

FSNWG¹ Food Security and Nutrition Update

Key messages

- An estimated 62.9 million people in 10 of the 13 countries covered by the FSNWG were highly food insecure (IPC² Phase 3+) and in need of urgent assistance in April 2021. Of these, about 32.3 million were from seven of the eight IGAD Member States.
- In the DRC, an estimated 27.3 million people are highly food insecure (IPC Phase 3+), making the country home to the highest number of people in need of urgent food assistance in the world.
- The food security situation in South Sudan remains a major source of concern as the number of highly food insecure people (IPC Phase 3+) rose to 7.2 million following the start of the lean season. Scaled up interventions to save lives and protect livelihoods are urgently needed.
- In the Tigray region of Ethiopia, the nutrition situation remains critical with Global Acute Malnutrition (GAM) prevalence³ in assessed woredas ranging between 20-35%.
- Tigray and Somali refugees in Sudan, and Dollo Ado in Ethiopia respectively, face high levels of acute malnutrition. For instance, nutrition screening of newly arrived refugees in Dollo Ado indicated a GAM rate⁴ of 23% among children under the age of five.
- The humanitarian response in the region remains underfunded, despite growing needs. In South Sudan for instance, just 18.8% of the funding requirement for the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) had been met at the time of reporting, despite life-threatening levels of food insecurity and malnutrition. In addition, refugees in the region continue to face food ration cuts, most recently in Burundi and South Sudan, due to funding shortfalls.
- The March-May 2021 rainy season saw a slow start with below-average rainfall observed in many areas, risking crop failure.

Figure 1: Food insecure population estimates, as of April 2021

Country	Stressed (IPC Phase 2)	Crisis (IPC Phase 3)	Emergency (IPC Phase 4)	Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5)	Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3+)
Djibouti	389,000	167,000	27,000		194,000
Ethiopia	17,353,112	10,279,333	2,592,136		12,871,469
Kenya	4,802,500	1,185,600	238,600		1,424,200
Somalia	2,497,200	1,451,000	149,800		1,600,800
South Sudan ⁵	3,138,000	4,668,000	2,411,000	108,000	7,187,000
Sudan	17,407,791	5,800,371	1,296,808		7,097,179
Uganda	4,542,829	1,630,877	371,860		2,002,737
IGAD Total	50,130,432	25,182,181	7,087,204	108,000	32,377,385
Burundi	3,955,432	1,206,500	128,129		1,334,629
CAR	1,756,781	1,520,732	407,877		1,928,609
DRC	40,779,169	20,533,697	6,728,624		27,262,321
Total	96,621,814	48,443,110	14,351,834	108,000	62,902,944

Source: IPC Global Support Unit (GSU) for East and Central Africa

¹ The East and Central Africa Food Security and Nutrition Working Group (FSNWG) is a multi-stakeholder regional forum, chaired by IGAD and FAO, mandated to provide adequate and timely information of food security and nutrition to relevant stakeholders for improved decision making

² The Integrated Food Security Phase Classification (IPC) is a set of standardised tools used to classify the severity of food insecurity using a five-phase scale, that is, Minimal (IPC Phase 1), Stressed (IPC Phase 2), Crisis (IPC Phase 3), Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and Catastrophe or Famine (IPC Phase 5).

³ Based on Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC) from rapid nutrition assessments

⁴ Based on MUAC

⁵ Based on IPC Global Support Unit's consolidated findings from the South Sudan IPC Technical Working Group and two external reviews (Famine Review and Quality Review), following a breakdown in technical consensus in the estimation of populations in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) in six counties. According to the South Sudan IPC Technical Working Group, 3,144,000 people were in Stress (IPC Phase 2), 4,743,000 in Crisis (IPC Phase 3), 2,467,000 in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) and 31,000 in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5)

Sector updates

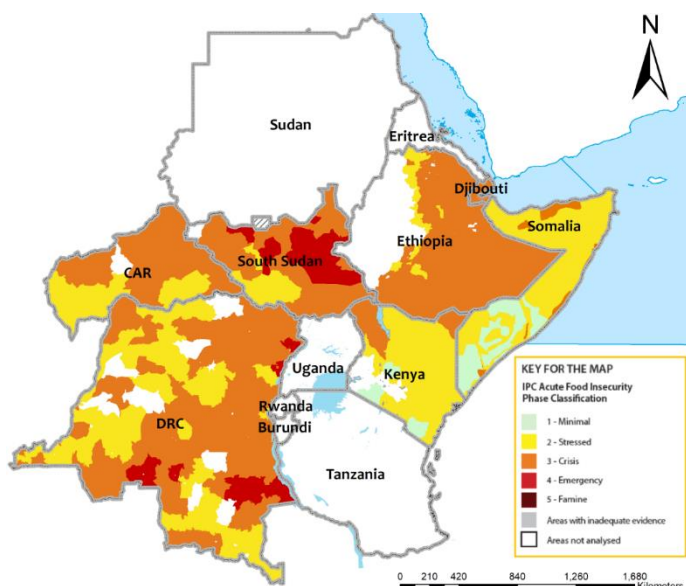
Food security

Multiple shocks, including conflict, economic difficulties (macro-economic challenges and the socio-economic impacts of COVID-19), and climatic hazards, compounded by constrained humanitarian assistance, continue to sustain large populations in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3+) levels of acute food insecurity across the region.

The IPC Global Support Unit (GSU) for East and Central Africa estimates that 62.9 million people in 10 of the 13 countries covered by the FSNWG were highly food insecure (IPC Phase 3+) and in need of urgent food assistance in April 2021 (see Figure 1). Of these, about 32.3 million were in seven of the eight IGAD Member States - Djibouti, Ethiopia, Kenya, Somalia, South Sudan, Sudan and Uganda. The other 30.5 million were in Burundi, Central African Republic (CAR) and the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC).

An additional, 96.6 million people were Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and in need of livelihood support, including 50.1 million in the IGAD region.

Regional food security situation



Source: IPC GSU for East and Central Africa

Country updates

In Ethiopia, ongoing conflict in the Tigray region continues to displace households and disrupt livelihoods, and access to basic services and Productive Safety Net Programmes (PSNP), leaving affected households at risk of increased food insecurity and malnutrition. Furthermore, staple food prices remain atypically high due to macro-economic shocks, including high inflation and currency depreciation, thereby constraining vulnerable households' access to food.

The poor start to the "Belg⁶" season, especially in Afar, Amhara, southern Oromia and Somali regions, risks crop failure.

In South Sudan, an estimated 7.2 million people, representing 60% of the country's population, are highly food insecure (IPC Phase 3+). Of these, about 2.4 million are in Emergency (IPC Phase 4) while 108,000 are in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5)⁷. This is largely owing to the impacts of protracted conflict, persistent flooding, a prolonged macroeconomic crisis, and decimated livelihoods, alongside a depletion of food stocks and increased reliance on markets for food as the lean season (April-August 2021) progresses. Exacerbating the situation is limited access to humanitarian assistance due to disruptions caused by conflict and insecurity.

Key areas of concern include Jonglei, Unity, Upper Nile, Warrap, Northern Bar El Ghazal and Lakes states.

Sudan is expected to face increased food insecurity through the peak of the lean season (June-September 2021), due to atypically above-average food prices that have been occasioned by the macro-economic crisis in the country. For instance, between February and March 2021, staple food prices were about six times more than their recent five-year average⁸ as a result of the recent devaluation of the Sudanese Pound (SDG). Currently exacerbating the situation is high production and transportation costs following a rise in fuel prices.

⁶ Short rains season in Ethiopia between February and May, depending on areas

⁷ It should be noted that this conclusion differs from that of the South Sudan IPC Technical Working Group which classified 31,000 people in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5)

⁸ Ibid

FEWS NET estimates these costs to be ten times more now, compared to 2020⁹.

Further driving food insecurity in the country is ongoing conflict in greater Darfur and the protracted conflict in South Kordofan and Blue Nile states, which has led to households' displacement, loss of food stocks and constrained market access.

In Kenya, particularly in the eastern and northern parts and in parts of Somalia, a slow start to the March-May 2021 seasonal rains is likely to culminate in a second consecutive season of below-average rainfall. Food insecurity is therefore likely to intensify in affected areas, due poor harvests and pastoral conditions.

In the DRC, an estimated 27.3 million people are highly food insecure (IPC Phase 3+), making it host to the highest number of people in need of urgent food assistance across the globe. Conflict, mainly in the East (Ituri, North and South Kivu and Tanganyika provinces) and more recently in central Kasai, continues to be a leading driver of food insecurity in the country. In addition is a weak economy, which coupled with the effects of COVID-19, has left many living in extreme poverty.

Further, up to 5.2 million people are displaced and have lost or had their livelihoods disrupted in the DRC, making them disproportionately vulnerable to food insecurity.

Generally, the severity of food insecurity in the region is projected to increase through most of 2021 due to a confluence of the aforementioned drivers.

Nutrition

There are major concerns around a deterioration of the nutrition situation in the region, particularly in Ethiopia and South Sudan.

In the Tigray region of Ethiopia, findings from rapid nutrition assessments conducted point to critical levels of acute malnutrition as Global Acute

Malnutrition (GAM) rates¹⁰ exceed the internationally agreed emergency threshold of 15%.

More specifically, the prevalence of GAM¹¹ was estimated at 34.5% in Endamehoni, 34.4% in Kilite Awulaelo, 31% in Hintalo Warijat, 29.8% in Enderta, 25.5% in Tsaedaemba, and 23.8% in Raya Azebo, according to rapid nutrition assessments conducted by the Regional Emergency Nutrition Coordination Unit (RENCU) with technical support from UNICEF between 01-05 March 2021.

Similarly, the prevalence of GAM¹² was estimated at 32.3% in Hawzen, 29% in Tsirae Womberta, 28.7% in Tanqua Milash, and 27.7% in Degua Tembien, following another rapid nutrition assessment conducted by the RENCU and Disaster Prevention and Preparedness, Food Security (DPPFS) Bureau between 26 March-05 April 2021.

In South Sudan, the nutrition situation also remains critical and is expected to deteriorate further during the lean season, due in part to increased food insecurity. In this respect, 57 (72%) counties in the country are projected to be in IPC Acute Malnutrition (AMN) Phase 3 and above through July 2021, including 38 counties in IPC AMN Phase 4.

Furthermore, as per recent nutrition SMART surveys conducted by UNICEF in Pibor, Akobo West and Tonj North counties, the prevalence of GAM was estimated at 21.6%, 19% and 18.4% respectively, exceeding the internationally agreed emergency threshold.

In Uganda, the nutrition situation among refugees is concerning. Based on findings from a Food Security and Nutrition Assessment (FSNA) conducted in all refugee settlements by UNHCR, UNICEF and WFP, the prevalence of stunting among children under the age of five ranges from high (20-30%) to very high (>30%). In addition, the prevalence of anaemia ranges from moderate (20-39.9%) to severe (>40%).

Funding gaps continue to slow down nutrition service delivery in the country, with UNICEF warning

⁹ FEWS NET. Sudan - High food prices and poor purchasing power drive high needs through the lean season. April 2021

¹⁰ Based on Mid-Upper Arm Circumference (MUAC)

¹¹ Ibid

¹² Ibid

of a complete pipeline break in nutrition supplies in September 2021 if no funding is received.

Markets and trade

Generally, during the first quarter of 2021, staple cereal prices were relatively stable or below 2020 levels and recent five-year averages at most markets in the region, except in Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan.

In Ethiopia, maize prices were generally stable but were above their 2020 and recent five-year average. In Addis Ababa for instance, maize prices in February 2021 were nearly 100% higher than their recent five-year average¹³. Pockets of significant price increases were, however, recorded in the Tigray region, as maize prices reportedly doubled.

In South Sudan and Sudan, maize prices increased due to macro-economic challenges, including currency depreciation and inflation, high transportation costs occasioned by high fuel prices, and partly due to conflict. In Central Equatoria for instance, the price of white maize was more than 200% higher than the recent five-year average. Similarly, in Somalia, maize prices atypically increased despite “Deyr¹⁴” harvests, as cereal production was estimated at below average due to erratic October- December rains.

Sorghum prices atypically declined in Kenya and Uganda, possibly due to reduced demand. Conversely, they increased in Ethiopia due to high inflation, and in Somalia due to below-average “Deyr” harvest and expectations of a below-average “Gu¹⁵” harvest.

In Sudan, both sorghum and millet prices were far above their 2020 and recent five-year average owing to currency depreciation, high inflation, and high transportation and production costs following an increase in fuel prices. Similar trends were also observed in South Sudan as a result of the continuous weakening of the South Sudanese Pound (SSP). For instance, the average retail price of white

sorghum increased by 161% in Wau, by 65% in Juba, and by 50% in Mingkaman, compared to the same period in 2020.

As the lean season progresses, staple food prices are expected to increase seasonally through June 2021, and trend near or just above their recent five-year average in most markets. In Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan, however, high food prices (significantly above their recent five-year average) are expected to persist.

In addition to currency depreciation and inflation in Ethiopia, South Sudan and Sudan, other key factors that need to be monitored going forward include the March-May 2021 seasonal performance, ongoing conflict in parts of Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan, and high fuel prices in Ethiopia, Kenya, South Sudan and Sudan.

Displacement

COVID-19 cases continued to increase among displaced populations. As of 20 April 2021, a total of 2,790 COVID-19 cases had been confirmed among UNHCR’s populations of concern in the region.

In respect to Tigray refugees, new arrivals in Kassala and Gedaref states in Sudan had reached a total of 63,016, as of 24 April 2021. The majority of them are in dire need of humanitarian assistance, including health and nutrition interventions. This is as findings from a nutrition screening conducted in January 2021 indicate a GAM prevalence¹⁶ of 22% among children under the age of five. Even though efforts have been made to scale up nutrition interventions, there are still gaps including limited capacity for Severe Acute Malnutrition (SAM) management, limited preventive Blanket Supplementary Feeding Programmes (BSFP), lack of breast milk substitutes, and limited nutrition support to Human Immunodeficiency Virus (HIV) and Tuberculosis (TB) patients.

Between January-March 2021, around 2,428 Somali refugees arrived in Dollo Ado in Ethiopia, mainly

¹³ FEWS NET. [Ethiopia - Conflict, weather shocks, and poor macro-economic conditions drive persistent high needs in 2021. March 2021](#)

¹⁴ Short rains season in Somalia between mid-September and December

¹⁵ Main rains season in Somalia between mid-March and June

¹⁶ Based on MUAC

from Bakool, Banadir, Bay, Gedo and Hiraaan, representing a 49% increase compared to the same period in 2020 (1,629). Similar to the nutrition situation among Tigray refugees, a nutrition screening conducted among the newly arrived refugees in Dollo Ado indicated critical levels of acute malnutrition, with a GAM prevalence¹⁷ of 23% among children under the age of five.

Funding shortfalls continue to affect the refugee response in the region. In April 2021, the World Food Programme was forced to reduce its monthly assistance to refugees in Burundi by 20%, and further reduce its monthly assistance to refugees in South Sudan by 50% from 30%. In this regard, UNHCR warns of increased risk of affected refugees adopting negative coping mechanisms in order to meet their basic needs.

Climate

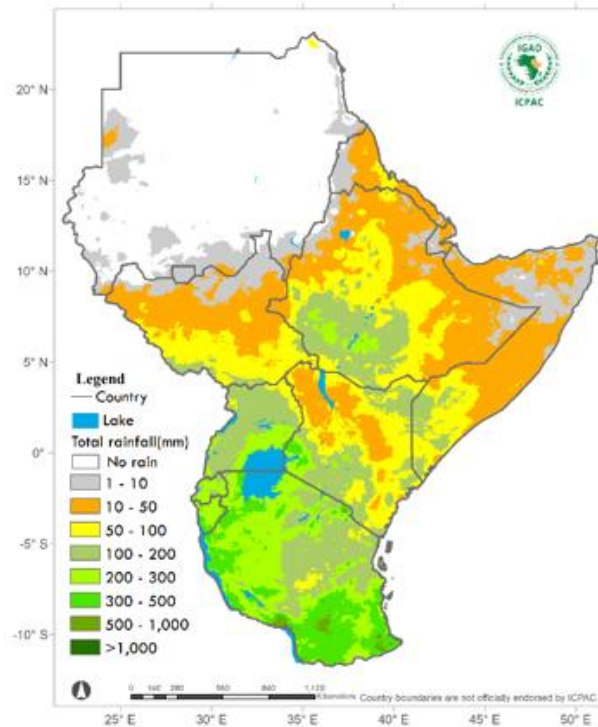
Looking at the March-20th April 2021 rainfall performance, average conditions were recorded over eastern and Lake Victoria basin of Kenya, much of Tanzania, Burundi, eastern Uganda, western Ethiopia, central and southern Somalia.

Drier than usual conditions were, however, recorded over much of Kenya, north western Uganda, central and eastern Tanzania, Rwanda, South Sudan, much of Ethiopia, northern and parts of central Somalia, and Djibouti, risking crop failure and minimal pasture regeneration.

Despite the recent increase in rainfall observed from late April 2021, the season is approaching conclusion, leaving insufficient time for recovery of crop yields.

In this respect, some areas of concern include central-eastern Kenya, central-eastern Ethiopia and southern Somalia.

March-20th April 2021 rainfall performance



Source: ICPAC

Conflict

Conflict remains a leading driver of food insecurity in the region.

According to a recent study by the IGAD Conflict Early Warning and Response Mechanism (CEWARN), the leading conflict-related issues in the IGAD region are youth unemployment, mismanaged electoral processes, polarised ethnicity, natural resources and land conflicts, extreme climate conditions and the effects of climate change, and environmental challenges manifested by prolonged drought, floods, and desert locust invasion.

There is, therefore, a need to explore appropriate actions to address these issues. These may include introduction of social cohesion programmes, youth empowerment and employment programmes, national dialogues, restructuring of education curriculums to match needed skillsets, and involving the youth in peacebuilding and policy formulation processes among others.

More information can be found [here](#).

¹⁷ Ibid

Humanitarian funding

The humanitarian response in the region remains underfunded despite growing humanitarian needs.

As of 29 April 2021, just about 10-20% of the total funding requirement for the 2021 Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) in Ethiopia, Somalia, South Sudan and Sudan had been met.

Humanitarian funding by country (million USD)

Country	Required	Funded	Funded (%)
Ethiopia ¹⁸	1,500	290.1	19.3%
Somalia	1,090	182.8	16.7%
South Sudan	1,680	313.5	18.7%
Sudan	1,940	197.8	10.2%

Source: OCHA

There is therefore a need for sustained advocacy and resource mobilisation in order to respond to these needs, and protect livelihoods.

Recommendations

The FSNWG recommends:

- Scale up of multi-sectoral humanitarian assistance to save lives, and safeguard livelihoods, especially in areas with populations categorised in Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3+) levels of acute food insecurity.
- Close monitoring of the nutrition situation, and scale-up of interventions, especially in Tigray and South Sudan, as well as among refugee populations.
- Collective advocacy to increase awareness of crises in the region and mobilise resources to respond to the various humanitarian needs in the region.
- Scale up of refugee response given that the majority of refugee populations in the

region have been affected by food ration cuts linked to funding shortfalls.

- Strengthening and supporting initiatives, such as social cohesion programmes, that aim to address the root causes of conflict and insecurity in the region.
- Close monitoring of the March-May 2021 season performance, and contingency plans relating to drought and floods, in areas likely to be affected.

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¹⁸ Humanitarian Response Plan (HRP) is yet to be approved by the Government