Rwanda Remote Monitoring Update
August 2020

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Urban areas remain Stressed (IPC Phase 2) with continued slow economic recovery

KEY MESSAGES

- The number of daily COVID-19 cases, which averaged 32 new cases per day in July increased to 108 new cases per day in the second half of August. The rapid rise in confirmed COVID-19 cases is reportedly due to complacency in adherence to public health guidelines. On August 27, the government extended the curfew by two hours to 19:00-05:00 hrs., prohibited mass gatherings, reduced staffing in public institutions to 30 percent capacity, and prohibited upcountry travel by public transport to control the spread of infection. Offices in the private sector and markets will continue operating at 50 percent occupancy.

- Although most businesses have resumed, schools, sports and performance places, and bars remain closed. The National Bank of Rwanda noted signs of economic recovery in June, particularly in the trade, manufacturing, and financial sectors. However, public transport is operating at 50 percent of normal capacity to comply with physical distancing protocols, increasing transport costs, and hotels and restaurants are nearly empty. Schools have been closed since March and no reopening date has been announced. While recovering sectors are gradually hiring back furloughed employees, sectors that are still closed or operating at below-average levels continue to lay off employees. The loss of income in better-off households impacted by the furloughs has reduced the demand for services in the informal sector which many poor households rely on for income. Reports from key informants suggest that at least one in five households in Kigali are likely to be Stressed (IPC Phase 2), with some of the most vulnerable poor households in Crisis (IPC Phase 3). Households are currently coping by borrowing food, reducing meal sizes, and limiting non-food purchases. Relatives (including from rural areas), better-off neighbors, and church organizations are also assisting affected households.

- Food insecurity in rural areas remains Minimal (IPC Phase 1) as household food stocks and market access is normal following the average Season B harvest in July. According to key informants, the flow of food and money from rural areas to Kigali may now be greater than the traditional remittance flow from urban to rural areas.

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Zone: Kigali City

**Current Anomalies**

- Many businesses are operating at half-capacity or lower, to comply with social distancing guidelines.
- Delayed re-employment or additional furloughs.
- Below-average income for petty trade and casual labor.

**Projected Anomalies**

- COVID-19 control measures are expected to remain in place until infection rates significantly drop.
- Slow economic recovery.

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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.

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PROJECTED OUTCOMES THROUGH JANUARY 2021

Following the lifting of the lockdown in July, the number of confirmed COVID-19 cases increased likely due to an increase in poor adherence to public health guidelines. The rate of confirmed daily cases, which was on average 34 confirmed cases per day in July, increased in August to an average of 67 confirmed cases per day. Most new infections occurred in Kigali City, particularly in markets, and in Rusizi District which is already under quarantine. On August 27, in response to the rise in confirmed cases, the government closed the two largest Kigali markets for a week for cleaning and to ensure that more robust prevention measures are in place before reopening. Public transport between Kigali and other districts has also been suspended but private transport can continue except to and from Rusizi District. In Rusizi District the quarantine remains in place along with increased testing, tracking, and enforcement of control measures; the government is expected to re-allow travel in and out of the district when infection rates are under control.

The anticipated economic recovery following the lifting of the initial national lockdown and the launching of the Economic Recovery Fund remains modest, despite increased activity in manufacturing, trade, and construction. However, many businesses, particularly private hospitals, schools, hotels, and restaurants, are unable to hire-back staff. There are reports that some struggling businesses are now dismissing some mid-level staff, while the sectors that are recovering have begun re-hiring employees. According to key informants, this is leading some members of middle-income households impacted by job losses to begin engaging in stressed coping strategies such as borrowing food from shops and vendors, requesting relatives (including from rural areas) to assist with food or money, or seeking assistance from friends. Remittances from abroad are also increasing, though individual money transfers are smaller than normal. According to anecdotal accounts, some poor Kigali residents who depended on daily wages or the informal sector for their livelihood have returned to their rural homes where access to food and income from the sale of food or casual labor (classroom construction) is easier. Due to the anticipated average to above-average harvests for 2020 Season C and 2021 Season A, rural areas, including Rusizi district, are likely to maintain Minimal (IPC Phase 1) food security outcomes through January 2021. In contrast, Kigali City is likely to continue facing Stressed (IPC Phase 2) outcomes through January 2021 due to below-average economic activity and a slow economic recovery.

Food prices increased in August following seasonal trends but remained below the three-year average. However, food prices are very high compared to 2019. According to the July 2020 Consumer Price Index (CPI) bulletin, the price of food and non-alcoholic beverages in urban areas seasonally increased by 0.3 percent between June and July 2020 but was 11.9 percent higher than prices in July 2019. This is likely due to unusually low food prices in 2019, following an above-average 2019 Season B harvest. The price of transport, the third-largest expenditure for urban households, increased by approximately 23 percent compared to last year, likely due to the current COVID-19 regulations including a 50 percent reduction in public transport capacity and travel restrictions increasing the cost of transportation. The annual national increase of 11.5 percent in the CPI is primarily being driven by increases in the price of food, housing, and transportation compared to 2019.

Following the recent peaceful Burundian presidential election and an agreement between UNHCR and the Rwandan and Burundian governments to facilitate voluntary repatriation, a group of 493 Burundian refugees from Mahama Camp returned to Burundi on August 27, 2020. The approximately 60,000 refugees in Mahama Camp are expected to return at a rate of 500 people or more per month, depending on security in Burundi. The estimated 12,000 Burundian refugees in urban areas are likely to wait for more security guarantees before returning as many are from Bujumbura City, an opposition stronghold to the ruling party. During the initial national lockdown, UNHCR also provided a one-time cash-based transfer of 50,000 RWF to the most likely food insecure urban refugees to support food purchases. Due to below average income-earning opportunities and an overall decrease in total remittances impacting household purchasing power, urban refugees are likely Stressed (IPC Phase 2) with the most vulnerable households likely in Crisis (IPC Phase 3).
SEASONAL CALENDAR FOR A TYPICAL YEAR

Source: FEWS NET