections in late 2020. Over 700,000 people had left their homes as of April 2020 (UNHCR 2020), with further population displacements expected to impede access to livelihoods. More than 2.36 million people in the Central African Republic are expected to be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse through August 2020 (IPC 2020), and food security is affected by population displacements induced by the activities of armed groups and intercommunal conflict, as well as by the disruption of market systems. Significant COVID-19 impact is already being felt, with partial border closures with Cameroon and the Democratic Republic of the Congo, an increase in food and transport prices, transport disruptions and a slowdown in economic activities negatively impacting the purchasing power of the poorest households, particularly those depending on markets.

The **Democratic Republic of the Congo** has the second highest number of food-insecure people globally and continues to face multiple and large-scale complex crises (e.g. protracted insecurity, mass displacement, resurgence of Ebola Virus Disease, and measles and cholera outbreaks). As a result of COVID-19-induced price inflation and job losses, households in the most affected areas have lost almost 40 percent of their purchasing power (WFP 2020). Kinshasa remains the most severely affected area, followed by North Kivu and Haut Katanga. COVID-19-related market closures, movement restrictions and cross-border trade disruptions are likely to limit farmers' activities, particularly in northern and central provinces, shrinking the purchasing power of millions of farmers as a result. Displaced populations in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, estimated at over 5 million IDPs by the Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre, are also highly vulnerable, as their coping capacities are often limited. Continued insecurity, Ebola outbreaks and the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic are likely to hamper humanitarian capacity to respond, including securing humanitarian access to populations in need.

Regional overview and country hotspots

Near East and North Africa

Already before the virus outbreak, several countries in the Near East and North Africa were among the most food insecure globally.

Now, spillover effects of COVID-19, with movement restrictions, trade barriers and reduced working hours affecting small businesses and casual labour, are increasing the price of food and other key commodities and driving up inflation rates in several countries. These factors come on top of pre-existing financial fragilities – mounting debt, external balance deficits, diminished hard currency reserves, weakened national currencies – which directly threaten food security.

The global recession driven by COVID-19 is affecting remittances, a major source of households' income and of hard currency. The Sudan and Lebanon – and, to a lesser extent, Algeria, Jordan Tunisia and Egypt – stand to be particularly affected. Countries that depend on oil exports – such as Iraq and Libya – or food imports – such as Yemen, Lebanon, Libya and Jordan – will also be critically impacted. The impact on livelihoods in Palestine has been significant, and the provision of food assistance remains critical. The presence of plant pests in some areas, such as the desert locust infestations in the Sudan and Yemen, will further affect agricultural activities.

With the potential aggravation of conflict dynamics, Yemen, the Syrian Arab Republic, Iraq and Libya may experience increasing levels of food insecurity, particularly in the face of disruptions to food-assistance networks and potential further population displacement. Driven by conflict, the number of IDPs in Libya has increased steadily, with latest WFP assessments (June) classifying over 10 percent of the population as IDPs (WFP 2020). The precarious situation of the over 650,000 migrants in the country, who heavily depend on the informal labour market, is also a cause for concern. Already now, the food consumption of one in three migrants is insufficient, and two in three resort to a stress, crisis or emergency livelihood coping strategy (IOM/WFP May 2020).

According to IPC, some 15.9 million people (53 percent of the population) in **Yemen** were facing severe food insecurity in December 2018 (IPC 2018). Also, a hotspot IPC analysis, issued in July 2019, indicated that 1.2 million people in 29 of the 45 most food-insecure districts were facing acute food insecurity between July and September 2019 (IPC 2019). The country remains the world's largest food and humanitarian crisis to date. The significant weakening of official reserves, coupled with the likely devaluation of the currency, will make it difficult to finance vital food imports. The national cost of the minimum food basket increased by 8 percent in June 2020, compared to the pre-COVID-19 period of February 2020 (FAO 2020).

As of June, a 35 percent increase in food prices since early April was also recorded in some areas (OCHA 2020).

Furthermore, the multiplication of conflict fronts, the uncertainty of a lasting ceasefire in the south and overlapping health emergencies – cholera, malaria, dengue fever and COVID-19 – are likely to fuel instability and insecurity as well as disrupt food supply, especially to hard-to-reach areas. Movement restrictions and high input costs could affect the summer planting season, and negative coping strategies amongst pastoralists, such as selling herds, could continue. According to FEWS NET's May 2020 Update, a risk of famine persists and could materialize if the country's capacity to import food is severely limited or if food supplies to particular areas are restricted for a prolonged period of time.

In the **Syrian Arab Republic**, where according to WFP VAM a further 2 million people may become food insecure in 2020 in addition to the current total of 9.3 million, COVID-19-related measures will continue to damage economic activity, resulting in a lack of income opportunities and increased unemployment. Ongoing depreciation of the Syrian Pound, along with pre-existing macroeconomic vulnerabilities aggravated by the strong ties with the Lebanese economy, and the potential for re-escalation of conflict in the northern areas, could result in more households descending into food insecurity or resorting to negative coping strategies. This could exacerbate social unrest, especially in southern governorates. Internal movement restrictions and increasing transportation costs could further add to a continued increase in food prices. Within the agriculture sector, the most affected are small livestock herders, due to an increase in feed prices, market closures, movement restrictions and increasing transportation costs.

The Sudan is experiencing multiple crises – health, economic and political – in the midst of peace negotiations to stabilize the transitional government and reduce intercommunal violence. The country faces various challenges: COVID-19 restrictions and public health effects, a macroeconomic crisis, fuel shortages, and forecasts of above-average rainfall in southeastern regions which could also intensify the ongoing desert locust outbreak. These will likely create a precarious situation for agriculture production and food security. According to IPC, between June and September 2020 an estimated 9.6 million people will be acutely food insecure, the highest figure ever recorded in the Sudan (IPC 2020). The upcoming cereal production season (rainfed crops harvested in November/December, irrigated winter cereals harvested in March) will likely face issues such as shortages of casual labour due to movement restrictions and diminished fuel support for irrigated and rainfed mechanized agriculture. Families who rely on pastoralism, and displaced communities in Darfur or South Kordofan, will be particularly hard hit. In addition, the Government's potential decision to gradually lift fuel subsidies in 2020 would likely lead to a significant rise in poverty, unless offsetting measures are swiftly adopted.

In 2019, **Iraq** already had 1.8 million acutely food-insecure people (GRFC 2019). Political instability and economic challenges have been on the rise, while cases of COVID-19 have skyrocketed since May. Following a drop in oil prices, the state's capacity to respond to the virus outbreak has been weakened as Iraq relies predominantly on crude exports to fund its budget, including subsidies and a large public sector.

The economy is projected to shrink by almost 10 percent this year (WB 2020). Dwindling oil revenues could limit the Government's ability to provide social protection and food-related assistance. This could result in the inability of the Government to pay farmers at subsidized prices. Overall, social grievances have potential for increasing levels of political instability and civil unrest.

COVID-19 mitigation measures have exacerbated an ongoing economic crisis in **Lebanon**. The currency depreciation has reached unprecedented levels, significantly jeopardizing households' purchasing power and the country's ability to finance its food imports – domestic cereal production only covers less than 20 percent of consumption (FAO 2020) – leading to widespread food insecurity among both local citizens and the 1.5 million-strong refugee population (UNHCR 2020). In addition, the agriculture sector is dependent on imported inputs, and the crisis is resulting in the sector transitioning to a low-input system. This means that farmers are relying on lesser quantities of lower-quality inputs, which is likely to result in a decline in yields and marketable production. A protraction of the current situation, characterized by long-standing issues of economic deterioration, social divides and grievances, socioeconomic disparities and government distrust, could further fuel unrest and violence.

Regional overview and country hotspots

Asia and the Pacific

The economic repercussions of the COVID-19 pandemic are being widely felt across Asia and the Pacific. Reduced purchasing power, combined with unstable informal/daily wages in urban and rural areas, is resulting in less diversified and nutritious diets. This is further aggravated by border closures and internal travel restrictions, and limited or no market access which hinders access to food and critical inputs for agricultural activities.

Over the coming months, the economic cost of lockdown measures, knock-on effects through the supply chain, tourism sector disruptions, decreased remittances and capital flights will likely have a negative impact on people's purchasing power and, consequently, access to food as well as agricultural supply chains.

The risks are wide-ranging and there are very distinct sub-regional COVID-19 scenarios. While mainland Southeast Asia has mostly overcome the first peak and its countries are easing or ending their lockdowns, a first peak may still be some weeks away in South and West Asia, with numbers still following an upward trend. Outliers in East Asia and the Pacific Islands have reported no or few cases of COVID-19, but they also are suffering severe economic consequences, which will have an impact on the agricultural livelihoods of many vulnerable families.

In Central Asia, Commonwealth of Independent States (ex-Soviet) countries are affected significantly due to border closures and restrictions on seasonal migration.

Climate-risk layers also need to be factored in. The cyclone season has recently started for Southeast Asia and the northern Pacific Islands, while the coinciding monsoon season increases the risk of flooding in parts of Southeast and South Asia. As of early 2020, parts of Southeast Asia have been experiencing dry conditions, and some areas of Cambodia, Laos, Vietnam and the Philippines may continue to receive below-average rainfall.

Minimal evidence from the Democratic People's Republic of Korea has excluded the country from the hotspot list, but concerns remain as 10.1 million people were already food insecure prior to the pandemic (FAO/WFP 2019). While having no official reports of COVID-19, the country has implemented extensive border restrictions. Trade with China declined by over 90 percent over March/April and the economic flow-on effects are expected to exacerbate existing vulnerabilities.

In **Afghanistan**, COVID-19 mitigation measures have resulted in a range of cascading effects. This includes food price increases of up to 20 percent (IPC 2020), reduced incomes and disruptions to food supply chains coupled with export restrictions and access issues to agricultural inputs, fuel and labour. Such developments are likely to counterbalance a projected seasonal improvement in food insecurity in rural areas following the summer cereal harvest (August) and the beginning of the winter planting season in September. Nomadic herders are also vulnerable as movement and border restrictions have halted their traditional migration to key grazing areas, potentially compromising the health of their animals.

Moreover, the number of acutely food-insecure people in urban areas could increase due to rising unemployment, decreased remittances and inflation. The flow of citizens returning from Iran and Pakistan continues, according to UNHCR, because of lost work/wages, discrimination/stigmatization, lack of access to markets, pressure by foreign authorities to return, movement restrictions, and lack of access to medical services. Conflict is escalating in the context of the advanced withdrawal of US troops in July under the US-Taliban peace deal, and the anticipated beginning of intra-Afghan talks in the coming weeks. This is likely to hamper access to markets and agricultural activities/land, further compromising food security.

COVID-19 restrictions are likely to heighten economic vulnerabilities in **Bangladesh**. The economic impact of the crisis is poised to double the country's poverty rate, pushing it to over 40 percent according to the South Asian Network on Economic Modeling (SANEM 2020). As the spread of the virus continues, transport and market access could be further suspended, or hours reduced. This could affect the key sowing and transplanting period for the Aman rice season (June-September) and lean season (September). Remittances, which are the second-largest driver of the Bangladesh economy, could also decrease by 20 percent in 2020 and push some families further into destitution, according to the National University of Singapore and the Institute of South Asian Studies (NUS/ISAS 2020). The situation is further compounded by the onset of the monsoon season, which is increasing the chances of flooding, and the resumption of the cyclone season from October. This is particularly concerning in refugee camps in Cox's Bazar, where more than 850,000 people living in densely populated and makeshift settings (FAO 2020) – where physical distancing is close to impossible – are exposed to regular flooding and landslides.

Strategic recommendations

To prevent multiple food crises resulting from the secondary impacts of the pandemic, and to safeguard people already suffering from acute food insecurity, FAO and WFP are putting forward the following recommendations for urgent action:

1. Preserve and scale up critical humanitarian food, nutrition and livelihood assistance

One of the immediate priorities will be to ensure that critical ongoing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable populations is maintained and scaled up to address potential COVID-19 impacts. This will be particularly important in the most vulnerable contexts, such as fragile conflict countries, areas where access is challenging, and high-risk congested areas such as refugee and internally displaced sites. The food security of refugees and internally displaced persons, who are typically extremely vulnerable to shocks, is now threatened by constrained supply chains, reduced opportunities for self-reliance, and rising food prices amidst severe underfunding for humanitarian assistance. New food-insecure populations are also emerging, particularly in urban areas and among those employed in the informal sector. A free and predictable flow of emergency food, nutrition and livelihood assistance is essential. Local purchases of food and agricultural inputs for humanitarian purposes should be exempt from restrictions, and the establishment of efficient and effective humanitarian food reserves should be considered. Unconditional cash transfers, distributed through contactless remote solutions such as mobile money and electronic payments, are an effective transfer mechanism that provides for safer distribution or retrieval of cash transfers. Cash transfers can help stabilize markets affected by containment measures and facilitate financial inclusion.

2. Adapt assistance activities to the COVID-19 operational context, and promote flexible financing

It is necessary to adapt assistance programmes in order to safeguard the health and safety of beneficiaries as well as humanitarian staff. This could include revising operating procedures as well as changing and adapting response modalities.

Assistance channels can also be used to disseminate COVID-19 sensitization and prevention messaging, especially in remote and highly congested areas with limited reach by government schemes, as well as for distribution of protection equipment to reduce transmission along the food chain. Wherever possible, flexible financing should be encouraged to support FAO, WFP and partners in this process, enabling them to channel funds where they are most needed at any given time. Specifically, this means that existing funding is flexible enough to be rapidly reprogrammed to address priority needs, and that new funding is disbursed through fast-track provisions that allow humanitarian partners to respond in a timely and agile way to rapidly evolving needs.

3. Minimize interruptions to critical food supply chains and ensure the functioning and resilience of agri-food systems

Measures should be established to ensure that the flow of food between countries and between rural, urban and peri-urban areas is maintained, taking into account the disruption of supply and distribution channels already caused by the pandemic. Support to local food production, including by protecting smallholders' assets and ensuring access to inputs, will increase local food availability and income opportunities, which is crucial to offset some of the disruptions caused by COVID-19. It is vital to maintain and support the continuous functioning of local food markets, value chains and agri-food systems in food-crisis contexts, including through ongoing and scaled-up support to food storage, processing, transport, marketing; strengthening of local producers' groups; and advocating for trade corridors to remain open as much as possible. It is also important to ensure the functionality of agri-food trade, especially for countries that highly depend on food imports and are experiencing significant financial and fiscal crises. This would include assistance to governments for compliance with food-safety measures to ease food import and exports, and border controls.

4. Support governments to reinforce and scale up social-protection systems, and strengthen basic service delivery

To address immediate needs and lay the foundations for recovery, governments must be at the centre of the response, and supported in strengthening national capacities, particularly in the areas of social protection, basic service delivery and food systems. Access to food will have to be stabilized by supporting the incomes and purchasing power of those most vulnerable to COVID-19 impacts on food security. Governments in some of the affected countries will need support to rapidly scale up or adapt their social-protection measures in response to COVID-19, to maximize coverage, comprehensiveness,

adequacy and quality of support to affected populations, and to ensure coverage of excluded groups. A scale-up of social protection would at least partially compensate for the loss of income and reduced remittances from abroad. Furthermore, critical nutrition and school-based programmes need to be safeguarded in order to serve as a safety net for children and households, and to build a foundation for recovery.

5. Reach excluded groups and take into consideration the impact of COVID-19 on women and girls

Special attention will need to be given to populations already in Integrated Phase Classification (IPC) 3 and 4 in rural and urban areas, in particular those who are not receiving assistance due to access or resource constraints, pastoral/nomadic populations, and refugee, internally displaced and migrant populations who rely on the informal sector for income and are often excluded from national social-protection schemes. Furthermore, it is crucial to take into account the disproportionate impact of COVID-19 on women and girls, who are more vulnerable to the economic impact of the crisis, may be faced with reduced health services and increased unpaid care burden, and are exposed to gender-based violence, which is reported to be exacerbated by lockdown measures and economic and social stress. It is crucial that women and girls are involved in decision making on the COVID-19 response, and that their specific needs are taken into account when planning assistance and supporting socioeconomic recovery.

6. Promote innovative data collection, monitoring and assessment for evidence-based programming

Given the unprecedented nature of the crisis, creating a better understanding of the potential impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on food security and related vulnerabilities is of paramount importance and urgency. In food-crisis contexts, data-collection and data-sharing modalities should be adapted to help anticipate COVID-19-related shocks and the deterioration of food security. Particular attention needs to be given to monitoring and assessment modalities, avoiding on-the-ground data collection to the extent possible and prioritizing remote options. Assessments should focus on generating a better understanding of the situation and the specific vulnerability and needs of the various socioeconomic groups (women, youth, elderly people, farmers, pastoralists, IDPs, etc.). Data collection and analysis of food insecurity should be carried out regularly, including through more frequent IPC and mVAM analyses as well as the Food Insecurity Experience Scale (FIES).

7. Adapt interventions to ensure inclusion and to minimize social tensions.

The design and implementation of all interventions should be informed by a local context analysis, so as to 'do no harm' and reduce the possibility of social tensions and stigmatization. Interventions should be accompanied by clear and factual messages on the COVID-19 pandemic to beneficiaries, crafted according to WHO guidelines and delivered through appropriate channels.

Moreover, all stakeholders involved in the response should monitor and use existing conflict-incidence reporting, displacement-tracking mechanisms and other similar tools to understand trends, develop possible scenarios and put in place adequate livelihood-support interventions. Particular attention should be paid to IDPs and refugee populations due to their specific risks and heightened vulnerabilities.

8. Step up coordination and partnerships

Reducing the impact of the pandemic on acute food insecurity cannot be done in isolation and requires the coordination and involvement of all relevant actors. Governments should be supported in their efforts to strengthen national response capacity – particularly in the areas of social protection and basic service delivery – and to adopt policies and make investments in agricultural production and in maintaining critical supply chains that strengthen food systems. Moreover, governments should ensure coordination in the response across sectors, mainstreaming health and safety measures. Regional institutions, such as the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) Food Security and Nutrition Working Group or the Food Crisis Prevention Network in West Africa, play a fundamental role in providing member countries with the necessary analytical support, while guaranteeing a harmonized approach in the monitoring of potential impacts. Strong partnerships are needed between national institutions, International Financial Institutions, United Nations agencies, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), farmers' groups and all other relevant stakeholders, including coordination structures, such as the Global Network Against Food Crises, the Global Nutrition Cluster and the Global Food Security Cluster. Through food security and nutrition coordination mechanisms such as the clusters, there is an opportunity to disseminate practices for safe delivery of assistance during COVID-19, coordinating joint analysis on food security and markets, and supporting the development of national COVID-19 response plans including on targeting and prioritization.

Acronyms

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
GRFC	Global Report on Food Crises
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 Venezuela
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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