

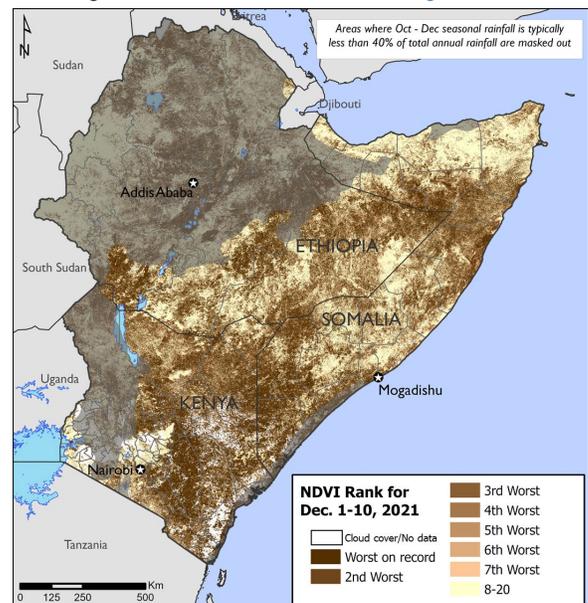
Over 20 million people in need of urgent food aid in the Horn of Africa amid severe drought and conflict

FEWS NET anticipates more than 20 million people in Ethiopia, Somalia¹, and Kenya will need urgent humanitarian food assistance in 2022 to prevent Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes. The sharp increase in food assistance needs, which is over 70 percent higher than food crises in 2016 and 2017, is primarily driven by the impacts of severe drought across the eastern portion of the region and by the impacts of conflict, especially in northern Ethiopia. Most areas of the Horn are experiencing water shortages and record-low vegetation conditions, reflecting both degradation of pasture for livestock and wilting or absent crop growth. Household purchasing power is also declining due to a sharp increase in staple food prices, declining livestock prices, and low agricultural labor demand. At the same time, the conflict in northern Ethiopia has led to severe food availability and access constraints for millions of households. Given the potential for a historic fourth consecutive poor rainfall season in early 2022 and given the likelihood that conflict in northern Ethiopia will persist, there is high concern that household food consumption gaps will widen and drive rising levels of acute malnutrition and mortality through mid-to-late 2022. Large-scale humanitarian food and livelihood assistance, coupled with unhindered humanitarian access to conflict-affected areas, is urgently needed to save lives and livelihoods.

During the October to December (OND) 2021 season, rainfall failed in most of Somalia, southern and southeastern Ethiopia, and northern and eastern Kenya, resulting in a third consecutive below-average season. While forecasts indicate some rainfall is likely in late December, overall poor seasonal rainfall and degraded vegetation are indicative of severe drought, according to the NOAA CPC's analysis. Vegetation conditions rank among the worst on record in most drought-affected areas (Figure 1), according to USGS satellite-derived data, and surpass the severity of vegetation desiccation during the 2010/2011 and 2016/2017 droughts in several areas. Drought severity will likely intensify through the January to March dry season, as above-average temperatures further deplete water and pasture resources. Furthermore, climate research indicates waning La Niña conditions will likely cause a fourth consecutive season of below-average rainfall² across the region from March to May (MAM) 2022, a historically rare multi-season sequence.³

The ongoing drought is worsening the severity of acute food insecurity among pastoral and farming populations in the eastern Horn of Africa, many of whom have already experienced sustained reductions in food and income over the past three-to-four seasons due to the ongoing drought, early 2020 flooding, the desert locust upsurge, and economic impacts of COVID-19. In pastoral livelihood zones, household food and income sources are significantly reduced due to drastic declines in livestock salability, herd sizes, and milk production. Livestock are increasingly emaciated across species, resulting in atypically high livestock deaths, low levels of livestock reproduction, and an increase in distress livestock sales to offset the rising cost of

Figure 1. Ranking of vegetation conditions in December 1-10, 2021, compared to the same period of 2002-2020, according to the Normalized Difference Vegetation Index.*



Source: USGS and FEWS NET

* Early November to early December is typically when vegetation values are at a bi-annual peak.

¹ Somalia's Alert was a joint publication with FSNAU.

² While long-range forecasts have an inherent level of uncertainty, FEWS NET's climate scientists correctly predicted the past three poor rainfall seasons in OND 2020, MAM 2021, and OND 2021.

³ The 2010/2011 and 2016/2017 droughts each consisted of two consecutive seasons of drought. The last drought consisting of three consecutive seasons was in 1983/1984. The satellite rainfall record begins in 1981.

livestock feed and household food and water purchases. Available field assessments and key informant estimates suggest household herd sizes are currently 30-50 percent below baseline levels, implying that most pastoral households are entering the January to March 2022 dry season with fewer resources than they had before the peak of the 2016/2017 drought. In Kenya, sentinel site data suggests livestock milk production – a key source of food and income for pastoralists – is roughly 40-80 percent below average. In Kenya and Somalia’s agropastoral and cropping livelihood zones, preliminary estimates based on mid-season assessments indicate the January/February 2022 cereal harvests are 60-70 percent below average. Consecutive poor harvests since 2020 are resulting in household and local market cereal supply shortages, significant reductions in household income from crop sales and agricultural labor, and the use of unsustainable coping strategies such as accelerated sales of livestock at below-market prices.

Purchasing power for both pastoral and cropping households is progressively declining, linked to sharply rising food prices, the death or off-take of livestock assets at reduced prices, limited income from milk sales, and the loss of cash income from laboring on farms during the planting, weeding, and harvesting periods. In Somalia, staple cereal prices are significantly higher than those observed at the start of the 2016/2017 drought, with prices rising more than 75 percent higher than those recorded in November 2016 in several southern and northeastern markets. In pastoral markets of Ethiopia and Kenya, the amount of cereal that a household can purchase with the sale of a goat ranges from 25 to 45 percent below the 2016-2020 average. Household purchasing power is expected to decline further as local cereal stocks dwindle, livestock health worsens and deaths increase, and imported food prices rise due to shipping and global supply constraints. Surging cereal prices are also expected to place increased strain on displaced populations and poor urban households, who typically spend a high proportion of their income on food.

In Ethiopia, the impacts of severe drought will be accompanied by the likelihood of continued conflict in the north along with poor national macroeconomic conditions, namely high inflation and currency depreciation. The conflict, which has shifted its frontline from Tigray to bordering areas of Amhara and Afar, continues to threaten lives and disrupt household access to food and income, leaving millions of people at risk of extremely high levels of acute food insecurity.

In 2022, the size of the acutely food insecure population in Ethiopia, Somalia, and Kenya is expected to significantly outpace ongoing and planned levels of government and humanitarian assistance. The impacts of the exceptional regional drought and the ongoing conflict in northern Ethiopia are expected to result in widespread Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes. More severe Emergency (IPC Phase 4) outcomes are anticipated in the worst affected areas in several zones of northern and southern Ethiopia and Somalia’s *Juba Pastoral*, *Bay Bakool Low Potential Agropastoral*, and *Coastal Deeh Pastoral* livelihood zones. Worse outcomes are possible in Tigray, though information to confirm remains unavailable. Additionally, an increase in the number of households in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) is likely to occur across the drought-affected region, including across northern and eastern Kenya. Large-scale emergency food, water, and livelihoods assistance is urgently needed across the Horn of Africa, alongside unhindered humanitarian access in northern Ethiopia, to prevent large to extreme food consumption deficits, associated levels of acute malnutrition and hunger-related mortality, and destitution resulting in displacement.

FEWS NET East Africa Food Security Alert: Over 20 million people in need of urgent food aid in the Horn of Africa amid severe drought and conflict, December 29, 2021.