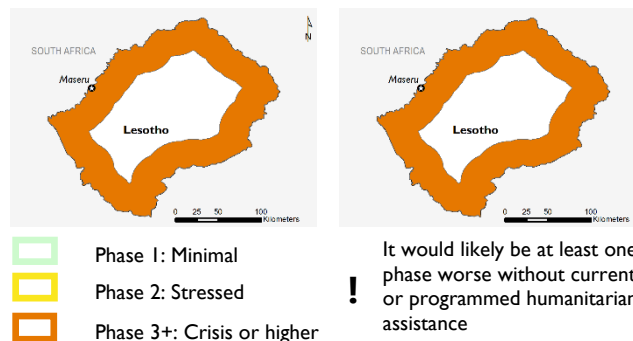


Timely and well-distributed rainfall expected to drive average harvest

KEY MESSAGES

- Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes continue in Lesotho due to low food access driven by depleted own-produced food stocks, below-average incomes, and slightly above-average staple food prices. Households are trying to mitigate existing food consumption gaps through market food purchases from earned income. Agricultural labor opportunities are seasonally increasing; however, wages are below average, and market food purchases are not expected to fully cover food consumption gaps.
- The 2020/21 rainfall season started on-time across most of Lesotho with cumulatively average rainfall through mid-December. The effective onset of rainfall for most of Lesotho was between mid-October to the beginning of November, except southern Mafateng and southern Mofale's Hoek, where the start of effective rainfall was delayed. The generally normal onset of rainfall has resulted in farmers engaging in agricultural activities on time, which is crucial as there is typically a frost risk during the harvest period in May.
- Since the border reopening in October, there has been an increase in migrants crossing the border into South Africa to seek better labor opportunities. Cross-border migrants include miners, seasonal farm laborers, domestic workers, shop keepers, and general cross-border traders. Increased access to labor opportunities in South Africa is improving access to wages and remittances, an important household income source for most households in Lesotho. However, labor migration is still below average levels as both the economies of Lesotho and South Africa are recovering from the economic impact of COVID-19 lockdowns. The requirement to produce a certified negative COVID-19 test at the border posts continues to limit business operations.
- COVID-19 remains a concern in Lesotho and the rest of the southern Africa region. On December 18, there were 2,546 confirmed COVID-19 cases in Lesotho, a 30 percent increase compared to November 1, 2020. Since lifting the COVID-19 restrictions in October, economic activity has increased to near-normal levels, particularly in urban areas.

Projected food security outcomes, December 2020 to January 2021 (left) and February to May 2021 (right)



Source: FEWS NET

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.

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

ZONE

CURRENT ANOMALIES

PROJECTED ANOMALIES

Mafateng, Mofale's Hoek, Quthing and Qacha's Nek

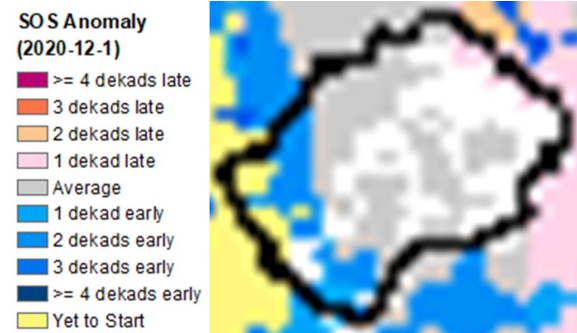
- Below average incomes due to the economic impacts of COVID-19 restrictions and 2020 poor harvest
- Above-average staple food prices

- Low purchasing power
- Below average agriculture-labor wage rates

PROJECTED OUTLOOK THROUGH MAY 2021

Across Lesotho, the 2020/21 rainfall season started on time, ranging from mid-October to the beginning of November across most of the country. According to [CHIRPS rainfall data](#), southwestern Lesotho, which is typically drier than the rest of the country, has received cumulatively near-average rainfall since mid-to-late October for the first time since the 2014/15 agricultural season. According to [CHIRPS preliminary rainfall data](#), Lesotho is expected to receive average to above-average rainfall from October 1 through December 31, 2020. Local key informants have also confirmed there have been good rains since the start of the season. According to local and international forecasts, Lesotho is likely to receive normal to above-normal rainfall during the second half of the season (January to March). With the rains' timely start, there has been an increase in agricultural activities, with most households planting through November and into December. Across the country, soil moisture has been [sufficient](#) for germination. By December 10, the maize crop is expected to be in the emergence crop stage in southwest Lesotho and the vegetative crop stage across the rest of the country.

Figure 1. The onset of rains (SOS) anomaly by December 10, 2020



Source: FEWS NET/USGS

Poor households have faced some challenges accessing agricultural inputs due to below-average income and the inability to legally cross the border to buy from usual markets in South Africa. However, through government subsidies, households can buy inputs at 40 percent of the normal price and access government cultivation services (tractors for hire) for 50 percent of the normal price. The subsidies have assisted many farmers in accessing inputs to start the agricultural season on time. In December, agriculture-based labor opportunities have increased to near-normal levels, providing very poor and poor households access to in-kind payments and income for market food purchases. However, wage rates remain below average, limiting household purchasing power. With the forecast normal to above normal rainfall, it is expected that households will continue to access near-normal labor opportunities through May 2021. The green harvest is expected to start around the end of February to March, providing households some relief from the lean season. However, household food consumption is not expected to return to normal until the dry harvest in April.

As of December 18, 2020, Lesotho has 2,546 confirmed COVID-19 cases, with the number of confirmed cases increasing by approximately 18 percent over the previous two weeks. The government encourages people to follow basic health and safety guidelines such as avoiding large gatherings and wearing masks in public. Many of the restrictions that hindered business operations were relaxed in October, and people are engaging in livelihood activities with limited restrictions. On November 22, restaurants resumed normal operations, and tourists were permitted to visit Lesotho with a 72-hour negative COVID-19 test certificate. In the rural areas, the economic recovery has been slow as the relaxation of restrictions coincided with the lean season. It is likely to return to near-normal levels with the start of the dry harvest in April 2021. The economic impacts of the COVID-19 restrictions have more greatly impacted urban populations. In November, WFP continued providing 831 LSL cash assistance to around 34,000 people in the urban councils of Maseru, Mafeteng, Mohale's Hoek, Quthing, and Qacha's Nek districts. The opening of Lesotho and South Africa's borders in October increased opportunities for migrant workers, with most expected to have returned to South Africa. According to the Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (LVAC), the Ministry of Labor and Employment estimates that around 80 percent of mine workers have returned to South Africa, facilitated by the South African government announcing a waiver for mine workers before borders were opened to the public. Other migrant workers are also traveling to South Africa in search of labor opportunities. Household income from wages and remittances are expected to increase. However, access to certified negative COVID-19 tests within 72 hours of crossing is likely limiting formal border crossings.

Household food insecurity is expected to continue through the lean season. Many very poor and poor households will continue to be affected by below-average purchasing power due to below-average income and above-average staple food prices. It is projected that most poor households in Lesotho will continue to face Crisis (IPC Phase 3) outcomes through March 2021. Food security outcomes are expected to improve to Stressed (IPC Phase 2) with the dry harvest in April 2021.

ABOUT REMOTE MONITORING

In remote monitoring, a coordinator typically works from a nearby regional office. Relying on partners for data, the coordinator uses scenario development to conduct analysis and produce monthly reports. As less data may be available, remote monitoring reports may have less detail than those from countries with FEWS NET offices. [Learn more here.](#)