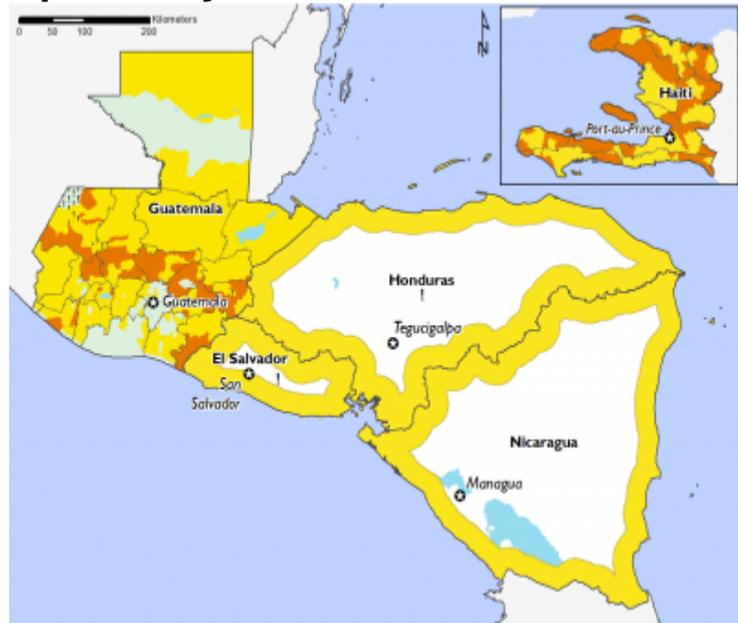


Central America and Caribbean

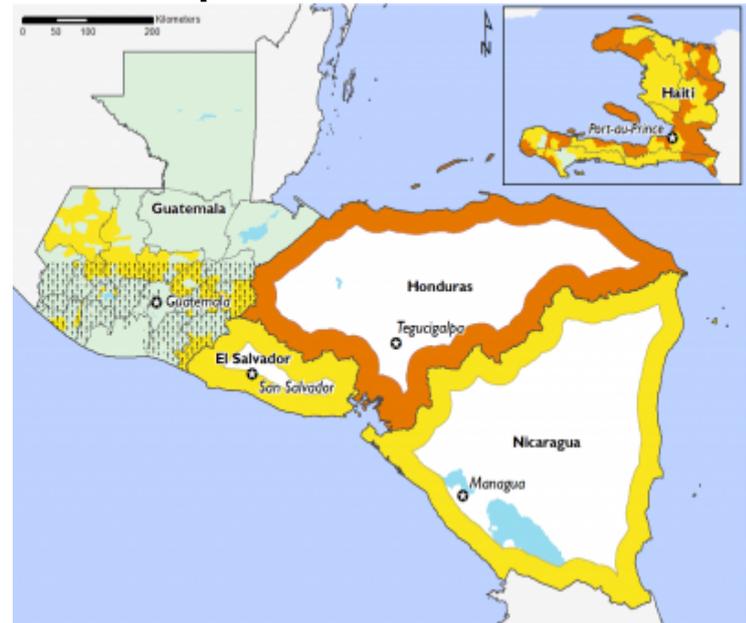
Key Message Update

COVID-19 movement restrictions worsen food access in urban and rural areas

April - May 2020



June - September 2020



IPC v3.0 Acute Food Insecurity Phase

Presence countries:

- 1: Minimal
- 2: Stressed
- 3: Crisis
- 4: Emergency
- 5: Famine

Remote monitoring countries:

- 1: Minimal
- 2: Stressed
- 3+: Crisis or higher

! *Would likely be at least one phase worse without current or programmed humanitarian assistance*

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.

FEWS NET Remote Monitoring countries use a colored outline to represent the highest IPC classification in areas of concern.

Key Messages:

Government measures to limit the spread of COVID-19 continue to affect household access to food in urban and rural areas across the region, except in Nicaragua where no measures are in place. Movement restrictions and social distancing measures have widely reduced poor households' sources of income, especially among those who rely on income sources in the informal sector. Further, remittances from the United States and Europe have declined.

Although market food availability remains stable in the region, household food access is limited by atypically high staple food prices and restricted hours of operation in the markets. In March, staple food prices – including maize – were generally above the five-year average across the region. However, bean prices were slightly below average in most key reference markets in Central America, except in Guatemala where beans have been above the average recently due to price speculation. Maize prices are most likely to remain high, though declines are expected after the Central American *Primera* harvests in August/September.

The governments of the region are providing food assistance, either in kind or through cash transfers. For example, the Government of Haiti is reaching more than 1 million people in urban and rural areas with in-kind food assistance, while the Government of Guatemala delivered five days of food assistance to 1 million people in the greater metropolitan area of Guatemala City in April. Food assistance will likely help to alleviate household food consumption gaps, particularly in Guatemala where planned assistance will scale up starting in May or June. In Haiti and Honduras, however, planned assistance is not enough to fill households' monthly minimum calorie requirements through September.

In Central America, a forecast of average precipitation from May to August is most likely to overcome short-term rainfall deficits and favor an average *Primera* harvest in August/September. In Haiti, however, irregular precipitation resulting in drier-than-normal conditions has prevailed since the end of March. Poor rainfall performance is delaying agricultural activities for the *Printemps* season in the North, Northeast, West, Center and Haut-Artibonite.

In Central America, households with below-normal income are applying stressed coping strategies, such as the use of loans, credit, and savings and reducing the size and quality of their meals. Most households are currently Stressed (IPC Phase 2), but areas in the Dry Corridor are in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or are Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) due to consecutive seasons of below-average harvests and the impacts of COVID-19. In Guatemala, however, the scale up of food assistance is likely to improve outcomes to Minimal! (IPC Phase 1!) or Stressed! (IPC Phase 2!) from June to September.

In Haiti, the socio-political situation remains calm but unpredictable, while inflation continues to be the long-term driver of high food prices. Crisis (IPC Phase 3) and Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes continue to be driven by high food prices and exacerbated by the indirect impacts of COVID-19 on market functioning, remittances, and household income. Although the *Printemps* harvests typically lead to a reduction in the number of acutely food insecure households around June, the effects of inflation and reduced income will likely sustain an atypically high population in Crisis (IPC Phase 3) through September.

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<https://fews.net/central-america-and-caribbean/key-message-update/may-2020>

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