AFGHANISTAN Food Security Outlook June 2020 to January 2021

Food consumption in rural areas improves with the harvest, while urban poor are expected to face gaps

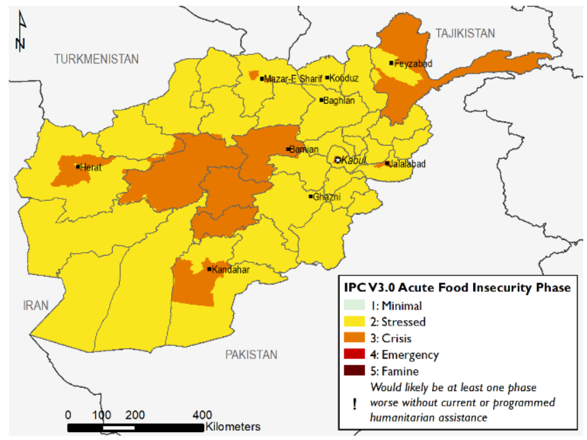
KEY MESSAGES

- Due to above-average cumulative precipitation from October 2019 to May 2020, national wheat production is expected to be near average. However, slightly below average production is expected in localized northern areas due to rainfall deficits from October to December, and in localized eastern and southern areas due to crop diseases. Meanwhile, vegetable and fruit production in eastern areas is expected to be average, supporting access to income. Due to the above-average precipitation, rangeland conditions for livestock are also average to above average, with no major atypical livestock migration expected this year. Currently, increased access to food from the harvest is expected to be improving outcomes to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) in most rural areas.

- In urban areas, the easing of COVID-19 control measures in May has led to increasing labor availability and improvement in food consumption for some poor households. However, due to severe impacts of COVID-19 on job markets and higher prices of staple food commodities, many households have not recovered. Humanitarian assistance and gifts (Zakat) are expected to have prevented large consumption gaps for many in recent months. Despite this, many urban poor are expected to be facing some consumption gaps, with Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes likely to persist in many urban areas through at least January 2021 in the absence of additional assistance.

- Between January and May 2020, about 86,400 individuals fled their homes due to conflict, with the greatest number of displacements in the eastern, northern, northeastern, and southern parts of the country. Due to separation from livelihoods, many of these households are likely to be facing food consumption gaps and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes. Additionally, more than 300,000 undocumented migrants have returned to Afghanistan from January to May 2020. Most of these migrants have come from Iran, given the weak economy and the severity of COVID-19 pandemic.

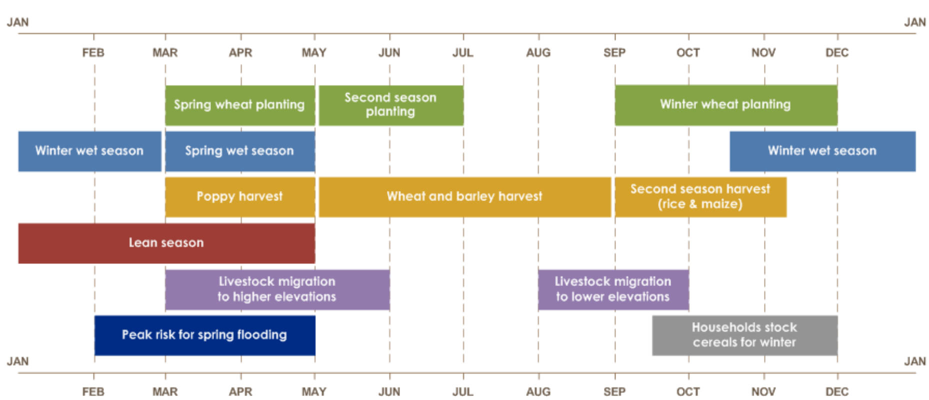
Current food security outcomes, June 2020



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.

SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR



Source: *FEWS NET*

FEWS NET Afghanistan
fewsinquiry.afghanistan@fews.net
www.fews.net/afghanistan

NATIONAL OVERVIEW

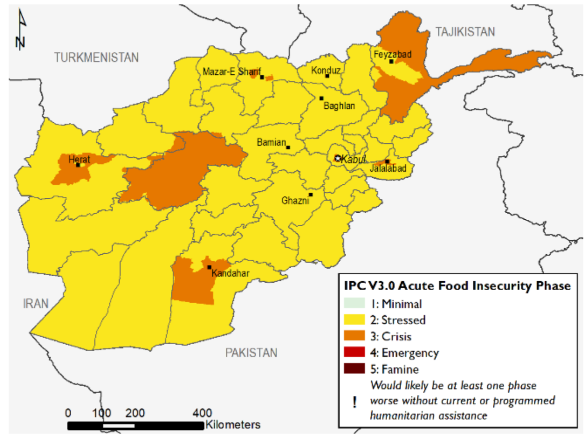
Current Situation

Average to above-average cumulative precipitation occurred during the wet season from October 2019 to May 2020 across most of the country, with the highest precipitation totals recorded in eastern, southern, southeastern, and western areas (Figure 1). However, in the northeastern Badakhshan Province, precipitation was significantly below average. Snowpack development was also below average at higher elevations – especially in the northern and northeastern parts of the country – throughout the 2019/20 season. In contrast, above-average snow accumulation was reported at lower elevations in eastern and central parts of the country during the same period. Field reports indicate that most areas received sufficient and timely precipitation during 2019/20 wet season to support irrigation requirements of winter crops.

In most lower elevation areas of the country, the wheat harvest is near conclusion, while it is yet to commence in the higher elevation areas. In areas where first season crops have been harvested, preparations are underway for the planting of second season crops – mainly rice, maize, and pulses.

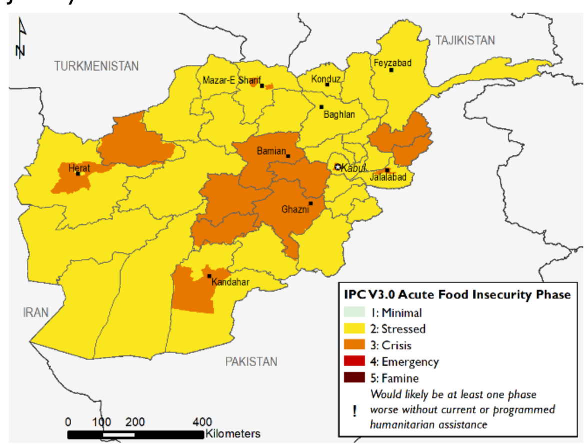
In general, favorable climate conditions during the 2019/20 wet season have led to expectations for near average national wheat production in Afghanistan. However, slightly below average production is expected in some localized areas due to the impacts of rainfall deficits and crop diseases. In some rainfed areas of northern Afghanistan, early season rainfall deficits during October-November 2019 are expected to have led to slightly reduced wheat production, as farmers reduced area planted in favor of other crops such as oilseeds. Meanwhile, wheat rusts in eastern Afghanistan are expected to have impacted production in localized affected areas. Similarly, above-average precipitation and humidity during April-May 2020 led to widespread wheat yellow rust in southern parts of Afghanistan, which later spread to some northern areas as well. The quality of harvested wheat is expected to be poor in impacted areas, with evidence provided by significantly below average farmgate prices.

Projected food security outcomes, June – September 2020



Source: *FEWS NET*

Projected food security outcomes, October 2020 – January 2021



Source: *FEWS NET*

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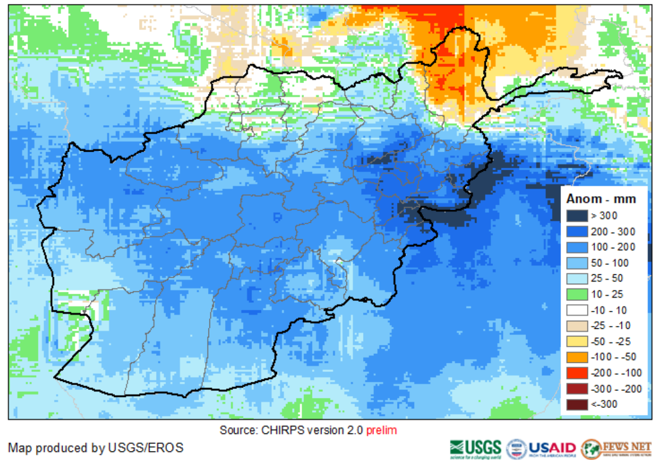
In eastern parts of the country, fruit and vegetable production are expected to be near average. Due to border closures with Pakistan from April to mid-May, farmers have been able to sell their products at good prices in the absence of imports from Pakistan. As a result, income from fruit and vegetable production in the eastern region has been slightly above average levels. Meanwhile, domestic demand for vegetables and fruits increased as prices of other commodities increased sharply in March. These products – particularly vegetables – have played a significant role in supporting food consumption for many households. In southern parts of the country, income from the sale of poppy was also at average levels, and fruit crops are maturing well.

Meanwhile, average to above-average precipitation in the 2019/20 season has also contributed to natural disasters in Afghanistan during this time. According to the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA), around 58,000 individuals were affected by natural disasters from October 2019 to May 2020. Out of this number, 20,000 were affected by flash floods and nearly 36,000 by heavy snowfall. However, the total affected by natural disasters is lower relative to the total during the same time period of last year, when almost 260,000 were impacted by flash floods. This year, the southeastern and southern parts of the country were the most affected by natural disasters.

With the escalation of the COVID-19 outbreak in the region, many countries responded by limiting their trade with other countries to contain the virus and/or protect their national food supplies. In mid-March, Pakistan shut its border with Afghanistan for all imports and exports, while in late March Kazakhstan introduced an export quota on wheat. Both countries play a significant role in food availability and prices in Afghanistan; Pakistan typically supplies or serves as an entry point for rice, some fruits and vegetables, cooking oil, pulses, and other commodities, while Kazakhstan mainly supplies wheat. Furthermore, at the end of March, Afghanistan imposed lockdown restrictions in main cities, with stricter measures enforced two weeks later. All of these measures contributed to increased staple food prices in urban markets, particularly among imported commodities (Figure 2).

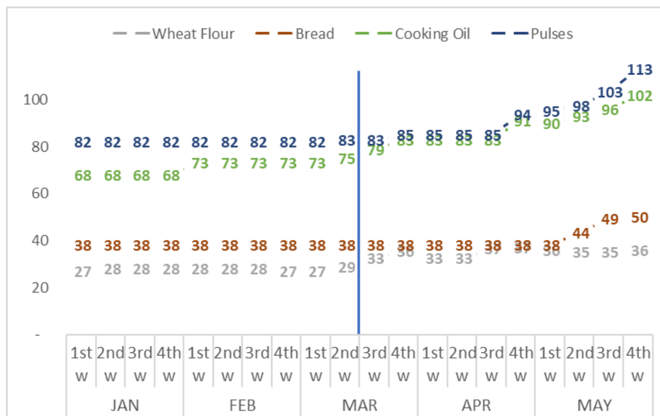
Between early March and late May, wheat flour prices in the Kabul market increased by 24 percent, while prices of cooking oil and pulses increased by 36 percent. Though the price per unit of bread did not increase, the quantity of flour used in bread reportedly decreased, resulting in the price per kilogram of bread increasing by 32 percent over this time period. With the start of the harvest in lower elevation areas in May, upward pressure on wheat flour prices was eased. Also in May, Pakistan eased border restrictions, Kazakhstan increased exportable wheat quotas, and the government of Afghanistan eased lockdown measures. These measures further reduced pressure on wheat flour prices. As of June 22, Pakistan's border has been fully opened for all exports and imports. Kazakhstan's export restrictions were reportedly lifted as of June, although this has not been confirmed by government sources.

Figure 1. Seasonal rainfall accumulation anomaly, from October 2019 to May 2020



Source: *FEWS NET/USGS*

Figure 2. Weekly prices of staple foods in kilogram in Kabul market, from January to May 2020; the blue line shows the time when restrictions were imposed on Afghanistan



Source: *FEWS NET, based on WFP data*

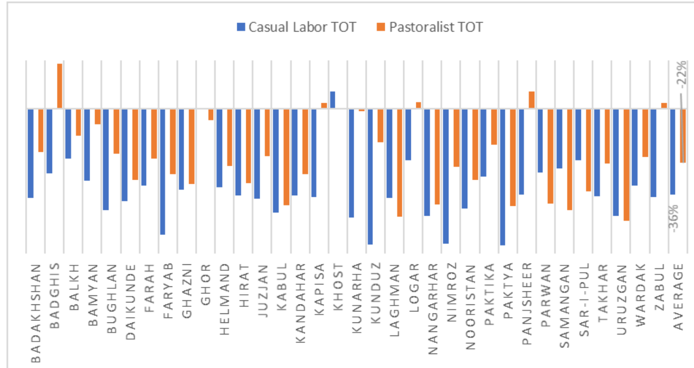
Despite the easing of control measures in main cities, availability of casual labor opportunities remains significantly below average, due primarily to lack of demand for labor in the construction and manufacturing sectors. Supply of labor has also increased in recent months. In March, urban markets experienced a significant influx of casual laborers when thousands of undocumented Afghan migrants in Iran – in addition to some banned Afghan migrants in Pakistan – returned and sought labor opportunities in Afghanistan. As such, reduced demand for labor in combination with increased domestic labor supply is putting downward pressure on wages. Based on data from the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock (MAIL), on average, unskilled labor wages remained stable between April and May 2020 at levels five percent below the three-year average.

Due to decreased casual labor wages and increased food prices, the terms of trade (TOT) between the two have significantly deteriorated in recent months. At the national level, the TOT deteriorated five percent from April to May, reaching levels 31 percent lower than the same time last year and 36 percent lower than the three-year average (Figure 3). Paktya, Nimroz, Kunduz, and Faryab have been the worst affected provinces, with TOT in May more than 50 percent below the average. Khost was the only province where the TOT was not below average.

As a result of above-average precipitation during the 2019/20 wet season, pasture conditions are currently average to above average for livestock grazing across most of the country, which has facilitated improved livestock body conditions and reproduction. No significant atypical livestock disease outbreak has been reported in the season thus far. On average, livestock prices remained stable between April and May 2020. At the national level, livestock prices in May were 14 percent higher than the same time last year and 16 percent higher than the three-year average. In May, the highest prices relative to last year were reported in Zabul Province (57 percent higher) and Balkh Province (56 percent higher). In Badghis Province, where livestock conditions have been gradually improving since 2017/18 when the area was severely hit by drought, livestock prices are 66 percent higher than the three-year average – the highest relative to average across all provinces.

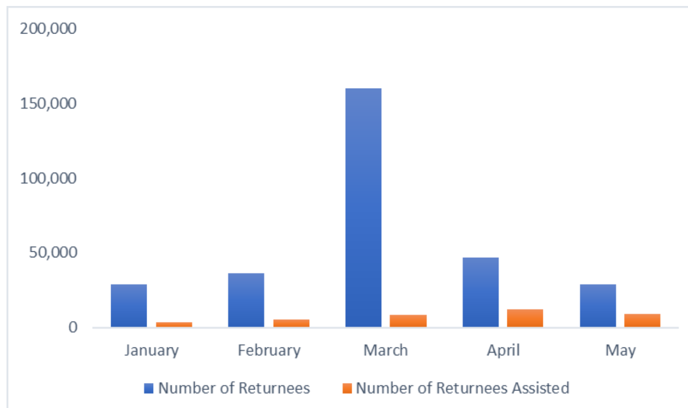
However, improvement in livestock prices has not been sufficient to offset higher food prices. Hence, the pastoralists' terms of trade (TOT) – between livestock and wheat flour – deteriorated by a further 4 percent between April and May, to reach levels 19 percent lower than last year and 22 percent lower than the three-average at the national level (Figure 3). The lowest TOTs relative to average have been reported in Uruzgan, Laghman, Paktya, and Kabul Provinces. Badghis was the only province where the TOT was significantly above average in May, by 19 percent.

Figure 3. Terms of Trade (TOT) for casual labor and pastoralists in Afghanistan provinces, May 2020 compared with three-year average



Source: *FEWS NET, based on MAIL data*

Figure 4. Number of returnees arriving from Iran and Pakistan, and their assistance status, from January to May 2020



Source: *FEWS NET, based on IOM data*

According to the International Organization of Migration (IOM), more than 300,000 undocumented Afghan migrants returned from Iran and Pakistan between January and May 2020, only 13 percent of whom received humanitarian assistance upon arrival in Afghanistan (Figure 4). Of all the returnees, the vast majority (more than 99 percent) returned from Iran. With COVID-19 declared a pandemic in March 2020, an influx of undocumented Afghan migrants began returning from Iran through Herat Province. Iran was among the first countries where the outbreak started; as such, the arriving returnees contributed to the spread of the disease in Afghanistan, first in Herat Province and then across the country as they returned to their homes. The COVID-19 pandemic severely affected Iran's economy, reducing labor opportunities for everybody, including Afghans working there. As a result, levels of remittances from Iran have significantly declined since start of the pandemic, according to key informants.

According to UNOCHA updates, approximately 86,400 individuals have fled their homes due to conflict across 27 provinces from January to May 2020. This total is significantly lower than the total over the same time period last year, at least partly attributed to the signing of the peace deal between United States and Taliban on February 29, 2020. Out of the 86,400 internally displaced persons (IDPs), around 52,000 (60 percent) were supported with either food packages or cash-for-food at the time of displacement. According to the Afghanistan Humanitarian Response Plan June 2020 revision, food assistance provided to IDPs is typically a one-time three-month package sufficient to cover 2,100 kcal/person/day. Throughout 2020, the highest levels of displacement have occurred in the eastern region.

According to the most recent available national nutrition survey (NNS) conducted in 2013, the prevalence of Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) at the national level was 9.5 percent (95% CI 8.7 – 10.4) at the time of data collection. According to the more recent available survey data, acute malnutrition remains a concern across much of Afghanistan. A SMART assessment conducted between March and April 2020 in Nangarhar Province by Action Against Hunger (AAH) shows that the prevalence of GAM as measured by weight-for-height z-score (WHZ) for 6 to 59 month old children was 9.6 percent (95% CI 7.5 - 12.2), classified as an "alert" level nutrition situation according to the IPC framework. However, the same survey shows that prevalence of GAM by mid-upper arm circumference (MUAC) was 10.1 percent (95% CI 7.9 - 12.9), which indicates a "serious" nutrition situation. In Nimroz Province, the prevalence of GAM by WHZ in 6 to 59 month old children was estimated at 8.4 percent (95% CI 6.1 – 11.7) and in Parwan Province at 8.1 percent (95% CI 5.8 - 11.2). Both provinces are classified as "alert" level nutrition situations.

Based on Integrated Management of Acute Malnutrition (IMAM) data from the Public Nutrition Department (PND) of the Ministry of Public Health of Afghanistan (MoPH), nearly 132,000 children under five identified as acutely malnourished and enrolled in the IMAM program between March and May 2020. Of those who enrolled, 104,000 children (79 percent) were successfully cured. However, the enrollment of malnourished children significantly decreased in April and May, and levels were lower than during the same period of the previous year. Movement restrictions and fear of being contaminated by COVID-19 at health facilities likely contributed to reduced admission of malnourished children into the programs during the COVID-19 outbreak in Afghanistan.

At end of April, the government of Afghanistan started distributing flatbread ("naan") to poor urban households in Kabul and, later, in other cities in Afghanistan. Initially the program was designed to include three phases. During phase one, each household received two naan per member (an average of 10 per household) per day. According to Kabul Municipality, the first phase that lasted for 40 days and covered 311,320 households in Kabul, with 15 million naans distributed. The Ministry of Finance reports that over 36 million USD was spent on phase one of this program, with 14.8 million USD spent in Kabul. At least partially attributable to budget constraints, the program was stopped after lockdown measures were lifted.

Overall, impacts of COVID-19 on rural populations have been minimal, and rural households have been able to sustain their livelihoods. With the start of harvest season in lower elevation areas of Afghanistan, many rural livelihoods opportunities – including agriculture labor – have resumed. As a result of increased access to food from own production and income from labor opportunities, food security outcomes have improved in many rural areas. However, given high levels of labor supply and restricted opportunities, many poor households remain unable to meet all essential non-food needs, with Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes prevalent in most rural areas. Meanwhile, some areas that have not harvested yet (in the northeastern and the central highlands) or where conflict has severely impacted livelihoods continue to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes. Furthermore, households that usually rely on remittances from Iran – especially in the northern region and the central highlands – are among the worst affected, with Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes likely.

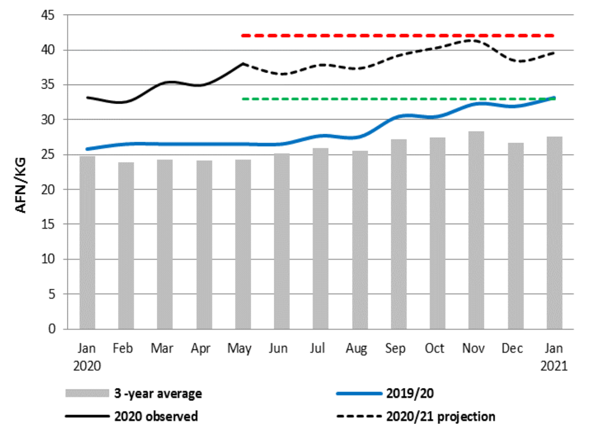
In urban areas, many poor households who typically rely on casual labor and petty trade have experienced significant reductions in income-earning due to the impacts of COVID-19. Despite the recent ease in control measures in main urban areas, the labor market has only partially recovered, and these households continue to face lack of income-earning opportunities. The reduction in remittances from Iran is also affecting some urban poor, especially in the northern region. At the same time, food prices are atypically high. As a result, many households have been purchasing food on credit, borrowing from relatives, and relying on humanitarian assistance and gifts (Zakat). However, given insufficient provision of assistance, many households are still expected to be facing some consumption gaps. As a result of insufficient income to meet all food needs, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and higher food security outcomes are likely prevalent among the urban poor, with food assistance needed to fill consumption gaps.

Assumptions

The June 2020 to January 2021 most likely scenario is based on the following national-level assumptions:

- The main harvest of wheat is expected to be near average at the national level. However, localized below-average production is expected in some rainfed northern areas that experienced early season precipitation deficits and in some eastern and southern areas where diseases caused some crop damage.
- Based on global trends and available information from leading health experts including the WHO and the London School of Hygiene & Tropical Medicine, the COVID-19 pandemic is likely to continue in the near to medium term (1-6 months).
- Despite the high caseload of COVID-19 in Afghanistan, lockdown measures are not likely to be reinstated on a large scale during the scenario period, given limited ability of government to enforce the measures or effectively provide food assistance to citizens. However, some localized and temporary increases in control measures are possible in areas where COVID-19 caseload is increasing more rapidly. Border restrictions and school closures are expected to remain in place in the near term (1-3 months). Based on historical patterns, the border with Pakistan is expected to remain largely open to trade, though with fluctuations in restrictions expected throughout the scenario period.
- Based on current levels of supply and the easing of export restrictions by Kazakhstan, overall imports of wheat are expected to be near average and sufficient to fulfill Afghanistan's import needs.
- Given expectations for near average national production and imports, retail wheat flour prices are expected to follow seasonal trends, though remain above average throughout the scenario period. It is anticipated that rice prices will remain stable during the scenario period due to stable market supply from Pakistan.

Figure 5. Observed and projected wheat flour prices in Kabul market, January 2020 to January 2021



Source: *FEWS NET calculation based on MAIL data*

- Given significantly above-average numbers of undocumented migrant Afghan workers returning from Iran in March, expectations for eased border restrictions, and below-average labor availability in urban areas of Afghanistan, it is anticipated that many undocumented Afghans will return to Iran to seek labor opportunities in the medium term. However, overall numbers of Afghan migrant workers abroad – particularly in Iran – are expected to remain below average and lower relative to the pre-COVID period, due to insecurity along travel routes and poor economic conditions in Iran. This is expected to result in below-average levels of remittances from Iran. Remittances from Gulf countries are expected to remain normal.
- Income from the sale of cash crops and fruits are expected to be normal throughout the scenario period.
- Due to the general economic slowdown, availability of non-agricultural labor opportunities – particularly in main urban markets – is expected to be below-average in the near to medium term. Availability of agricultural labor opportunities is expected to be near normal.
- Given favorable rangeland conditions, livestock body conditions and productivity will likely be at average levels, and no major livestock migration is anticipated. Given current above average prices, livestock prices will likely remain slightly above average during the scenario period. During July due to Eid Ul Azaha, it is anticipated that livestock prices will increase compared to the rest of the season, as is typical.
- Given second season rainfall (March – May) and current water availability, it is expected that near average area will be planted under second season crops of mainly rice and maize. Production of these crops is anticipated to be near average, with the harvest taken in September-October 2020.
- Given expectations for first and second season harvests, households food stocks are expected to remain at near average levels throughout the scenario period. Most poor households will likely be able to maintain their food stocks until around December 2020. As the lean season progresses, an increasing number of poor households will exhaust food stocks and become reliant on market purchases and in-kind assistance by relief organizations.
- Insecurity/conflict is anticipated to increase typically with the warmer weather during summer. Increased levels of displacement are likely during this time.
- Given below-average access to income and above-average food prices, the prevalence of acute malnutrition at the national level is likely to increase during the scenario period, particularly in the near to medium term in urban areas. Higher levels of acute malnutrition are also likely in the conflict-affected districts due to internal displacement, disrupted livelihoods, and decreased access to health and nutrition services.
- Due to the impacts of COVID-19, humanitarian assistance is expected to increase to above average levels throughout 2020. According to FSAC, the provision of two-month packages of humanitarian food assistance averaging 70 USD per month (10 USD per household member per month; average household size of seven) for 3 million people in mostly urban areas is largely funded as part of the COVID-19 response, though distribution plans have not been specified.
- Based on preliminary forecasts, the beginning of the October 2020 – January 2021 precipitation season is likely to be below average. However, planting is expected to be average as the majority of winter wheat is irrigated.

Most Likely Food Security Outcomes

In most rural areas, near average agricultural production and good livestock productivity are anticipated to improve food consumption during the June to September period as households access food from own production. During this time, most rural households will be expected to meet all food consumption needs, with Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes likely. Beginning in December 2020, an increasing number of households will be expected to exhaust food stocks and become dependent on market purchases. Given the poor labor market and expectations for above-average staple food prices, households' access to food will likely be restricted, with Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes likely to emerge in some areas in January 2020.

In most of the central highlands, the lean season will continue until the winter wheat harvest starts in July/August. With start of the harvesting season, many poor households in these areas will likely experience improvement in food consumption and Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes from June to September 2020. However, their stocks typically last only a few months. As such, an increasing number of households are expected to exhaust food stocks as the lean season starts in November/December. As a result, households will likely be unable to meet all food needs, with Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes expected throughout the remainder of the projection period. In higher elevation areas of Badakhshan where harvest has not started yet, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are expected to persist through September, with Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes likely to emerge with the start of wheat harvest in October/November.

Meanwhile, in urban areas, many poor households will likely continue to face significantly constrained purchasing power due to below-average availability of labor opportunities, below-average remittance levels, and above-average food prices. Due to decreased income-earning opportunities, poor households will likely continue to buy less nutritious/less preferred foods and consume lower quantities of food. Urban households who receive two-month packages of humanitarian food assistance would be expected to face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes while the assistance lasts, but would likely deteriorate to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) as the lean season progresses.

Internally displaced persons have lost their ability to maintain their livelihoods and cultivate their lands. As a result, newly displaced households who receive three-month packages of humanitarian assistance are expected to face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes for the three-month period following displacement, with deterioration to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes expected following that due to the poor labor market. In addition to causing displacement, conflict and natural disasters will likely decrease access to health and nutrition services. This may further deteriorate the nutrition condition of the most vulnerable groups, such as under-five children and pregnant and lactating women (PLWs).

Events that Might Change the Outlook

Possible events over the next eight months that could change the most-likely scenario:

Area	Event	Impact on food security outcomes
National	Borders remain closed or labor migration does not resume to the extent anticipated	This would continue constraining access to income among households dependent on labor migration and remittances throughout Afghanistan, in both rural and urban areas. This would likely have negative consequences on food security outcomes, with Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes likely to persist among the worst affected.
National	Border with Pakistan is re-closed in the June – September period	This would affect households involved in horticulture businesses and would likely reduce income from crop sales, with the southern region most affected. Area-level Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes would still be expected.
National	Pandemic of COVID-19 worsens beyond what is anticipated	Direct impacts on affected households would include reduced ability of household members to work, increased health costs, and deterioration of mental health. Indirect impacts would likely include further impacts on income-earning and food prices. In addition, Afghan exports would face stricter restrictions in the global market, with adverse consequences on households and national income. Worst affected households would likely face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes.
National	Food prices further increase atypically due to COVID-19 impacts	This would further deteriorate purchasing power of poor households. This would particularly impact market-dependent urban households, but would be expected to also increasingly impact rural households as food stocks are exhausted around December. This would likely cause additional households to deteriorate to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse outcomes, and would likely accelerate the deterioration of rural areas to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) as the lean season progresses.

National	Peace deal between Afghanistan government and Taliban	This would likely reduce levels of conflict. Causalities and displacements would likely decrease. Positive impacts on livelihoods would be experienced over subsequent years.

AREAS OF CONCERN

At the time when areas of concern were identified in late April, FEWS NET was investigating reports of atypical levels of precipitation, border restrictions, and other COVID-19 impacts on these provinces. With additional information from the field, FEWS NET's analysis is that these areas will likely face a less severe food security situation than originally anticipated.

Nangarhar Province

Current Situation

Due to above-average cumulative precipitation from April to May 2020, rust in wheat and powdery mildew in vegetables are expected to have reduced wheat and vegetable output by an estimated 10 to 20 percent compared to last year, according to key informants. Due to the poor quality of harvested wheat, farmgate prices were below average according to field observations, which has adversely affected income of wheat producers in this province. Currently, harvesting of vegetables – such as onion, potato, tomatoes, and other seasonal crops – is ongoing. Due to the border closure with Pakistan through late June, Pakistani vegetables could not enter Afghanistan through this province. As a result, there was high demand for domestically produced vegetables, both inside and outside of the province. This has led to increased income for vegetable and fruit producers in Nangarhar Province. In rural areas of Nangarhar, wheat and vegetables are the main source of income for rural households.

Meanwhile, prices of key staple food commodities – including wheat flour, cooking oil, and beans – remain significantly above average. In Jalalabad market, prices of wheat flour increased a further 4 percent between April and May, to reach levels 40 percent higher than last year and 50 percent higher than the three-year average. At the same time, wages for casual labor remained stable between April and May, though at levels 33 percent lower than the same time last year, and 17 percent lower than the three-year average. Significantly above-average food prices and below-average wages are constraining purchasing power among market-dependent households.

In urban areas such as Jalalabad City, poor households are mainly dependent on daily labor and petty trade. In the summer months, skilled laborers typically migrate to Pakistan and earn enough income to meet their food and non-food needs back home. However, due to border closures this year, these laborers could not make it to Pakistan. This severely impacted the approximate 5 percent households who typically rely on skilled labor migration. In addition, levels of remittances from Iran and Pakistan have significantly decreased in this province, reducing poor households' income in both rural and urban areas.

Insecurity incidents have reportedly decreased in Nangarhar after the peace deal was signed between the U.S. and Taliban at the end of February 2020. Despite this, UNOCHA reports that almost 28,000 individuals fled their homes due to conflict in the eastern region from January to May 2020, with the majority displaced to Jalalabad City. Of these, approximately 55 percent were assisted with either food packages or cash-for-food. These IDPs increased the number of people competing for scarce labor opportunities in Jalalabad, putting pressure on the already weak livelihoods of urban poor in this province.

According to results of a SMART nsurvey conducted by AAH from March 30 to April 07, 2020, and which covered all 22 districts of Nangarhar, approximately 27 percent of households reported inadequate food consumption (with 2.4 percent registering Poor FCS and 24.2 percent registering Borderline FCS), and at least 42 percent registered Medium or High levels of coping as measured by the Reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI). The same survey estimated that the GAM prevalence in 6 to 59 month old children as measured by WHZ was 9.6 percent (95% CI 7.5 – 12.2) and the prevalence of SAM was 1.8 percent (95% CI 1.0 – 3.3). As measured by MUAC, however, the prevalence of GAM was slightly higher at 10.1 percent (95% CI 7.9 – 12.9) while the prevalence of SAM was 2.4 percent (95% CI 1.5- 3.9). As measured by WHZ, the nutrition situation in Nangarhar Province is considered "alert" level, while it is considered "serious" as measured by MUAC. The crude death rate was 0.46 (95% CI 0.26 - 0.81) and the under-five death rate was 0.52 (95% CI 0.20 - 1.35) per 10,000/day, both below the emergency threshold. These recent GAM prevalence point estimates are lower than those measured by the last SMART survey conducted in Nangarhar in 2016, though overlapping confidence intervals make it impossible to discern a trend. In 2016, the prevalence of GAM as measured by WHZ was 12.6 percent (95% CI 10.1 – 15.5) and the prevalence of SAM was 3 percent (95% CI 1.9 – 4.7).

In rural areas, most poor households are expected to be consuming food from the recent harvest and earning some income from crop sales as well as agricultural labor in vegetable and fruit fields. These households are likely able to meet their minimum food needs but not all essential non-food needs, with Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes expected. As a result of below-average access to income and high food prices, many market-dependent households in this province – particularly in urban areas – are likely facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) food insecurity outcomes, with humanitarian assistance required to fill consumption gaps and protect livelihoods. Displaced households in Nangahar Province are currently expected to be facing food consumption gaps and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes, despite some humanitarian assistance provided by relief organizations.

Assumptions

In addition to the national assumptions described above, the most likely scenario for Nangarhar Province is based on the following assumptions:

- For most rural households, wheat stocks are expected to last through approximately January 2021.
- Due to expectations for restrictions on cross-border movement, labor migration to Pakistan will likely continue to be significantly reduced in the near term. As a result, levels of remittances from Pakistan will likely be significantly below average during this time.
- According to information from partners, it is expected that humanitarian food assistance will reach a total of over 200,000 individuals in Nangarhar Province during the July to October 2020 period under different food and cash modalities. However, this assistance is not yet planned, funded, and likely, and is therefore not considered in the analysis of projected outcomes.

Most Likely Food Security Outcomes

Most rural households are expected to continue relying on food stocks through January 2021. However, many poor rural households who are dependent on remittances or whose harvests were impacted by wheat rust and other crop diseases are expected to face income shortages. Households dependent on labor migration will also face reduced access to income in the near term. Given this, many households will likely borrow money and consume less preferred foods to maintain their essential food needs, with Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes expected through at least January 2021.

Despite the easing of control measures, many urban poor households who heavily rely on daily labor, petty trade, and daily transportation services (such as rickshaw) will likely continue facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes through at least January 2021. They will not be able to meet their essential food and nonfood needs without humanitarian interventions. Urban households who receive humanitarian food assistance would be expected to face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes while the assistance lasts, but would likely deteriorate to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) as the lean season progresses, as income opportunities are expected to remain below average.

Balkh Province

Current Situation

In rural areas, COVID-19 has had minimal impact on agricultural activities. Agricultural land, both irrigated and rainfed, was reportedly cultivated at average levels, with slightly more cultivation than last year. Oilseed and horticulture, which are main cash crops, were planted on time. During the start of 2019/20 wet season, precipitation deficits were reported, but precipitation later in the season made up for earlier deficits and allowed crops to mature.

Like other provinces, measures have been taken to limit the exposure of residents to COVID-19, including lockdowns in urban areas lasting from early April through late May. These restrictions resulted in food price increases during the lockdown period and severely restricted income earning in urban areas. Balkh Province has also reported an influx of returnees from Iran and a significant reduction in remittances from Iran, Pakistan, and Turkey due to COVID-19.

According to MAIL data, wheat flour prices remained stable in the Mazar market between April and May, but remained 37 percent higher than prices at the same time last year and 50 percent higher the three-year average. As a result, the terms of trade between casual labor and food were 13 percent lower than the same time last year and 21 percent lower than the three-year average. Furthermore, above-average sheep prices have not been sufficient to offset high wheat prices. As a result, the pastoralists' terms of trade – between livestock and wheat flour – also remained 11 percent below average.

In rural areas, most households are currently consuming own-produced food from the harvest. However, labor opportunities, handicraft sales, and remittances have been significantly impacted by the COVID-19 pandemic and have not yet returned to typical levels. As a result, many poor households are likely unable to meet all essential non-food needs, with Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes expected. In urban areas, reduced income-earning due to below average labor opportunities and reduced remittances is also expected to impacting households. Due to lack of alternative livelihood means, dependence on markest for food, and insufficient humanitarian assistance, many poor urban households are unable to meet all food needs, with Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes likely.

Assumptions

In addition to the national assumptions described above, the most likely scenario for Balkh Province is based on the following assumptions:

- Food stocks are expected to last most poor households through November 2020. In a normal year, stocks from the wheat harvest last five to six months while stocks from the vegetable harvest last four to five months.
- Access to markets in rural areas will likely be limited at times during the winter months from December 2020 to January 2021.

Most Likely Food Security Outcomes

In rural areas, most households will likely continue accessing food from own production and income from crop sales due to the current harvests, with food stocks expected to last through around October 2020. However, due to prolonged impacts of COVID-19 on labor opportunities and remittances, poor households will have below average income throughout the scenario period. In the winter months, poor households also typically have less access to income given reduced availability of labor opportunities. As a result, poor rural households will likely access sufficient food but will be unable to meet all essential non-food needs throughout the scenario period, with Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes expected.

In urban areas, impacts of reduced access to remittances and labor opportunities are expected to persist throughout the scenario period. As such, many market-dependent urban households are likely to consume less preferred foods and reduce quantities of food consumed in order to meet food needs. Overall, poor households in urban areas are expected to continue facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes in the absence of additional assistance. Urban households who receive humanitarian food assistance would be expected to face Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes while the assistance lasts, but would likely deteriorate to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) as the lean season progresses, as income opportunities are expected to remain below average.

ABOUT SCENARIO DEVELOPMENT
To project food security outcomes, FEWS NET develops a set of assumptions about likely events, their effects, and the probable responses of various actors. FEWS NET analyzes these assumptions in the context of current conditions and local livelihoods to arrive at a most likely scenario for the coming eight months. Learn more here.