

LESOTHO

Climate shocks, rising living costs, and livestock disease outbreaks continue to drive acute food insecurity

IPC ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY ANALYSIS

MAY 2026 – MARCH 2027
Published on 3 August 2026

CURRENT ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY MAY - SEPTEMBER 2026



234,000

15% of the analysed 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	234,000 People in Crisis
Phase 2	610,000 People Stressed
Phase 1	681,000 People in food security

PROJECTED ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY OCTOBER 2026 - MARCH 2027



311,000

20% of the analysed population

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

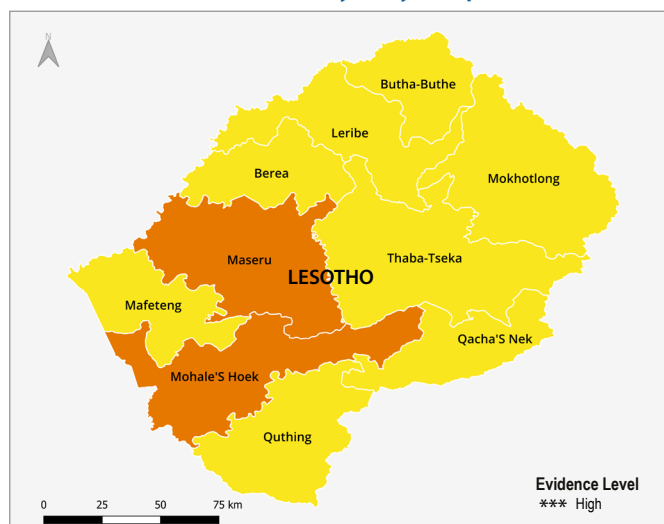
IN NEED OF URGENT ACTION

Phase 5	0 People in Catastrophe
Phase 4	0 People in Emergency
Phase 3	311,000 People in Crisis
Phase 2	615,000 People Stressed
Phase 1	600,000 People in food security

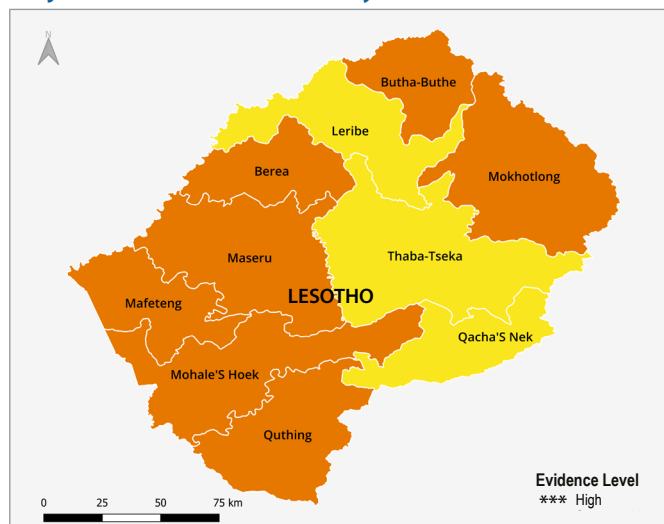
Overview

More than 234,000 people in rural Lesotho (15 percent of the analysed population) are facing high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above) between May and September 2026. This population needs urgent lifesaving and livelihood assistance to prevent further deterioration. Across the ten analysed districts, eight are classified in IPC Phase 2 (Stressed) while two are in IPC Phase 3 (Crisis). Acute food insecurity is driven by climate-related shocks, including dry spells, hailstorms, heavy rains, pest infestations and livestock disease outbreaks, as well as rising fuel prices and loss of employment opportunities. These shocks have reduced crop production, weakened livelihoods and constrained the purchasing power of poor households. While food availability remains generally adequate due to functioning markets and stable imports from South Africa, poorer households are expected to deplete their food stocks earlier than normal and increasingly depend on market purchases despite persistently high living and transport costs.

Current Acute Food Insecurity: May – Sep 2026



Projected Acute Food Insecurity: Oct 2026 – Mar 2027



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



Climatic shocks

Hailstorms, above-average rainfall, prolonged dry spells, and elevated temperatures have negatively affected crop and livestock production in many areas.



High food prices

Food is not affordable for the majority of households, as rising fuel and transportation costs continue to constrain physical and economic access to food.



Livestock disease outbreaks

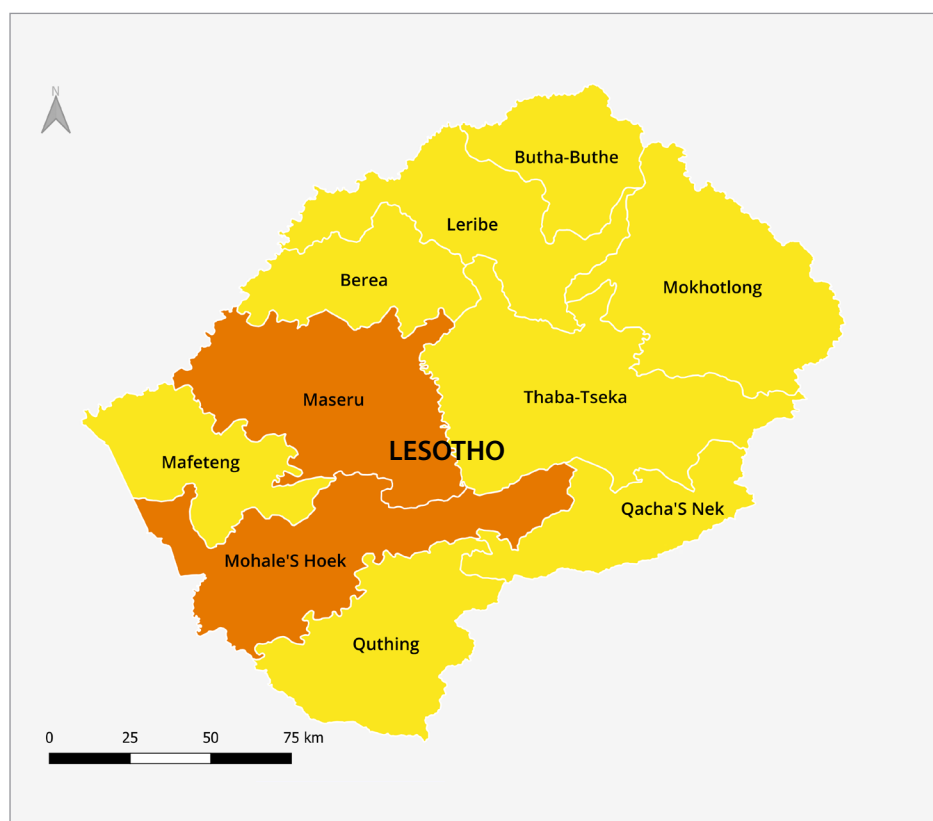
Pest and livestock disease outbreaks increased, with some households reporting livestock deaths.



During the projected period (October 2026 to March 2027), approximately 311,000 people in rural Lesotho (20 percent of the analysed population) are projected to face Phase 3 or above. Compared to the current period, when eight districts were classified in Phase 2, five districts—Quthing, Mafeteng, Berea, Butha-Buthe, and Mokhotlong—are projected to deteriorate into Phase 3, indicating a worsening acute food insecurity situation during the October 2026 to March 2027 projection period. The remaining three districts (Leribe, Thaba-Tseka, and Qacha's Nek) are projected to remain in Phase 2.

The anticipated transition to El Niño conditions is likely to result in a late onset of rains and elevated temperatures, leading to reduced crop production and increased disease outbreaks. Food availability is expected to remain adequate as markets continue to function normally. However, food access is likely to be a major limiting factor, driven by escalating fuel prices and deterioration of key livelihood strategies. Food utilisation is also expected to deteriorate due to the compounding effects of El Niño conditions and high fuel prices for cooking (paraffin and gas).

CURRENT IPC ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY MAP AND POPULATION TABLE (MAY – SEPTEMBER 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
- 2 - Stressed
- 3 - Crisis
- 4 - Emergency
- 5 - Famine
- Areas with inadequate evidence
- Areas not analysed

Evidence Level

*** High

Current Population Table: May – September 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	187,993	103,396	55	56,398	30	28,199	15	0	0	0	0	P2	28,199	15
Butha-Buthe	89,778	35,911	40	40,400	45	13,467	15	0	0	0	0	P2	13,467	15
Leribe	268,354	107,342	40	134,177	50	26,835	10	0	0	0	0	P2	26,835	10
Mafeteng	161,381	88,760	55	48,414	30	24,207	15	0	0	0	0	P2	24,207	15
Maseru	240,424	96,170	40	96,170	40	48,085	20	0	0	0	0	P3	48,085	20
Mohale's Hoek	164,529	65,812	40	57,585	35	41,132	25	0	0	0	0	P3	41,132	25
Mokhotlong	102,117	40,847	40	45,953	45	15,318	15	0	0	0	0	P2	15,318	15
Qacha's Nek	57,513	28,757	50	23,005	40	5,751	10	0	0	0	0	P2	5,751	10
Quthing	121,752	54,788	45	48,701	40	18,263	15	0	0	0	0	P2	18,263	15
Thaba-Tseka	132,113	59,451	45	59,451	45	13,211	10	0	0	0	0	P2	13,211	10
Grand Total	1,525,954	681,234	45	610,254	40	234,468	15	0	0	0	0		234,468	15

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 2026)

The current analysis period in Lesotho normally corresponds with the harvest and post-harvest season, when most households rely on own-produced food. Those who are not engaged in crop production are forced to get food through purchases. The four main livelihood sources—remittances, casual labour, old-age pensions and crop sales—are expected to be maintained throughout the current period in all the ten districts in order to complement households' income. An estimated 234,000 people in rural Lesotho (15 percent of the analysed population) are classified in Phase 3 or above and require urgent lifesaving and livelihood assistance to prevent further deterioration. This represents a slight improvement compared with the same period in 2025, when approximately 258,000 people in rural Lesotho (17 percent of the analysed population) were classified in Phase 3 or above. Of the ten districts analysed, eight are classified in Phase 2, while Maseru and Molepolole are classified in Phase 3.

The 2025/26 agricultural rainfall season had a near-normal onset, with rains generally experienced from October to November, though this was slightly later than the usual start of the season. In December 2025, rainfall was generally adequate despite a prolonged dry spell which extended from late December 2025 into January 2026. From late January onwards, rainfall improved significantly, with February and March receiving above-average rainfall that enhanced moisture conditions across most areas. Vegetation conditions remained average to slightly above average throughout the season, indicating that soil moisture was generally sufficient to support crop growth. Despite the slightly delayed onset of rains, particularly in the mountain zone, some farmers utilised early moisture from snowfall to plant on time. The season was characterised by a near-normal onset, variable rainfall distribution, and a notably wet mid-to-late season.

Overall, total area planted for all main crops declined (sorghum by 40.3 percent and wheat 9.3 percent), while maize area decreased by 6.3 percent compared to the previous year. It should be noted that, in 2026, total area planted declined by 7.9 percent, compared to the previous year. Households were adversely affected by a combination of climatic and socio-economic shocks. Climate-related shocks, including hailstorms, heavy rainfall, dry spells, high temperatures, and pest and livestock disease outbreaks, damaged crops and livestock, leading to reduced agricultural production and weakened livelihoods. In addition, households faced rising fuel and transport costs, loss of employment opportunities, and reduced income from key livelihood sources, which further constrained their purchasing power. Consequently, many households reported that food remained unaffordable and that they were spending more of their income on food, limiting their ability to meet other non-food essential needs.

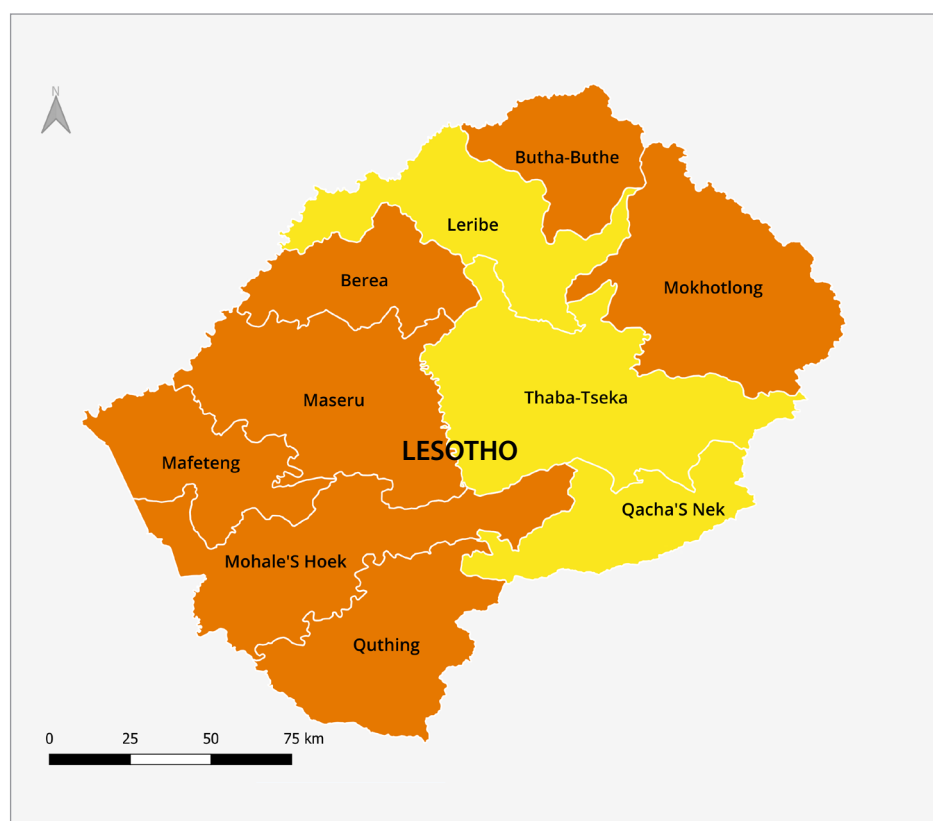
Cereal production declined compared with the previous year, particularly for maize and sorghum, which decreased by approximately 30.1 percent and 58.9 percent, respectively. This decline was mainly driven by a decline in area planted for all crops, prolonged dry spells during the critical stages of crop development, followed by excessive rainfall that damaged crops at the maturity stage. However, potato production performed well in mountain livelihood zones. Food availability remains adequate as markets are functioning normally and food imports from South Africa remain stable.

Food access remains a minor limiting factor during the current period, as households are currently able to meet much of their food needs from own production. Households are able to obtain food through markets, as food prices have decreased, although some households still reported that food is no longer affordable due to high living costs, particularly among poorer households. Vegetables are expected to contribute to household food supplies during the current period. Food consumption outcomes show that most households have acceptable food consumption, while some households continue to experience borderline or poor food consumption and use coping strategies to meet their food needs. Nutrition clubs continue to support improved dietary diversity and food production.

Food utilisation also remains a minor limiting factor, as most households have access to safe drinking water and nutrition interventions. Acute malnutrition remains within acceptable levels, although nutrition vulnerabilities persist among some households.

Remittances from migrant workers remain an important income source, with many households relying on remittances from household members working in South Africa and urban areas. However, ongoing anti-migrant activities in South Africa may affect remittance flows, which may reduce household income and purchasing power for households that depend mainly on this source of income.

PROJECTED IPC ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY MAP AND POPULATION TABLE (OCTOBER 2026 – MARCH 2027)



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

Projected Population Table: October 2026 – March 2027

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	187,993	103,396	55	46,998	25	37,599	20	0	0	0	0	P3	37,599	20
Butha-Buthe	89,778	31,422	35	40,400	45	17,956	20	0	0	0	0	P3	17,956	20
Leribe	268,354	93,924	35	134,177	50	40,253	15	0	0	0	0	P2	40,253	15
Mafeteng	161,381	72,621	45	56,483	35	32,276	20	0	0	0	0	P3	32,276	20
Maseru	240,424	84,148	35	96,170	40	60,106	25	0	0	0	0	P3	60,106	25
Mohale's Hoek	164,529	57,585	35	57,585	35	49,359	30	0	0	0	0	P3	49,359	30
Mokhotlong	102,117	35,741	35	45,953	45	20,423	20	0	0	0	0	P3	20,423	20
Qacha's Nek	57,513	25,881	45	23,005	40	8,627	15	0	0	0	0	P2	8,627	15
Quthing	121,752	42,613	35	54,788	45	24,350	20	0	0	0	0	P3	24,350	20
Thaba-Tseka	132,113	52,845	40	59,451	45	19,817	15	0	0	0	0	P2	19,817	15
Grand Total	1,525,954	600,176	39	615,010	40	310,766	20	0	0	0	0		310,766	20

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 2026 - MARCH 2027)

During the projected period (October 2026 to March 2027) which is the lean season, an estimated 311,000 people in rural Lesotho (20 percent of the analysed population) are projected to face high levels of food insecurity. Of the ten analysed districts, seven are projected to be in Phase 3, while Leribe, Thaba-Tseka, and Qacha's Nek are expected to remain in Phase 2. Timely interventions will be required to protect food consumption and livelihoods, particularly for poorer and vulnerable households.

The 2026/27 projection period is expected to be influenced by the anticipated El Niño conditions, which are likely to result in a late start of the rainy season, high temperatures, prolonged dry spells, and below-average agricultural labour opportunities. Existing socio-economic inequalities will continue to limit access to productive assets and income-generating opportunities, particularly for poor households. Agricultural labour, off-farm labour, remittances, and safety nets will remain the main livelihood sources, although income from these sources is expected to decline with the exception of safety nets, which are expected to remain stable.

Household purchasing power is expected to remain weak due to high living costs, rising fuel and transport costs, and reduced employment opportunities. Ongoing anti-migrant activities in South Africa are likely to reduce remittance income, while reduced agricultural labour opportunities will further limit household income. Although staple food prices are expected to remain relatively stable and markets are expected to remain functional with normal food imports from South Africa, many poor households are likely to struggle to afford sufficient food.

National crop production from the 2025/26 season was below the previous season and the five-year average, resulting in reduced household food stocks and an earlier-than-normal start to the lean season. Households are therefore expected to rely more heavily on market purchases. Crop pest and disease outbreaks, water shortages in drought-prone areas, and livestock disease outbreaks especially bluetongue and poor rangelands resulting in poor animal body conditions, may further reduce crop and livestock production and household income.

Food availability is expected to remain adequate as markets remain well supplied and food imports continue. However, food access is expected to be the main limiting factor due to reduced household purchasing power. Food utilisation is expected to remain a minor limiting factor during the projected period, as basic health and nutrition services are expected to continue. However, access to cooking fuel may be constrained by persistently high energy prices. In addition, water availability may deteriorate in areas affected by rainfall deficits, which could negatively affect household food utilisation and overall well-being.

Key Assumptions:

Socio-economic inequalities: Existing socio-economic inequalities (e.g. wealth group distribution) will continue to limit access to income-generating opportunities and productive assets among vulnerable households.

Livelihood assets: Agricultural labour, off-farm labour opportunities, remittances and safety nets will remain the main livelihood sources for the poor households. These sources are already volatile, and with El Niño anticipated, households are likely to face reduction of income from agricultural labour opportunities.

Fuel prices: Fuel prices increased sharply from February 2026, leading to higher transport costs from May 2026 onwards. Any further increases in fuel prices are expected to place additional pressure on transportation costs, particularly in remote areas with limited market access. These higher costs are likely to be passed on to consumers through increased staple food prices. As a result, household purchasing power may weaken further, making it more difficult for vulnerable households to access sufficient food from markets.

Income opportunities: On-farm labour opportunities are expected to be below-average due to anticipated El Niño conditions likely resulting in late start of the season.

Remittances: Remittances are expected to deteriorate due to ongoing anti-migrant sentiment and activities in South Africa, reducing opportunities for Lesotho migrants as the conditions are forcing them to return home.

Crop pests and diseases: Pest and disease outbreaks are expected to increase under stressed crop conditions associated with the anticipated El Niño-related impacts, using 2024 as an analogue year.

Water availability: Water scarcity is expected during the 2026/27 rainy season and are expected to worsen in some areas if rainfall deficits materialise under the anticipated El Niño conditions,

Crop production: National crop production is expected to remain below average following the below-average 2025/26 agricultural season. As a result, poor households are likely to have reduced own-produced food stocks and may deplete them earlier than normal, leading to increased reliance on market purchases during the projection period.

Household food stocks: Due to low production in 2025/26, household food stocks are expected to be depleted earlier than normal, leading to an early start of the lean season and increased reliance on market purchases for food

Livestock production: Livestock productivity is expected to be constrained by Foot-and-Mouth disease (FMD) and other livestock disease outbreaks, and due to deteriorating rangeland conditions linked to the forecasted El Niño in the next 2026/27 rainy season. This is likely to constrain household income from livestock and livestock products sales.

Humanitarian Food Security Assistance (HFSA)

No food security humanitarian assistance was implemented during the current analysis period, and none is planned for the projection period. However, it should be noted that Government of Lesotho has set aside 18 million maloti for the purchase of local farmers' produce, which will be distributed to the vulnerable households in the projection period.

Impact of El Niño and the 2026 conflict in the Middle East

El Niño is expected to adversely affect food security through below-normal rainfall, prolonged dry spells, and above-average temperatures, resulting in reduced crop yields, deteriorating pasture conditions, and declining availability of water for domestic use, livestock, and agricultural production. These conditions are likely to reduce household food stocks, agricultural labour opportunities, and income from livestock production and sales, while increasing dependence on markets, contributing to higher food prices and reduced purchasing power due to declining household incomes. Reduced water levels are also expected to limit water availability.

The 2026 conflict in the Middle East is also expected to indirectly affect food security in Lesotho by increasing fuel and food prices. Higher fuel costs may raise transportation and production expenses resulting in increased prices of imported food, agricultural inputs mostly fertiliser, and other essential goods. Since Lesotho relies heavily on food imports, higher prices may reduce household purchasing power especially among poor and market-dependent households increasing the risk of food insecurity.

Market supply and food imports: Food imports from South Africa are expected to remain at normal levels throughout the projection period, supporting national food availability. Markets are also expected to remain functional and adequately supplied, benefiting from current-season production and carryover stocks from South Africa.

Food prices: Staple food prices are expected to remain relatively stable throughout the projection period; however, poor households are already experiencing deteriorated purchasing power and rely on unsustainable income sources, which will continue to limit their ability to afford even stable prices

Purchasing power: Despite stable food prices, household purchasing power is already severely constrained due to low incomes, reduced job opportunities and high living costs.

Livestock sales: FMD-related restrictions are suspended and expected to improve household income from livestock and livestock products (e.g. wool and mohair, milk) sales.

Food utilisation: Food utilisation is expected to remain generally stable during the projection period, supported by the continued availability of basic health and nutrition services. However, water access may deteriorate in some areas if El Niño-related rainfall deficits occur, while persistently high fuel and energy costs are likely to constrain access to cooking fuel. These factors will likely negatively affect food preparation, hygiene practices, and overall food utilisation among vulnerable households.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ACTION

Response priorities

- Immediate conditional and unconditional humanitarian assistance for populations in Phase 3 or above in both rural and urban settlements.
- Government and partners to continue to design programmes intended to promote market access for farmers who have surplus from own produce.
- Government and its partners to implement programmes that will improve food and nutrition security e.g. establishment of additional nutrition clubs.
- Government and partners to intensify Integrated Catchment Management initiatives to improve rangelands and protect water sources.
- Intensify livestock vaccination campaigns and subsidise livestock drugs and vaccines to prevent seasonal livestock diseases.
- Government to scale up anticipatory actions to mitigate impact of hazards and shocks on food and nutrition security.
- Government to invest more in risk financing to enhance early action in supporting farmers, food-insecure and other affected populations.
- Government to adopt recommended actions from the Integrated Context Analysis to fully operationalise the National Resilience Building Strategic Framework.
- Government to continue to subsidise agricultural inputs and strengthen targeting and access.

Risk factors to monitor

- Prices of staple food and fuel
- Seasonal Rainfall performance (Rainfall, Temperatures, NDVI & WRSI)
- Livestock and human diseases outbreaks
- Humanitarian Food Security Assistance

PROCESS AND METHODOLOGY

A face-to-face workshop was conducted by the IPC Technical Working Group (TWG) from 22 to 27 June 2026 following a four-day training from 17 to 20 June 2026 to conduct the IPC Acute Food Insecurity (AFI) analysis. This workshop gathered 22 participants and was conducted in the presence of the IPC Global Support Unit (GSU), which provided physical technical assistance.

Both primary and secondary data were used. The primary data, sourced from the Lesotho Vulnerability Assessment Committee (LVAC), covered the food security indicators Food Consumption Score (FCS), Household Dietary Diversity Score (HDDS), Household Hunger Scale (HHS), and Livelihood Coping strategies (LC). The main assessment was conducted in May 2026, with complementary data on prices from BOS and World Food Programme (WFP) monitoring.

Trend analysis was undertaken from the past four years of VAA and Crop forecasting (2021/22-2025/26) and compared those with the current results.

The Household Economy Approach (HEA/LIAS) was also used to collect and analyse data from key informants. The key parameters monitored included: prices of staple food; wages and prices for food-for-work; remittances; income from beer brewing; agricultural labour opportunities and associated wage rates; livestock product prices; livestock numbers; and crop production estimates, disaggregated by wealth group.

The IPC AFI analysis was used to classify areas (ten districts) according to their level of severity, with an analysis level of evidence that was assessed as High (***) in line with the IPC protocols.

Limitations of the Analysis

The TWG was using the new analysis platform for the second time, with an interface different from the previous ISS, which the LVAC had used since 2012 when the IPC AFI analysis was introduced in Lesotho.

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

Hlomohang Matjopile

IPC TWG Focal Person

Email address: hmatjopza@gmail.com

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:

