



Integrated Food Security Phase Classification
Evidence and Standards for Better Food Security and Nutrition Decisions

INSIDE

P.1 About these Guidelines

P.2 About The Acute Food Insecurity Scale

P.2 Communicating the Acute Food Insecurity Scale

P.2 Qualifying Levels of Acute Food Insecurity Using the Reference Table for Area Classification

P.3 Communicating the Acute Food Insecurity Scale in Key Messages and Recommendations

P.4 Communicating Famine

P.4 Key Technical Concepts & Communication Guidelines

GUIDELINES FOR COMMUNICATING THE IPC's ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY SCALE AND FAMINE

About these Guidelines

These guidelines, developed by the IPC Communication Unit, are intended primarily for IPC technical trainers, writers and translators, both in-house and freelance, working on any form of technical communication. Now that so many texts disseminated by the IPC are drafted in English by native and non-native speakers alike, rules, reminders and handy references will help to serve a wider readership as well.

Technical writing is broadly any form of communication about the IPC's Acute Food Insecurity (AFI) scale. The writing style includes any type of text that aims to explain detailed food security information. An IPC technical writer communicates in a way that presents technical information so the reader can use the information for a specific purpose.

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.

About the Acute Food Insecurity Scale

Acute food insecurity is 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. Countries classify and map acute food insecurity situations within geographical areas - defined according to the national administrative divisions (e.g. provinces, prefectures, counties, etc.) or livelihood zones - and the proportion of affected households within those areas. Each area is attributed an acute food insecurity "Phase". A geographical area is attributed and mapped in a specific IPC Phase when at least 20 percent of the population in the area is experiencing the conditions related to that phase or higher phases. The IPC Acute Food Insecurity scale categorises acute food insecurity into five Phases of severity, ranging from IPC Phase 1, corresponding to No/Minimal acute food insecurity, to IPC Phase 5, corresponding to Catastrophe/Famine. Each of these phases has important and distinct implications for where and how best to intervene.

Communicating the Acute Food Insecurity Scale

Use of 'severe' while communicating the AFI scale

For the purposes of the IPC, we will no longer be using the term 'severe' or 'severely' food insecure to describe Phases 3-5 collectively. This is to avoid confusion with terminology used in FAO's State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World (SOFI) reports. The IPC will use the phrase 'high levels of acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above)' or 'high acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 3 or above)' or 'Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or worse' or 'Crisis or worse (IPC Phase 3 or above)' when describing Phase 3-5 collectively. The IPC will stick to the term 'acute food insecurity' which will be qualified with the use of adjectives 'mild', for Stressed (IPC Phase 2) 'high' for Crisis (IPC Phase 3) or above, and 'critical' for Emergency (IPC Phase 4), as seen in examples on page 3.

Qualifying Levels of Acute Food Insecurity Using the Reference Table for Area Classification

Mild acute food insecurity High acute food insecurity Critical acute food insecurity					
Phase name and description	Phase 1 None/Minimal	Phase 2 Stressed	Phase 3 Crisis	Phase 4 Emergency	Phase 5 Catastrophe/ Famine
	Households are able to meet essential food and non-food needs without engaging in atypical and unsustainable strategies to access food and income.	Households have minimally adequate food consumption but are unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures without engaging in stress-coping strategies.	Households either: - Have food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; or - Are marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies.	Households either: - Have large food consumption gaps which are reflected in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality; or - Are able to mitigate large food consumption gaps but only by employing emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation.	Households have an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution and extremely critical acute malnutrition levels are evident. (For Famine Classification, area needs to have extreme critical levels of acute malnutrition and mortality.)
Priority response objectives	Action required to build resilience and for disaster risk reduction	Action required for disaster risk reduction and to protect livelihoods	Urgent action required to:		
			Protect livelihoods and reduce food consumption gaps	Save lives and livelihoods	Revert/prevent widespread death and total collapse of livelihoods

Note

It is important to note that these adjectives are only meant to correctly describe the situation in any of the IPC phases of interest and should not substitute or be confused with the actual IPC Acute Food Insecurity phases.



Communicating the Acute Food Insecurity Scale in Key Messages and Recommendations

Phase Classification	Technical Interpretation	Technical Key Messaging and Call to Action	Media Messaging and Call to Action
IPC Phase 1 None/ Minimal	Households are able to meet essential food and non-food needs without engaging in atypical and unsustainable strategies to access food and income.	Key Message <i>Households are food secure. Households have adequate access to food and non-food items without resorting to unsustainable coping strategies. Area / population is classified in Minimal acute food insecurity (IPC Phase 1).</i>	Key Message <i>People are food secure / People are not in acute food insecurity / People have stable access to food.</i> <i>At area level, the population is minimally food insecure.</i>
		Call to Action <i>Interventions are required to build resilience and disaster risk reduction, so households can continue to sustain themselves.</i>	Call to Action <i>Action is required to reduce people's vulnerability to disasters/shocks and to build resilience, so they can stay food secure.</i>
IPC Phase 2 Stressed	Households have minimally adequate food consumption, but are unable to afford some essential non-food expenditures without engaging in stress-coping strategies.	Key Message <i>Households experience low levels of acute food insecurity / mild acute food insecurity. Households have borderline adequate access to food, but cannot afford some essential non-food expenditures without resorting to unsustainable coping strategies. Area / population is classified in Stressed (IPC Phase 2).</i>	Key Message <i>People experience low levels of acute food insecurity / People are in mild acute food insecurity / People are at risk of facing high levels of acute food insecurity / People are in stress / People have erratic economic access to food / People are vulnerable to disasters/shocks.</i>
		Call to Action <i>Interventions are required for disaster risk reduction and to protect livelihoods, so households can sustain themselves.</i>	Call to Action <i>Action is required to improve people's stability of access to food and to reduce their vulnerability to disasters/shocks.</i>
IPC Phase 3 Crisis	Households either: • Have food consumption gaps that are reflected by high or above-usual acute malnutrition; or • Are marginally able to meet minimum food needs but only by depleting essential livelihood assets or through crisis-coping strategies.	Key Message <i>Households experience Crisis levels of acute food insecurity / Crisis acute food insecurity. Many or more children than usual are malnourished due to inadequate access to food. Households only have adequate access to food by resorting to harmful coping strategies or selling their assets. Area / population is classified in Crisis (IPC Phase 3).</i>	Key Message <i>People experience crisis levels of acute food insecurity / People are in crisis acute food insecurity / People are in crisis / People are malnourished due to inadequate access to food / People only have enough food by selling off their assets or through other harmful coping strategies.</i>
		Call to Action <i>Urgent action is required to protect livelihoods and increase access to food to avoid a food emergency.</i>	Call to Action <i>Urgent action is needed to improve and increase people's access to food. If nothing is done, people could face high levels of hunger.</i>
IPC Phase 4 Emergency	Households either: • Have large food consumption gaps which are reflected in very high acute malnutrition and excess mortality; or • Are able to mitigate large food consumption gaps but only by employing emergency livelihood strategies and asset liquidation.	Key Message <i>Households face critical levels of acute food insecurity / critical acute food insecurity. The situation is life-threatening with households being food deprived and children under five acutely malnourished. Households only have adequate access to food by resorting to emergency coping strategies and selling their assets. Area / population is classified in Emergency (IPC Phase 4).</i>	Key Message <i>People experience critical levels of acute food insecurity / People are in critical acute food insecurity / People are in a situation of emergency / People are malnourished due to lack of food / People only have enough food by selling off their assets or through other emergency coping strategies.</i>
		Call to Action <i>Urgent action is needed to save lives and livelihoods. If nothing is done, the population could face starvation or death.</i>	Call to Action <i>Urgent action is needed to save lives. If nothing is done, people could face extreme hunger or death.</i>
IPC Phase 5 Catastrophe/ Famine	Households have an extreme lack of food and/or other basic needs even after full employment of coping strategies. Starvation, death, destitution and Extremely Critical acute malnutrition levels are evident. For Famine Classification, area needs to have Extremely Critical levels of acute malnutrition and mortality.	Key Message <i>Households experience catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity / catastrophic acute food insecurity. Households are extremely food deprived and children under five acutely malnourished. Households still have inadequate access to food even after full employment of coping strategies. Households experience starvation and death. Area / population is classified in Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5).</i>	Key Message <i>People experience catastrophic levels of acute food insecurity / People are in catastrophic acute food insecurity / People are in a catastrophic situation / People are starving and dying. / People are malnourished due to lack of food. / People do not have any means left to access food.</i> <i>At area level, the population is in a situation of Famine.</i>
		Famine definition: According to the IPC, 'Famine' exists in areas where at least one in five households suffers from an extreme deprivation of food. Starvation, Extremely Critical levels of acute malnutrition (at least 30 percent of children malnourished) and significant mortality, directly attributable to outright starvation or to the interaction of malnutrition and disease (at least 1 person for every 5,000 dies each day), are occurring.	
		Call to Action <i>Urgent immediate action is needed to stop widespread starvation and death, and the total collapse of livelihoods.</i>	Call to Action <i>Urgent action is needed to stop widespread starvation and death.</i>
IPC Phase 5 Famine Likely	For Famine Likely Classification, Famine is likely occurring, however, not enough evidence is available to confirm or deny it.	Call to Action <i>Urgent immediate action is needed to stop the likelihood of widespread starvation and death, and the total collapse of livelihoods. Additional evidence should be collected to confirm classification urgently.</i>	Call to Action <i>Urgent action is needed to stop likely widespread starvation and death. More evidence should be collected to confirm the situation.</i>



Communicating Famine

Famine is among the most loaded terms used in humanitarian communication to galvanise global attention and trigger response action. Experiences from the Somalia and South Sudan famines show that the word evokes strong emotional reactions, and triggers some form of action. In theory, Famine is the humanitarian equivalent of the fire alarm – to be used only in absolute emergencies. Recent years have seen an increase in and casual use of Famine messaging by humanitarian and development actors, in most cases, backed by no actual evidence. Whereas some food security situations may be critical, in some cases, just like false fire alarms, false Famine alarms pose a considerable problem for those who make response decisions with limited resources. Consequences of the misuse or overuse of the word Famine are likely the following:

- The word Famine losing its resonance due to overuse;
- Key stakeholders losing interest whenever a Famine alarm is sounded;
- Misallocation of scarce time, human and financial resources;
- The undermining of the reliability of humanitarian communication.

The purpose of this section is to clarify how the IPC classifies and communicates Famine. It also describes the difference between IPC Acute Food Insecurity Phase 5 Catastrophe and Famine, as well as Famine Likely and Risk of Famine.

Key Technical Concepts & Communication Guidelines

1. What is Famine?

Famine is a technical term. The IPC only officially classifies Famine when specific acute food insecurity, mortality, and acute malnutrition criteria are met:

- 1 in 5 households face an extreme food shortage;
- At least 30% of children are acutely malnourished;
- At least 2 in every 10,000 people die per day (or at least 4 in every 10,000 children under five years old die per day).

Whereas some emergencies occur suddenly, such as tsunamis, earthquakes, floods, among others, Famine is unique, as the conducive environment for a famine builds up slowly, usually caused by long-term drivers such as conflict, extreme drought, extreme poverty, etc. Famines are never inevitable – they are always predictable, preventable, and almost always man-made.

• Messaging Catastrophe (IPC Phase 5) without Famine Classification

IPC Phase 5 Catastrophe is a classification of the Acute Food Insecurity scale at the household level. Households may be classified in IPC Phase 5 Catastrophe even if the area is not classified in IPC Phase 5 Famine. This is the case when less than 20 percent of the population in a given area is experiencing Phase 5 Acute Food Insecurity conditions and/or when malnutrition and/or mortality levels have not (or not yet) reached Famine thresholds. It is recommended that humanitarian communicators refrain from using the word Famine without conclusive data to confirm it.

CURRENT CLASSIFICATION: *About 200,000 people in Donda region of Karonga Democratic Republic are experiencing starvation and collapse of livelihoods, latest data shows. They are classified in IPC Phase 5 Catastrophe and require urgent humanitarian action to prevent further deterioration of the region into IPC Phase 5 Famine.*

PROJECTED CLASSIFICATION: *About 200,000 people in the Donda region of Karonga Democratic Republic will likely be at risk of starvation and even death between June and August 2022, latest data shows. They are classified in IPC Phase 5 Catastrophe and require urgent humanitarian action to prevent further deterioration of the region into IPC Phase 5 Famine.*

• Messaging Famine (IPC Phase 5) Classification

When the country IPC Technical Working Group (TWG) or the IPC Global Support Unit or its partners conclude that there is the possibility that at least one area is in Famine, the Famine Review Committee (FRC) is requested to conduct a review of the data and analysis processes to ensure technical rigour and neutrality of the analysis before the results are confirmed and communicated. The FRC is a team of leading independent international food security and nutrition experts. It is tasked with reviewing and debating evidence available and IPC analysis results and determining whether a Famine classification is warranted. The most senior humanitarian in the country often leads famine declaration communication at the country level in conjunction with the line government agency. Famine messaging in the Current and Projection periods could be communicated as follows:

CURRENT FAMINE CLASSIFICATION: About 100,000 people in the Donda region of Karonga Republic are experiencing famine conditions, characterised by widespread deaths, starvation, collapse of livelihoods and extremely critical levels of acute malnutrition, latest data shows. A further 100,000 people, classified in Emergency (IPC Phase 4), are on the brink of Famine and need urgent action to prevent widespread starvation and death.

PROJECTED FAMINE CLASSIFICATION: Latest data shows that about 200,000 people in Donda region of Karonga Republic are projected to experience famine conditions between June and July 2022 if the ongoing conflict persists with little or no humanitarian assistance delivered. Urgent action is needed now to avert likely widespread deaths and starvation.

2. What is 'Famine Likely'?

Famine Likely classification allows the IPC to warn about potential Famine in contexts when there is limited data. Famines tend to occur in areas where access is not possible or is significantly restricted, which has implications on collecting data, making it difficult to meet all the criteria for a Famine classification. Based on this observation, it was concluded that Famine situations can be reliably identified and classified through a robust analysis process using available data. Based on those experiences, the IPC Global Support Unit and partners have agreed to 'institutionalise' the Famine Likely methodology and classification and to add it to the Famine protocols of the IPC Technical Manual Version 3.0. Even in cases with less than optimal evidence, Famine Likely classification applied to projections acts as an early warning mechanism, and this allows the IPC to inform decisions and humanitarian response to help crisis situations from deteriorating further. It is important to note that Famine and Famine Likely classifications are equally severe, the only difference is the amount of reliable evidence available to support the statement.

CURRENT 'FAMINE LIKELY' CLASSIFICATION: Available data shows that about 200,000 people in Donda region of Karonga Republic are likely to be experiencing famine conditions, characterised by starvation, collapse of livelihoods, extremely critical levels of acute malnutrition and widespread deaths. However, more data is urgently needed to confirm the classification, scope, and extent, as current data is insufficient to confirm or deny the presence of famine.

PROJECTED 'FAMINE LIKELY' CLASSIFICATION: Available data shows that about 200,000 people in Donda region of Karonga Republic will likely experience famine conditions between June and July 2022 if the ongoing conflict persists with little or no humanitarian assistance delivered. Urgent action is needed now to avert likely widespread starvation and death.

3. What is the Risk of Famine?

Risk of Famine refers to the reasonable probability of an area going into Famine in the projected period. While this is not perceived necessarily as the most likely scenario, it is a scenario that generally has a realistic chance of occurring. It complements the Famine and Famine Likely projections of the most likely scenario by providing insights of potential Famine, if prospects evolve in a manner worse than anticipated. It differs from Famine and Famine Likely projections because it focuses on a worst-case scenario with a reasonable and realistic chance of happening. It is a statement about the potential deterioration of the situation from what is expected. It is not a new classification, and it is not to be accompanied by population estimates. It is an additional assessment that focuses on assessing if the area could realistically go into Famine during the projected period. Not all areas need to undergo assessment for Risk of Famine.

RISK OF FAMINE: Donda region in the north of Karonga Republic is at risk of Famine in the coming months if conflict increases and humanitarian assistance delivery plans are hampered, food security partners have warned. The agencies call for urgent and unimpeded access in Donda to avert potential widespread starvation and deaths.

For any questions about these guidelines, please contact the IPC Communications Unit at ipc@fao.org.

IPC Global Partners



IPC Funding Partners

