Famine Early Warning Systems Network

Southern Africa

Lesotho

Key Message Update

Sharp increase in confirmed COVID-19 cases a concern to livelihoods

July - September 2020

October 2020 - January 2021

IPC v3.0 Acute Food Insecurity Phase

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.

July 2020

Key Messages:

As of July 26, Lesotho has 505 confirmed COVID-19 cases, and 12 deaths, implying a case-fatality rate of 2.1 percent. The rapid increase in the number of confirmed cases in July has increased the possibility for another lockdown, which would likely slow down economic activity and further impact...
income-earning opportunities and trade. Although the lockdown in Lesotho was relaxed in early May, South Africa has introduced new restrictions, including another ban on alcohol sales, and a 21:00-04:00 curfew which will likely continue to impact income-earning opportunities for migrant labor in South Africa and remittance flows into Lesotho.

Market supplies of staple and non-food items remain stable. Due to the recent completion of the 2020 harvest, rural household reliance on markets for food purchases have reduced. Maize meal prices in Maseru increased by 1 percent between April and May, suggesting prices are beginning to stabilize following the 9 percent increase between March and April. However, May prices were still slightly (7 percent) above the five-year average and 16 percent above last year. The increase in prices is likely driven by an increase in the logistical costs related to the closure of the borders in March. The increase in maize meal prices is primarily affecting urban populations as rural households are primarily consuming recent harvests.

Vegetable production from gardening activities is supplementing household food stocks and providing income for some rural households. Dependence on income from off-farm labor is increasing following the end of the 2020 harvest. Labor opportunities remain below typical levels due to the below-average 2020 harvest, border closures limiting economic migration options, and the general slowdown of the economy following the COVID-19 control measures in Lesotho and South Africa. Currently, most poor household food stocks are not expected to last longer than three months. Very poor households and some poor households are likely unable to adequately meet their basic non-food needs due to limited incomes. Most of Lesotho remains Stressed (IPC Phase 2), but from September food security outcomes are expected to start deteriorating to Crisis (IPC Phase 3) as own food stocks deplete earlier than normal.

There is a concern for the food security outcomes of urban populations due to the impact of COVID-19 on income-earning opportunities. The Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (LVAC) reported that WFP is planning a Crisis Response Program for urban areas beginning in August, which will last for six months. Up to 8,500 households (34,000 people) in urban areas vulnerable to food insecurity will be targeted through cash transfers using mobile money in Maseru, Mohale's Hoek, Mafeteng, Quthing, and Qacha's Nek districts. Currently, the number of urban food insecure populations is estimated to be atypically higher than usual, particularly in Maseru as it is the economic hub of Lesotho where households are generally more reliant on salaries and daily wages for food purchases.

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https://fews.net/southern-africa/lesotho/key-message-update/july-2020

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