Overview

Around 3.5 million people are classified in Crisis or Emergency (IPC Phase 3 or 4) during the seasonal hunger period of May to August 2021, and require urgent action. This figure is projected to decrease to 2.5 million during the period of lowest acute food insecurity between September 2021 and January 2022.

Through August 2021, 16 departments are classified in Crisis (IPC Phase 3): Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz, Chimaltenango, Chiquimula, El Progreso, Huehuetenango, Izabal, Jalapa, Quetzaltenango, Quiché, San Marcos, Santa Rosa, Sololá, Suchitepéquez, Totonicapán and Zacapa. From September 2021 to January 2022, five departments are projected to remain in Crisis (Phase 3): Alta Verapaz, Chiquimula, Huehuetenango, Quiché and Totonicapán, and 11 are projected to improve to a situation of Stressed acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 2).

The most vulnerable population are subsistence farming households with income losses due to damage caused by storms ETA and IOTA during the month of November 2020, small informal traders, and agricultural day labourers affected by the constraints resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic. These households are forced to use Crisis coping strategies to get food, either by selling assets and using their savings, borrowing money, reducing non-food expenditures on health, education and household consumption, and reducing or abandoning traditional strategies such as home production, foraging and traditional medicines.

The consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in Guatemala in terms of mandatory mobility restrictions to limit transmission of the virus had a major impact on the country’s economy in 2020 and continue into 2021. However, the increase in cases and the slow progress in the vaccination process could once again lead to some restrictive measures, especially in those departments with red and orange alerts.

Covid-19

The increase in the prices of the basic food basket, mainly basic grains, affects more than half of the population (57%) in accessing food through purchase, due to low purchasing power, presenting serious difficulties to support their families, and forcing them to use Crisis coping strategies to get food, either by selling their assets (40%) or spending their savings (56%).

In addition, restrictions to mobility and economic activities in some areas, due to high levels of COVID-19 cases, have impacted the overall availability of food products and services.

Agricultural production has been affected by the impact of the hurricanes, with losses in bananas, cardamom, vegetables and fruit trees, which will impact food availability and food affordability. The current structure of the inter-sectoral and inter-institutional coordination at the local level is considered as a key factor to guide the implementation of targeted interventions and strategies to reduce food insecurity.

As a result, there is an increase in the number of households using coping strategies to get food, either by selling assets, borrowing money, reducing non-food expenditures on health, and other traditional strategies such as home production, foraging and traditional medicines. This is reflected in the increase in the number of households using Crisis coping strategies, from 32% in May to August 2021 to 40% in September 2021 to January 2022.

Crisis coping strategies include: selling assets, borrowing money, reducing non-food expenditures on health, education and household consumption, reducing or abandoning traditional strategies such as home production, foraging and traditional medicines.

Coping strategies are widely used across the country, with the highest levels of use in the departments of Alta Verapaz, Izabal, Jalapa, Sololá, Suchitepéquez, Totonicapán and Zacapa.

Assumptions for the Projected Situation

For the projected situation, a scenario is presented in which, even if COVID-19 cases do not decrease substantially and vaccination progresses slowly, no additional restrictions will be imposed on economic activities and population movement. The climatic outlook is good for the establishment and development of postharvest crops. However, an active hurricane season is forecast, which could lead to heavy rains (tropical depressions, hurricanes) that would affect agricultural production and the livelihoods of the population. Basic grain prices are expected to remain high: so far this year, factors such as higher transport costs, higher fuel prices, higher international maize and wheat prices and droughts in other countries have influenced this behaviour. With the Primera harvests, prices are expected to stabilise but remain above the 5-year average. Transport service would remain irregular due to restrictions imposed under COVID-19, and the price would remain above average. Harvests of Primera and Postrema basic grains are expected to be in normal ranges, which will improve the availability of food for households. This period is the peak season for the hiring of seasonal agricultural labour. The various cash crops such as sugar, coffee, bananas, cardamom, vegetables and fruit trees would hire labour for several months. However, in some areas and for some products, hiring could be lower than usual as some producers are still recovering from the economic impact of COVID-19 and the damage caused by tropical storms ETA and IOTA. Continued economic recovery would allow jobs in both the informal and formal sectors to recover, and this increased income would improve households’ access to food.

PROJECTION: Acute Food Insecurity

Around 2.5 million people are likely to experience high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) in Guatemala between September 2021 and January 2022.

Population in Phases of acute food insecurity

Around 3.5 million people out of the 17.1 million people analysed are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) in Guatemala through August 2021.

Recommended Actions

**Protect livelihoods and reduce food consumption gaps**

Identify at the sub-national level populations and municipalities where a higher proportion of households have depleted their reserves and are employing Crisis or Emergency strategies (selling assets, spending savings, borrowing money, reducing non-food expenditures on health, and education). In these areas, give priority response objectives towards protecting livelihoods and reducing food consumption gaps in households in IPC Phases 3 or 4, through targeted interventions and intensification of strategic food aid and other actions to be defined in Government Action Plans in coordination with national and international actors and institutions.

**Monitor and reduce risks**

Making use of the current structure of inter-sectoral and inter-institutional coordination at the local level, it is recommended to promote actions for risk reduction and specific response strategies jointly with local actors, municipalities and communities, programmes and projects, in the short and medium term. Monitor risk factors such as: climate prospects; ENSO (El Niño) phenomenon, probability of storms, hurricanes, etc.; food and fuel price trends; disease trends, mainly COVID-19 and containment measures and their control; demand for agricultural and non-agricultural, temporary and permanent employment, mainly in the projected period.

**Increase coping strategies**

Around 3.5 million people out of the 17.1 million people analysed are experiencing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) in Guatemala through August 2021.

**Crisis coping strategies**

- Selling assets and using their savings.
- Borrowing money.
- Reducing non-food expenditures on health, education and household consumption.
- Reducing or abandoning traditional strategies such as home production, foraging and traditional medicines.

**Emergency coping strategies**

- Abandoning traditional strategies such as home production, foraging and traditional medicines.
-assa