Food crises forecast for 2021

Over 142 million people in 40 out of the 55 countries/territories included in the GRFC 2021 are forecast to be in Crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) or equivalent in 2021. Through mid-2021, around 155,000 people will likely face Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) in South Sudan (108,000) and Yemen (47,000). No forecast is available for the 15 remaining countries/territories at the time of publication.

High levels of acute food insecurity will persist in countries with protracted conflicts by limiting access to livelihoods and agricultural fields, uprooting people from their homes, and increasing displaced populations’ reliance on humanitarian aid for their basic needs. Even if there is some hope that peace negotiations or ceasefires may lead to a reduction in violence and improvement in security conditions in some countries in 2021, economic recovery from protracted conflict takes years.

With the COVID-19 pandemic still not under control, many households will face reduced incomes associated with limited labour wage opportunities and delays in payment of government employee salaries. If there is no improvement, the economic consequences may become more severe as the year progresses. In net food-importing countries, weakening currencies will continue to push up food prices and further curtail purchasing power. High levels of government debt stress could impinge on longer-term development policies that would potentially undermine economic recoveries, stalling improvements in food security and equality.

Drier-than-average weather conditions are expected during the March–May rainfall season in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia with a negative impact on rangeland and crops. Coupled with persisting threat of desert locust infestations – already causing damage to crops and rangeland in southern and south-eastern Ethiopia, central and northern Kenya and Somalia – this could result in below-average crop and livestock production, reducing agricultural labour income, restricting food and milk consumption, increasing resource-based conflict and driving up cereal prices in the Horn of Africa. In early 2021, dryness prevailed in Iraq and particularly in southern and western Afghanistan, underpinned by the La Niña meteorological phenomenon (FAO-GIEWS, March 2021).

Forecasts for refugee food security are largely dependent on humanitarian assistance given refugees’ limited rights and lack of economic opportunities. Refugee food assistance is projected to be reduced (or continued at less than required) in 2021 across several countries, particularly in East Africa. The worsening economic crisis in Lebanon and ongoing COVID-19 restrictions in host countries are expected to adversely affect Syrian refugees’ livelihoods. Concerns over the deterioration in the protection and security environment in Cox’s Bazar in Bangladesh, stemming in part from COVID-19-related interruptions to the delivery of essential services and assistance are likely to persist.