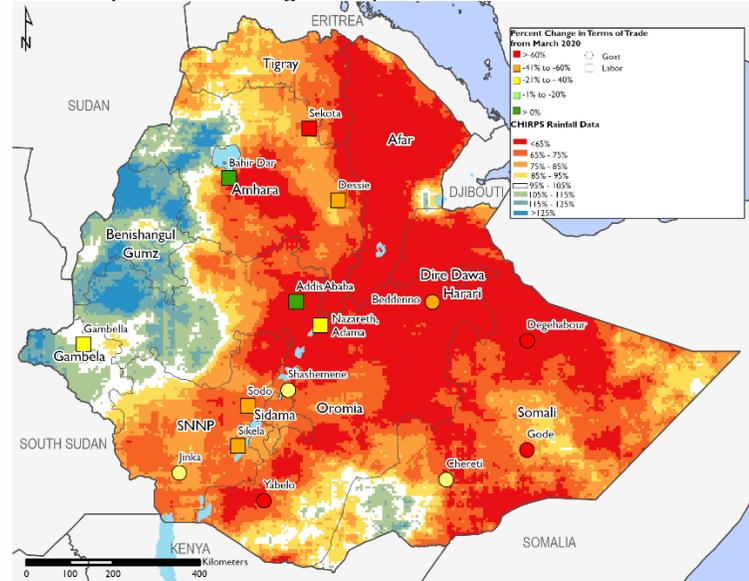


Increasing hunger-related mortality likely due to historic drought and unresolved conflict

The population in need of humanitarian food assistance in Ethiopia has reached record levels¹ in 2022 - **10 to 15 million people** - driven by ongoing insecurity and climate shocks that are likely to result in continued high needs into 2023. In northern Ethiopia, where large-scale conflict significantly damaged livelihoods and a de facto humanitarian and commercial blockade persists, Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are likely, at a minimum, and roughly two-thirds of the population in need resides. In southern and southeastern pastoral areas, the extremely poor performance of the March to May *gu/genna* rainfall marks the fourth-consecutive poor season and has led to large-scale livestock deaths and an abysmal outlook for crop production. Widespread Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are likely with increasing concern that more extreme food insecurity could emerge in mid-to late-2022. The elevated likelihood that the October to December *deyr/hageya* season will be below average² is setting the stage for an unprecedented five-season drought, deepening the already high levels of concern. With the potential for extreme outcomes and associated high levels of acute malnutrition and hunger-related mortality in multiple areas of the country, large-scale and sustained food assistance, as well as unfettered humanitarian access, is needed urgently to save lives.

Figure 1. Rainfall as a percent of average for March 1 to May 31, 2022, with May 15 to 31 rainfall based on GEF5 forecasts with colored circles indicating the percent change from March 2020 and March 2022 for how much a day of work or one goat can purchase in maize.



Source: FEWS NET/USGS

In northern Ethiopia, localized incidents of conflict were reported in early 2022, and occasionally since the humanitarian truce in April. Humanitarian and commercial access to Tigray and adjacent areas of Afar and Amhara remains challenging. Improvement in access has been observed since April, but economic activity remains extremely limited within Tigray, is driving high food prices, upwards of 135 percent higher than last year, while fuel prices are 15 times higher than pre-conflict levels. Given low levels of crop production and the large-scale loss of livestock and labor opportunities, many households are heavily reliant on markets but unable to earn sufficient income and facing high prices. Conditions are unlikely to improve in the near term, especially given limited oxen, seed, and fertilizer availability for the upcoming *meher* season.

In southern and southeastern Ethiopia, drought conditions have persisted for over two years and widespread areas have received only 30 percent of typical rainfall during the current *gu* season. Pasture conditions are among the driest on record, with few to no migration options. Subsequently, an estimated 2.5 million livestock have died between late 2021 and mid-May 2022, and herd sizes are likely to decline further given very limited livestock births this season and high offtake expected during the upcoming dry season. A drastic decline in terms of trade has also resulted (Figure 1). In Gode market, the sale of

¹ This statement is in relation to the time frame for which FEWS NET has comparable national needs estimates, which includes 2014-2022. Prior to 2022, the highest recorded needs in this time period were in 2016 following the El-Nino drought

² Forecast models predict an increased likelihood of strong sea surface temperature gradients in the Indo-Pacific Ocean, and a La Niña event and/or a negative Indian Ocean Dipole appear likely during the October to December 2022 rainfall season. Based on research conducted by FEWS NET science partners, these three climate drivers are all correlated with below-average rainfall in the eastern Horn, signaling an elevated chance that the October to December 2022 short rains season will be below average.

one goat purchased only enough maize in March 2022 to meet the minimum calorie needs of a household of six people for around seven days, compared to March 2020, when the sale of a goat would have covered around 23 days of food – a 65 percent reduction. Given poor livestock body conditions, milk production is also minimal, further limiting households' access to food and income.

In *belg*-cropping areas of Ethiopia, predominantly in southern and central areas, February to May rainfall has also been extremely poor, with some areas registering the [driest March to May on record](#). As a result, planting *belg* and long-maturing *meher* crops is significantly below average, driving delayed and poor production prospects for both seasons.

Ongoing humanitarian assistance is mitigating food consumption gaps for many households across Ethiopia. However, the needs are significantly outpacing assistance levels. In Tigray, an estimated 1.5 million people have been reached with assistance in total between mid-October 2021 and early May of 2022, considerably lower than the 2.9 million people per month during the same time period of 2021. While the size of rations has increased in recent months, a large proportion of those reached in 2022 have received partial rations, a reflection of the limited response to a population that is likely facing moderate to extreme consumption gaps. In the Somali and Oromia regions, humanitarians have reached about 2.7 million people between December 2021 and April 2022, though rations have been reduced, in the Somali Region, due to limited funding.

In northern areas the continued de facto blockade is severely restricting households' capacity to earn income and also limiting humanitarian assistance; many face moderate to extreme consumption gaps and limited ability to rebuild their asset base. In drought-stricken areas, available information suggests that despite humanitarian assistance, livelihoods are already being degraded or lost entirely, marked by the large-scale death of livestock and increased drought-driven displacement, and many are facing increasingly wide consumption gaps. This, alongside limited access to clean water and health services, has contributed to the high and increasing prevalence of acute malnutrition. Available data suggest that acute malnutrition levels are within the 'Critical' (GAM 15-29.9%) and 'Extremely Critical' (GAM \geq 30%) levels across the worst conflict- and drought-affected areas of the country.

Already historic levels of acute food insecurity persist in Ethiopia, and further deterioration is likely. Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes, at a minimum, are widespread in Tigray. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes exist across southern and southeastern areas, and there is a risk of more extreme outcomes – marked by Extremely Critical levels of acute malnutrition and high levels of hunger-related mortality – without sustained, large-scale assistance. The forecast of below-average 2022 *deyr* rains suggests food security conditions will not improve until 2023 at the earliest. Large-scale food and livelihood assistance, as well as nutrition and WASH services, are urgently needed, coupled with unhindered humanitarian access in northern Ethiopia, to mitigate the further loss of life and livelihoods.

FEWS NET: Ethiopia Food Security Alert, May 20, 2022: Increasing hunger-related mortality likely due to historic drought and unresolved conflict, May 2022.