

WFP Global Hotspots:

Potential flashpoints in 2020

Eighteen countries are at risk of plunging further into crises that pose serious threats to people's food security and livelihoods, according to an updated report by the UN World Food Programme (WFP).

Global Hotspots 2020 identifies countries needing rapid assistance and increased funding due chiefly to the destructive effects of conflict, political instability and climate-induced disasters.

In this latest update, Syria is among countries added as a top priority, with increased violence in the northwest likely to displace a further 250,000 people in the coming months. Also added to the report is Sudan, with 9.3 million people requiring humanitarian assistance as the economy deteriorates rapidly and food prices spiral. Burundi is braced for a potential escalation of unrest due to upcoming elections, with 1.7 million in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in 2020, while the run-up to elections in Myanmar could similarly further inflame violence that has already displaced more than 300,000 people.

Regionally, countries of sub-Saharan Africa continue to feature heavily, with Zimbabwe, South Sudan, the Democratic Republic of the Congo and the Central

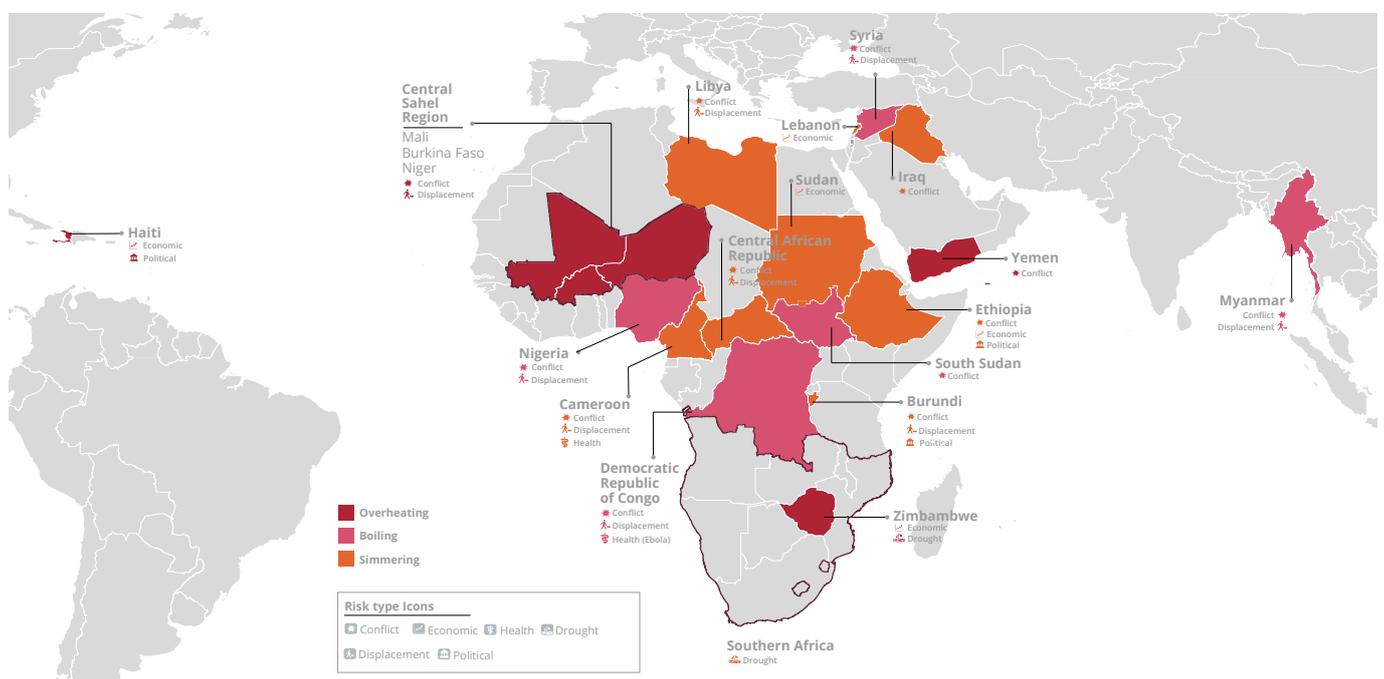
Sahel region all needing immediate support, while the severe hunger afflicting more than 1 million people in Haiti means the country is high among current priorities. In the Central African Republic, ongoing violence has left 44 percent of the population food insecure.

Since work began on this update, COVID-19 has emerged to pose a potentially major threat to countries around the world. WFP will be constantly reviewing the effect on countries and on the way it delivers assistance, so it is better able to respond to sudden changes in food availability or disruption to food supply chains. For more information [visit our emergency page](#).

WFP is the frontline agency responding to emergencies and strengthening people's preparedness and ability to cope in the face of such crises. Our efforts depend on the backing of donor governments however, with US\$10.6 billion needed to fully fund our work in saving and changing lives in 2020.

Here is the latest breakdown of the countries WFP considers most at risk of sliding further into crisis in 2020, updated from January 2020.

WFP Global Hotspots 2020: Countries most at risk of sliding further into crisis



OVERHEATING

Haiti

Context: Further social unrest is expected amidst a political crisis in which the President has been ruling by decree since mid-January. The economic situation is expected to worsen with further inflation and rising food prices amidst the current lean season. Furthermore, early indications of below-average rainfall are likely to further affect upcoming harvests. A rise in criminality and kidnappings means access is likely to remain challenging, with the security of humanitarian staff a growing concern. The international community is drastically underfunded to respond, while other, global financial assistance is dependent on solving the crisis.

Effects: Nearly one in three Haitians, or 4.1 million people, needs urgent food assistance in both rural and urban areas. 1.2 million are suffering from severe hunger along with rates of severe acute malnutrition.

Response: WFP had reached 160,000 people with emergency food and cash by February. However, current funding shortfalls are likely to restrict scale-up to 295,000 in total, representing just 24.5 percent of those with severe hunger.

Central Sahel (Burkina Faso, Mali and western Niger)

Context: The Central Sahel faces a toxic cocktail of rapidly escalating armed conflict, displacement, hunger and widespread poverty, combined with the severe effects of climate change. Violent clashes have killed scores, forced hundreds of thousands to flee their homes, and pushed communities to the brink. Insecurity is expected to worsen over the next six months, hindering humanitarian access. There is also a high risk of spill-over to northern regions of coastal countries.

Effects: Burkina Faso has become one of the fastest-growing displacement crises in the world, with over 1 million people projected to be displaced by the middle of the year. Food insecurity is set

to increase dramatically in Burkina Faso, Mali and western Niger, doubling to 4.8 million people during the lean season. OCHA estimates that at least 2.2 million people in Burkina Faso will require life-saving humanitarian assistance in 2020, nearly double the number compared to a year ago.

Response: WFP assisted 1.2 million people across the three countries in January, with investments in food security, education, nutrition, health, livelihoods and resilience building. There are plans to double the size of WFP's crisis response and to increase preparedness for increased needs in coastal countries.



OVERHEATING

Zimbabwe

Context: Zimbabwe's worst drought in a decade has compounded the crisis engulfing the country, as economic collapse and political instability fuel political protests and social unrest which may worsen in the coming months. Food inflation had increased to over 700 percent by the end of 2019, and is likely to rise further during the peak of the lean season between harvests in the first quarter of 2020. Farmers are struggling to access agricultural materials, bringing fears of another poor harvest.

Effects: Zimbabwe is experiencing its highest food-insecurity levels in a decade, with latest analysis

from an International Food Classification report estimating about 4.3 million people facing severe acute food insecurity. This figure is expected to rise through to March 2020.

Response: Zimbabwe is experiencing its highest food-insecurity levels in a decade, with latest analysis from an International Food Classification report estimating about 4.3 million people facing severe acute food insecurity. This figure is expected to rise through to March 2020.

Yemen

Context: Yemen continues to be the worst humanitarian and food security crisis globally. Almost five years of conflict have left millions of Yemenis severely food insecure.

Needs: Around 80 percent of Yemen's population, an estimated 24.1 million people, are in need of humanitarian assistance.

Response: This is WFP's largest operation, with the number of people in need unlikely to decrease

in the near future. WFP has been scaling up its operations to meet the needs of vulnerable populations. In January, WFP reached 12.84 million people with general food assistance, with US\$6.4 million in cash-based transfers and US\$17.9 million provided through food vouchers. WFP is prioritizing the areas of the country and populations facing the highest levels of food insecurity, specifically people living in conflict-affected areas, marginalized communities and vulnerable IDPs.



BOILING

The Democratic Republic of the Congo

Context: Persistent insecurity and conflict in the east are causing large-scale displacement and food insecurity. This is compounded by limited humanitarian access and climate shocks. More than 6,000 people, including 4,500 children aged under 5, died from measles in 2019. The second largest and deadliest Ebola outbreak had claimed more than 2,200 lives by February 2020, though it is now restricted to less areas.

Effects: Almost 16 million people are severely food insecure.

Response: WFP provides food and nutrition assistance to internally displaced people, food and other assistance to those affected by the Ebola emergency, and specialized nutritious food to vulnerable people including children under 5, and pregnant and breastfeeding women.

Myanmar

Context: Recurrent armed clashes in Rakhine, Kachin and northern Shan states have caused large-scale displacement, access restrictions and disruption of livelihoods. The run-up to general elections, expected by November 2020, could heighten ethnic tensions and violence in the country. The Government's adoption of a resettlement strategy and closure of camps will further limit Internally Displaced People's (IDPs) access to essential services and livelihoods opportunities. The government has also severely restricted access to humanitarian organizations.

Effects: More than 300,000 people are currently displaced.

Response: WFP assisted 299,250 IDPs in Rakhine, Kachin and northern Shan states in 2019. WFP's operation in Myanmar is only 29 percent funded through to July 2020. Ration cuts may have to be introduced if funds are not received within the next couple of months.

Nigeria

Context: An upsurge of violence in the northeast and ongoing violence in the northwest has resulted in further displacement of people, and cut off access to farming lands.

Effects: A total 5.9 million people are projected to be severely food insecure during the next lean season between June and August, if no

humanitarian support is provided – double the amount of a year ago. There are more than 2 million IDPs, with over 160,000 IDPs in the northwest states of Zamfara, Sokoto and Katsina.

Response: WFP provides life-saving food and nutrition products to IDPs, returnees, young children and pregnant or breastfeeding women.

BOILING

South Sudan

Context: The risk of a re-escalation in armed clashes persists amidst daunting array of challenges with the new government's unity . A precarious humanitarian situation exists and essential services are unavailable in many states. A crippled economy, poorly functioning markets, lack of infrastructure and climate shocks all further hamper recovery efforts.

Effects: According to the latest International Food Classification report of August 2019, an estimated 5.29 million people will be severely food insecure between January and April 2020 – more than 45 percent of the population. This is projected to increase to 6.48 million people from May to July

2020. Around 1.5 million people remain internally displaced, while a further increase in IDPs along with the anticipated influx of returning refugees could further raise food insecurity.

Response: WFP provides life-saving food distributions, along with food assistance to enable communities to build or restore assets such as roads and farming land. WFP also provides food for school meals and special nutritious products for the prevention and treatment of malnutrition among children and pregnant or nursing women. WFP will enhance preparedness and review programming should there be a failure with the new government's unity.

Syria

Context: Nine years of conflict have pushed millions of Syrians into hunger and poverty. Insecurity in Idlib and western Aleppo, in north-western Syria, has resulted in a large-scale humanitarian response. Across the country, the economic situation continues to deteriorate rapidly. The cost of the WFP food basket in the retail market has increased by 60 percent in a year, and 42 percent of interviewed households report they are spending 75 percent or more of their income to meet their food needs.

Effects: The scale, severity and complexity of humanitarian needs in Syria remain extensive, with 11.1 million people in need of humanitarian assistance. According to a 2019 Food Security Assessment, some 7.9 million people are now food insecure, an increase of some 20 percent in a year. An additional 2.5 million people are at risk of food insecurity. February was marked by the worst

humanitarian crisis in the northwest since 2011. Since the restart of intense conflict in the area in December 2019, 959,000 people, mostly women and children, have been displaced.

Response: In response, WFP Syria is now targeting 4.5 million people a month with food assistance across all 14 Syrian Governorates. In February, WFP reached 1.25 million people in northwest Syria with food assistance. This was the highest number of people reached with food assistance dispatched cross-border into Syria in a single month, since the [operation was authorized through the UN in 2014](#). WFP urgently requires US\$184 million to keep operations running through August 2020. If WFP does not receive additional funds in March, the operation will face a pipeline break from June onwards, as there is a four-month lead time to import food into Syria.

SIMMERING

Burundi

Context: May 2020 presidential elections present some risks, with potential for renewed public protests and human rights violations. Unrest and insecurity linked to elections, combined with socio-economic hardship, may cause further internal displacement.

Effects: A [Humanitarian Needs Overview](#) estimates that over 1.7 million people will be in need of humanitarian assistance and protection in 2020. Some 45 percent of Burundian households are estimated to be affected by food insecurity. Fifteen percent of these are facing crisis and emergency levels of food insecurity. Population

displacements and climatic shocks are likely to further worsen the food security situation in the country. An inter-agency contingency plan for the forthcoming elections envisages internal displacement of up to 300,000 in the coming months.

Response: WFP is providing transport and procuring pulses to complement government distributions in Zambia. In addition, WFP is assessing further activities including cash-based distributions in Namibia, as well as technical assistance to the Government of Angola's emergency response.

Cameroon

Context: Continued worsening of violence in the northwest and southwest, with increased tensions between government forces and separatists following the elections in February 2020.

Effects: The crisis has affected over 460,000 IDPs, of whom 80 percent are in hard-to-reach areas. Projections for 2020 indicate 1.1 million people

facing food insecurity, with over 600,000 of these in northwest and southwest regions.

Response: WFP is pre-positioning food before the wet season. It is also working with the UN Department for Safety and Security and the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, on reaching people in need.

Central African Republic

Context: The spectre of ongoing violence looms in the run-up to Presidential elections scheduled for December 2020, in a country beset by repeated coups and waves of conflict. This is likely to result in large-scale displacements and a worsening of the food security situation as the fighting is likely to impede people's ability to access their land.

Effects: It is estimated that 44 percent of the population – 2.1 million people – are food insecure, 6 percent of whom are severely food insecure. The

IDP population increased by 15 percent between September and December 2019, due to the insecurity.

Response: WFP's support includes food, nutrition and cash assistance. However, significant funding shortfalls are affecting the implementation of nearly all its activities.

SIMMERING

Ethiopia

Context: A general election scheduled for August 2020 may worsen ongoing civil unrest as well as ethnic and intercommunal violence. Further displacement of people is also likely. Conflicts, disease outbreaks and climate shocks such as recurrent drought and seasonal flooding continue to pose further threats to people's food security, as do emerging swarms of desert locusts that are destroying crop harvests and pastures. A highly indebted economy may affect grain imports and worsen steadily rising inflation and the affordability of food for vulnerable communities.

Effects: An estimated 8.4 million people will require humanitarian assistance in 2020, That number could further rise due to the potential insecurity.

Response: WFP is using food, cash, nutrition assistance and other livelihood approaches such as training farming communities in business skills and crop cultivation, while building government capacity in emergency preparedness and response.

Iraq

Context: Unemployment, perceived corruption and lack of basic services have sparked protests since October 2019, with continued uncertainty after the rejection of both the former Prime Minister and PM-elect. Tensions increased after a US airstrike killed Iranian general Qassem Soleimani in Baghdad in January. Meanwhile, conflict in northeast Syria continues to cause a refugee influx. The already complicated situation has been compounded by the detection of COVID-19 in Iraq since 24 February, with more than 70 registered cases and 8 fatalities.

Effects: The number of people displaced internally has reduced significantly. An estimated 4.6 million people have returned to their places of origin, while some 1.4 million people remain internally displaced. There is smaller but steady flow of refugees from northeast Syria into the Kurdistan

Region. Increased insecurity and political instability could hinder WFP's ability to operate on the ground, with civil unrest causing delays to humanitarian work. Additional COVID-19 medical checkpoints are also causing delays to field movement.

Response: In February, WFP reached 378,203 people in 11 governorates with cash-based assistance and food. Around 96 percent of all assistance in Iraq is provided through cash-based transfers. WFP has taken additional measures with regards to social distancing, to prevent the transmission of COVID-19 during distributions and when people redeem their entitlements. Contingency plans are in place - including a possible switch to distributing food instead of cash, if the crisis affects the ready availability of food supplies in shops.

SIMMERING

Lebanon

Context: An economic crisis with high public debt, compounded by a political crisis, has triggered nationwide demonstrations since October 2019. High levels of inflation are causing a significant increase in prices combined with loss of income, leading to reduced purchasing power. In addition, there are an estimated 1.5 million Syrians refugees in Lebanon.

Effects: The economic crisis has hindered access to food by vulnerable Lebanese and refugee households across the country. WFP's operation

in Lebanon could be severely affected if markets stop functioning due to a further deterioration in security or the economic situation.

Response: In Lebanon, WFP targets 800,000 refugees – Syrians, Palestinians from Syria, and refugees of other nationalities – with food vouchers, cash transfers, cash e-cards and in-kind food snack distributions at schools. WFP is planning for potential expansion of its operation in the event of increased needs.

Libya

Context: As per the 2020 Humanitarian Needs Overview, an estimated 336,000 people are in need of food assistance in Libya as a result of persisting political instability, conflict, insecurity, the breakdown of the rule of law, a deteriorating public sector, and an unstable economy. Renewed hostilities have caused the displacement of some 355,670 people, with this trend on the rise for ten consecutive months and likely to increase if the situation does not improve. Clashes and insecurity will also continue to affect humanitarian access. The economic crisis is affecting the purchasing power of Libyans, with disruptions in salary payments and shortages of fuel affecting transportation of food and goods, especially in remote areas. Prices of cooking fuel and several commodities have increased severely – up to 16 percent on staple items.

Effects: WFP and its partners, along with the WFP-managed UN Humanitarian Air Service, have been

facing access challenges, with some programmes severely affected. Around 13 percent of Libya's population, an estimated 900,000 people, need humanitarian assistance. Of these, 336,000 are food insecure. Due to coping strategies, families are reducing their spending on health and education. This compromises their medium to long-term resilience, which combined with the potential spread of COVID-19, will become a serious problem at household level.

Response: WFP's work includes providing emergency food assistance to displaced families in and around Tripoli, a food assistance-for-training project aimed at improving the livelihoods of targeted communities in northwestern Libya, and an e-voucher initiative in Tripoli that will be extended to other locations. Local authorities are highlighting the increasing need of food assistance on the ground.

SIMMERING

Southern African drought

Context: The region's drought in 2019/20 was the worst in 40 years, wrecking harvests and putting millions of people in need of immediate assistance. Similar conditions are expected throughout 2020. Several countries are experiencing below-average and erratic rainfall, particularly Zimbabwe, southern Mozambique and parts of Zambia. Others have experienced heavy rains and flooding including the Congo, parts of the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Tanzania, northern and central Madagascar, and northern Mozambique.

Effects: A record 45 million people across the 16-nation Southern African Development Community are food insecure.

Response: WFP is scaling up assistance to 8.3 million people facing crisis and emergency levels of food insecurity in Zimbabwe, Mozambique, Zambia, Madagascar, Namibia, Eswatini, Lesotho and Malawi. Funding is urgently required to sustain operations through June. WFP may need to quickly increase its presence and operational capacities, and adapt the type of assistance provided, in response to emerging demands.

Sudan

Context: Sudan is facing significant economic challenges related to rising inflation, currency depreciation and foreign reserve shortages. Shortage of hard currency is also limiting the ability of the public and private sector to import, causing shortages and price increases of essential food and non-food items such as fuel and wheat flour. Inflation reached over 64 percent in January 2020, rising from 48 percent in June 2019, and is projected to further increase in the coming months.

Effects: The average retail price of sorghum in January 2020 was 91 percent higher compared to a year earlier. Widespread shortages of fuel and bread have been reported. The [Humanitarian Needs Overview 2020](#) estimates that up to 6.2 million people are food insecure, with 9.3 million requiring humanitarian assistance.

Response: WFP continues to support IDPs, refugees and vulnerable populations through a combination of food and cash-based transfers, including in newly accessible areas.



SIMMERING

Afghanistan

Context: Afghanistan is still overcoming the setbacks of the devastating drought that struck the country in 2018. Ongoing conflict caused more than 10,000 civilian casualties for the sixth consecutive year in 2019. The historic agreement between the USA and Taliban to reduce hostilities is encouraging. However, the potential for peace has not been realized and domestic political uncertainty persists, most of all regarding the intra-Afghan talks between the Taliban and the Government. Four decades of conflict have eroded the livelihoods of many communities, with more families needing seasonal support and displaced by natural disasters and conflict. Access negotiations have become more onerous in the past months and communities more difficult to reach. Border closures to contain the spread of COVID-19, if

prolonged, could gravely disrupt WFP's supply chain into the landlocked country and have a damaging effect on beneficiaries.

Effects: More than 14 million people are estimated to be severely food insecure and 2.4 million children under 5 are malnourished.

Response: WFP plans to support 7.2 million people in 2020, 4.5 million of them through seasonal support prior to the lean season and winter, and 500,000 who have been displaced. Some 500,000 people are to participate in activities focused on disaster risk reduction, increasing agricultural productivity and vocational skills training. A total 1.4 million malnourished children and pregnant and lactating women will receive nutritional support.



The information contained in this report is drawn from WFP's Corporate Alert System, an internal analysis that is compiled every two months and used to identify countries of high prioritization for emergency assistance.

Photo credits:

Front cover; WFP/Gabriela Vivacqua, page 2-3 (left to right); WFP/Alex Masciarelli, WFP/Marwa Awad, WFP/Matteo Cosorich, WFP/Mohammed Nasher, page 9; WFP/Mohamaed Ben Khalif, WFP/Abeer Etefa, page 10; WFP/Fezeh Hosseini, WFP/Marwa Awad.