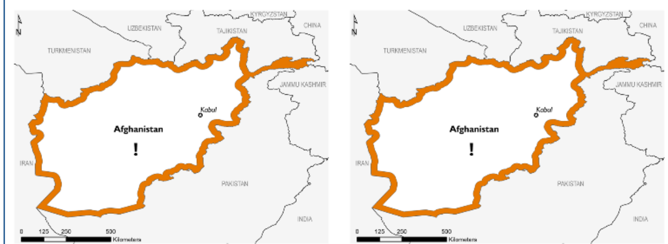
Drought and poor economy to drive atypically high assistance needs in the 2022/23 lean season

KEY MESSAGES

- According to government estimates, wheat production in the recently concluded 2021/22 season is expected to have been around 5 percent less than in the previous drought-affected season and around 15 percent less than the five-year average, with rainfed production areas experiencing the greatest losses (Figure 1). Harvesting of second-season crops is ongoing in October, providing many households with additional seasonal food and income. Second season production of most crops is expected to be near average to slightly below average, though worse production is expected in localized areas worst affected by drought and flooding.

- WFP reached more than 10 million people with emergency food, nutrition, and livelihoods support in September 2022. In October, WFP is beginning to scale up its response for the lean season. From October to December 2022, WFP plans to reach 15 million people per month. This is equivalent to between one third and one half of the country's entire population. Beneficiaries of emergency food assistance receive monthly rations equivalent to 50 to 75 percent of a household's total monthly energy requirements.

Projected food security outcomes, October 2022 to January 2023 (left) and February to May 2023 (right)



Phase 1: Minimal

Phase 2: Stressed

Phase 3+: Crisis or higher

! Would likely be at least one phase worse without current or programmed humanitarian assistance

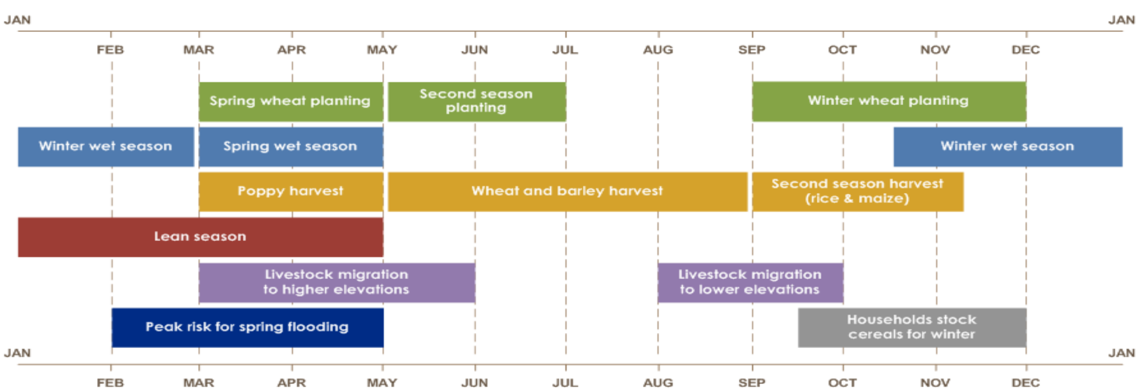
Source: *FEWS NET*

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.

FEWS NET Remote Monitoring countries use a colored outline to represent the highest IPC classification in areas of concern.

- Given seasonally high availability of food and income from recent and ongoing harvesting, declining food prices in recent months, and significant humanitarian assistance, area-level Stressed (IPC Phase 2) or Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) outcomes are currently expected across the country. However, income-earning remains below average and resilience has been eroded by consecutive shocks. An above-average number of households—including the poorest households in both rural and urban areas and those who were affected by drought and floods—are likely facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes. As winter progresses, more households will exhaust stocks from below-average harvests and seasonal availabilty of income will decline. In areas worst-affected by drought, area-level Crisis! (IPC Phase 3!) outcomes are expected to re-emerge by November/December, and the number of households facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes will increase through the peak of the lean season in March 2023, before declining again in the beginning of the harvest season.

SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR



Source: *FEWS NET*

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ZONE	CURRENT ANOMALIES	PROJECTED ANOMALIES
National	• Wheat production in the recently concluded 2021/22 season was below normal due to the impacts of a second consecutive drought across much of the country, with rainfed production worst affected. According to estimates from Afghanistan's National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA) and Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), wheat production in the 2021/22 season is expected to have been around 5 percent less than in the previous season and around 15 percent lower than the five-year average (Figure 1). It should be noted that production levels in the previous 2020/21 season and in the 2017/18 season (both included in the five-year average calculation) were also reduced due to the impacts of drought. • The second season harvest of rice, maize, and cotton is underway as of October. Production of rice and maize is expected to be near average to slightly below average due to below-average irrigation water availability and high fertilizer prices. Production of cotton and other first and second season irrigated agricultural products—including orchard crops, melons, and watermelons—was generally not significantly impacted by drought conditions as farmers paid for irrigation water due to these crops' high profitability. Production of melons and watermelons in the July to September harvest in southern and northern Afghanistan was reportedly better than last year, with higher producer prices further increasing farmers' profits. Production in the ongoing fruit and vegetable harvest will likely be near normal, except in localized areas of Kandahar due to impacts of drought. However, the potato harvest in the northeast and central highlands was reportedly below the five-year average due to lack of irrigation water and pests. Crop production outcomes are expected to be worse in localized areas worst affected by drought and floods. • Pastures did not regenerate to typical levels in the spring of 2022 due to dry conditions and above-average temperatures. This is expected to have increased competition for available pasture in higher elevation areas and increased reliance on expensive fodder. Despite higher production costs, the livestock sector has been supported by unofficial exports to neighboring Pakistan and Iran, where demand has increased. This has put upward pressure on prices and supported income-earning from the livestock sector, though prices have not risen fast enough to keep up with inflation. At the national level, the price of a one-year-old female sheep in September 2022 was 3.6 percent higher than the same time last year, according to data from WFP. Furthermore, price trends have varied significantly across provinces.	• According to international forecasts, cumulative precipitation in Afghanistan's 2022/23 winter wet season (October 2022 to February 2023) is most likely to be below average. Given the forecast of La Niña conditions until the spring, cumulative precipitation in Afghanistan's spring season (March to May 2023) is also most likely to be below average, though uncertainty exists given the long lead time of the forecast. • Area planted with winter wheat and barley during the October to December 2022 planting period is expected to be below average due to below-average soil moisture and below-average precipitation, though this depends on the timing and distribution of rainfall received. Farmers who reduce winter planting will likey seek to compensate during the spring planting window (March/April in lower elevations and April/May in higher elevations), though below-average spring rainfall could threaten this, depending on timing and distribution of rainfall. Farmers are generally expected to access sufficient seed for planting given support from government and international agencies. In anticipation of the winter planting season, the FAO planned to distribute improved wheat seeds and fertilizer to 500,000 households (3.5 million people) and animal feed to 275,000 households beginning in September. • Though significant uncertainty exists, wheat production in the 2022/23 season is expected to be below average given expectations for below-average planted area, below-average precipitation, and below-average groundwater and reservoir levels. • Poppy production in the 2022/23 season is expected to be below average due to the ban on poppy announced by Taliban in the spring of 2022. However, in areas where the ban is unlikely to be enforced, poppy production is expected to continue. In the southern provinces—including Helmand—thousands of

- The 2022/23 wet season (October 2022 to May 2023) has started off well below average. As of mid-October, most of the country had not received any precipitation. As such, soil moisture remains well below average across much of the country, though is above-average in areas bordering Pakistan that received above-average rainfall during the dry season. Groundwater and surface water levels are also atypically low (and even lower than last year in many areas) following two consecutive drought years. Though farmers in lowland areas have started preparing land for winter crops such as wheat and vegetables, they are waiting for rainfall and improved soil moisture before planting.

- The significant reduction in conflict and stabilization of the economy since the political tranision in August 2021 has supported some recovery of business and livelihood activities. The exchange rate has remained generally stable to date in 2022, supported by ongoing domestic revenue collection, increased exports, and efforts to control the foreign currency market. According to the June 2022 Private Sector Rapid Survey conducted by the World Bank, more than three-quarters of surveyed firms were operational, up from two-thirds surveyed in November 2021. However, the economy remains poor given job losses and sharply reduced foreign investment following the political transition, and unemployment rates are above average, particularly in urban areas, with many experiencing below-average income-earning.

- In October, many households are stocking basic food and non-food items in for the upcoming winter, particularly in higher elevation rural areas that experience access constraints during winter. However, cereal purchase requirements are above-average in many areas (especially rainfed areas) due to below-average production and stocks and market prices are above average. In September, the average price of staple wheat flour (low quality) at the national level was 31 percent higher than the same time last year according to data from WFP, despite declining 7 percent since peaking in June. Prices of staple rice (low quality) were 10 percent higher than the same time last year, and cooking oil prices were similar to last year but above average.

- According to key informants, remittance inflows are expected to be above average due to high need in the country and are increasing seasonally with the approach of winter. Remittances from Iran, however, are significantly lower than in recent years, but seasonal increases are likely enabling households to procure food for the coming winter. Remittances from Iran are important for areas of western Afghanistan.

hectares of land have reportedly been prepared for poppy cultivation, according to key informants and news reports. Farmers who decrease poppy production will likely grow other cash crops such as cotton. Both poppy and cotton prices are expected to remain significantly above average. This will support above-average income-earning from cash crop sales, compensating for losses in wheat production for households who benefit.

- Vegetation and pasture are expected to remain sparse during the remainder of the dry season and throughout the winter months, as is typical, before improving in the spring. However, improvment is expected to be less than is typical due to the impacts of a forecast third consecutive below-average precipitation season.

- Due to poor pasture conditions and high fodder prices in the previous season, livestock owners' fodder stocks are likely below normal. Fodder costs will likely further increase during the winter due to reduced availability of local fodder and seasonally high demand, which will increase livestock production costs. Overall, income from livestock sales will likely be near average due to above-average livestock prices. However, in some areas where households engage in atypical livestock sales during the winter (December to March) given to inability to afford production costs, livestock prices will likely further decline from December to March before seasonally increasing again in April. Additionally, income-earning from livestock sales is expected to be below-average in areas where households' herd sizes have declined to very low levels.

- Demand for agricultural and non-agricultural labor is expected to decline to seasonally low levels during the winter months, as is typical. Income-earning from other sectors is expected to remain below average, though will likely continue to recover in the spring when economic activity resumes. Given this, seasonal labor migration to

- In late September 2022, the Afghan government signed an import agreement with Russia, confirming an annual supply of one million MT of gasoline, one million MT of diesel, 500,000 MT of liquid petroleum gas, and two million MT of wheat. Just after the deal, fuel prices declined as markets responded. For example, diesel prices declined by 6 percent from the third week of September to the second week of October, though remained 49 percent higher than the October 2022 average, according to data from WFP.

- According to data from WFP, labor wages in September 2022 were similar to the same time last year, on average at the national level. However, with food prices significantly elevated, the amount of the minimum food basket that an unskilled wage laborer could purchase from one day's work was 18 percent lower than the same time last year. Additionally, lower demand for agricultural labor in drought- and flood-affected areas during the May to August main harvesting season likely reduced labor opportunities and wages (including in-kind payments) for poor and landless households.

- In mid-October, WFP reported reaching more than 10 million people with emergency food, nutrition, and livelihoods support in September 2022. Distributions for October were ongoing, with plans to reach 15 million people as part of the first month of scale-up during the winter and lean seasons. This number of beneficiaries is equivalent to 36-44 percent of the national population, depending on the base population used.[1] Beneficiaries of emergency food assistance receive monthly rations equivalent to 50 to 75 percent of a household's total monthly energy requirements.

- A Catholic Relief Services (CRS) assessment conducted focus group discussions in communities (mostly rainfed production areas that were badly affected by drought) in central highland areas of Ghor and Bamyan in June and July 2022. In most assessed areas, the wheat harvest was expected to be very poor, with stocks expected to last no more than two to three months. In these areas, the assessment found that livestock herd sizes have decreased significantly over the years, averaging three sheep and goats per household at the time of assessment in 2022, having fallen from 25 in 2010 to 19 in 2020 to nine in 2021. The coping strategies most commonly mentioned by communities were reducing plate size (but not skipping meals), borrowing cash or purchasing on credit, and selling livestock. However, many households have likely already exhausted ability to cope by selling livestock due to low livestock ownership.

neighboring countries, Turkey, Gulf countries, and Europe is expected to be above normal during the winter.

- Foreign remittance inflows will likely remain above average and increase during the winter and lean seasons due to reduced availabilty of income-earning from other sources, increased seasonal labor migration, and higher levels of need. However, remittances from Iran will likely remain below-average and decline further during the projection period overall due to poor economic conditions in the country.

- According to MAIL estimates, Afghanistan's wheat deficit for the 2022/23 marketing year stands at 2.6 million MT. This compares to 2.3 million MT in the prior year. USDA estimates the deficit to be higher, at 3.4 million MT compared to 3.6 million in the previous year. The wheat deficit is expected to be filled through intra-regional trade—especially from with Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan—and normal market supply is expected across most of the country throughout the projection period. However, in higher elevation areas and areas with poor road conditions, seasonal access constraints during winter will likely limit access to markets from January to March 2023.

- Due to high global prices and disruptions to supply chains, fuel prices are expected to remain high or further increase and will likely remain significantly above average throughout the projection period.

- Market demand for cereals is expected to peak in October and November as households who can afford to do so stock food for winter. Overall, staple wheat flour prices are expected to follow typical seasonal trends, increasing during the winter and lean seasons, and remain significantly above average due to high global and regional prices, high transportation costs, and a greater-than-normal reliance on imports due to below-average domestic production.

[1] The NSIA's population estimate for 2022/23 is 34,262,840. Flowminder's population estimate for 2022 is 41,727,304.

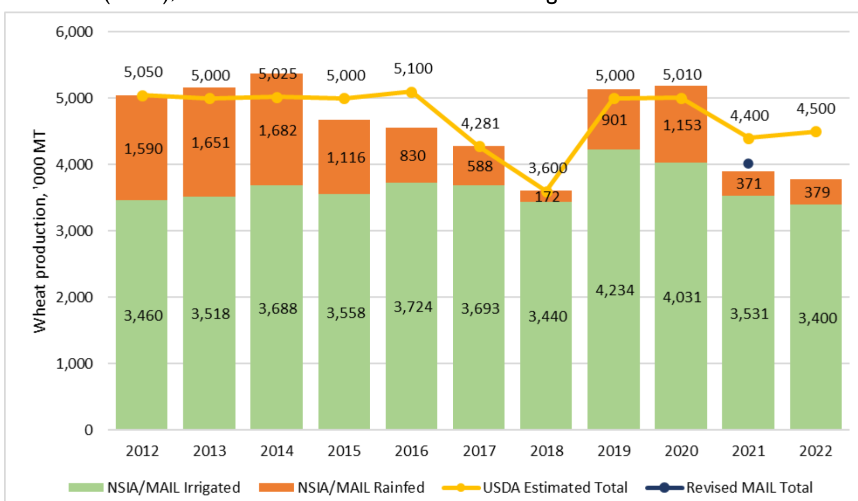
- Despite below-average production levels, recent and ongoing harvesting has improved availability of food from own crop production and income from agricultural labor opportunities and crop sales for many households across the country. Households with access to second-season harvests are currently benefiting from additional seasonal food and income. Given this, declining food prices in recent months, and large-scale humanitarian assistance, area-level Stressed (IPC Phase 2) or Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) outcomes are expected across the country in the current post-harvest period. However, income-earning remains below average overall and resilience has been significantly eroded by consecutive droughts and several recent economic shocks (including from the COVID-19 pandemic, the international response to the Taliban takeover, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine). Overall, an above-average number of households—including the poorest households in both rural and urban areas and those who were affected by drought and floods are likely facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes. Prices of other imported food and non-food commodities will also remain above average due to high global prices and high fuel prices.

- WFP has reported plans to continue reaching 15 million people (36-44 percent of the national population) per month with emergency food, nutrition, and livelihoods support through December 2022. WFP has historically always scaled up assistance deliveries during the lean season in Afghanistan, and it is therefore anticipated that emergency food assistance levels will continue at scaled up levels—or even increase further—during the remainder of the lean season from January to April 2023 before declining again at the beginning of the main harvesting period in May 2023.

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH MAY 2023

Some households will continue to access agricultural labor opportunities through the end of the winter planting period in December. However, planting is expected to be below normal in areas impacted by below-average soil moisture. Following this, as the winter sets in, income-earning from agricultural and non-agricultural labor will decline due to seasonally declining demand for labor. As time goes on throughout the winter and lean seasons, an increasing number of rural households will exhaust food stocks atypically early due to below-average production and will become dependent on market purchases. With food prices above average and expected to increase further during the winter, many poor households in both urban and rural areas will increasingly struggle to meet their needs. Many will rely heavily on humanitarian assistance and borrowing or selling remaining assets—including livestock—with detrimental impacts on livelihoods.

Figure 1. National-level wheat production estimates from Afghanistan's National Statistics and Information Authority (NSIA), Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL),[2] and the USDA for the seasons ending in 2012 to 2022



Source: *FEWS NET, using data from NSIA & USDA*

Despite scaled-up levels of humanitarian assistance, the number of households facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3), Crisis! (IPC Phase 3!), or worse outcomes will increase through the peak of the lean season in March 2023 as poor households exhaust food stocks, financial resources, and any remaining coping capacity. In areas worst affected by drought, province-level Crisis! (IPC Phase 3!) outcomes are likely to re-emerge in November/December, with humanitarian assistance preventing worse

[2] Note: rainfed and irrigated production estimates for the seasons ending in 2012 to 2021 are from the NSIA while rainfed and irrigated production estimates for the recent season ending in 2022 is from the recent MAIL Agricultural Production Report

outcomes. At the peak of the lean season in March 2023, an estimated 9 to 10 million people[3] will need humanitarian food assistance. An increase in levels of acute malnutrition is possible in some areas as households further reduce dietary quality and quantity during the lean season.

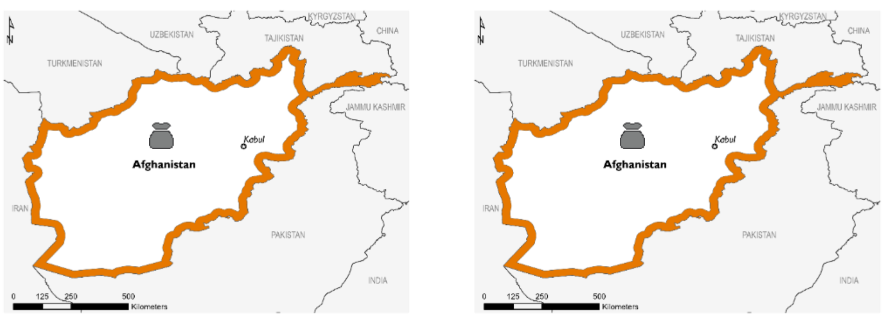
Particular concern exists for rainfed production areas, central highland areas where livelihood options are more limited and where access is more difficult, areas where conflict continues to disturb livelihood activities (specifically in higher elevations of Panjsher province), urban areas, and areas that were impacted by earthquakes and floods earlier in the year. Overall, Badghis, Ghor, Daykundi, Badakhshan, Bamyan, and Faryab provinces are assessed to be among those of greatest concern due to a combination of limited livelihood options and access constraints, drought impacts, and relatively greater dependence on remittances from Iran.

In April and May 2023, seasonal access to food and income from harvesting labor opportunities and crop production will reduce the population facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes.

MOST LIKELY FOOD SECURITY OUTCOMES AND AREAS RECEIVING SIGNIFICANT LEVELS OF HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

Each of these maps adheres to IPC v3.1 humanitarian assistance mapping protocols and flags where significant levels of humanitarian assistance are being/are expected to be provided. indicates that at least 25 percent of households receive on average 25–50 percent of caloric needs from humanitarian food assistance (HFA) in at least one province. indicates that at least 25 percent of households receive on average over 50 percent of caloric needs through HFA in at least one province. This mapping protocol differs from the (!) protocol used in the maps at the top of the report. The use of (!) indicates areas that would likely be at least one phase worse in the absence of current or programmed humanitarian assistance.

Projected food security outcomes, October 2022 to January 2023 (left) and February to May 2023 (right)



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ABOUT REMOTE MONITORING
In remote monitoring, a coordinator typically works from a nearby regional office. Relying on partners for data, the coordinator uses scenario development to conduct analysis and produce monthly reports. As less data may be available, remote monitoring reports may have less detail than those from countries with FEWS NET offices. Learn more here.

[3] Using NSIA's 2022/2023 population estimate of 34,262,840