

Emergency food assistance needs unprecedented as Famine threatens four countries

The combined magnitude, severity, and geographic scope of anticipated emergency food assistance needs during 2017 is unprecedented in recent decades. Given persistent conflict, severe drought, and economic instability, FEWS NET estimates that 70 million people, across 45 countries, will require emergency food assistance this year. Four countries – [Nigeria](#), [Somalia](#), [South Sudan](#), and [Yemen](#) – face a credible risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5). In order to save lives, continued efforts to resolve conflict and improve humanitarian access are essential. In addition, given the scale of anticipated need, donors and implementing partners should allocate available financial and human resources to those areas where the most severe food insecurity is likely.

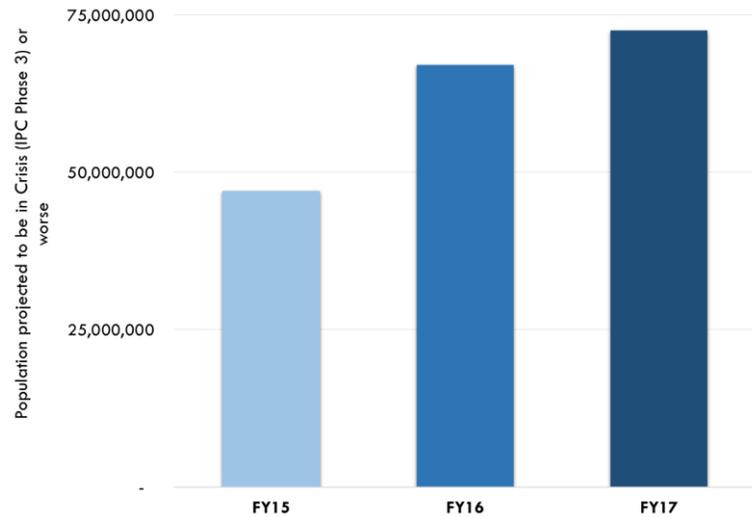
Food insecurity during 2017 will be driven primarily by three factors. Most importantly, persistent conflict is disrupting livelihoods, limiting trade, and restricting humanitarian access across many regions, including the Lake

Chad Basin, the Central African Republic, Sudan, South Sudan, the Great Lakes Region, Somalia, Yemen, Ukraine, Syria, Iraq, and Afghanistan. A second important driver is drought, especially those driven by the 2015/16 El Niño and the 2016/17 La Niña. In Southern Africa and the Horn of Africa, significantly below-average rainfall has sharply reduced crop harvests and severely limited the availability of water and pasture for livestock. In Central Asia, snowfall to date has also been below average, potentially limiting the water available for irrigated agriculture during 2017. Finally, economic instability, related to conflict, a decline in foreign reserves due to low global commodity prices, and associated currency depreciation have contributed to very high staple food prices in Nigeria, Malawi, Mozambique, South Sudan, and Yemen.

As a result of these principal drivers, FEWS NET estimates that 70 million people across 45 countries, will face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse acute food insecurity and will require emergency food assistance during 2017 (Figure 2). This marks the second consecutive year of extremely large needs, with the size of the acutely food insecure population roughly 40 percent higher than in 2015 (Figure 1). The countries likely to have the largest acutely food insecure populations during 2017 are Yemen, Syria, South Sudan, and Malawi. Together, these four countries account for roughly one-third of the total population in need of emergency food assistance.

In addition to the sheer size of the food insecure population, a persistent lack of access to adequate food and income over the past three years has left households in the worst-affected countries with little ability to manage future shocks. Given this reduced capacity to cope and the possibility that additional shocks will occur, four countries face a credible risk of Famine (IPC Phase 5) during 2017. In [Nigeria](#), evidence suggests that Famine occurred in 2016 and could be ongoing. In both [Yemen](#) and [South Sudan](#) the combination of persistent conflict, economic instability, and restricted humanitarian access makes Famine possible over the coming year. Finally in [Somalia](#), a failure of the October to December 2016 *Deyr* rains and a forecast of poor spring rains threaten a repeat of 2011 when Famine led to the deaths of 260,000 Somalis. Emergency (IPC Phase 4), characterized by large food gaps, significant increases in the prevalence of acute malnutrition, and excess mortality among children, is also anticipated in southern areas of Malawi, Zimbabwe, Sudan, and Madagascar if adequate assistance is not provided.

Figure 1. Estimated population in need of emergency food assistance (2015-2017)



Sources: FEWS NET, OCHA, Southern Africa RVAC
Note: Fiscal years run from October 1 through September 30. See Figure 2 for illustration of countries included in these estimates.

