MALAWI
IFPRI

MAIZE MARKET REPORT JANUARY 2026

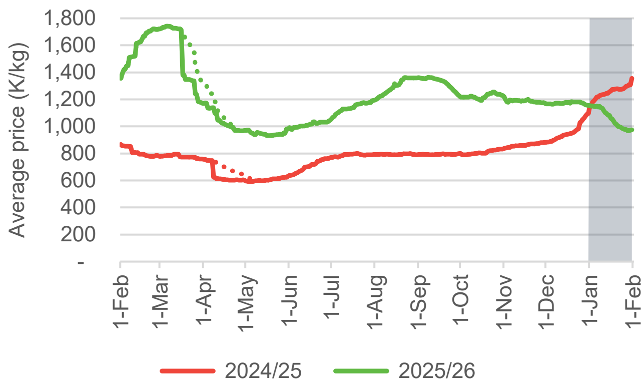
Highlights

- Average retail prices of maize declined in all monitored markets in January by 16 percent on average.
- The price decline was driven by cheap imports of maize.
- Imports dominated cross-border trade in maize despite some strong but localized informal exports to Zambia.

Average maize prices decreased by 16 percent in January

Figure 1 shows a trend in prices over the 12 months ending in January 2026, and for comparison, over the 12 months ending in January 2025. At the beginning of the harvest season, we start reporting prices of newly harvested maize, which has a higher moisture content than maize from the previous harvest. High moisture content makes maize unsuitable for storage or milling. During drying, it loses up to 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.

Figure 1: Trends in maize retail prices



Contrary to typical lean-season patterns, retail prices of maize declined in Malawi during January. The national average price fell by 16 percent, from K1,161/kg in the last week of December to K978/kg in the last week of January. This contrasts with the same period last year, when maize prices increased by 21 percent.

Prices were lowest in the north and highest in the south

The decline was observed in all monitored markets, though its magnitude varied from just under 1 percent in Chitipa to 25 percent in Lilongwe. Overall, prices declined more in the Central and Southern Regions than in the Northern Region. The Northern Region nevertheless continued to register the lowest maize prices, averaging K923/kg in the final week of January, followed by the Central Region at K950/kg and the Southern Region at K1,022/kg (Table 1 and Figure 2).

Informal imports continue to dominate despite declining maize prices

In January, informal cross-border trade in maize was dominated by net imports across most monitored border posts, with particularly strong inflows through the Mozambique and Tanzania borders. The exception to the overall trend of net imports was the Mchinji border (and to a lesser extent Mqocha and Jenda). Mchinji was the point of entry for Zambian maize imported in bulk by the National Food Reserve Agency, but even more maize seemed to simultaneously leave Malawi through the same border, leading to a net outflow of maize indicated by the red arrow in Figure 3. It is unclear what drove these exports, as prices on the Zambian side of the border were not much higher than prices in Malawi (Table 2). Despite this anomaly, consistent net imports at relatively favorable prices and market exchange rates pushed maize prices down in January. There is also anecdotal evidence that declining prices prompted some traders to dispose of their remaining stock, further exacerbating the price decline to levels well below last year's government-mandated minimum farmgate price of K1,050/kg (Figures Figure 4 and Figure 5).

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

Market	31-Dec	7-Jan	14-Jan	21-Jan	28-Jan	Monthly change
	Week ending on					
1 Chitipa	882	916	911	848	879	0%
2 Karonga	936	1,009	966	976	922	- 1%
3 Rumphi	1,018	1,000	1,001	929	913	-10%
4 Mzuzu (boma)	1,082	1,045	1,001	990	996	- 8%
5 Mzimba (boma)	1,061	1,069	992	930	899	-15%
6 Mzimba (Jenda)	994	1,000	983	931	881	-11%
North	1,007	1,012	981	942	923	-8%
7 Salima	1,148	1,143	1,112	1,048	873	-24%
8 Mchinji	1,176	1,138	1,132	1,121	1,079	- 8%
9 Kasungu	1,105	1,114	1,136	1,000	1,000	- 9%
10 Lilongwe city (Nsungwi)	1,144	1,100	1,075	984	956	-16%
11 Lilongwe (Mitundu)	1,186	1,152	1,103	950	893	-25%
12 Dedza (Chimbiya)	1,095	1,093	1,015	986	894	-18%
Center	1,140	1,117	1,092	1,006	950	-17%
13 Balaka	1,185	1,176	1,156	1,071	935	-21%
14 Mangochi (M'baluku)	1,192	1,177	1,158	1,052	1,012	-15%
15 Mangochi (boma)	1,200	1,183	1,145	1,063	1,005	-16%
16 Machinga (Liwonde)	1,133	1,119	1,095	1,016	983	-13%
17 Phalombe (Chiringa)	1,236	1,212	1,138	1,042	1,028	-17%
18 Zomba (Mpondabwino)	1,332	1,251	1,184	1,052	1,012	-24%
19 Blantyre (Lunzu)	1,201	1,211	1,147	1,053	1,020	-15%
20 Blantyre city (Mbayani)	1,289	1,270	1,232	1,174	1,075	-17%
21 Mwanza	1,331	1,317	1,259	1,118	1,049	-21%
22 Mulanje	1,242	1,199	1,158	1,135	1,010	-19%
23 Thyolo (Luchenza)	1,287	1,258	1,228	1,148	1,036	-20%
24 Chikwawa (boma)	1,261	1,242	1,214	1,185	1,200	- 5%
25 Chikwawa (Ngabu)	1,280	1,270	1,257	1,206	1,182	- 8%
26 Nsanje (Bangula)	1,243	1,227	1,191	1,117	1,105	-11%
27 Nsanje (boma)	1,244	1,267	1,219	1,139	1,025	-18%
South	1,232	1,213	1,169	1,086	1,022	-17%
Malawi	**1,161**	**1,144**	**1,110**	**1,032**	**978**	**-16%**

Figure 2: Location of monitored markets

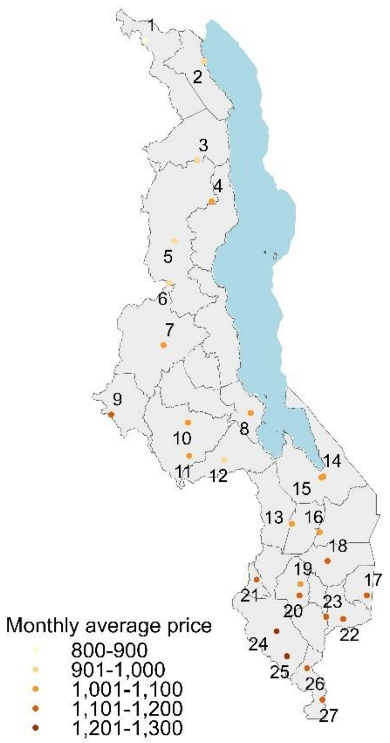
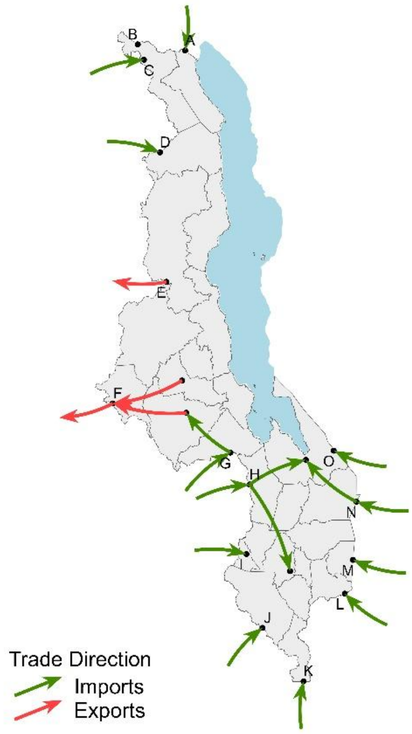


Table 2: Cross-border trade and import/export parity prices

District (border post)	Neighbor		4-Jan		11-Jan		18-Jan		25-Jan		01-Feb
		Week ending on									
A. Karonga (Songwe)	TZ	-	-	⟨	1,175	⟨	1,083	⟨⟨	1,200	⟨	1,225
B. Chitipa (Mbirima)	TZ	-	-	⟨	850	⟨	750	-	-	-	-
C. Chitipa (Sopolera)	ZM	⟨	717	⟨⟨	783	⟨	900	⟨	838	⟨	775
D. Rumphi (Hewe)	ZM	⟨⟨	750	⟨	783	⟨	750	-	-	⟨	650
E. Mzimba (Mqocha/Jenda)	ZM	⟩	850	⟨	867	⟨	800	⟩	795	⟩	900
F. Mchinji	ZM	-	-	⟩	1,025	⟩	1,050	⟩⟩	960	⟩⟩	<1,000
G. Dedza	MZ	⟨⟨	973	⟨	875	⟨	1,205	⟨⟨	720	⟨⟨	900
H. Ntcheu (Tsangano)	MZ	⟨⟨	925	⟨⟨	925	⟨	800	⟨⟨	717	⟨⟨	717
I. Mwanza	MZ	⟨	1,200	⟨	1,133	⟨⟨	1,000	⟨⟨	927	⟨	950
J. Chikwawa (Mkumaniza)	MZ	⟨	950	⟨	975	⟨	1,000	⟨	800	⟨	720
K. Nsanje (Marka)	MZ	⟨	1,200	⟨	1,100	⟨	1,000	⟨	900	⟨	967
L. Mulanje (Muloza)	MZ	⟨	1,090	⟨	997	⟨	1,000	⟨	833	⟨	787
M. Phalombe (Kolowiko)	MZ	⟨	900	⟨	1,000	⟨	950	⟨	850	⟨	850
N. Machinga (Nayuchi)	MZ	⟨	950	⟨	925	⟨	900	⟨⟨	880	⟨⟨	970
O. Mangochi (Chiponde)	MZ	⟨	925	⟨⟨	1,100	⟨	900	⟨⟨	690	⟨	1,000

Notes: ⟨ net imports passing through to other districts, ⟨⟨ net imports into border district only, ⟨⟩ similar volume of trade in both directions, ⟩ net exports sourced from border district only, ⟩⟩ net exports sourced from other districts, **-** no cross-border trade. Import and export parity prices, i.e., the prices at which imported maize can be bought and those at which maize for export can be sold on the Malawi side of the border, are reported in K/kg.

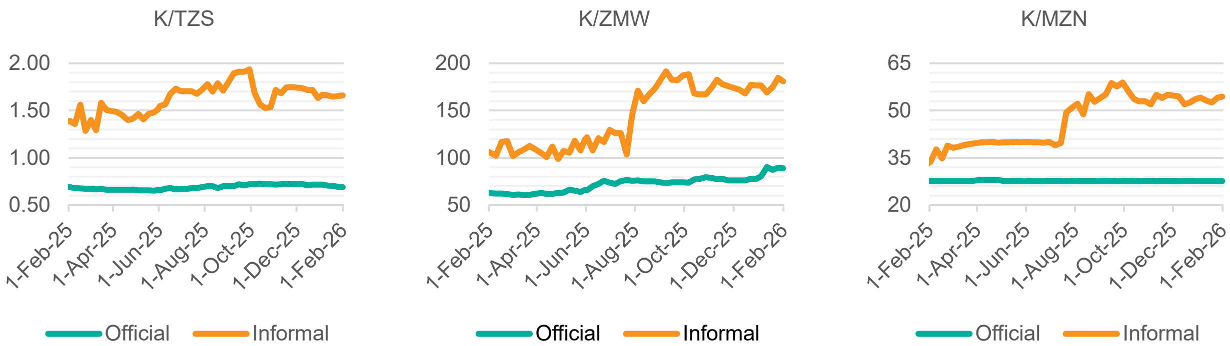
Figure 3: Cross-border trade



Notes: Arrows illustrate net imports and net exports in the week ending on 1 February 2026

Figure 4: Import parity and retail prices

Figure 5: Exchange rates in 2025/26



Notes: Official rates are the selling rates published by the Reserve Bank of Malawi. Informal rates are reported by cross-border traders.

How data were collected

IFPRI Malawi has been monitoring maize retail prices in selected markets since November 2016. Price data are collected telephonically six times per week (excluding Sundays) from 27 markets across the country. Additionally, local import and export prices as well as the direction and terms of trade are collected on a weekly basis from 15 border locations. Three monitors (typically small grain traders) report from each location. All prices are reported in Malawi kwacha (K).

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