

Increase in food insecurity due to damage to livelihoods caused by COVID-19

KEY MESSAGES

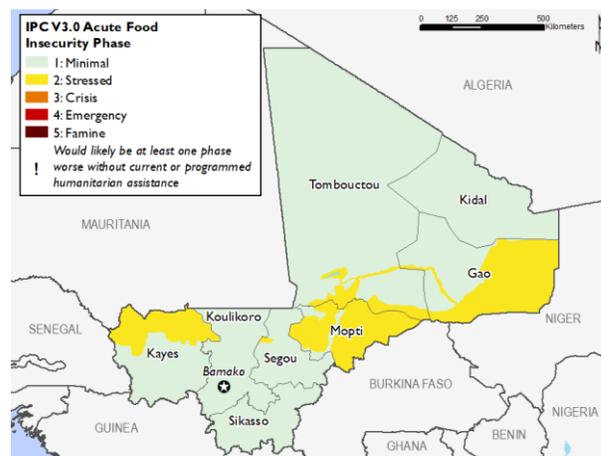
- The arrival of COVID-19 in the country and the health measures taken by the government are negatively affecting household incomes and increasing the vulnerability of households to food insecurity, especially in cities and semi-urban areas, where migrant remittances play a major role.
- The supply of food to markets remains adequate throughout the country despite disruptions in flows due to insecurity in the central and northern areas of the country and restrictions on movement between countries due to COVID-19. Cereal prices are similar to or below the five-year average, as are the terms of trade between goats and cereals, which supports average household access to food.
- The early lean season under way in the western Sahel and in some parts of the Liptako-Gourma region is reducing farmers' incomes due to the unusual deterioration in the physical condition of livestock and in livestock production. This is having a negative impact on the purchasing power of livestock farmers in these areas. Elsewhere in the country, the lean season is continuing normally.
- Poor households in western Sahel, Liptako-Gourma and in some areas in the north of the country, where livelihoods are deteriorating, are making atypical use of labor and migration, and reducing their non-food and even food expenditure. As a result, households in western Sahel are facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes from April to September. These outcomes will deteriorate to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) in Liptako-Gourma between June and September due to the continued deterioration of livelihoods resulting from ongoing conflicts and unusual population displacements.

CURRENT SITUATION

The volatile security situation in Mali continues to be marked by security incidents in the central and northern parts of the country, including the Liptako-Gourma region. Disruption to the movement of people, goods and livestock is contributing to a deterioration in household livelihoods in these areas. Looting and theft of goods (equipment, livestock), the cessation of economic activities and unusual displacements (239,484 people at the end of March 2020, Population Movement Commission (CMP)) are increasing food insecurity for poor households in these areas.

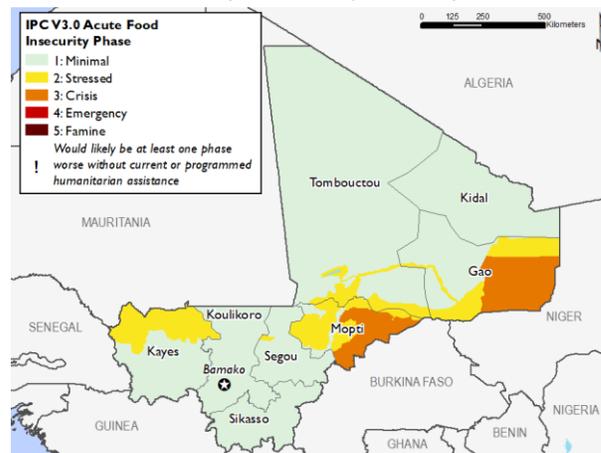
As at 29 April, Mali has recorded 482 positive cases of COVID-19, including 129 recoveries and 21 deaths. An estimated 2,039 contacts of these cases are being monitored. The arrival of the COVID-19 pandemic in Mali has led to the adoption of health

Projected food security outcomes, April to May 2020



Source: FEWS NET

Projected food security outcomes, June to September 2020



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.

measures to limit its spread and impact on people's lives. Reducing the movement of people by closing land and air borders, hotels/bars and public spaces, introducing curfews and reducing working hours and the operations of markets have led to a drop in the level of economic activity and monetary transfers from migrants, especially in the country's urban centers. Declining incomes and rising prices for imported food are reducing the purchasing power of households, especially the poorest, who are reliant on daily work. These measures are expected to be strengthened in the coming days due to the spread of the pandemic in the country.

Despite the security and health crises, markets continue to operate normally on the whole, although disruptions in the flow of goods as a result of insecurity in the central and northern parts of the country are still being reported. Thus, despite movement restrictions linked to COVID-19, the overall supply of local food (cereals, vegetables) to markets remains sufficient. The 20.6 percent increase in cereal production compared with the five-year average and the current off-season cereal harvests have resulted in average food availability in the country. In addition, the government's ban on the export and re-export of certain basic necessities (rice, millet, sugar, milk, pasta, refined oil), introduced on 17 April 2020 as part of measures to mitigate the impact of COVID-19, is helping to stabilize availability. Reductions in the flow of imported goods (oil, milk and sugar) are only being observed in some border markets due to transport restrictions between countries. This situation mainly affects products that are not consumed in great quantities by poor households, though this is not generally expected to continue for a long time, with prices expected to return to normal soon.

The seasonal rise in cereal prices is continuing in markets, though to a lesser extent than in other years and with less impact on demand from Ramadan due to the good availability of cereals. Prices for the main cereals are generally stable or up on the previous month. Compared with the five-year average, millet/sorghum prices are higher in Tombouctou (+10 percent), Koulikoro, Kayes (+9 percent) and Gao (+8 percent), and lower in Mopti (-17 percent), Ségou (-12 percent) and Sikasso (-3 percent). These price levels support average household access to food.

Overall average harvests for market garden crops are generating income and helping to improve the diets of farming households. Ongoing work relating to off-season rice in irrigated areas of the Niger River region between Koulikoro and Gao offers average opportunities for poor households to supply labor in return for income and food.

The current early lean season in the Kayes region of western Sahel, which is due to poor livestock farming conditions, is resulting in a deterioration of animals' physical condition. The same applies to livestock farmers in Liptako-Gourma because of the insecurity that is disrupting access to pastures. The deterioration in the physical condition of livestock and the resulting decline in animal production is leading to a fall in farmers' incomes and consequently in rural households' access to food. Elsewhere in the country, the usual deterioration in livestock farming conditions continues and is considered to be average, as is animal production.

The supply of livestock has increased as usual, particularly in western Sahel, due to the unusual destocking caused by poor livestock farming conditions. The seasonal fall in prices has been observed but to a much lesser extent for cattle as a result of rising demand for Ramadan. Compared with the five-year average, the price of goats at the end of March was up by 17 percent in Ménaka and 42 percent in Ténenkou, and down 6 percent in Gao. The terms of trade between goats and millet are generally similar to or above the five-year average, which supports market access for livestock farmers' households.

UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS

The current situation has affected the development of FEWS NET's [most likely scenario for February to September 2020](#), i.e. the emergence of COVID-19 and its impact on households' livelihoods. The main impacts have been felt in the following areas:

- **Markets:** The availability of certain essential foodstuffs such as rice, pasta, milk, oil and sugar is linked to the fluidity of trade flows with the international market. According to the National Directorate for Trade and Competition, available stocks of these foods are sufficient to cover at least two months until the end of May. Restrictions on movement within various countries and border closures, although these do not formally apply to goods, will disrupt trade flows and reduce supply in markets. This is compounded by the high demand associated with people's fear of the situation and the approach of Ramadan. All this will result in a moderate rise in the prices of these widely consumed foods. The mitigation measures (exemption, other facilities) expected from the government will reduce the upward trend in prices that has already been observed.
- **Incomes:** Job losses, the reduction in economic activities following introduction of the curfew from 9.00 p.m. to 6.00 a.m., the reduction of working hours, and the closure of bars and restaurants are adversely affecting household incomes,

especially those of the poorest households, which depend on the informal economy. The same applies to monetary transfers (seasonal and permanent) especially for those located outside the continent or even in some African countries. In some areas that depend on transfers from the European Union, these are the primary source of revenue for 60 percent or more of households. With the closure of industries and job losses in these countries, remittances to villages will be reduced, particularly since the travel of people who are often the means of transfer has been stopped.

- **Agricultural/non-agricultural work:** The decline in household income associated with COVID-19 is reducing the ability of households to provide employment opportunities for able-bodied people. There will be disruption to the seasonal movement of able-bodied people throughout the country due to the fear of infection and restrictions on the movement of people within and outside the country.

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH SEPTEMBER 2020

Average to above-average availability of cereals in the country, and food prices which are similar to or slightly above the five-year average support adequate household access to food. Poor households have access to markets on the basis of average income from usual activities and have pursued average income-generating activities. As a result, from April to September 2020, most households in the country will continue to experience Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food insecurity.

The early lean season for poor households in the Kayes region of western Sahel (Nioro and Yélimané communes and the northern areas of Diéma and Kayes) due to early stock depletion and a deterioration in livelihoods as a result of insecurity mean that households must resort to more atypical coping strategies. The use of loans and the reduction of non-food expenditure means that poor households are experiencing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) levels of food insecurity. The same is true for poor households in Liptako-Gourma, which, in addition to the early depletion of stocks, are experiencing a deterioration in livelihoods due to the continuing insecurity that disrupts the movement of people and goods as well as economic activities in the area. Coping strategies for Crisis to Emergency situations, such as the full migration of entire households, selling last female animals, sending household members elsewhere to eat, reducing spending on support for agropastoral production, selling production assets and depending on assistance from relatives or friends, which applied to 11.4 percent of households in the area around the border with Burkina Faso and 14.9 percent of households in Ménaka during the harvest period from October to January 2019, are expected to deteriorate in this early lean season. The current Stressed (IPC Phase 2) food security situation will therefore deteriorate to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) from May.

Restrictions on movement, which have reduced economic activity in the country, mainly in urban centers, are also reducing household incomes and consequently their purchasing power. The same applies to (migrant) remittances from urban centers in the country and from external countries, particularly from the European Union. Poor households experiencing a decline in income as a result of rising food and health care expenditure are exceptionally resorting to in-kind and cash loans, and to reducing non-food and food expenditure. Consequently, poor households in urban centers and areas dependent on migrant remittances will experience Stressed (IPC Phase 2) levels of food insecurity. How this situation develops will depend on the spread of the pandemic and the severity of government measures.

ABOUT THIS UPDATE

This report covers current conditions as well as changes to the projected outlook for food insecurity in this country. It updates FEWS NET's Food Security Outlook, which is published three times per year. Learn more about our work [here](#).