

LESOTHO

IPC ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY ANALYSIS

MAY 2025 – MARCH 2026
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CURRENT ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY MAY - SEPTEMBER 2025



258,000

17% of the population

People facing high acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above)

IN NEED OF URGENT ACTION

Phase 5	0 People in Catastrophe
Phase 4	0 People in Emergency
Phase 3	258,000 People in Crisis
Phase 2	561,000 People Stressed
Phase 1	696,000 People in food security

PROJECTED ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY OCTOBER 2025- MARCH 2026



334,000

22% of the population

People facing high acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above)

IN NEED OF URGENT ACTION

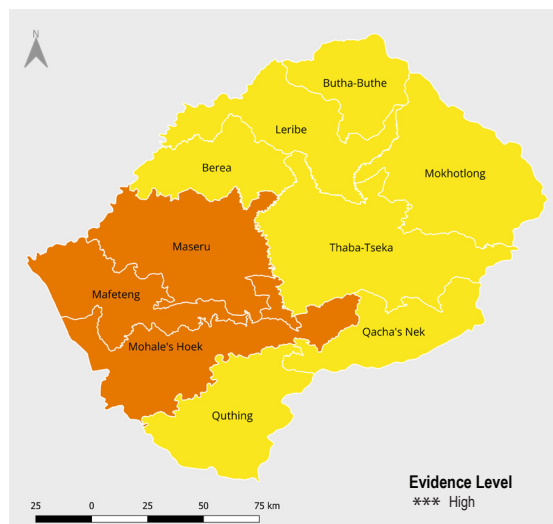
Phase 5	0 People in Catastrophe
Phase 4	0 People in Emergency
Phase 3	334,000 People in Crisis
Phase 2	592,000 People Stressed
Phase 1	590,000 People in food security

Overview

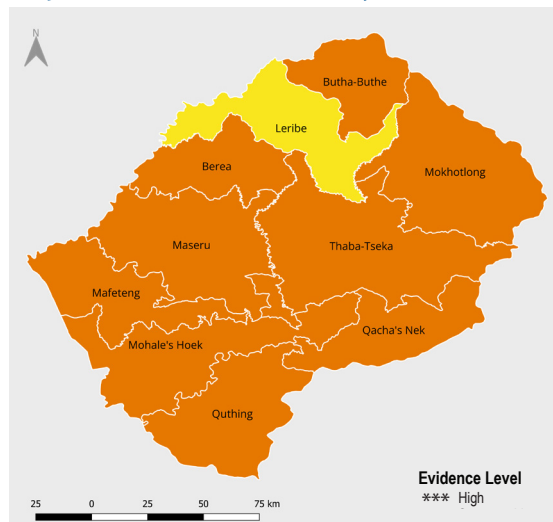
More than 258,000 people living in rural areas of Lesotho (17 percent of the population analysed) experienced high levels of acute food insecurity, classified as IPC Phase 3 or above (Crisis or worse) between May and September 2025.

Eight of the 10 districts analysed were classified in IPC Phase 2 (Stressed), while the remaining three districts—Mafeteng, Maseru, and Mochale's Hoek— were classified in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis). The onset of rains that started in late October to November 2024 enabled the timely start of planting in the lowlands. However, the country experienced dry spells and high temperatures at the crucial growth stage of cropping between December 2024 and January 2025. Other drivers of acute food insecurity include livestock disease outbreaks, high food prices and reduced agricultural opportunities due to decreased areas planted. Food availability remains a minor limiting factor as food will be available from the markets. From November 2025, the poorer populations are expected to experience food gaps. With reduced income sources likely to compromise their already depleted purchasing power, they will mainly rely on purchases as their primary food source. Therefore, food access (financial access) will remain a

Current Acute Food Insecurity: May – Sept 2025



Projected Acute Food Insecurity: Oct 2025 – Mar 2026



Key for the Map

IPC Acute Food Insecurity Phase Classification

(mapped Phase represents highest severity affecting at least 20% of the population)

1 - Minimal	5 - Famine
2 - Stressed	Areas with inadequate evidence
3 - Crisis	Areas not analysed
4 - Emergency	

Key Drivers



Prolonged dry spells

The rains were favourable and enabled timely planting, however, the high temperatures and dry spells experienced between November 2024 and January 2025 led to crop failure.



High food prices

Food Prices remained high compared to last year, undermining household purchasing power.



Livestock disease outbreak

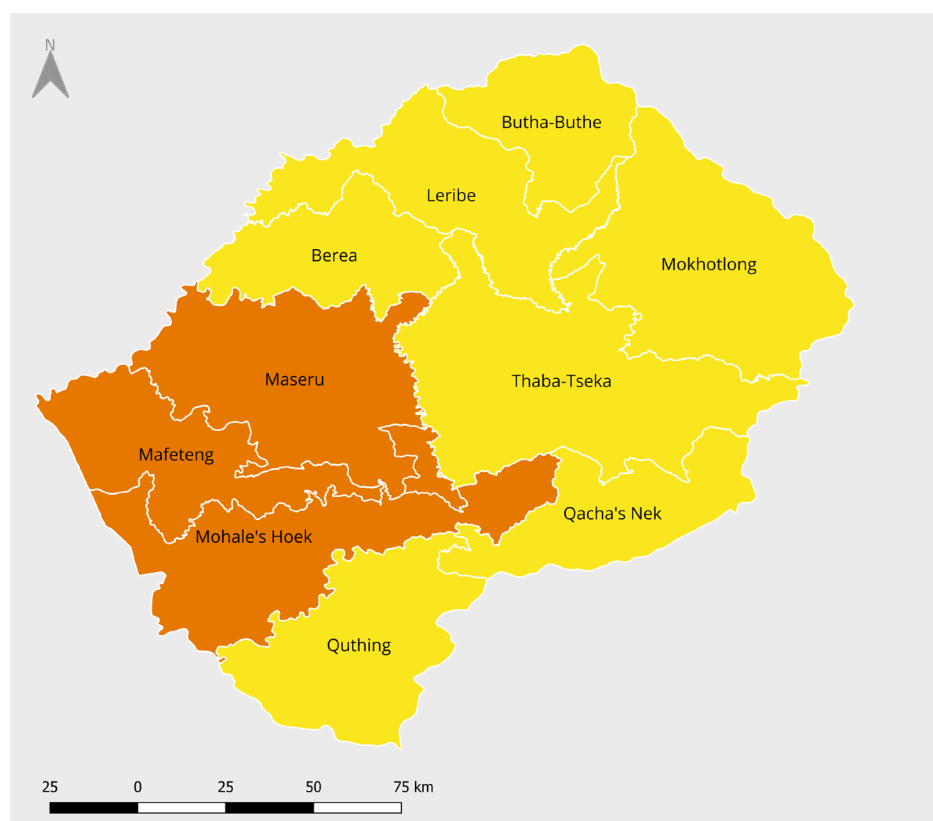
Increased temperatures and poor rainfall performance led to the outbreak of livestock diseases.



major limiting factor. Furthermore, food utilisation is a minor limiting factor as there were no major challenges encountered regarding food preparation.

During the projected period (October 2025 to March 2026), around 334,000 people (22 percent of the rural population analysed) are projected to face high levels of acute food insecurity (Phase 3 or above). Nine of the 10 districts are expected to be classified in Phase 3. Only Leribe is likely to be in Phase 2. The main hazards projected are erratic climatic conditions (heavy rainfalls, high temperatures, and prolonged dry spells) and price hikes, which are likely to negatively affect food access and food utilisation, while food availability is projected to remain unaffected as markets are functional and stable.

CURRENT IPC ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY MAP AND POPULATION TABLE (MAY – SEPTEMBER 2025)



Key for the Map

IPC Acute Food Insecurity Phase Classification

(mapped Phase represents highest severity affecting at least 20% of the population)

- 1 - Minimal
- 2 - Stressed
- 3 - Crisis
- 4 - Emergency
- 5 - Famine
- Areas with inadequate evidence
- Areas not analysed

Evidence Level

*** High

Current Population Table: May – September 2025

Districts	Total population analysed*	Phase 1		Phase 2		Phase 3		Phase 4		Phase 5		Area Phase	Phase 3+	
		#people	%	#people	%	#people	%	#people	%	#people	%		#people	%
Berea	186,723	93,362	50	65,353	35	28,008	15	0	0	0	0	2	28,008	15
Butha-Buthe	89,172	49,045	55	26,752	30	13,376	15	0	0	0	0	2	13,376	15
Leribe	266,542	146,598	55	93,290	35	26,654	10	0	0	0	0	2	26,654	10
Mafeteng	160,291	56,102	35	64,116	40	40,073	25	0	0	0	0	3	40,073	25
Maseru	238,801	107,460	45	83,580	35	47,760	20	0	0	0	0	3	47,760	20
Mohale's Hoek	163,418	65,367	40	57,196	35	40,855	25	0	0	0	0	3	40,855	25
Mokhotlong	102,428	45,643	45	40,571	40	15,214	15	0	0	0	0	2	15,214	15
Qacha's Nek	57,124	25,706	45	22,850	40	8,569	15	0	0	0	0	2	8,569	15
Quthing	120,929	54,418	45	48,372	40	18,139	15	0	0	0	0	2	18,139	15
Thaba-Tseka	131,220	52,488	40	59,049	45	19,683	15	0	0	0	0	2	19,683	15
Grand Total	1,516,648	696,189	46	561,129	37	258,331	17	0	0	0	0		258,331	17

Note: A population in Phase 3+ does not necessarily reflect the full population in need of urgent action. This is because some households may be in Phase 2 or even 1 but only because of receipt of assistance, and thus, they may be in need of continued action. Marginal inconsistencies that may arise in the overall percentages of totals and grand totals are attributable to rounding.

CURRENT SITUATION OVERVIEW (MAY – SEPTEMBER 2025)

The current analysis period in Lesotho normally starts during the post-harvest season which is the time when the majority of households are expected to consume food from own production as their main food source. Those who are not engaged in crop production are forced to get food through purchases. The four main sources of livelihoods for households are remittances, casual labour, social grants (including old age pension) and crop sales. These are expected to be maintained throughout the current period in all the ten districts to complement household income. During this period, about 258,000 people (17 percent of the rural population) are experiencing Phase 3 or above and require urgent action to reduce food consumption gaps. This represents a slight decrease compared to the same period in the last analysis, where 293,000 people (19 percent of the rural population) faced high level of acute food insecurity (Phase 3 or above).

Seven of the 10 analysed districts in Lesotho are classified in Phase 2, and only three districts (Maseru, Mophale's Hoek and Mafeteng) are in Phase 3 in the current period.

The onset of the 2024-2025 rainy season for most areas in the country occurred between 21 October and 11 November 2024, which was slightly late, compared to the normal start of the season. The earliest onset of rain was in Quthing, while the last was in Mafeteng, and its impact is observed through the severity of the phase classification. Cumulative rainfall for both the first part (October to December 2024) and the second part (January to March 2025) of the season was below to slightly below average, with vegetation cover between average to slightly above-average, which is an indication that moisture content was adequate to support plant growth. Despite this slight delay to the start of the season, some farmers maximised the use of moisture from snowfall and planted on time, especially across mountain livelihood zones.

Overall, total area planted for three main crops increased by 2.6 percent (maize - 2.64 percent, sorghum - 162.7 percent and wheat - 24.5 percent) compared to the previous year because of increased access to agricultural inputs, including seeds and fertilisers. It should be noted that in 2024, the total area planted declined by 32 percent compared to 2022/23. During the current analysis, multiple hazards and shocks were observed that affected households and their crops.

Climatic shocks

Hailstorms and heavy rains damaged both crops and livestock. There were also dry spells at the start of the rainy season (October-November-December (OND) 2024), coupled with livestock disease outbreaks, high temperatures, and pests, including Fall Armyworm.

Socio-economic shocks

Price shocks affected at least 34 percent of households- and loss of formal employment affected 19 percent. Most households spend most of their income on food purchases, an indication of economic crisis. There is also reduced income from the main livelihood sources which are already volatile, and income from sales of livestock products (wool and mohair) showing slight improvement in mountain areas while declining in other areas, despite increasing cost of animals due to high competition in the market.

In addition, the country had crop failure due to protracted dry spells and heavy rainfall from January to March 2025, which occurred during the crucial stage of crop growth. Pests and wild animals were further reported to have destroyed crops and impacted negatively on crop production throughout the country. National crop production estimates for maize shows a 19 percent decrease in 2025 compared to the previous year (2024) representing 45,780 metric tons (MT) in 2025 from 56,472 (MT) in 2024. Good rangelands were evident in most districts, hence good livestock conditions. With an estimated increase in maize production in the Republic of South Africa, the country will still meet its annual cereal requirements through imports. Considering all the factors mentioned, food availability remains a minor limiting factor though there is inadequate food availability at household level, but the market will still be functioning throughout the country. Also, the 2025 Market Functionality Index supports this outlook, showing that the markets in Lesotho are resilient with fairly good availability of food and non-food items. The stable supply chain and market resilience also provide a reassuring foundation for food availability in the country.

Poorer households are already facing survival gaps which in most livelihood zones normally start in the lean season. These gaps are expected to start in November, which is an improvement compared to the previous year, when they started in August. However, the food gaps for poorer households might also result in them employing unfavourable coping strategies. Food and non-food prices are already slightly increasing in the current period, and the purchasing power of poorer households has also been affected as their sources of income decrease. Therefore, food access remains a major limiting factor for the entire country.

Utilisation remains a minor limiting factor as wasting levels for all districts are within the acceptable range. The water supply was somewhat satisfactory, and water levels were still high in the main rivers and reservoirs, which is an indication that water supply will remain stable throughout the analysis period.

Food security outcomes

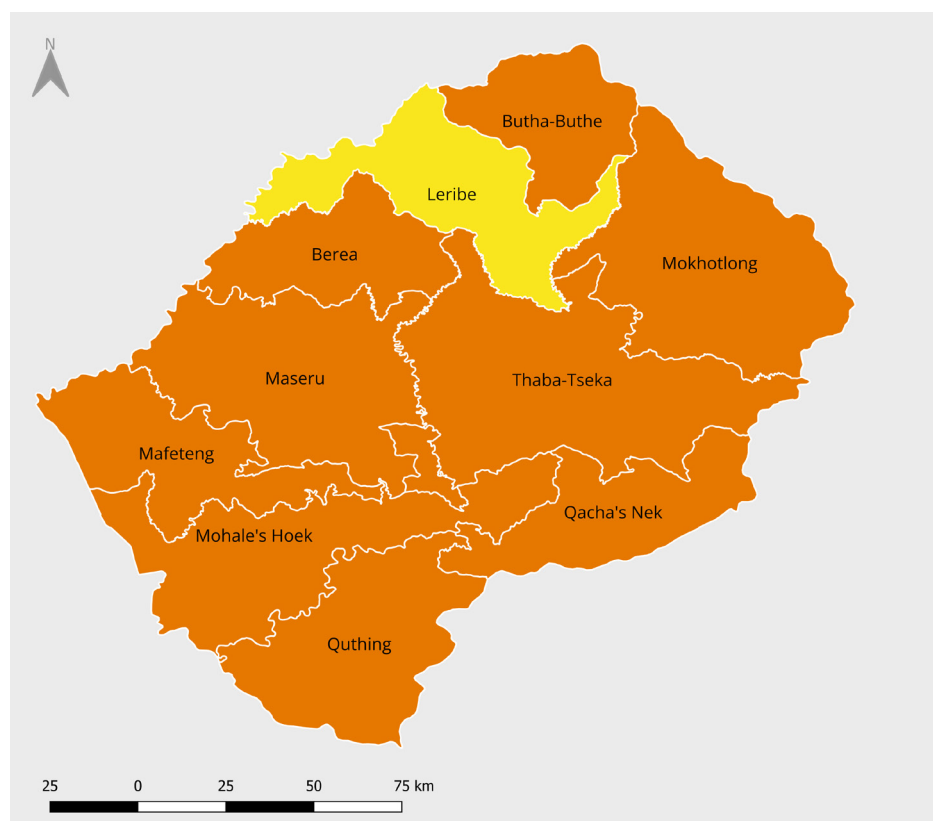
The average food consumption outcomes across districts shows a mixed picture. Mafeteng (53 percent acceptable), Thaba-Tseka (50 percent), and Berea (50 percent) performed relatively better, with at least half of households having acceptable food consumption scores (FCS). Butha-Buthe (45 percent), Quthing (43 percent), and Maseru (43 percent) fall in the moderate range, where borderline and poor categories make up more than half of households. The most concerning districts are Mohale's Hoek (33 percent acceptable), Qacha's Nek (35 percent), Leribe (38 percent), and Mokhotlong (38 percent), where the majority of households fall into borderline or poor categories. Overall, while some districts show relatively stronger outcomes, several others reflect high vulnerability, with less than 40 percent of households meeting acceptable food consumption standards.

The use of livelihood coping strategies (LCS) index varies widely across districts. Thaba-Tseka (61 percent in Phase 1) and Mokhotlong (52 percent) reported the highest proportions of households not engaging in stress, crisis, or emergency coping, indicating relatively stronger resilience. In contrast, Berea (34 percent), Leribe (36 percent), and Mohale's Hoek (35 percent) had the lowest shares of households in Phase 1, with a majority relying on stress, crisis, or emergency coping strategies. Qacha's Nek (39 percent Phase 1), Quthing (40 percent), and Maseru (41 percent) also reflected high reliance on negative coping. Overall, the national average shows that 44 percent of households are in Phase 1, while the rest are adopting stress (36 percent), crisis (15 percent), or emergency (6 percent) coping strategies. This highlights that while some districts, such as Thaba-Tseka and Mokhotlong, demonstrate relatively better resilience, others such as Berea, Leribe and Mohale's Hoek, face high vulnerability, with more than half of households resorting to negative coping mechanisms.

Acute malnutrition

Wasting levels among children under five years are estimated at 2 percent in Lesotho, which is within the acceptable range. Mokhotlong recorded the highest (4 percent) according to the DHS 2023-24. Acute malnutrition historically has remained below 5 percent thresholds even in negative years for many years. The prevalence of acute malnutrition is likely to remain within acceptable levels in the projected period.

PROJECTED IPC ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY MAP AND POPULATION TABLE (OCTOBER 2025 – MARCH 2026)



Key for the Map

IPC Acute Food Insecurity Phase Classification

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- 1 - Minimal
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- 5 - Famine
- Areas with inadequate evidence
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Evidence Level

*** High

Projected Population Table: October 2025 – March 2026

Districts	Total population analysed*	Phase 1		Phase 2		Phase 3		Phase 4		Phase 5		Area Phase	Phase 3+	
		#people	%	#people	%	#people	%	#people	%	#people	%		#people	%
Berea	186,723	74,689	40	74,689	40	37,345	20	0	0	0	0	3	37,345	20
Butha-Buthe	89,172	40,127	45	31,210	35	17,834	20	0	0	0	0	3	17,834	20
Leribe	266,542	119,944	45	106,617	40	39,981	15	0	0	0	0	2	39,981	15
Mafeteng	160,291	48,087	30	64,116	40	48,087	30	0	0	0	0	3	48,087	30
Maseru	238,801	95,520	40	83,580	35	59,700	25	0	0	0	0	3	59,700	25
Mohale's Hoek	163,418	57,196	35	57,196	35	49,025	30	0	0	0	0	3	49,025	30
Mokhotlong	102,428	40,571	40	40,571	40	20,286	20	0	0	0	0	3	20,286	20
Qacha's Nek	57,124	19,993	35	25,706	45	11,425	20	0	0	0	0	3	11,425	20
Quthing	120,929	54,418	45	42,325	35	24,186	20	0	0	0	0	3	24,186	20
Thaba-Tseka	131,220	39,366	30	65,610	50	26,244	20	0	0	0	0	3	26,244	20
Grand Total	1,516,648	589,911	39	591,620	39	334,113	22	0	0	0	0		334,113	22

Note: A population in Phase 3+ does not necessarily reflect the full population in need of urgent action. This is because some households may be in Phase 2 or even 1 but only because of receipt of assistance, and thus, they may be in need of continued action. Marginal inconsistencies that may arise in the overall percentages of totals and grand totals are attributable to rounding.

PROJECTED SITUATION OVERVIEW (OCTOBER 2025 - MARCH 2026)

The projected period and the lean season in Lesotho start in October, when most households are expected to have depleted their own produce. From October 2025 to March 2026, about 334,000 people (22 percent of the rural population) are expected to face Phase 3 or above, driven by high food and fuel prices, decline in crop production, and reduced sources of income countrywide. About nine of the 10 districts analysed, except for Leribe, are projected to be in Phase 3, which calls for urgent interventions to safeguard lives and livelihoods.

According to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BoM), there is a 65 percent chance that ENSO-neutral conditions will persist during the 2025–2026 season. However, there is a slight chance that La Niña will develop from July to September 2025, which could improve water sources and possibly start the season on time. Despite the availability of water at household level, there is an increase in paraffin (main cooking fuel) prices throughout the country, which might strain food preparation practices, thereby compromising food utilisation. While there is a likelihood of improved water availability and access, it may affect crop production negatively due to water logging, which is likely to occur with anticipated normal to above normal rainfall. Additionally, livestock prices are predicted to decline due to high market competition, as households are expected to sell their livestock more than usual to cover the anticipated food gaps, starting in November in most livelihood zones. However, livestock conditions are likely to remain good because of improved pastures resulting from good rangelands. Casual labor, remittances, and old age pensions are most likely to be maintained in the projection period as main livelihood sources. The total contributions from all livelihood sources are projected to decline compared to the reference year, reducing households' total income which compromises household purchasing power. High food prices, coupled with repeated climatic shocks and reduced income opportunities, will likely put high pressure on the income of the poorest households, worsening acute food insecurity among the analysed population.

Due to the decline in crop production throughout the country, compared to the previous year and the five-year average, poorer households are expected to experience food gaps in most livelihood zones. Households will probably start relying more on food purchases to cover these food gaps, hence increasing food expenditure share and putting more pressure on the income of poorer households, as prices for most essential items are expected to be higher in the projected period, coupled with a decline in livelihood sources. Most households are expected to employ unfavorable coping strategies to fill the existing food gaps after the depletion of their food stocks. Despite the unpalatable food security outcome in the projection analysis period, markets are expected to remain functional and stable, although prices will be the main limiting factor in household food access.

Key Assumptions:

Rainfall: There is a 65 percent chance of continued ENSO-neutral conditions, with a slight increase in the chance of La Niña developing for the period of July to September 2025 according to the Australian Bureau of Meteorology (BoM). Therefore, there is a high likelihood of favourable rains in the 2025/26 agricultural season.

Water supply: The country received above-normal rainfall in March and April as well as snowfall in June. The water sources at all levels were recharged and improved. As a result, there is a high likelihood that the water supply will remain stable throughout the projected period.

Crop production: Winter cropping is expected to benefit from moisture brought by cumulative rainfall in April 2025. The government, through the Ministry of Agriculture, Food Security and Nutrition has subsidised agricultural inputs (seeds and fertilisers by 70 and 80 percent, respectively) to support households engage in winter cropping.

Summer cropping: summer cropping will likely kick off in time due to good moisture content, especially for the mountain livelihood zone where snowfall was eminent and cultivation normally starts earlier.

Livestock production and sales: Livestock body conditions are likely to remain satisfactory following improved rangelands due to expected good rains.

Employment: The unemployment rate has increased from 22.5 percent to 30.1 percent from 2024 to 2025 (LFS 2024). The Basotho youth represent 39 percent of the overall unemployment rate. It is likely to remain constant in the projected period.

Livelihood sources: The four most significant sources households relied on are income from agricultural casual labour (28 percent of HH), old-age pension (16 percent), remittances (15 percent) and crop sales (10 percent). It is anticipated that agricultural labour opportunities will increase; pension and remittances will remain constant, while crops sales will decline in the projected period.

Humanitarian Food Security Assistance (HFSA)

Humanitarian assistance considered in this analysis is a one-off distribution of cash assistance in May and July 2025, from the Government (Disaster Management Authority) and ARC Insurance as support to households whose crops were affected by prolonged dry spells. This cash assistance when converted is equivalent to 86 percent of the Kilo-caloric needs of the affected population, and the coverage varied amongst the districts, with Qacha's Nek being the highest covered with 19 percent of the rural population receiving this assistance. This assistance is only valid for the current period of the analysis which ends in September 2025. The analysis indicated that humanitarian assistance did not meet any of the requirements for it to be considered significant, as per IPC protocols for all ten districts.

HIV – adherence to ART: The adult HIV prevalence rate in Lesotho was estimated to be 18.5 percent in 2024. While adherence to ART has improved, 94 percent of those infected are accessing ART and 98 percent of those on ART are achieving viral suppression. Therefore, adherence to ART is expected to remain normal in the projected period.

Food availability: South Africa's summer crop in 2025 is estimated to be strong, with a notable increase in maize production compared to the previous year. The Crop Estimates Committee (CEC) has revised the maize production forecast upwards, reaching 14.56 million tons, a 4.65 percent increase from the previous estimate. This indicates a robust recovery in the agricultural sector, despite concerns about weather conditions earlier in the season (Crop estimates Agribusiness Research 24/04/2025). With the increase in South Africa's crop production and the fact that even in the bad years the country never experienced the challenge of importing grains from RSA, the Imports from South Africa are expected to be stable in the projected period. As a result, food is likely to be available in the markets.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Response Priorities

- Immediate conditional and unconditional humanitarian assistance for food insecure population (Phase 3 or above) in both rural and urban settlements.
- The government should continue to provide interventions aimed at encouraging farmers to participate in market trade exchanges and other market opportunities for farmers who generate surpluses, through the relevant institutions such as the Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security.
- The government should undertake sustainable and resilient programs to promote food production and nutrition security.
- Government to intensify Integrated Catchment Management initiatives to improve rangelands and protect water sources.
- The Government to intensify livestock vaccination campaigns by establishing notification networks, utilising veterinary personnel for vaccination, creating vaccination parks for large animals, and implementing strategies to improve vaccine access and adoption by farmers. These efforts are essential for protecting agricultural livelihoods, promoting food security, and reducing seasonal animal diseases like Peste des Petits Ruminants (PPR).
- Government to scale up anticipatory actions and community-based early warning systems and Impact Based Forecasting to anticipate and mitigate the impact of hazards and shocks on food and nutrition security.
- Governments to set geographical and profile-related targeting criteria for their investments in risk financing to enhance early action in support of the most food insecure populations.
- Government to adopt recommended actions from the Integrated Context Analysis to fully operationalize the National Resilience Building Strategic Framework.
- Strengthening collaboration among all stakeholders to avoid duplication and promote effective response and complementation.

Risk factors to monitor

- 1. Prices of staple food and agricultural inputs:** It is anticipated that staple food prices will remain high but steady at their current levels. This needs to be monitored as case prices rise above the expected levels. Monitoring fuel prices is also necessary, particularly for paraffin (cooking fuel), which is already expensive during this time.
- 2. Seasonal rainfall performance (rainfall, temperatures, NDVI & WRSI):** While a generally favourable outlook for good rains exists for the 2025/26 agricultural season, specific district variations and across all livelihood zones require monitoring.
- 3. Livestock and human diseases outbreaks:** Monitoring is required for disease outbreaks that may jeopardize the anticipated livestock body conditions, which are expected to stay favourable following better rangelands due to forecasted good rains.
- 4. Social protection and humanitarian assistance:** Continue to monitor government programmes and plans to increase social protection through child grants, public works projects, and old-age pensions, as well as food distribution to disadvantaged households.

PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

Before the analysis workshop, a five-day in-person, comprehensive level 1 training session was conducted on June 25, 2025. To prepare the analysts for the analysis roll-out utilising the IPC Analysis Platform (AP), the fifth day of the training was devoted to training and simulation exercises. A face-to-face workshop was conducted by the IPC Technical Working Group to enable analysts to analyse data from a variety of sources in the presence of the IPC Global Support Unit (GSU), which provided physical technical assistance. The TWG representatives were from the Disaster Management Authority, Food and Nutrition Coordinating Office, Ministry of Agriculture and Food Security, WFP and FAO.

Both primary and secondary data sources were used whereby the primary data was used for food security indicators namely FCS, HDDS, HHS, and LCS from the Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (LVAC). The main assessment was conducted in June 2025, with complementary data on prices from BOS and WFP monitoring. Trend analysis was undertaken from the past four years of VAA and Crop forecasting (2019/20-2022/23) and compared those with the current results. HEA was also used to collect and analyse data from key informants and the key parameters which were monitored were as follows, prices of staple food, price of food for work, remittances, beer brewing, and agricultural labour opportunities and their prices, livestock products prices, livestock numbers and crop production estimates per different wealth groups.

IPC Acute Food Insecurity Analysis was used to classify rural areas in 10 districts according to their level of severity.

Limitations of the Analysis

The TWG was using the new analysis platform with interface different from ISS, which LVAC used since 2012 when IPC AFI analysis was introduced in Lesotho. The analysis was delayed due to lack of funding which was confirmed later than the initial planned dates for analysis.

What is the IPC and IPC Acute Food Insecurity?

The IPC is a set of tools and procedures to classify the severity and characteristics of acute food and nutrition crises as well as chronic food insecurity based on international standards. The IPC consists of four mutually reinforcing functions, each with a set of specific protocols (tools and procedures). The core IPC parameters include consensus building, convergence of evidence, accountability, transparency and comparability. The IPC analysis aims at informing emergency response as well as medium and long-term food security policy and programming.

For the IPC, Acute Food Insecurity is defined as any manifestation of food insecurity found in a specified area at a specific point in time of a severity that threatens lives or livelihoods, or both, regardless of the causes, context or duration. It is highly susceptible to change and can occur and manifest in a population within a short amount of time, as a result of sudden changes or shocks that negatively impact on the determinants of food insecurity.

Contact for further Information

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IPC Global Support Unit
www.ipcinfo.org

This analysis has benefited from the technical and financial support of Government of Lesotho, UN-Agencies, INGOS and FAO/GSU.

Classification of food insecurity was conducted using the IPC protocols, which are developed and implemented worldwide by the IPC Global Partnership - Action Against Hunger, CARE, Catholic Relief Services (CRS), CILSS, EC-JRC, FAO, FEWSNET, Global Food Security Cluster, Global Nutrition Cluster, IFPRI, IGAD, IMPACT, Oxfam, SICA, SADC, Save the Children, UNDP, UNICEF, the World Bank, WFP and WHO.

IPC Analysis Partners:

