KEY MESSAGES

- Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes persist in conflict affected areas among displaced populations and, in areas, where poor households are still recovering from the 2018 drought. With the onset of winter, the anticipated depletion of household food stocks, and increased reliance on markets with below average incomes, Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are expected to emerge across most areas of the country in February.

- According to field reports, area planted for winter wheat in northern, northeastern, and northwestern regions is slightly above last year and cropping conditions are above average due to favorable, timely, and well distributed precipitation during October and November. Cumulative precipitation for the October 2019 to May 2020 wet season is most likely to be average with above average precipitation in eastern areas. This will most likely facilitate normal spring wheat planting and continued favorable cropping conditions.

- As per the IOM, over 470,000 undocumented Afghans spontaneously returned or were deported from Iran in 2019 through early December through Milak (Nimroz) and Herat (Islam Qala) entry points. During the same time period, according to UNOCHA, nearly 402,500 people were displaced due to conflict. The continued returns from Iran and displacement to urban areas will likely result in continued above normal competition for labor opportunities. Below average incomes from casual labor will likely result in these populations remaining in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) through the end of the lean season in May.

CURRENT SITUATION

For the second consecutive year, Afghanistan has had a favorable start of season with average precipitation between October and mid-December. The favorable precipitation and above average soil moisture led to the timely completion of winter wheat planting. In addition to the favorable start of season more households are engaging in agriculture activities, which has led to average winter wheat area planted in both rainfed and irrigated areas. Pasture conditions are generally favorable although are gradually deteriorating as is typical at this time of year with the onset of winter. Additionally, herders have moved their livestock from higher elevated
areas to lower elevated areas as normal in preparation for winter. Due to a favorable season in 2019, pastoralists and agropastoralists are generally finding sufficient pasture and fodder to maintain seasonally typical livestock conditions and productivity.

With the onset of winter, labor opportunities and incomes have seasonally decreased throughout the country. This coupled with below average employment opportunities in both the formal and informal sectors has resulted in below-average incomes for a large proportion of the population. The number of people engaging in seasonal labor migration to neighboring and gulf countries is continuing as normal. However, labor migration to Iran is occurring at below average rates leading to below normal quantity and frequency of remittances. Households who rely heavily on casual labor for income will likely have reduced incomes compared to recent years. This is largely due to a reduction in foreign and domestic investment and spending, especially in the construction industry, as well as a reduction in trade activity, which typically employ a large number of casual laborers. Although, in southern areas the pomegranate harvest is wrapping up and providing near normal labor opportunities and incomes.

Wheat flour imports from Kazakhstan and Pakistan continue as normal; with this, the wheat supply and prices continue to be relatively stable. Prices of fruits, vegetables, and other perishable agriculture products lack a market, except for Saffron, and prices are volatile as there is not a sustainable market. Currently prices for these goods are near average facilitating near normal incomes in southern areas of the country.

According to UNOCHA, as of early December in 2019, almost 402,500 and nearly 300,00 people were displaced by conflict and natural disasters, respectively. In areas where conflict is not protracted households return to their place of origin to rebuild their normal livelihoods. However, in areas with more frequent conflict like Badghis, as households are moving to Qala-e-Now and Herat city they are likely to remain displaced for longer periods of time. These households often face difficulty establishing new livelihoods and finding labor opportunities. Recent conflict in some rural districts of Ghor province have forced some populations to move to Ghor and Herat city.

According to the IOM, as of early December, over 470,000 undocumented people have returned from Iran and Pakistan. Of the total undocumented returnees only 42,000 have received assistance for resettlement. Similarly, to IDPs, undocumented returnees who do not receive re-settlement packages migrate to city centers to establish new livelihoods. Although, these households also typically have difficulty finding labor opportunities and often face high competition with IDPs and those unemployed.

Market and household stocks have improved from last year, with an above average wheat harvest, livestock prices, and fruit harvest. However, due to reduced income from limited labor opportunities, and continued conflict-related displacements, much of the country will be in Stressed (IPC Phase 2) and Crisis (IPC Phase 3) as winter begins. Areas with the greatest proportion of people estimated to be facing Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes include many parts of the north and central highlands that are heavily dependent on rainfed agriculture and livestock grazing, as well as areas heavily affected by ongoing conflict.

**UPDATED ASSUMPTIONS**

The assumptions used to develop FEWS NET’s most likely scenario for the Afghanistan Food Security Outlook for October 2019 to May 2020 remain unchanged, except for the following:

- Cumulative precipitation for the October 2019 and May 2020 wet season is still expected to be average across most of the country; however above average precipitation is anticipated in eastern Afghanistan. As a result of the increased probability of above average precipitation from March to May 2020, there is an increased risk of flooding in eastern and northern Afghanistan.

**PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH MAY 2020**

Many households are expected to continue relying on markets for food; however, as household incomes are below average, households purchasing power is expected to be comparatively lower than normal. Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes are expected to continue where households are not directly impacted by conflict and incomes are slightly below average. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are expected in higher elevated areas and households with below average purchasing power with limited ability to stock food for the winter. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes are expected to emerge across more areas of the country in January/February. This is due to depleted household food stocks and households start relying on markets with
below average incomes and somewhat restricted movement due to the winter season. The rest of the country is expected to be in Stressed (IPC Phase 2). Newly displaced households or those in IDP settlements receiving food assistance are expected to remain in Stressed (IPC Phase 2); however, those who will not be able to receive assistance due lack of humanitarian access are likely to remain in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) throughout the outlook period.

ABOUT THIS UPDATE
This report covers current conditions as well as changes to the projected outlook for food insecurity in this country. It updates the FEWS NET’s Food Security Outlook, which is published three times per year. Learn more about our work here.