Highlights

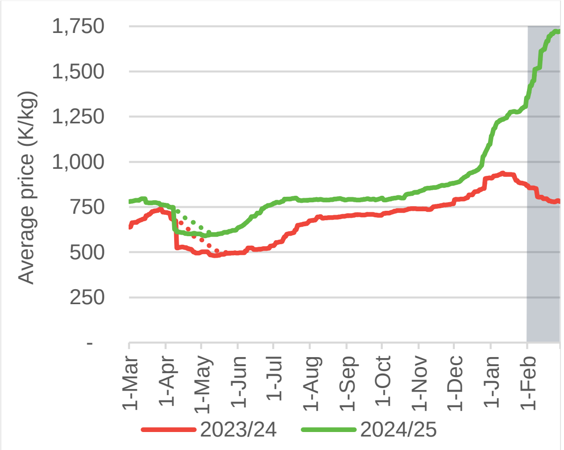
- Retail prices of maize increased by 32 percent in February as a result of a similar decrease in the value of Malawi Kwacha on the informal market.
- Maize prices were lowest in the Northern region, where informal imports from Tanzania enter the country, and increased southward.
- At the market exchange rate, retail prices of maize in Malawi were similar to those in Zambia and Mozambique, but lower than in Zimbabwe.

Maize prices increased by 32 percent in February

Figure 1 shows a trend in prices over the 12 months ending in February 2025, and, for comparison, over the 12 months ending in February 2024. At the beginning of the harvest season, we start reporting prices of newly harvested maize, which has a higher moisture content compared to maize from the previous harvest. High moisture content makes it unsuitable for storage or milling. During drying, it loses about 20 percent of its weight. Solid lines in Figure 1 represent observed maize prices. Dotted lines represent prices adjusted for moisture content, reflecting the true price trend.

Unlike the typical February decline observed in the past two years, where prices fell by 12 percent in 2024 and 1 percent in 2023, maize retail prices continued their sharp rise this February, increasing by 32% from an average of K1,304/kg in the last week of January to an average of K1,718/kg in the last week of February (Figure 1 and Table 1). A poor 2024 harvest has led to a limited domestic maize supply, forcing the country to rely heavily on imports, primarily from Tanzania. Import dependence coupled with ongoing foreign currency shortages has created significant price pressures. The sharp decline in Malawi Kwacha's value on the unofficial exchange market—from K3,700/$ at the end of January to K4,900/$ at the end of February—has significantly contributed to the increase in the price of maize.

Figure 1: Trends in maize retail prices



Prices highest in the South

Malawi is not unique in its reliance on Tanzanian maize. The 2024 harvest was poor in much of southern Africa, so maize from Tanzania, which had bumper harvests in the last two years, finds its way south to the rest of the region. Due to transportation and other transaction costs, the commodity gains value as it moves south. This regional dynamic (Figure 3) is reflected in the geographical price pattern in Malawi (Table 1 and Figure 2): Prices are lowest in the Northern Region (K1,418/kg on average in the last week of February) where maize enters the country from Tanzania, and highest in the Southern Region (K1,806/kg on average in the same time period), where it leaves Malawi mostly around Marka in Nsanje district. In contrast with substantial southward trade flows, longitudinal trade with Zambia and Mozambique is limited and mostly local.

Table 1: Weekly average retail prices (K/kg)

Market	Week ending on 31-Jan	7-Feb	14-Feb	21-Feb	28-Feb	Monthly change
1 Chitipa	1,079	1,207	1,264	1,323	1,367	27%
2 Karonga	1,081	1,206	1,252	1,288	1,330	23%
3 Rumphi	1,094	1,236	1,317	1,379	1,429	31%
4 Mzuzu (boma)	1,141	1,220	1,295	1,371	1,429	25%
5 Mzimba (boma)	1,135	1,258	1,314	1,343	1,424	25%
6 Mzimba (Jenda)	1,110	1,244	1,300	1,427	1,447	30%
North	1,112	1,232	1,295	1,374	1,418	28%
7 Salima	1,265	1,434	1,547	1,662	1,682	33%
8 Mchinji	1,269	1,348	1,405	1,591	1,647	30%
9 Lilongwe city (Nsungwi)	1,282	1,420	1,605	1,710	1,806	41%
10 Lilongwe (Mitundu)	1,325	1,430	1,548	1,660	1,694	28%
11 Dedza (Chimbiya)	1,312	1,426	1,560	1,638	1,686	28%
Center	1,288	1,416	1,560	1,673	1,738	35%
12 Balaka	1,367	1,481	1,610	1,707	1,679	23%
13 Mangochi (M'baluku)	1,324	1,545	1,676	1,743	1,793	35%
14 Mangochi (boma)	1,301	1,462	1,557	1,648	1,796	38%
15 Liwonde	1,420	1,541	1,637	1,792	1,849	30%
16 Phalombe (Chiringa)	1,252	1,351	1,510	1,636	1,725	38%
17 Zomba (Mpondabwino)	1,456	1,588	1,740	1,860	1,881	29%
18 Blantyre (Lunzu)	1,393	1,515	1,659	1,774	1,807	30%
19 Blantyre city (Mbayani)	1,400	1,532	1,685	1,788	1,859	33%
20 Mwanza	1,326	1,418	1,629	1,700	1,776	34%
21 Mulanje	1,399	1,457	1,610	1,852	1,864	33%
22 Thyolo (Luchenza)	1,379	1,486	1,676	1,867	1,850	34%
23 Chikwawa (boma)	1,416	1,455	1,628	1,731	1,707	21%
24 Chikwawa (Ngabu)	1,447	1,539	1,671	1,781	1,747	21%
25 Nsanje (Bangula)	1,433	1,490	1,681	1,752	1,767	23%
26 Nsanje (boma)	1,394	1,533	1,738	1,843	1,833	32%
South	1,381	1,503	1,651	1,773	1,806	31%
Malawi	**1,304**	**1,427**	**1,560**	**1,672**	**1,718**	**32%**

Figure 2: Location of monitored markets

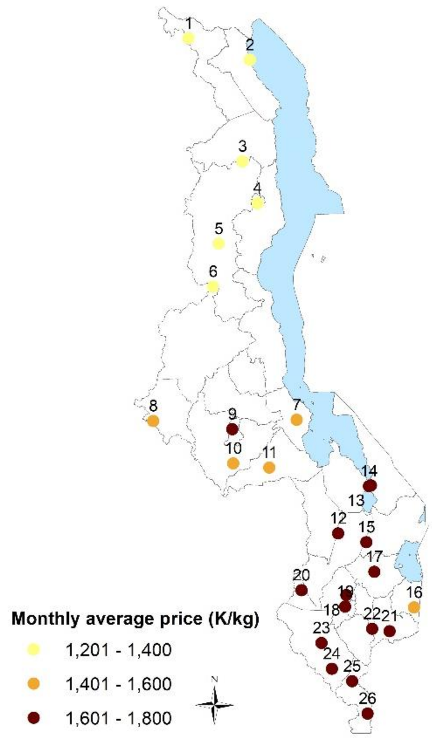
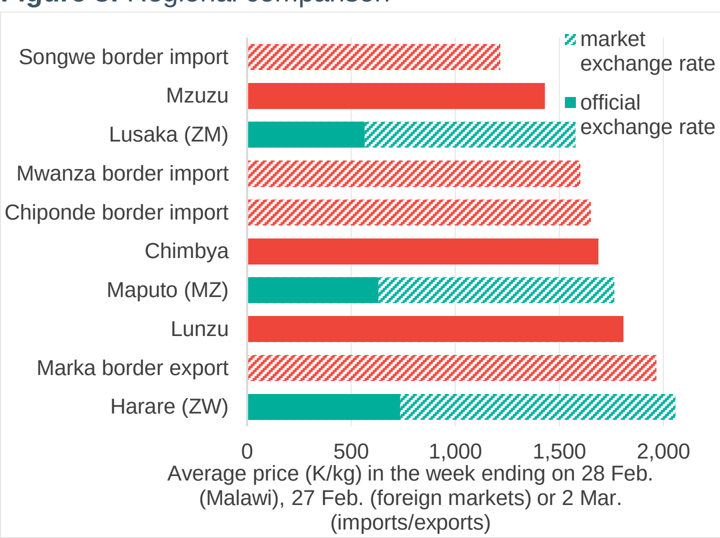


Figure 3: Regional comparison



How data were collected

IFPRI Malawi has been monitoring maize retail prices in selected markets since February 2016. All prices are reported in Malawi Kwacha (K). Price data are collected telephonically six times per week (excluding Sundays) from 26 markets across the country. Additionally, local import and export prices are collected on a weekly basis from 14 border crossing points. Three monitors (typically small grain traders) report from each location. Regional prices reported in Figure 3 are sourced from weekly reports by Commodity Insights Africa.

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