AFGHANISTAN Food Security Outlook February to September 2021

Below-average precipitation likely to drive below-average agricultural and livestock production in 2021

KEY MESSAGES

- Cumulative precipitation to date in the 2020/21 wet season from October 1, 2020, to February 20, 2021, has been significantly below average in Afghanistan. As a result, snowpack development is also well below average. This is likely to impact water available for irrigation of both first and second crops in 2021, particularly in downstream areas. Similarly, forecast below-average spring precipitation is likely to result in below-average wheat production in rainfed areas.

- In rural areas, many poor households continue to be impacted by seasonally low levels of income from labor opportunities and below-average remittances. At the same time, food prices remain above average and an increased number of households are currently reliant on markets for food at the peak of the lean season. With the arrival of harvests around May/June in lower elevation areas and July/August in higher elevation areas, seasonal improvements in food availability are expected to improve outcomes to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) for many rural households. However, in the June to September period, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are expected in areas likely to be impacted by below-average agricultural and livestock production.

- In urban areas, the currently ongoing winter season is a time of relatively low economic activity. This is prolonging negative impacts of COVID-19 on the economy, with labor availability, wages, and remittances remaining below average levels. At the same time, food prices remain above average. Throughout the projection period, increased economic activity is expected to improve access to income for poor households, with Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes expected to improve to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) in the May to September period.

SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR

Source: FEWS NET

FEWS NET classification is IPC-compatible. IPC-compatible analysis follows key IPC protocols but does not necessarily reflect the consensus of national food security partners.
NATIONAL OVERVIEW

Current Situation

Conflict and insecurity have continued to severely impact local livelihoods throughout 2020 in Afghanistan and, according to several sources, have likely not decreased in the winter months to the same extent as is typical, likely in part due to above-average temperatures and an increase in incidents in urban areas. According to the Armed Conflict Location and Event Data (ACLED) project, around 7,448 incidents occurred in 2020 that resulted in 20,902 fatalities in Afghanistan. The number of fatalities was highest in the last quarter of 2020, particularly from November to December 2020. Similarly, the numbers of incidents and fatalities in 2020 were highest in the southern region, mainly Kandahar and Helmand provinces. As of February 17, these two provinces were also among the worst affected in 2021. Conflict trends in 2020 are also supported by the UNAMA annual report on estimated causalities from conflicts in Afghanistan. The report highlights that the last quarter was the deadliest in 2020 both in terms of persons killed and injured.

These conflict and insecurity incidents have impacted household livelihoods by displacing households and disrupting typical livelihood activities. For example, in the southern region, conflict in October 2020 impacted the harvest of fruit (mainly pomegranate) — a key source of income in the region. Similarly, these incidents have been impacting other agricultural activities such as disrupting cultivation of winter wheat in the same region.

According to OCHA, 400,110 individuals were displaced by conflict in 2020, across 32 of 34 provinces in Afghanistan. Throughout 2020, most of displacements occurred in the northeastern, northern, and southern provinces. However, more recently, most displacements in 2021 have occurred in the southern provinces. Of those displaced throughout 2020, 86 percent were assisted with food and agricultural packages according to OCHA.

Field reports also suggest that atypically high levels of conflict have continued throughout the winter months. In many areas, cold temperatures, above-average food prices, and lack of proper shelter are impacting displaced populations. Conflict is also limiting market functioning and access in certain districts, while generally imposed unofficial taxes on traders in contested areas are increasing pressure on food prices.

The number of new COVID-19 cases reported daily in Afghanistan has remained lower in recent months, on average, relative to the peak period in May/June 2020 (Figure 1). According to the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), a total 55,518 confirmed cases of COVID-19 and 2,428 associated deaths were reported in Afghanistan as of February 16, 2021. The bulk of these cases were reported in Kabul (17,251 cases), Hirat (9,152 cases), Balkh (3,371 cases), Nangarhar (2,542 cases), and Kandahar (2,481 cases) provinces as of February 17, 2021. A high share of these were reported in urban areas. The total in these provinces makes almost 65 percent of the total confirmed cases in Afghanistan. However, due to limited testing capacity in Afghanistan, underreporting of cases is expected. As of February 23, 2021, the Afghanistan government officially began its COVID-19 vaccination campaign. The government received 500,000 doses (for 250,000 individuals) of the AstraZeneca vaccine from India. Priority is being given to security forces, health workers, and journalists in Afghanistan.

After reaching the highest levels recorded during the past four years in May 2020 and declining somewhat in subsequent months, wheat flour prices have generally remained stable at the national level since November 2020 (Figure 2), likely due to stability in exports from Kazakhstan. As of January 2021, wheat flour prices remained 12 percent higher than the same
time last year and 27 percent higher than the four-year average. However, the prices of other basic food items have increased in recent months as the lean season progresses and households increase reliance on markets to meet their food needs. The higher food prices are also partly associated with the government’s ongoing Dester khawan-e-Mili COVID-19 relief program. Under this program, communities buy food such as wheat flour, cooking oil, rice, and beans in bulk quantities from local markets and distribute packages to households. This additional demand has put pressure on food prices in some markets, including in Nangarhar, Laghman, and Kunar markets in the eastern region.

For example, average prices of vegetable oil for cooking increased eight percent between December and January and remained 34 percent above average. Similarly, average prices of mixed beans are around 17 to 19 percent higher than last year and average. In contrast, prices of rice, the second most important staple food, mostly remained stable throughout 2020 and similar to last year and the average, mainly because of above-average domestic production and stable imports from Pakistan (Figure 2). Overall, the cost of a minimum food basket (comprising imported wheat flour, local rice, vegetable oil, mixed beans/pluses, and sugar) in January 2021 was 17 percent higher than the four-year average (Figure 3).

Meanwhile, casual labor wages are at minimum levels recorded in the past four years of monitoring. In January 2021, wages at the national level were four to five percent lower than last year and the four-year average. Similarly, availability of casual labor opportunities was around 20 to 21 percent lower than last year and the five-year average according to WFP data. Though availability is higher than during the peak of COVID-19 restrictions around May 2020 (when an average of 1.4 days of work were available per week), current levels are around 1.7 days per week, which are the second lowest recorded since January 2014. Both casual labor wages and availability typically decrease during winter.

Assuming a casual laborer works at the January average of 1.7 days available per week and earns the average of 301 AFN per day, the worker would earn enough to buy only one third of a one-month package of basic food items at January prices. In comparison, at average levels of labor availability, wage rates and food prices, a casual laborer could buy half of the package. This translates into a reduction in purchasing power of 35 percent compared to the average, driven by reduced wages, reduced labor availability, and increased food prices. This has significantly impacted households who rely on casual labor as a main source of income, particularly in urban areas. Similarly, purchasing power in January as measured by the terms of trade between casual labor wages and wheat flour prices was around 25 percent below average at the national level and below average in every province (Figure 4). Worst affected were Nimroz and Khost provinces where terms of trade were more than 40 percent below average. Field information corroborates that casual labor wages and availability were below normal in 27 and 28 provinces, respectively, out of 34, in January, with near normal levels reported in the other provinces.

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1 A package is equivalent to the composition of the MFB, with salt excluded due to lack of data (60 kg wheat flour, 29 kg rice, 1 L refined vegetable oil, 14 kg mixed beans, and 1 kg sugar). The MFB is expected to support a six-person household in Afghanistan for one month.
On average, livestock prices have gradually increased in Afghanistan since the 2018 drought. In January 2021, prices were above average at the national level, mainly due to average to above-average precipitation in the 2019/20 wet season which generally supported pasture availability and livestock body conditions. In January, the average price of a one-year-old female sheep (alive) at the national level was 12 percent higher than at the same time last year and 27 percent above the four-year average. At the provincial level, prices were also near average or above average in most provinces except for Wardak where prices were 12 percent below average. In many cases, higher livestock prices are compensating for higher wheat flour prices, with purchasing power among pastoralists and agro-pastoralists (as measured by the terms of trade between sheep against wheat flour prices) near average or above average in many cases, though with significant variation across provinces (Figure 5). As of January 2021, terms of trade were best in Khost, Zabul, and Nimroz provinces (more than 40 percent above average), while terms of trade were worst in Uruzgan, Wardak, and Kabul provinces (more than 20 percent below average). Though higher livestock prices have generally benefited rural communities, urban communities have been adversely affected because of higher meat prices.

According to Cross-Border Return and Reintegration (CBRR) data of the International Organization for Migration (IOM), 865,793 undocumented Afghan migrants returned from Iran and Pakistan in 2020, only 10 percent of whom received humanitarian assistance upon arrival in Afghanistan (Figure 6). Of all the returnees, the vast majority (more than 99 percent) returned from Iran. This is significantly higher than last year and 34 percent more than the five-year average. Numbers of returns were particularly high in March and from September to December 2020. Meanwhile, visa restrictions and strict controls on the Iranian border are likely restricting migration of Afghans to Iran. As a result, remittances from Iran are likely below average. Remittances from other countries such as Pakistan and in the Gulf are also expectedly lower than average as economic activity in migrant-hosting economies was reduced by COVID-19 in 2020. This has impacted households dependent on remittances as their main income source in both rural and urban areas. According to field reports, though levels of remittances are gradually improving, they are still less than normal. Field reports from a majority of the provinces (28 of 34) reported lower than normal remittance levels, while the rest reported them at normal levels.

According to Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) data from the Public Nutrition Department (PND) of the Ministry of Public Health (MOPH), 928,881 children with acute malnutrition were admitted into the IMAM program in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan during 2020. Of these, 314,043 children with severe acute malnutrition (SAM) were admitted in IPD and OPD severe acute malnutrition programs, while 614,838 children with moderate acute malnutrition were admitted in the OPD MAM (TSFP) program. Comparing three years of SAM admissions data in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan, admissions of children in 2020 were similar to 2019 and 11 percent higher than in 2018 (Figure 7). Typically, malnutrition cases increase during summer months when diarrhea rates increase, and then decline in colder months. However, constrained access to

![Figure 4. Purchasing power for laborers, defined by the ratio of casual labor wages (1 day) against the cost of wheat flour (kgs), January 2021 compared with the four-year average](image)

![Figure 5. Purchasing power for pastoralists, defined by the ratio of price of a one-year-old female sheep (alive) against the cost of wheat flour (kgs), January 2021 compared with the four-year average](image)

![Figure 6. Number of returnees arriving from Iran and Pakistan monthly, and their assistance status, from 2012 to 2020](image)
health facilitates during colder winter months also likely plays a role in lower admissions, though increased incidence of pneumonia likely contributes to malnutrition cases during this time.

To date, progress of the 2020/21 wet season has been poor in Afghanistan due to prevailing La Niña conditions that typically bring lower precipitation for Central Asia. Overall, cumulative precipitation from October 1, 2020, to February 20, 2021, has been significantly below average across most of the country (Figure 8). Apart from a few provinces in the central and northern regions that have recorded positive anomalies in some areas, average cumulative precipitation at the provincial level has been between 30 to 50 percent below average to date.

 Contributing to this, snowfall has been below average in January and February 2021, the typical peak season for snowfall in Afghanistan. This and higher-than-normal mean temperatures during the same months have led to significantly below-average snowpack development (Figure 9). As a result, average snow water equivalent across the region and in many basins of the country are at or are near historic minimum levels as of February 25. Although soil moisture is above average in higher elevation areas where snow has been melting, soil moisture is significantly below average in the southern, western, and northern regions.

According to field reports, most provinces received little to no precipitation during the first two dekads of January 2021, while little to moderate precipitation occurred in the last dekad of January. Given this, farmers across provinces reported concern about lack of precipitation for their agricultural and livestock production. In most provinces, winter wheat (mostly irrigated) is at the tillering stage and farmers are concerned that lack of precipitation to date and below-average snowpack in particular are likely to impact irrigation of their winter wheat crops. In total, key informants from 22 provinces reported less precipitation in January 2021 compared with same time last year. Nine provinces reported similar precipitation, and only three provinces reported more precipitation.

The cultivation of spring wheat (mostly rainfed) has now started in some provinces, facilitated by late February precipitation. Normally, planting lasts through April, but timing varies depending on the area and elevation. Spring planting is highly dependent on progression of the spring wet season. In general, if the start of spring rainfall is promising, then households cultivate more of their rainfed land. If not, then farmers are likely to save their seeds and use inputs for alternative crops that require less precipitation. Additionally, temporal and spatial distribution of spring rainfall is critical for the yields of spring crops as well as important for yields of winter wheat during later growth stages. Spring cultivation is especially important this season as winter wheat is already under stress because of below-average soil moisture and below-average irrigation water availability.
According to field reports in January and February, winter wheat in the southern region is in the tillering stage and precipitation had not been received in the last two months. As such, concerns over lack of precipitation exist in the region, particularly in Kandahar, Uruzgan, and Zabul provinces. Lack of current precipitation reportedly impacted seed germination in some areas. Additionally, ongoing insecurity and conflict has impacted agricultural progress of the crops. In the southeastern region, field reports indicate below-average precipitation in both lower and high elevation areas, with overall less humidity. Irrigation water has reportedly decreased due to low precipitation and this is raising concerns for crops there. In low-elevation areas, winter wheat is in the tillering stage, while in high-elevation and colder areas the wheat is still in the dormancy stage.

In the western region, winter wheat is in normal conditions, but there is concern for below-average precipitation impacting the crop when demand for irrigation increases in coming weeks and months as temperatures become warmer, particularly in Farah province. Wheat in this region has entered the tillering stage, except in Ghor province where it is still in dormancy. Field reports indicate concern for the recently started spring cultivation, yield, and pasture conditions. Usage of ground water will likely increase if precipitation does not improve, which would increase costs for the cultivators. In the eastern region, winter wheat is in the tillering stage and is under irrigation. Temperatures have noticeably increased recently, but crops are in satisfactory condition overall. However, humidity is reportedly low in the region, which raises concern for increased water/irrigation requirements for crops in the coming weeks and months.

In the central region, winter wheat is in the germination stage in lower elevation areas and in the dormancy stage in higher elevation areas, but field reports indicate concern for wheat crops in the coming months due to the absence of January snowfall, which is critical for irrigating crops. In the central highlands, winter wheat is in the dormancy stage and spring cultivation will start around end March. Overall, below-average precipitation occurred during January.

In the northeastern region, both Badakhshan and Takhar provinces received below-average precipitation, raising concerns for the winter wheat, though crops were in satisfactory conditions. Wheat is in the tillering stage in lower elevation areas while in dormancy in high elevation areas. Spring cultivation is expected to start soon given recent precipitation in last dekad of February. In contrast, both Baghlan and Kunduz provinces reported good precipitation in January. Winter wheat is in the tillering stage and reportedly in satisfactory condition, while spring wheat has been cultivated and is awaiting further precipitation to germinate. In the northern region, winter wheat is in the tillering stage. Both Balkh and Samangan provinces received precipitation in the last dekad of January – rainfall in low elevation areas and snowfall (up to 20 cm) in high elevation areas. This precipitation benefited both irrigated and rainfed wheat and enhanced soil moisture. Additionally, this precipitation and above-average temperatures facilitated spring rainfed wheat cultivation, which starts earlier in low elevation areas of the north. Spring cultivation in high elevation areas will start around March. In these provinces, recent precipitation in late February benefited both irrigated and rainfed wheat. In Jawzjan, Sare Pul, and Faryab provinces, precipitation occurred in the form of rainfall or snowfall in a majority of districts. Winter wheat cultivation for both irrigated and rainfed wheat concluded by the end of December and currently crops are in satisfactory conditions, but concerns exist due to below-average precipitation.

According to Food Security and Agricultural Cluster (FSAC) partners, around 2 million beneficiaries were targeted with food assistance during the fourth quarter of 2020, while about 653,000 were targeted for livelihoods support. Food assistance beneficiaries were more concentrated in Kabul, Herat, Badakhshan, Nangarhar, Kandahar, and Balkh provinces, where the number beneficiaries exceeded one hundred thousand within each province. Most of these provinces have large urban populations. Herat province also received the largest portion of livelihoods support around this time, with more than 100,000 beneficiaries.

Meanwhile, the Afghanistan government commenced a COVID-19 relief program in late 2020, targeting households with incomes of 2 USD per day or lower (twice the national poverty line). With broad coverage, 5,063,721 households (about 90 percent of all households) are expected to be covered under this program. Households in rural areas will receive an equivalent of 50 USD in essential food staples and hygiene products, while those in urban areas a combination of cash and in-kind equivalent to 100 USD, in two tranches. As of late February, the Ministry of Rural Rehabilitation and Development (MRRD) of Afghanistan provided relief packages to 370,091 households in 2,768 rural communities, while the Independent Directorate of Local Governance (IDLG) covered around 71,500 households in urban areas.

Most households in rural areas continue to rely on food stocks and income from their average to above-average first and second season harvests in 2020. Pastoralists and agro-pastoralists are also consuming food they procured from average to above-average livestock productivity and prices. However, availability of agricultural labor is at seasonally low levels and income from remittances is likely below average, affecting many poor households across Afghanistan. Given this and above-
average food prices at the peak of the lean season, many poor households likely do not have sufficient income to meet all essential non-food needs, with Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes expected across most of the country. However, many poor households have likely depleted their food stocks at the peak of lean season, with an increasing number likely to be facing consumption gaps or engaging in unsustainable coping. At the area level, provinces that are worst affected by conflict, poor agricultural production, lower remittances, and very limited income opportunities during the winter are expected to be facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes. These provinces are Ghor, Bamyan, Daykund, Ghazni, Wardak, Samangan, Badakhshan, and Nuristan.

In urban areas, income from casual labor opportunities and remittances from abroad are expected to remain below average. This is also a time of seasonally low availability of casual labor opportunities given the winter. Meanwhile, most staple food prices remain significantly above average. As a result, many poor households are expected to be facing food consumption gaps in the absence of humanitarian assistance, with Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes likely at the area level.

Assumptions

The February to September 2021 most likely scenario is based on the following national-level assumptions:

- **Kazakhstan is expected to normally export wheat to the region including Afghanistan.** Given average wheat production in 2020, wheat exports are likely to be near average with above-average export prices expected to continue, likely in part due to high demand in the region.

- **In Afghanistan, wheat flour prices are expected to follow seasonal trend but remain higher than last year and the average throughout the projections period.** Prices are expected to decrease with arrival of new harvest around July 2021 (Figure 10).

- **Levels of insecurity/conflict are anticipated to increase, as is typical, during the spring of 2021 when insurgents start their usual offensives.** During this time, conflict is expected to remain above average levels. As a result, levels of conflict-driven displacement are likely to be above average with seasonal increases during the spring and summer.

- **WFP is expected to distribute emergency food assistance to 3.2 million beneficiaries from January to May 2021, though the exact timing of distributions is unknown.** Additionally, FAO is expected to distribute livelihoods assistance to 866,950 beneficiaries in 2021. According to the 2021 humanitarian response plan, target groups are displaced people, returnees, refugees living in Afghanistan, people affected by shocks in 2021, and acutely vulnerable people with humanitarian needs. Additional assistance is likely in the remainder of 2021, though plans are not finalized.

- **The MRRD will likely cover around 4.1 million rural households under the COVID-19 relief program in coming months, though timing of distributions is uncertain.**

- **Given cumulative precipitation to date and international forecasts (Figure 11), cumulative precipitation during the 2020/21 wet season from October 2020 to May 2021 is most likely to be below average, driven by La Niña conditions.** There is an elevated probability (40 to 50 percent) of precipitation in the lowest 20 percent of historical levels across nearly all of the country from March to May 2021.

- **According to international forecasts, monthly ensemble forecasts with February 2021 initial conditions, precipitation during the spring wet season from March to May 2021 is expected to be below average.**

![Figure 10. Observed and projected wheat flour prices in Kabul market, April 2020 to May 2021](source: MAIL (observed) and FEWS NET (projected))

![Figure 11. NMME precipitation probability for Central Asia for March to May 2021](source: NOAA CPC)
According to international forecasts, above-average mean temperatures are anticipated throughout most of the country through September 2021. However, to date, minimum temperatures have been below average in some parts of the country, even while maximum temperatures have been above average. While it is expected that maximum temperatures will likely be above average, below-average minimum temperatures are likely to continue in localized areas.

Snow water volume in some basins is close to or at minimum recorded levels. Given expectations for above-average temperatures and below-average cumulative precipitation from the above assumptions, snowpack development in the 2020/2021 season is expected to be significantly below average in most basins. As a result of these factors, flooding risk is expected to be below-average from February to May 2021, though localized flooding events related to springtime storms are possible. Meanwhile, very low snow water volume in many basins and forecasts for above-average temperatures will likely continue to lead to early snowmelt in these basins, particularly those with no or little permanent snow cover. This is expected to reduce water availability in downstream areas for the main season and will limit water availability for second season crops.

Given expectations for below-average cumulative precipitation in the 2020/21 season and above-average temperatures, rangeland vegetative conditions during the beginning of the spring season in late March through May 2021 and throughout the summer dry season through at least September 2021 are expected to be below average. This is expected to lead to reduced livestock productivity and body conditions in many areas. Households in worst affected areas are likely to increase livestock sales, driving down prices. Typical high demand for livestock in advance of the Eid holiday in June to July is expected to prevent further price decreases at this time.

According to international forecasts, precipitation is most likely to be average during the dry season period from June to September 2021. However, given the long lead time, a variety of outcomes are possible.

Based on above assumptions, both irrigated and rainfed wheat production levels are expected to be below average at the national level. Concerns are likely higher for irrigated wheat in the southern and western regions, and major rainfed wheat producing areas.

Similarly, second season production (mostly rice and maize) is expected to be below average in irrigated areas, with downstream areas likely to realize worst shortfalls.

Near average income from poppy is expected in the main southern producing areas around April to June 2021. However, in the event of below average precipitation, cultivators will rely on ground water pumping that will increase production costs and will likely impact income.

Based on current trends, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to continue throughout the projection period, with the total number of COVID-19 cases in Afghanistan expected to follow current trends and likely remain below the peak of May to June 2020 period.

Afghanistan’s borders will likely remain open for trade throughout the scenario period, though policy fluctuations remain possible, particularly with Pakistan.

Due to above-average numbers of Afghan returnees from Iran in 2020 and ongoing border/visa restrictions that are expected to continue, below-average numbers of migrant workers are expected in Iran throughout the scenario period. As such, remittances from Iran are expected to remain below average. Remittances from Gulf countries and Pakistan are expected to gradually improve but will likely remain below normal.

According to projections by the World Bank made in January 2021, the Afghan economy is expected to recovery in 2021 when the economy is expected to grow by up to 2.5 percent.

Due to the general economic slowdown, availability of non-agricultural labor opportunities – particularly in main urban markets – is expected to be below-average in the outlook period. Availability of agricultural labor opportunities from May to September 2021 is also expected to be below average in areas impacted by below-average agricultural production.

Most Likely Food Security Outcomes

In rural areas, around April, households in lower elevation areas are expected to experience some seasonal improvements in access to income from labor opportunities in the agricultural sector (including poppy harvesting) and non-agricultural sectors as the weather warms. This is likely to reduce consumption gaps for many poor households. However, around May/June with the arrival of first harvest, access to food will improve further, and thus most poor households are likely meet basic food
needs but not all essential non-food needs. In high elevation areas, availability of milk and livestock products from late March to August will support some access to food during the lean season, though Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are expected to persist in the February to May period. Following this, an increase in availability of labor opportunities prior to the harvest in July/August is expected to improve outcomes to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) in some areas from June to September 2021.

Despite seasonal improvements, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are likely to persist in areas affected by poor production (Ghor and Samangan provinces), areas severe affected by conflicts and insecurity (Uruzgan province), and areas with limited income and food sources during the lean season (Badakhshan, Nuristan, Daykundi, Bamyan, Wardak, and Ghazni provinces) from February to May 2021. In addition, with below-average harvest prospects and below-average livestock productivity, some area level Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are likely to emerge from June to September 2021 period. Prominent areas include southern and western regions where expected below average production and ongoing tense conflicts can trigger Crisis outcomes. Similarly, rainfed belt stretching from northeastern region to western region is likely to expect poor harvest prospects coupled with adverse conflicts and below-average remittances may slide to Crisis outcomes around that time.

Meanwhile, in urban areas, many poor households will likely continue to face significantly constrained purchasing power due to below-average availability of labor opportunities, below-average remittance levels, and above-average food prices. Though labor opportunity will seasonally increase around spring, it is likely to remain below average at that time. Due to decreased income-earning opportunities, poor households are likely continue buying less nutritious/less preferred foods and consume lower quantities of food. Urban households who receive two-month packages of humanitarian food assistance would be expected to face Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) outcomes while the assistance lasts but would likely deteriorate to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in the absence of assistance as winter progresses. Economic recovery in 2021 is expected to benefit some households who rely on businesses and trade, but overall high food prices will still be constraining food access for many poor urban households. Area level outcomes for urban households are expected to improve by June 2021 but poor households will still remain in Crisis due to adverse factors.

Internally displaced persons have lost their ability to maintain their livelihoods and cultivate their lands. As a result, newly displaced households who receive three-month packages of humanitarian assistance are expected to face Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) outcomes for the three-month period following displacement, with deterioration to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes expected following that due to the poor labor market and high food prices. In addition to causing displacement, conflict and natural disasters will likely decrease access to health and nutrition services. This may further deteriorate the nutrition condition of the most vulnerable groups, such as under-five children and pregnant and lactating women (PLWs).

**Events that Might Change the Outlook**

Possible events over the next eight months that could change the most-likely scenario:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Area</th>
<th>Event</th>
<th>Impact on food security outcomes</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>National</td>
<td>Peace deal between Afghanistan government and Taliban is not reached</td>
<td>This would likely result in escalation of conflict beyond what is currently anticipated. Causalities and displacements would likely increase further. An increasing number of households would be expected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rainfed belt (northeastern, northern, and parts of western region)</td>
<td>Precipitation during spring months is significantly below average, beyond what is anticipated</td>
<td>This would likely lead to lower agricultural production levels and worse pasture conditions than what is currently anticipated. In affected areas, an increase in the number of households facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes would be likely in the June to September period.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Irrigated areas</td>
<td>Precipitation during spring months is significantly below average, beyond what is anticipated</td>
<td>This would likely lead to lower agricultural production levels for both first and second season crops (including fruits and vegetables) and worse pasture conditions than what is currently anticipated. In affected areas, an increase in the number of households facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes would be likely in the June to September period.</td>
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Precipitation during spring months is near average, or below-average but well distributed such that it supports crop growth during critical stages. This would likely lead to higher agricultural production levels for first and/or second season crops (including fruits and vegetables) and potentially support better pasture conditions — depending on the distribution of the precipitation — than what is currently anticipated. Fewer households would be expected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes and fewer areas would be expected to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) at the area level in the June to September period.

**AREAS OF CONCERN**

**AF15: West-Central Highland Agro-Pastoral Zone (Ghor Province)**

**Current Situation**

The main livelihood activities of this province are livestock keeping and a mixture of rainfed and irrigated agricultural production. Cattle, sheep, and poultry are the dominant livestock kept by households, though poorer households own fewer cattle. In a good year, livestock are sold before the arrival of winter, transported from other districts to the central district of Chichcheran, then transported to Kandahar, Hirat, and Qalat markets for sale, and then finally informally exported to Iran. For agricultural land preparation, mixed methods of traditional oxen-pulled plows and machinery are used. Most of the settled population are engaged in mixed agriculture, producing wheat, potatoes, and barley, in addition to livestock keeping. Typically, market access is limited during winter months when snowfall blocks transportation routes to and from Kabul and Hirat. However, due to below average snowfall in the 2020/21 season to date, fewer weather-related access constraints have been reported this year.

According to estimates from the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock (MAIL) and the National Statistics Information Authority (NSIA), wheat production in 2020 was around 32,000 MT, 43 percent below last year and 61 percent below the five-year average (excluding the drought year). Similarly, rice production in 2020 was around 90 MT, 77 percent below last year. Reduced production was mainly due to reduced area harvested. As of February 20, 2021, average cumulative precipitation in Ghor province for the 2020/21 wet season was 96 mm, 73 percent of the 1981-2010 average.

According to field reports, pastures are not currently available for livestock, as is typical during the winter. As such, herders are relying on stored fodder. Overall, livestock body conditions are expected to be similar to last year and average levels according to field reports. Favorable livestock body conditions have resulted in significantly above-average (by 49 percent) livestock prices, with the terms of trade between a one-year-old female sheep (alive) and wheat flour 10 percent above average despite above-average food prices. Terms of trade in January 2021 were similar to last year. Following two consecutive good seasons since the 2017/18 drought, livestock productivity is expected to have improved relative to last year. Households mostly consume their own livestock products, but also sell or trade them to procure other food items.

In Ghor province, winter wheat was cultivated around October to November 2020. However, according to field reports, cultivated area is expected to have been below-average due to poor precipitation at that time. Currently, winter wheat is in the dormancy stage. Meanwhile, spring wheat cultivation is expected to start in coming weeks. According to key informants, more land area is typically cultivated under spring wheat (mostly rainfed), though winter wheat (mostly irrigated) yields are likely to be higher.

Labor migration to Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey is an important source of income for households in Ghor, where employment opportunities are limited due to the poor economy. For six to eight months out of the year (during the winter and agricultural off-seasons) a majority of households do not have local labor opportunities available to them. As such, households members migrate abroad or, to a lesser extent, to Hirat and Kabul to seek labor opportunities. According to MAIL data, in January 2021, a skilled laborer could earn 500 AFN per day, on average, while an unskilled labor could earn only 200 AFN per day. Both wage rates were significantly below the four-year average.

The prices of basic food commodities decreased after COVID-19 related restrictions were eased in mid-2020. However, after a main bridge connecting Ghor and Herat province was demolished by the Taliban in late November, 2020, transportation costs for basic food and non-food items entering Ghor markets increased. In addition, transportation costs are usually higher in winter, putting upward pressure on prices in local markets. In January 2021, wheat flour prices were 19 percent higher than last year and 36 percent above the four-year average according to MAIL data. Cooking oil was 18 percent higher than last year and 30 percent above the four-year average. Mixed beans were around 26 to 27 percent higher than last year and
the four-year average. Prices of all basic food commodities are also higher than prices in and other main markets in Afghanistan and higher than national average prices. Furthermore, prices in remote districts are usually higher than prices in the central districts that MAIL monitors. This is likely putting additional pressure on rural communities. Driven by wage rates and above average food prices, the terms of trade between casual labor wages and wheat flour prices in January 2021 were significantly below the four-year average.

According to the UNAMA 2020 annual report, 270 causalities (59 killed and 211 injured) were reported in Ghor province in 2020. This was 251 percent more than in 2019. The leading causes for civilian causalities in 2020 were non-suicide IEDs, ground engagements, and threats/intimidation/harassment. Similarly, according to OCHA, 13,731 individuals were displaced due to conflict in 2020. This is a 52 percent increase in displacements relative to 2019.

According to FSAC, an estimated 64,407 beneficiaries received food assistance in the last quarter of 2020, while 69,762 beneficiaries received livelihoods support during this time.

According to the nutrition SMART survey conducted by Action Against Hunger (AAH) in November to December 2020 in Ghor province, the prevalence of GAM (WHZ) in children aged 6 to 59 months was 10.4 percent (7.8 – 13.8 95% C.I.) and SAM prevalence (WHZ) in children aged 6 to 59 months was 1.9 percent (1.1 – 3.1 95% CI). According to WHO/UNICEF classifications, this is indicating a “high” nutrition situation and according to IPC protocols this is classified as a “serious” nutrition situation. According to the survey, the crude death rate was 0.50 (0.29 – 0.85 95% C.I.) and under five death rate was 0.77 (0.38 – 1.56 95% C.I.). Both death rates are below WHO emergency thresholds (1 per 10,000 per day and 2 per 10,000 per day for CMR and USMR respectively).

Though poor households are currently expected to be accessing some food and income from own livestock products and winter food stocks, many households have likely exhausted food stocks due to significantly below-average production for wheat and rice in the previous season. Additionally, above-average food prices and below-average labor availability and wage rates are driving below-average purchasing power. This has been exacerbated by intensified conflicts throughout 2020, which has caused displacements and increased transport costs. Additionally, labor migration to Iran and consequent remittance levels are likely to be below average. As a result, many poor households are unlikely to be earning sufficient income to meet all of their food needs, with Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes likely.

**Assumptions**

In addition to the national-level assumptions, the most likely scenario for Ghor is based on the following assumptions:

- Conflict is likely to increase in the spring, as is typical, with many displaced households expected to move to urban centers of the province. Marketing activities are expected to remain restricted by conflict. Levels of conflict are expected to remain above average.
- Food prices are expected to increase and remain above average as the lean season progresses before declining with the start of harvesting around July 2021 (Figure 12).
- According to WFP, 88,701 individuals will likely receive food assistance from January to May 2021. Additionally, FAO plans to distribute emergency livelihoods assistance packages to 79,324 individuals in 2021. However, the exact timing of distributions is unknown.
- Below-average winter planted area and below-average spring precipitation is likely to result in below average wheat production in 2021.
- Throughout the projection period, income from agricultural labor opportunities is expected to be below-average due to the below-average production season.
- In the June to September period, shortages of fodder and grazing areas for livestock are likely to result in below-average livestock body conditions and productivity, reducing livestock products available for own consumption and sale increasing sales of livestock.
**Most Likely Food Security Outcomes**

Seasonally low levels of food and income availability and above-average food prices are likely to continue constraining purchasing power through around March/April when agricultural and non-agricultural labor opportunities increase. As the lean season progresses, an increasing number of households will likely become dependent on market for food. Due to low availability of income sources, an increasing number of households will likely face consumption gaps and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes.

Around July, households are expected to begin accessing food from the main harvest. However, due to expectations for below-average harvests, households’ access to food from own-production and in-kind payments for labor will likely be below average. Income-earning opportunities are also expected to remain below average. Given the precipitation forecast and expectations for pastures, livestock keepers will likely sell more livestock than is typical. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are therefore expected to persist at the area level, though the number of households facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes will likely decrease during this period.

**AF27: South-Central Mountain Wheat, Dried Fruit and Livestock Zone (Uruzgan Province)**

**Current Situation**

Uruzgan province is located in the South-Central Mountain Wheat, Dried Fruit and Livestock Zone. Most of the settlements are spread out across the zone, near the irrigated areas. The commonly produced food crops are wheat, rice, barely, maize and vegetables. Traditional karez irrigation systems are used for irrigation purposes. Most households are also keep small orchards, producing almonds and fruits as cash crops in addition to the main staple food production. Livestock keeping is a key source of food and income for all wealth groups.

The main driver of acute food insecurity in Uruzgan province is conflict between Afghan national security forces and armed groups mobilized in this area. According to the UNAMA 2020 annual report, 182 causalities (61 killed and 121 injured) were reported that year in the province. This was 26 percent more than in 2019. Leading causes for these civilian causalities were ground engagements, non-suicide IEDs, and airstrikes. Similarly, according to OCHA, 20,049 individuals were displaced in 2020. This figure is 220 percent higher than in 2019. In 2020, most of these displacements occurred from September to October. Individuals were displaced to the center of Uruzgan, to nearby districts, and some to neighboring provinces like Daykundi and Kandahar.

Maize and rice were harvested around October 2020. Maize from this harvest typically meets only around two months of poor households’ staple food requirements. According to MAIL data production of rice was considered at above average levels. Estimates for maize in 2020 are not available. In the current season, wheat cultivation (irrigated and rainfed) was delayed due to below-average precipitation in October but occurred in November and December after precipitation was received. Overall, cultivated land is expected to be near average according to field reports.

Currently, many poor households are relying on market purchases of wheat flour and maize as the lean season progresses. According to MAIL data, staple food prices are still significantly at above average levels. Imported wheat flour prices in January 2021 were 37 percent higher than last year and 35 percent above the four-year average. In January, prices of vegetable oil — a food commodity used on a daily basis — were significantly higher than last year and the four-year average, at 45 percent and 37 percent higher, respectively. According to MAIL data, terms of trade between casual labor wages against wheat flour prices in January 2021 were 34 percent below last year and four-year average levels, while terms of trade between livestock prices against wheat flour prices were 26 percent below last year and 32 percent below the four-year average.

Casual labor opportunities inside the province are already limited due to ongoing armed conflict. Income-earning from labor migration to other adjacent provinces like Kabul and Kandahar (the main labor markets for Uruzgan labors) is also limited due to poor economic conditions compounded by recent impacts of COVID-19 on the local economy. Labor migration to Iran is also below average, which is adversely impacting remittance flows to poor households. Agricultural labor opportunities are at seasonally low levels and are also below average due to the impacts of conflict and below average precipitation.

Currently, livestock body conditions are reportedly good due to favorable climate conditions last year. Additionally, sufficient stocks of fodder for livestock consumption contributed to normal growth. However, according to MAIL data, livestock prices in January 2021 were seven percent below average. Due to continued armed conflict, access to markets has been restricted, often preventing livestock keepers from selling both livestock and livestock products. This has consequently decreased households’ income from this source.
According to FSAC, food assistance was provided to 39,592 beneficiaries and livelihood assistance to 44,520 beneficiaries during the last quarter of 2020. Each household received assistance equivalent to 120 USD. In addition, the COVID-19 relief program provided food items to 12,000 households in the Tirinkot center of Uruzgan province. Each household received the equivalent of 4000 AFN of food items in December 2020.

During peak of lean season, food stocks are already depleted for households who harvested lower amounts, with an increasing number of households reliant on market purchases. Currently, above average prices of staple foods and deteriorated purchasing power for casual laborers and livestock owners are restricting accessing food, especially in remote districts of this province. Below average remittances are further restricting household food access. Overall, many poor households are expected to be unable to meet all essential food needs, with Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes likely.

Assumptions

In addition to the national-level assumptions, the most likely scenario for Uruzgan is based on the following assumptions:

- Conflict is likely to increase in the spring, as is typical, with many displaced households expected to move to urban centers of the province. Marketing activities are expected to remain restricted by conflict. Levels of conflict are expected to remain above average.
- Food prices are expected to increase and remain above average as the lean season progresses before declining with the start of harvesting around June 2021 (Figure 13).
- According to WFP, 224,095 individuals will likely receive food assistance from January to May 2021. Additionally, FAO plans to distribute emergency livelihoods assistance packages to 56,658 individuals in 2021. However, the exact timing of distributions is unknown.
- Due to anticipated below-average precipitation around spring, both agriculture production and livestock productivity is likely to be below average in 2021.
- Throughout the projection period, income from agricultural labor opportunities is expected to be below-average due to the below-average production season.
- In the June to September period, shortages of fodder and grazing areas for livestock are likely to result in below-average livestock body conditions and productivity, reducing livestock products available for own consumption and sale increasing sales of livestock.

Most Likely Food Security Outcomes

Throughout the projection period, purchasing power is expected to remain constrained by below-average purchasing power. As the lean season progresses, an increasing number of households will likely become dependent on market for food. As such, an increasing number of households will likely face consumption gaps and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes through around March when agricultural labor opportunities increase. Around June, food availability will increase further as households access food from own production with the start of harvesting. However, production levels are expected to be below average, as are livestock productivity and body conditions. As such, households are expected so sell more livestock than is typical, putting downward pressure on prices. Overall, income from livestock sales and food from own livestock products are likely to be below average and food consumption and dietary diversity will reduce. It is expected that many poor households will likely remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) from June to September 2021.

ABOUT SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT

To project food security outcomes, FEWS NET develops a set of assumptions about likely events, their effects, and the probable responses of various actors. FEWS NET analyzes these assumptions in the context of current conditions and local livelihoods to arrive at a most likely scenario for the coming eight months. Learn more here.