KEY MESSAGES

• The security crises and impacts of COVID-19, coupled with deficits from the last growing season and high cereal prices, are causing persistent food difficulties for poor households. Despite this, the overall food insecurity situation is Stressed (IPC Phase 2), although households in conflict zones are in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). Looking ahead, the situation will likely improve to Minimal (IPC Phase 1) in most areas in October 2020, remaining so until January 2021.

• Delays have been observed in planting crops for the current growing season. Thanks to significant improvements in rainfall levels, crops are generally developing normally, suggesting that agricultural production could be average to good, especially if current rainfall frequency and intensity trends persist through to the end of September. However, heavy rainfall has caused flooding and led to significant losses of equipment and cereal crops, especially rain-fed rice grown in the valley of the Niger River, which has been above the red-alert threshold of 620 cm since August 24.

• The security crisis is ongoing, and new developments have led to the state of emergency being reinstated in some locations and even expanded to cover new areas, with significant socioeconomic impacts on household living conditions. The situation as regards the COVID-19 pandemic is stable. New cases are falling but the reopening of the air borders in early August could result in more imported cases, causing case numbers to rise again.

• In pastoral areas, the livestock feed situation is improving following an unusually long and arduous lean season that began very early in February. Livestock-farming households were Stressed (IPC Phase 2) in August. Thanks to improved availability of feed since early August, these households will face Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food insecurity from September 2020 until January 2021.
CURRENT SITUATION

Significant improvements in rainfall and water availability since July have allowed planting to be completed in all parts of the country, albeit with delays of varying lengths in certain areas.

Rainfall levels are considerably higher in August than they were in May, June and early July, when the country experienced periods of drought and low, unevenly distributed rainfall. As at August 10, 2020, the seasonal rainfall total is above average in most agricultural areas of the country (Figure 1).

The onset of favorable weather conditions has also promoted the improved growth of crops previously suffering from delayed development and water stress. However, the food security outlook for riverside communities is particularly concerning as a result of delayed planting, plus frequent flooding of fields planted with rice, millet, sorghum and other crops, which has caused substantial damage to these households’ livelihoods. Crop losses are weakening demand for agricultural labor, thereby adversely affecting the income of poor households. Likewise, the floods have caused many houses—most owned by poor households—to collapse, generating additional costs associated with rebuilding flood-damaged properties or renting new homes. Flooding has affected every part of the country, but its impact on livelihoods has been most severe on the poor populations of Niamey, Maradi, Tillabéry, Tahoua and Dosso regions, where rivers have reached levels well above the 30-year average. Data from the Niamey monitoring station, for instance, shows that the level of the Niger River has exceeded 660 cm since August 24—above the red-alert threshold of 620 cm.

Overall, the condition of pastures has improved considerably, with a significant increase in herbaceous vegetation cover following the heavy rainfall observed since the end of July. Satellite imaging reveals a normalized difference vegetation index (NDVI) roughly in line with the average for the first dekad of August. Animals are able to drink daily at surface water points, allowing the free movement of livestock in pastoral areas. With the physical condition of animals improving since July, dairy production has resumed and the terms of trade have stabilized (107 kilograms for an adult goat, compared with 110 kilograms in June 2020).

The decline in agricultural production in 2019 continues to weigh on food supply and availability, as do disruptions to local flows caused by the security crises and measures to contain the spread of COVID-19. Producers have depleted their cereal stocks in line with the seasonal trend and local supply is below average because production is lower than in the previous growing season. Cross-border flows from Nigeria, Burkina Faso, Benin, Togo, Ghana and Côte d’Ivoire are well below average due to the security crises and COVID-19 restrictions.

In a typical lean season, market demand is high. This year, however, demand is weak because the measures taken to prevent the spread of COVID-19 have deprived households of income-earning opportunities and significantly reduced their purchasing power. However, planned and updated food assistance programs scheduled for June to September 2020 are being implemented in a coordinated manner by the Government and humanitarian partners. The programs involve the free distribution of food to 279,178 households.

Commercial demand is also low owing to high transaction costs caused by preventive and safety measures imposed in countries from where supplies are sourced. Likewise, local and export demand for livestock is extremely weak because buyers are largely absent from the markets as a result of the measures.

Local and imported cereal prices are higher than last year and above the seasonal average on account of the COVID-19 measures, which are limiting the supply of domestic and imported goods. Weak export and local demand are keeping livestock prices below the seasonal average, although demand linked to Eid al-Adha and the improved physical condition of animals are helping to stabilize both prices and the terms of trade.
The COVID-19 pandemic is following a downward trend, with the number of confirmed cases gradually decreasing since July, although most mitigation measures remain in place with the exception of local lockdowns and restrictions on interurban and air transport. Health and socioeconomic measures, such as purchasing and wearing masks and buying soap and hand sanitizer gel, are having lasting effects on livelihoods since they represent additional non-food expenditure for poor households.

Fresh security incidents in the Diffa, Tillabéry and Tahoua regions have led to security measures being extended to new areas. A state of emergency has been declared in two new departments of the Tillabéry region, resulting in restrictions on the movement of people and hindering economic activities and trade.

The health situation has deteriorated in flood-hit areas of the country, where the growing prevalence of diarrheal diseases, malaria and other waterborne diseases is causing rising malnutrition among children. These climate-related factors, coupled with the damaging impact of COVID-19 on the healthcare system, are leading to a worsening of malnutrition among children under five years of age.

Most poor households are struggling to obtain food and cover other non-food needs and are therefore Stressed (IPC Phase 2). This analysis applies to poor households in agricultural, agropastoral and pastoral zones that are not receiving food assistance and are earning little income due to the effects of migration and the impact of COVID-19 on economic opportunities. Households in the Diffa region are Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) because they are receiving sufficient humanitarian assistance to cover their food needs. The situation is worst for poor households and displaced persons in the Tillabéry region and the northern part of the Tahoua region, who are in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) because the security crisis is preventing them from engaging in livelihood activities and making it difficult for humanitarian organizations to access the areas and distribute assistance.

**UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS**

The assumptions used to develop FEWS NET’s most likely scenario for June 2020 to January 2021 have not changed, other than the following updates:

- The number of confirmed cases of COVID-19 will continue to fall through to September. The measures to curb the spread of the disease will be eased from October and could even be lifted altogether in November, although their effects will continue until December 2020/January 2021. However, the reopening of the air borders in early August 2020 could result in more imported cases, causing case numbers to rise again and potentially leading to the re-imposition of localized restrictions, which would adversely affect livelihoods.
- Producers’ cereal stocks will return to normal levels from October onward following the new harvests. As a result, most agropastoral and agricultural households will have access to sufficient food without having to rely on markets or food assistance. The prices of local products will start to fall in October and will reach average seasonal levels in November, where they will remain until January 2021.
- If the borders are reopened and other restrictive measures are lifted, the supply of agricultural labor will return to normal levels. Assuming production is average as predicted, demand and prices will be in line with the average for poor households.

**PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH JANUARY 2021**

The growing season could be highly favorable should rainfall continue through to the end of September. Simulations based on current crop development and rainfall ending in late September indicate average to good production of millet and sorghum across most areas where these crops are grown.

The positive rainfall outlook should also lead to average to good harvests of cereal, cash and forage crops. As a result, most households in agricultural, agropastoral and pastoral zones are expected to be able to cover their food and non-food needs.
without social and humanitarian assistance and will therefore face Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food insecurity between October and December, and through to January 2021.

However, the combined effects of COVID-19 and flooding will cause localized declines in the production of cereal crops (especially rain-fed rice) and cash crops, leading to a decrease in the availability of food and income. Affected poor households will be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) between October and November 2020, and through to January 2021. Flooding in urban areas will hit the income of poor households working as laborers cultivating market garden crops and rice, as well as generating additional costs associated with rebuilding flood-damaged homes. Poor households in riverside urban areas will therefore be Stressed (IPC Phase 2) in September and October as flooding affects their food and non-food needs, although the outlook will evolve to Minimal (IPC Phase 1) in November and December 2020 and January 2021.

The ongoing security crisis will continue to undermine the ability of households in the affected parts of Tillabéry and Tahoua to access food. Poor households, displaced persons and those with limited access in these areas will therefore be in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). Households in the Diffa region will be Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) because food assistance will enable them to cover their food needs.

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