

# 2021

# GLOBAL REPORT ON FOOD CRISES

JOINT ANALYSIS FOR BETTER DECISIONS

## IN BRIEF

The magnitude and severity of food crises worsened in 2020 as protracted conflict, the economic fallout of COVID-19 and weather extremes exacerbated pre-existing fragilities. Forecasts point to a grim outlook for 2021, with the threat of Famine persisting in some of the world's worst food crises.

By the end of 2020, the global goal of achieving 'zero hunger' by 2030 seemed increasingly out of reach. This follows another annual rise in the numbers of acutely food-insecure people in need of urgent food, nutrition and livelihood assistance.

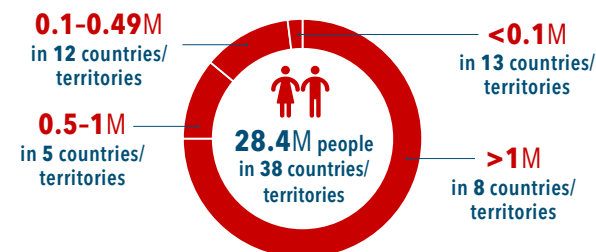
The GRFC focusses on food crises where the local capacities to respond are insufficient, prompting a request for the urgent mobilization of the international community, as well as countries/territories where there is ample evidence that the magnitude and severity of the food crisis exceed the local resources and capacities needed to respond effectively.

It provides estimates for populations in countries/territories where data are available based on the Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and Cadre Harmonisé (CH) or comparable sources.

At least 155 million people in 55 countries/territories were in Crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) in 2020, an increase of around 20 million people from 2019. Among the 39 countries/territories included in the GRFC since 2016, the number of people in Crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) or equivalent has increased from 94 million to 147 million people, reflecting worsening levels and wider geographical coverage.

Figure 2

**Of the 43 countries with IPC/CH analyses, 38 had populations in Emergency or worse, in 2020**



■ Emergency or worse (IPC/CH Phase 4 or above)

Note: 5 countries had no populations in Emergency or worse (IPC/CH Phase 4 or above). Source: FSIN, using IPC/CH data.

Around 28 million people across 38 of the 43 countries/territories with IPC/CH analyses were in Emergency or worse (IPC/CH Phase 4 or above) and required urgent action to save lives and livelihoods. Most people in these dire circumstances were in Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan and Yemen – with at least 2 million people in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) in each country.

Figure 1

**Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) and Cadre Harmonisé (CH)**

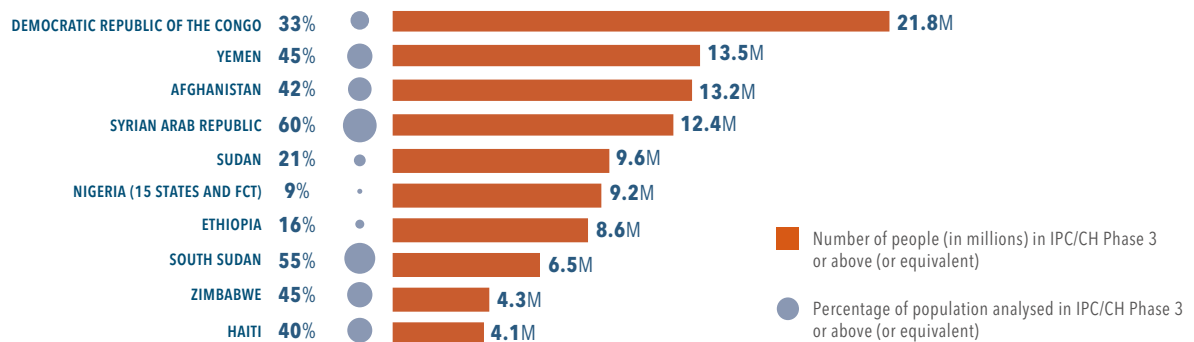
Phase 1 Minimal	Phase 2 Stressed	Phase 3 Crisis	Phase 4 Emergency	Phase 5 Catastrophe/Famine
Households are able to meet essential food and non-food needs without engaging in atypical and unsustainable strategies to access food and income.	Households have minimally adequate food consumption but are unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures without engaging in stress-coping strategies.	Households have food consumption gaps with high or above usual acute malnutrition OR accelerated depletion of livelihoods assets OR resort to crisis coping strategies.	Households have large food consumption gaps resulting in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality OR face extreme loss of livelihood assets OR resort to emergency coping strategies.	Households have an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs. Starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident.

Action for disaster risk reduction and livelihoods protection

Urgent action required

Figure 3

### The 10 crises with the highest number of people in IPC/CH Phase 3 or above (or equivalent) in 2020



Source: FSIN, GRFC 2021.

In South Sudan, Ethiopia, Haiti and Zimbabwe, more than 1 million people were in Emergency (IPC Phase 4). In six countries, more than 10 percent of the analysed population were in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) (Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, Haiti, South Sudan, Yemen and Zimbabwe).

Around 133 000 people were in the most severe phase – Catastrophe (IPC/CH Phase 5) – in Burkina Faso, South Sudan and Yemen and needed urgent action to prevent widespread death and total collapse of livelihoods.

In South Sudan, the number of people in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) rose from zero in May–July 2020 to 92 000 in October–November 2020, and increased further to 105 000 in six counties by December. The IPC Famine Review Committee warned that four western payams of South Sudan’s Pibor county faced Famine Likely (IPC Phase 5) in October–December 2020, while two other eastern payams were at Risk of Famine by December 2020 (IPC and external reviews, December 2020).

These figures are an indication of the severe impact of protracted crises on livelihoods and nutrition, which can eventually lead to extreme consequences such as destitution and death. The high numbers of people in Emergency (IPC/CH Phase 4) and Catastrophe (IPC/CH Phase 5) highlight an extremely serious situation in which acute malnutrition and mortality are expected to increase significantly among the acutely food-insecure population, should humanitarian intervention fail to reach them and help them meet basic food needs.

Repeated adverse events have progressively eroded the capacity of vulnerable households to recover from shocks. An additional 208 million people in 43 countries were classified in Stressed (IPC/CH Phase 2) in this report.

### The worst food crises in 2020

Of the 55 food crises identified in 2020, 10 stood out in terms of the number of people in Crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) or equivalent – six of these were in Africa (the Democratic Republic of the Congo, the Sudan, northern Nigeria, Ethiopia, South Sudan and Zimbabwe), two in the Middle East (the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen), one in the Americas (Haiti) and one in South Asia (Afghanistan).

For the third consecutive year, three conflict-affected countries – the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Yemen and Afghanistan – had the largest populations in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above). These three, plus the Syrian Arab Republic, accounted for nearly 40 percent of the total population in these phases.

In terms of prevalence, the Central African Republic, South Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic had more than half of their analysed populations in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above) or equivalent. Five countries – Afghanistan, Haiti, Lesotho, Yemen and Zimbabwe – had between 40 and 45 percent of their analysed populations in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above).

Twelve countries saw large increases in absolute terms between 2019 and 2020. The biggest increases in the populations in Crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) or equivalent were in the Democratic Republic of the Congo, northern Nigeria, the Sudan and the Syrian Arab Republic. Other countries that saw a major increase were Afghanistan, Burkina Faso, Burundi, Cameroon, Honduras, Mozambique, Sierra Leone and Uganda.

In 2020, over 15.8 million children under 5 years old living in the 55 food crises were suffering from wasting. Nearly half of these (7.2 million) lived in the 10 worst food crises (by number of people in IPC/CH Phase 3 or above).

The situation was particularly concerning in northern Nigeria, Ethiopia, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Sudan, which accounted for more than a third of all children affected by wasting in food-crisis countries.

The nutrition situation was particularly critical in countries affected by protracted conflict. Of the 10 countries/territories with the highest prevalence of wasting, eight (Yemen, South Sudan, the Sudan, the Niger, Somalia, Chad, northern Nigeria, and Burkina Faso) are affected by protracted conflict. Conflict and insecurity have disrupted the channels of food access and the functioning of basic health and sanitary services, severely affecting the nutritional status of the most vulnerable, especially women and children.

The 10 countries experiencing the worst food crises in 2020 were particularly affected by nutrition and health service disruptions mostly due to COVID-19 restrictions. In six out of the nine countries with data, vitamin A supplementation dropped nationally by at least 25 percent. The drop exceeded 50 percent in Afghanistan, northern Nigeria and the Sudan. In the Syrian Arab Republic and Yemen, the implementation of wasting treatment programmes dropped by 25–49 percent.

### The perfect storm: the multiple shock effect

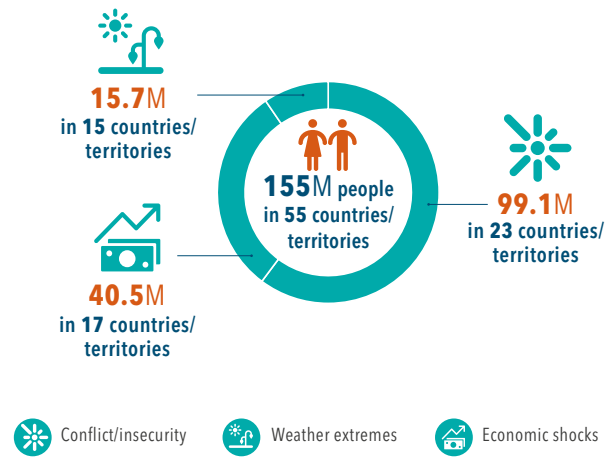
The drivers of acute food insecurity are often interlinked and mutually reinforcing. The sharp rise in acutely food-insecure populations partially reflects the increased geographic coverage of several analyses due to growing concerns about acute food insecurity and also accounts for the harsh economic impacts of COVID-19 in urban areas. However, the increase largely exposes the devastating consequences of conflict/insecurity, which remained the main driver of food crises in 23 countries/territories, where almost 100 million people were in Crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) or equivalent – up from around 77 million in 22 countries/territories in 2019.

The intensifying impacts of economic shocks, including those resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, triggered the worst global economic crisis since World War II, disproportionately hurting economies in poor countries and exacerbating already fragile conditions, including in countries with ongoing conflicts. Tens of millions of vulnerable people were unable to afford food in sufficient quantity as they suffered severe job and income losses, often coupled with abruptly escalating and sustained high food prices. In 2020, economic shocks (including those resulting from COVID-19) were considered to be the primary driver of acute food insecurity in 17 countries, accounting for over 40 million people in Crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) or equivalent, relative to eight countries in 2019 with around 24 million people.

Intense weather extremes compounded the severity of food crises and accounted for around 16 million people in Crisis or worse

Figure 4

### Numbers of people in Crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) or equivalent by key driver in 2020



Note: Many food crises are the result of multiple drivers. The GRFC has based these infographics on the predominant driver in each country/territory.  
Source: FSIN, GRFC 2021.

(IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) or equivalent across 15 countries. In 2020, exceptionally heavy rains and floods wrought havoc on livelihoods in many parts of Africa, the Middle East and South Asia. In Central America (Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua), tropical storms, hurricanes and flooding contributed to a precipitous rise in acute food insecurity, affecting areas where households experienced prolonged droughts in preceding years.

### The grim outlook for 2021

Food crises are becoming increasingly protracted and the ability to recover from new adverse events is becoming more difficult.

Conflict, the COVID-19 pandemic, and large-scale economic crises are expected to extend food-crisis situations in 2021, necessitating continuing large-scale humanitarian assistance. Over 142 million people in 40 out of the 55 countries/territories included in this report are forecast to be in Crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above) in 2021. Around 155 000 people will likely face Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) in two of these countries through mid-2021, with 108 000 in South Sudan and 47 000 in Yemen. No forecasts were available for the 15 remaining countries/territories at the time of publication.

Five of the major food crises are expected to have at least 12 million people in Crisis or worse (IPC/CH Phase 3 or above), led by the Democratic Republic of the Congo (27.3 million) and Yemen (16.1 million), followed by Afghanistan (13.2 million), Ethiopia (12.9 million) and northern Nigeria (12.8 million).

The Famine Review Committee warned that four payams of South Sudan's Pibor region will continue to face Famine Likely (IPC Phase 5), while two other payams will remain at Risk of Famine through July 2021. Meanwhile, Yemen faces a continued risk of Famine into 2021. In northern Nigeria, although no population/area is projected to be in Catastrophe/Famine (CH Phase 5), some indicators suggest that a small proportion of the population might face such conditions (less than 10 percent of the population).

In countries facing the most severe outcomes, conflict is expected to continue to be the major driver of food crises. Shifting conflict dynamics, insecurity and armed violence in Afghanistan, the Central African Republic, the Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and the Niger), the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, northern Nigeria, northern Mozambique, Somalia, South Sudan and the Sudan could lead to intensified violence in 2021.

Although information is limited in areas of particular concern, such as Tigray Region in Ethiopia, continued attention, additional data collection, and humanitarian access are essential to implement an informed, coordinated and effective humanitarian response. Although there is some hope for peace negotiations or ceasefires in certain countries in 2021, the recovery of livelihoods from protracted conflict will be a gradual and lengthy process.

The COVID-19 pandemic and related containment measures are expected to continue exacerbating economic crises and acute food insecurity, particularly in fragile economies in parts of Southern and Western Africa, and in Haiti. Even if COVID-19 can be contained in some parts of the world, slow vaccine roll-out in countries with poor health services could prolong restrictions, dimming the prospects for swift economic recovery.

The perennial threat of poor rainfall and adverse weather events is also likely to continue driving acute food insecurity in many countries. Forecast drier-than-average weather conditions from March–May in Ethiopia, Kenya and Somalia – coupled with the persistent threat of desert locust infestations – 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.

Conflict, insecurity and weather extremes are expected to lead to further increases in the number of forcibly displaced households – both for those fleeing across borders or being displaced within their own country. Refugees and asylum seekers face precarious conditions marked by limited opportunities for socioeconomic inclusion and lack of access to social safety nets. The worsening economic crisis in Lebanon and ongoing COVID-19 restrictions in host countries will particularly affect Syrian refugees' livelihoods and food security status in 2021. In Cox's Bazar in Bangladesh, the social impacts of the pandemic and increased competition over livelihoods could further undermine cohesion between refugees and host communities. Continued economic instability, joblessness, violence and acute food insecurity are also expected to fuel the massive outmigration crises from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela and Central American countries.

While all partners are in broad agreement with the data and information presented in this report, FEWS NET's analyses suggest that the population requiring emergency food assistance in 2020 was lower than the IPC estimates for Afghanistan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Ethiopia, Haiti and the Sudan.

## CONTACTS

✉ [fsin-secretariat@wfp.org](mailto:fsin-secretariat@wfp.org)[www.fsinplatform.org](http://www.fsinplatform.org)

@FSIN\_News

[www.fightfoodcrises.net](http://www.fightfoodcrises.net)

@fightfoodcrises

This initiative is undertaken by the Global Network Against Food Crises. FSIN's work is made possible thanks to the generous support of the European Union and USAID.

Food and Agriculture  
Organization of the  
United NationsGlobal Network  
Against Food Crises