



World Food  
Programme

## One year since the transition in Afghanistan

A review of monthly remote food  
security updates

AUGUST 2022

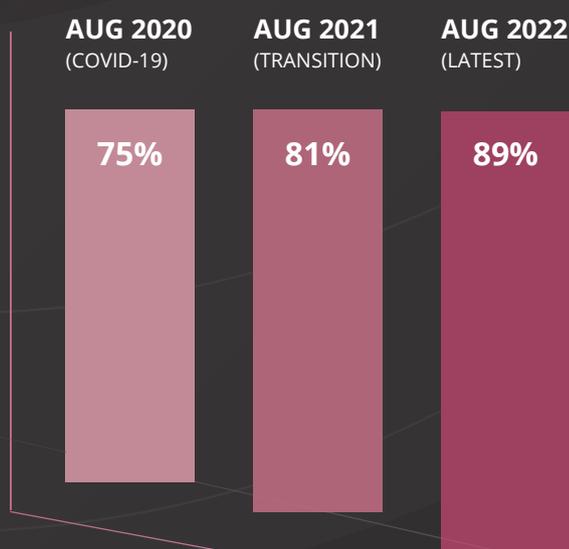
# Afghanistan has faced a year of **historic hunger levels**<sup>1</sup>

WFP's remote monthly household surveys have tracked the national food security situation in Afghanistan for years, through the worst of the pandemic, multiple droughts, conflict, and extreme weather events.

**But the past 12 months have been the worst yet.**



## The descent over the years is clear.



### 9 in 10

households now face insufficient food consumption.

That's the highest in the world.

Even worse than at the first peak of the pandemic.

And it has persisted for 12 months.

## The food security situation remains under threat

■ Additional % by Aug 2022  
■ % at comparison point



**92%** of household income is spent on food, leaving little left (up 12 percentage points from January 2022)



**51%** are relying on coping strategies to keep food on the table (up 40 percentage points from August 2021)<sup>2</sup>

1. Hunger levels refer to a combination of indicators, beyond just the food consumption score.  
2. Food-based coping strategies, using the consumption-based reduced coping strategy index.

# Policy Brief

Hunger levels worsened dramatically one year ago.<sup>3</sup> They have still not subsided.

**The number of people facing insufficient food consumption spiked sharply** after the pivotal events of August 2021. This was 12 months ago. Since then, hunger levels have refused to improve, with some nine in ten households continuing to face insufficient food consumption for month after month.

**Food consumption is even worse than when COVID-19 first struck the country.** Insufficient food consumption had already spiked to 75 percent in August 2020, at the first peak of the pandemic. But when this couldn't seem to have gotten worse, a combination of drought, conflict, political instability, and the economic crisis collided to deepen the food security crisis. By August 2022, Afghanistan had topped the list of countries with insufficient food consumption. It has remained there since.

**More than half of the population has been regularly turning to coping strategies to get by for most of the past year.** This is over four times worse than in August 2021. Adults are now more likely to be sacrificing meals in order for children to eat, with six in ten households relying on this strategy (up from one in ten in August 2021).

**With incomes under threat, food is falling further out of reach.** The income situation has worsened for five months in a row. Now, over six in ten households are facing shrinking incomes. The deterioration of incomes has gradually stripped families of funds to spend on non-food necessities. People are now spending almost all of their income on food (92 percent) – a figure which has been gradually creeping higher since the start of 2022.

Certain households are facing far worse conditions.

**Hunger levels are not equal across different segments of society.** Female-headed households have been especially affected; 96 percent of female-headed households are struggling with insufficient food consumption, compared to 89 percent of male-headed households. This gap is wider than a year ago. Households with person/s with disabilities are also bearing disproportionate consequences.

**Income sources are also making a substantial difference on whether families go hungry.** Households that had no income to rely on, or which relied on non-agriculture wage labour or skilled labour were at a disadvantage, with 94 percent facing insufficient food consumption.

Without further action, food insecurity could still deepen.

**The consequences of the global food crisis and exorbitant food and fuel prices are already here.** While humanitarian food assistance has helped to stave off an even worse food security situation, this lifeline is under threat. Costs are rising. Humanitarian funding is shrinking. As a result, many agencies have already been forced to reprioritize their assistance, or increase cash transfer values to keep up with high inflation. These factors could combine with the winter ahead and recurrent droughts to deepen the food security crisis even further.

**Needs are outpacing funding. Action is needed now.**

3. See above, n 1



## Background and Methodology

WFP has been conducting monthly telephone surveys across all 34 provinces of Afghanistan for over two years to better understand the food security situation and underlying factors. This report refers to data collected in August 2020, and the months between August 2021 and August 2022 to provide comparisons across the years.

The methodology has remained consistent across rounds, with a few minor adjustments. Since 21 August 2021, panel surveys are conducted for 80 percent of respondents in each round. Results are weighted to ensure socio-demographic representativity. Due to this being a mobile survey, results reflect only households who own cell phones.<sup>4</sup>

The questionnaire was also updated in January 2022 to include questions on food expenditure, income sources, income changes, and remittances. In certain months, some of the breakdowns are indicative due to lower sample sizes.

### Sample population at a glance:

**MOST RECENT MONTH (AUG 2022)**

1,418 households surveyed



Male-headed households: 96%  
Female-headed households: 4%



Average household size:<sup>5</sup>  
10.6 members



Urban households: 54%  
Rural households: 46%



Households reporting having a member/s with disability: 20%



Level of education of the head of the household:

- Lower education: 44.5%
- Primary education: 17.5%
- Secondary or higher education: 35%
- Islamic school education: 4%



4. There were 22.7 million mobile cellular subscriptions in Afghanistan in 2020 ([World Bank](#)).

5. Average household size refers to the average number of people permanently (at least six months) living in each household.

# Food Consumption

## Hunger levels have persisted at alarming levels for month after month.<sup>6</sup>

For months on end, some nine in ten households have continued to face insufficient food consumption. In other words, the vast majority of people have continued to suffer from inadequate dietary diversity, food frequency, and food quality for an excessive length of time. Following a particularly steep hike after August 2021, the proportion has hovered near this unsustainable level for a full year, with little sign of relief.

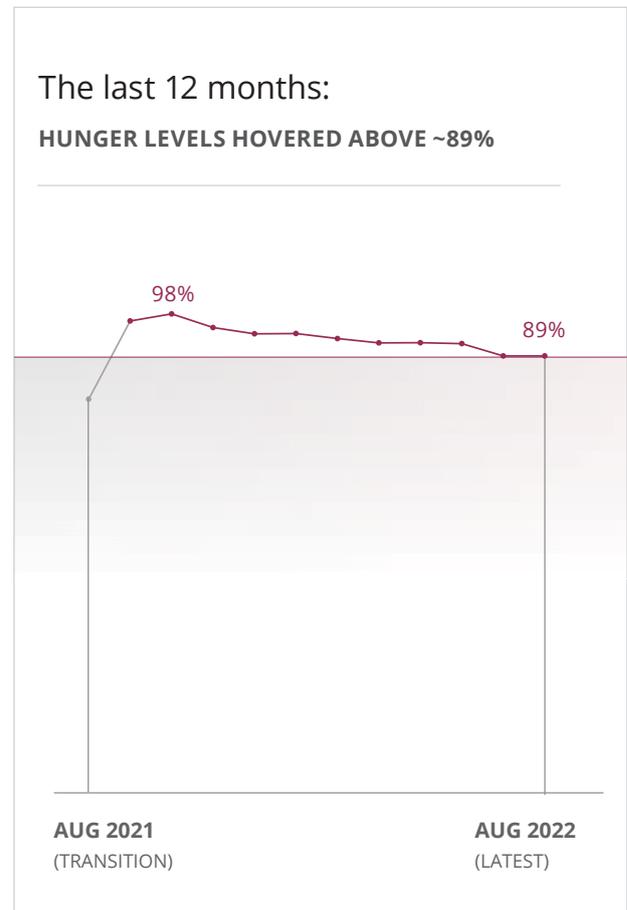
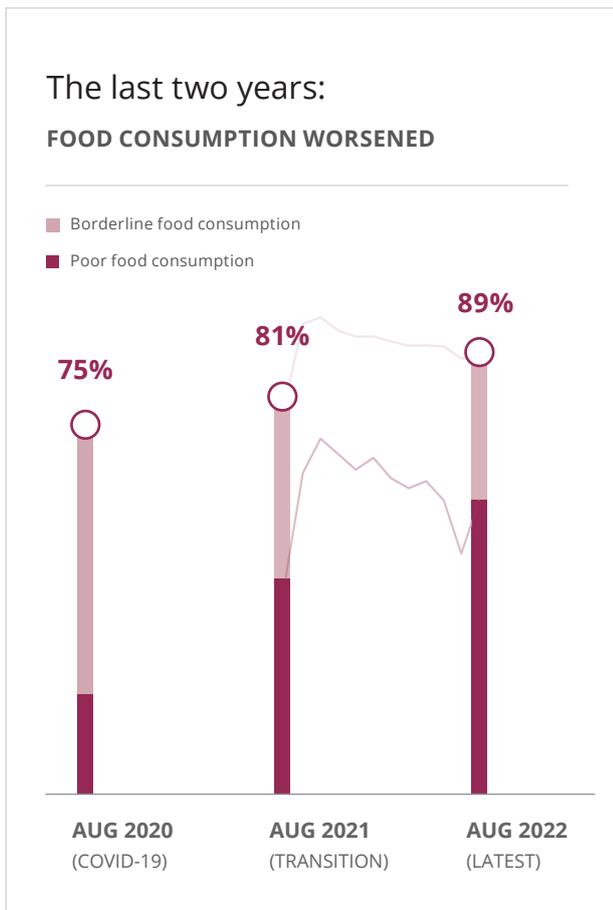
As a consequence, Afghanistan has consistently faced the highest prevalence of insufficient food consumption in the world.<sup>7</sup> The minor improvements in recent months, coinciding with the harvest season, should not undermine the fact that these hunger levels remain at a global high.

## Food consumption is even worse than when COVID-19 first struck the country.

Insufficient food consumption had already spiked to 75 percent in August 2020, following the first deadly peak of the pandemic. The impact on the population was pronounced, with a COVID-19 positivity rate of around 30 percent. Yet, hunger levels at that point were still low compared to what was to come.

Since then, new waves of people have fallen into hunger. Many of these have even fallen into the most severe category. The proportion of households facing poor food consumption has crept up by some 20 percentage points each year. Six in ten households are now at this most severe level, compared with two in ten households in August 2020.<sup>8</sup>

The most alarming levels were seen in November 2021, right before winter struck. At that time, almost all of the population faced insufficient food consumption. Now, as winter looms ahead, humanitarian agencies are mobilizing to preposition food before the upcoming snow blocks off roads. High costs and shrinking funding could collide with the impact of winter to wipe out any of the marginal gains made in recent months.

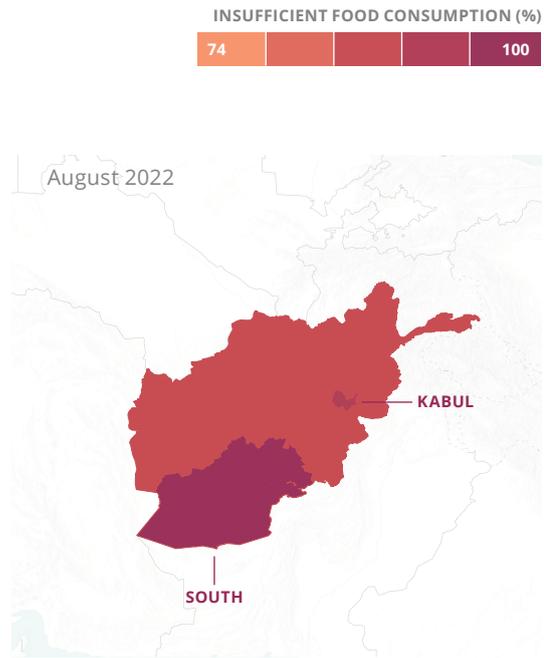
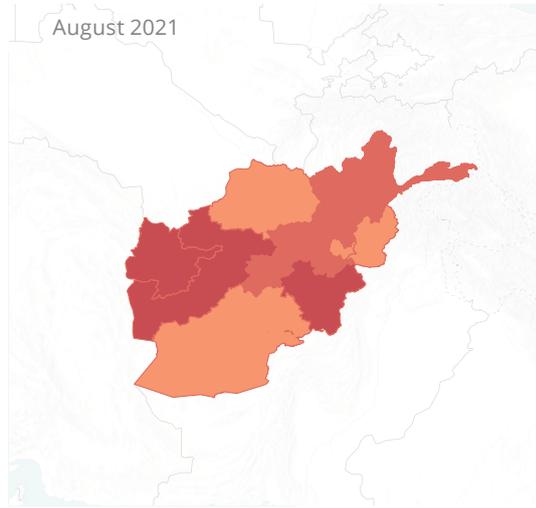


6. See above, n 1.

7. [WFP Hunger Map](#).

8. In August 2020, West and South regions were dropped due to an insufficient sample size.

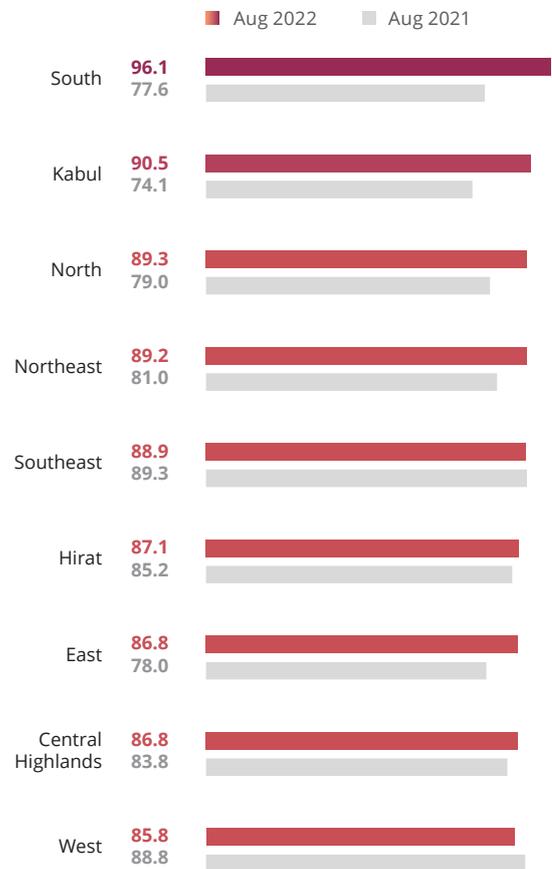
Food consumption **deteriorated** in nearly all regions.

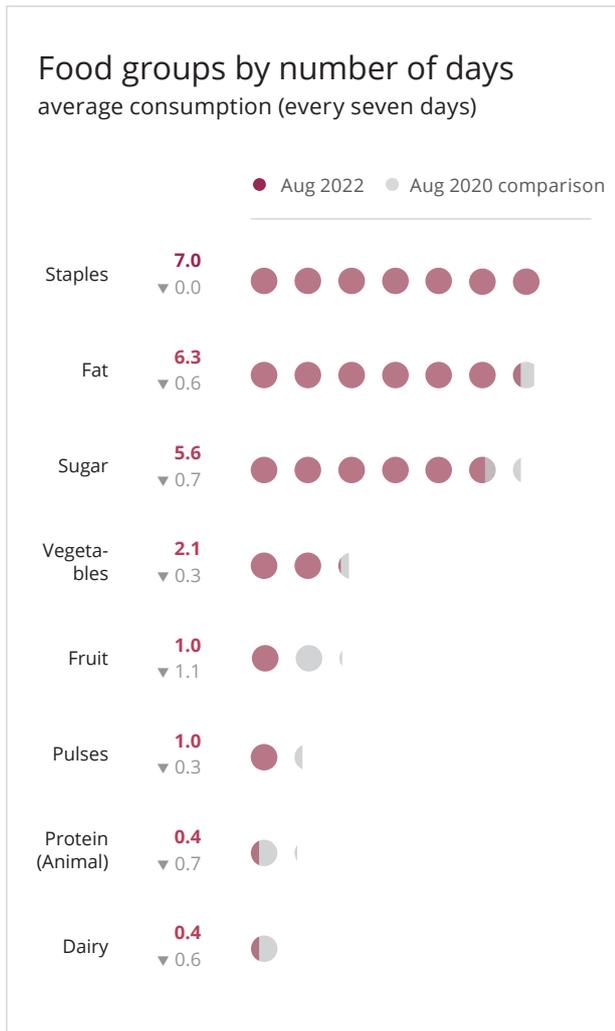


**Hunger has spread across the country.** Compared with August 2021, seven out of nine regions witnessed insufficient food consumption worsen. The steepest deterioration was seen in the South region and Kabul, by 19 and 16 percentage points respectively. While food consumption did not appear to worsen in West and Southeast regions, the majority of the past 11 months have been lower than in August 2021.

**All regions have at least 85 percent of people facing insufficient food consumption,** compared with six out of nine regions in August 2021. In many regions, these levels remained consistently high for month after month. In Kabul for example, where incomes have been particularly affected, it has been 11 months in a row that over 90 percent of people have been facing insufficient food consumption.

INSUFFICIENT FOOD CONSUMPTION, BY REGION (%)





## Dietary diversity has shrunk compared with 2020.

People are now eating less diverse diets. Almost all food groups saw a drop in consumption compared with two years ago. In particular, the consumption of animal protein and fruits has halved. Diets were already low two years ago, in August 2020. But while people were able to eat fruits at least twice a week in August 2020, people are now able to eat fruits only once a week, and protein once a week now.

This comes amid a steep escalation in prices for basic household food items. The sharpest year-on-year price increase was seen for wheat (over 40 percent), followed by high quality rice (33 percent), sugar (31 percent), and pulses (18 percent). In addition, diesel prices have drastically increased, driving transportation costs higher.<sup>9</sup>

These factors will continue to place diets at risk. The terms of trade for casual labour have deteriorated; in 2020, a labourer would have been able to purchase 3.3 kg of wheat flour against the daily wage. By 2021, this had dropped to 2.3 kg. By the fourth week of August 2022, this had dropped even further, to 1.3 kg.<sup>10</sup> With households already spending nearly all of their income on food, further erosion of purchasing power could impact diets and cut down on households' abilities to purchase more diverse food items.

9. WFP Market Monitor for August Week Four and World Bank Afghanistan Economic Monitor for September 2022.

10. Ibid.

# Underlying Vulnerabilities

## Income sources are making a dramatic difference on food security outcomes.

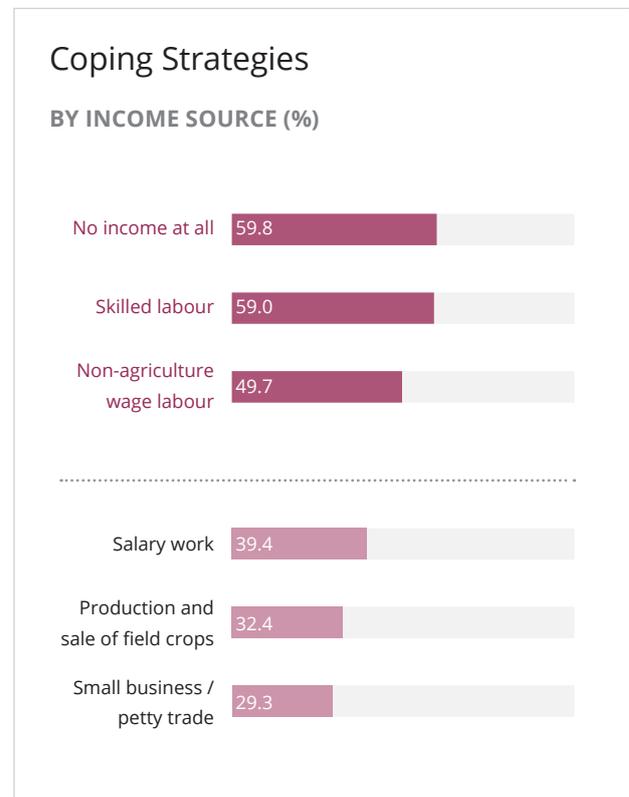
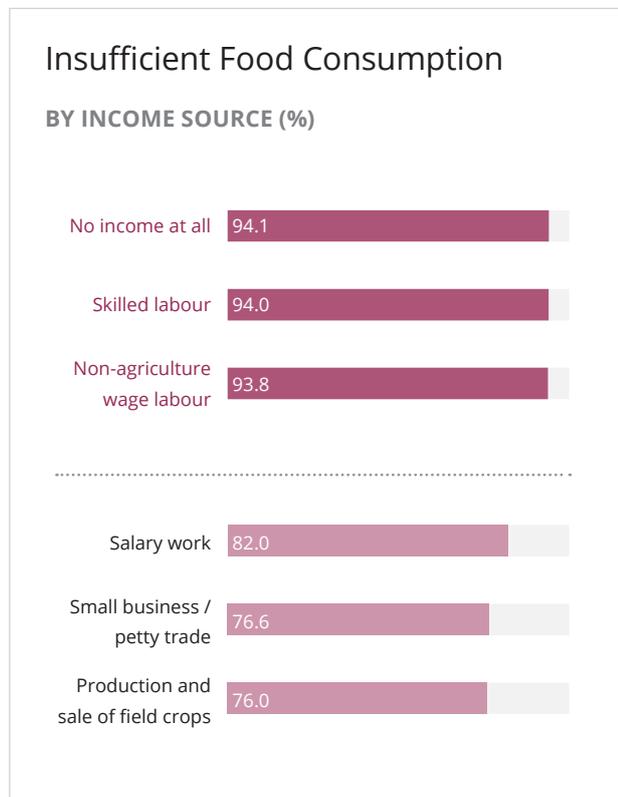
**Hunger levels varied greatly depending on income sources.** Households which had no income to rely on, or which relied on non-agriculture wage labour, were at a disadvantage, with 94 percent facing insufficient food consumption.

**Notably, households relying on skilled labour as their income source had equally poor food consumption levels** (94 percent facing insufficient food consumption). People impacted under this category generally include plumbers, doctors, surgeons, tailors, teachers, and public sector workers. These findings coincide with month after month of decreasing incomes and concerns

around job losses. While the salaries of those relying on skilled labour might have traditionally been in the higher brackets, many of these jobs have been shaken by the crisis; the International Labour Organization estimated that over a million men and women in public administration and social services had lost their jobs in the third quarter of 2021.<sup>11</sup>

**In comparison, households with salaried work, small businesses, or work in agriculture, had relatively better food consumption,** with about 82 percent or fewer facing insufficient food consumption. This could be due to having a more stable income stream, or having more food self-sufficiency.

**There was a similar story for coping strategies.** Households which had no income to rely on, or which relied on non-agriculture wage labour or skilled labour were much more likely to rely on crisis-coping strategies to get by. This was at about 60 percent for those with no income or those working as wage labourers, and 50 percent for those working as skilled labourers. In comparison, this was at 39, 32, and 29 percent for salaried workers, agriculture workers, and small business owners respectively.



11. International Labour Organization, Employment prospects in Afghanistan: A rapid impact assessment, January 2022

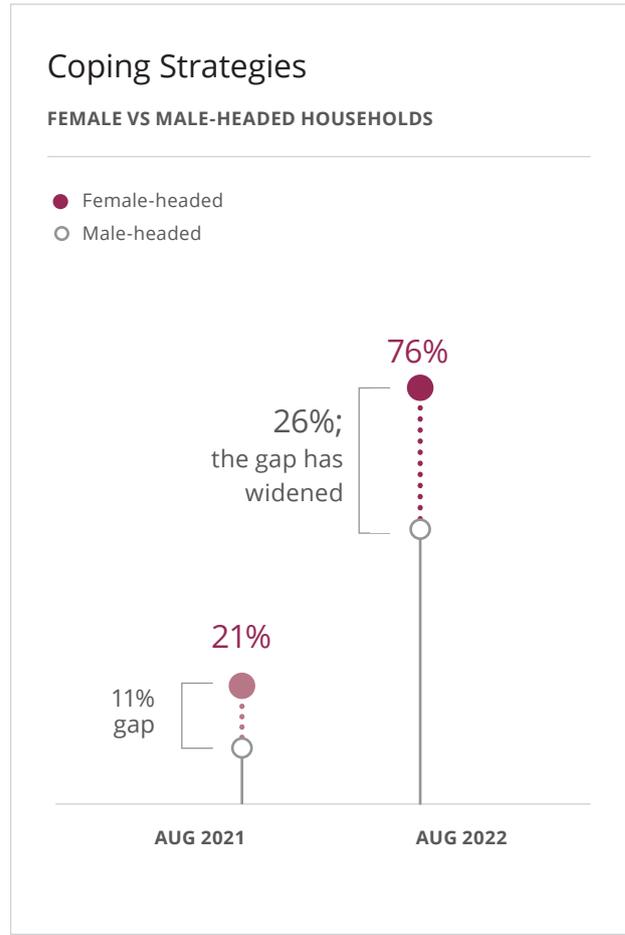
## Female-headed households face disproportionate hunger levels.<sup>12</sup>

The deterioration of the situation has especially affected female-headed households; 96 percent of female-headed households are struggling with insufficient food consumption, compared to 89 percent of male-headed households.

**This disparity persisted throughout the months;** in December 2021, nearly 100 percent of female-headed households were facing insufficient food consumption, which came at 5 percentage points higher than male-headed households.

**These households have also been forced to resort to coping strategies at far higher rates** — seven in ten female-headed households are using coping strategies to get by, compared to half of households headed by men. Compared to August 2021, the gap has widened from 11 percentage points to 26 percentage points.

**In August 2022, female-headed households were utilizing four out of the five coping strategies to get by,** compared to 3.4 in other households. In eight out of ten of these households, adults were sacrificing food so that children could eat, compared to six in ten in other households.



## Households with persons with disabilities are struggling more.

Households with person/s with disabilities (PWD) remain disproportionately impacted, with far more facing the most severe levels of food consumption; 70 percent are facing poor food consumption compared to 57 percent in other households.

**More than half of households with PWD (57 percent) are turning to drastic measures** to put food on the table – 7 percentage points higher than other households (50 percent). In recent months, there has been an improvement for these households, but the gap remains.



12. Findings for female-headed households may be indicative due to smaller sample sizes.

# Coping Strategies

People have been turning to drastic measures to put food on the table.<sup>13</sup>

More than half of the population has been regularly relying on coping strategies to get by for most of the past year - such as borrowing food, reducing the number of meals eaten, and sacrificing the meals of adults so that children can eat.<sup>14</sup>

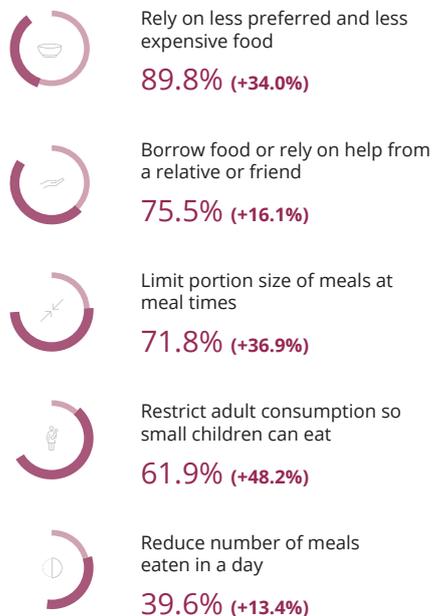
This was at its worst in February, when nearly seven in ten households were regularly turning to these measures. While there was a gradual declining trend from February to July 2022, this was broken in August 2022, when the use of these measures increased slightly to 51 percent of households.

Most commonly, households have been choosing less expensive or less preferred food; 90 percent of households use this strategy, at an average of 4.4 days in the past 7 days. In addition, adults are now more likely to be sacrificing meals in order for children to eat, with six in ten households relying on this strategy (up from one in ten in August 2021).

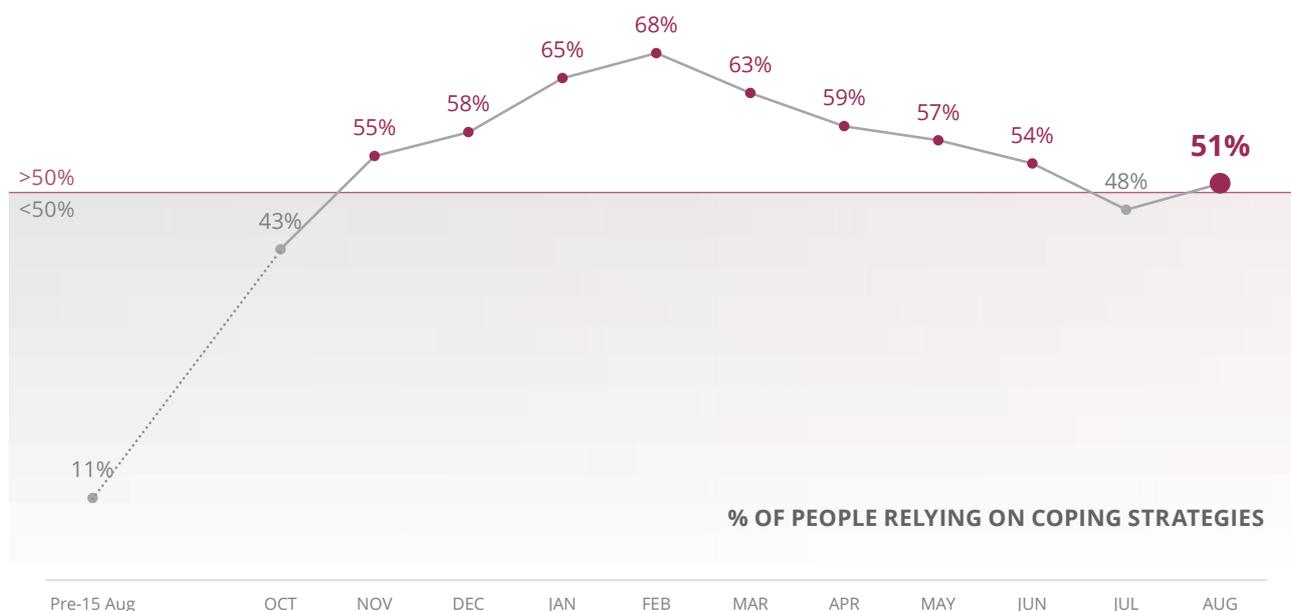
## Coping Strategies

### ONE YEAR COMPARISON

■ Additional % by Aug 2022    ■ % in Aug 2021



Proportion of households which have used the following strategies at least once in the past seven days



13. Food-based coping strategies, using the consumption-based reduced coping strategy index.

14. People are using, on average, 3.4 strategies per week. Each strategy is being used one to four times per week.

## Incomes and Food Expenditure

### With incomes under threat, food is falling further out of reach

The income situation has worsened for five months in a row. Now, over six in ten households are facing shrinking incomes. While this might appear to be an improvement against January 2022 (93 percent), the consecutive months of cumulative income losses are highly unsustainable. In every single month of 2022,<sup>15</sup> the proportion of people with dropping incomes has outnumbered those with increasing incomes.

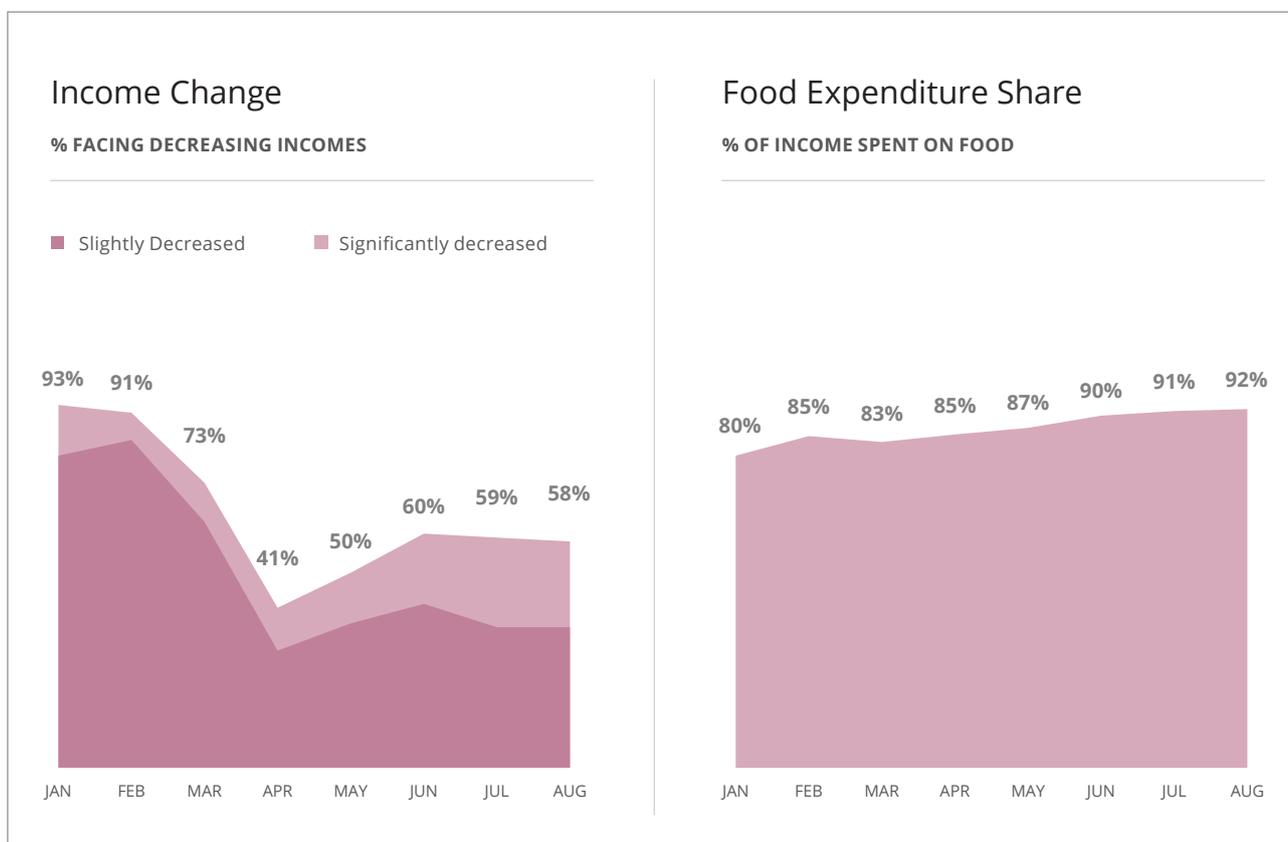
This decrease in incomes is cutting across the divides of rural and urban areas, education levels,<sup>16</sup> and households with PWD/s. However, female-headed households remain disproportionately impacted, with 68 percent facing decreasing incomes, compared to 57 percent of male-headed households.

### People are spending most of their little remaining income on food.

The deterioration of incomes has gradually stripped people of funds to spend on non-food necessities. People are now spending 92 percent of their income on food on average – a figure which has been gradually creeping higher since the start of 2022.<sup>17</sup>

The high expenditure is especially pronounced in the Central Highland and Northern provinces, where people are spending even more of their income on food (over 94 percent), followed by the North East (93 percent), and the South (92 percent). Female-headed households are also struggling with a higher food expenditure share, in line with the finding that they have been more likely to be facing income losses. On average, female-headed households have less than 5 percent of their income to spend on other non-food necessities.

The rise in food expenditure share comes amid skyrocketing food and fuel prices. By the end of August, there had been substantial year-on-year price spikes for diesel (55 percent), and key commodities like wheat flour (by over 40 percent), sugar (31 percent), and pulses (18 percent).<sup>18</sup> These prices could push food expenditure even higher.



15. This is the earliest month for this data point, as this new question was only introduced to the questionnaire in January 2022.

16. This refers to the education level of the head of household.

17. Above, n 15.

18. [WFP Market Monitor for August Week Four](#), and [World Bank Afghanistan Economic Monitor for September 2022](#).

# Worries and Access

## Anxieties about job losses and food have been relentless

The same three worries have remained at the forefront of people’s minds for the past five months. The top concern - for nearly half of the population - is job losses (45 percent in August), followed by food shortages (24 percent) and increases in food prices (11 percent).

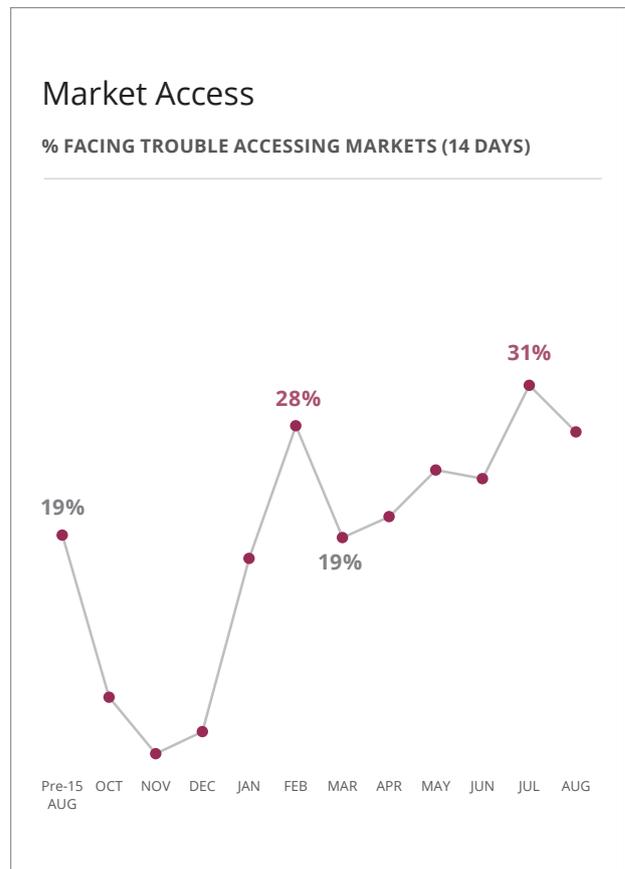
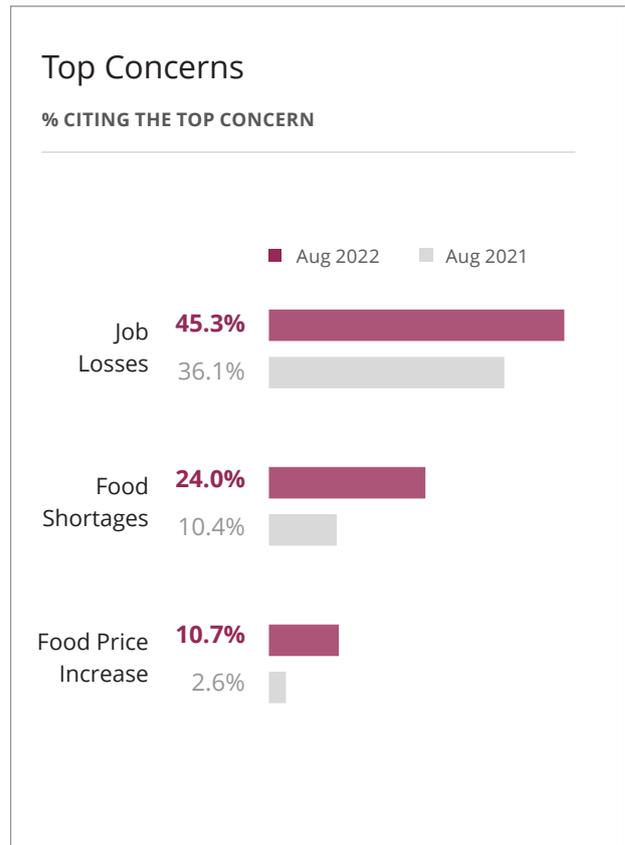
Concerns about job losses are not new; this has been the top concern since August 2020 (at 54 percent). However, concerns about food shortages have more than doubled since August 2020 and 2021, with 24 percent of households choosing this as their top concern in August 2022. This doubling occurred very suddenly in early 2022, likely reflecting the ripple effects of the crisis in Ukraine on the world.

## Market access has remained volatile across the past 12 months

At its worst, nearly one-third of people faced issues accessing markets in July, however, this has fluctuated across the months.

Long distances to markets has been the most commonly cited reason for these access issues (59 percent in August). However, in the most recent month, more people cited travel restrictions as the main reason – an increase from 5 percent in July to 30 percent in August.

These troubles in accessing markets varied across different groups. Households with person/s with disabilities faced more trouble with market access (32 percent) compared to others (26 percent). As for women-headed households, 40 percent are unable to access a market, compared to households headed by men at 27 percent. In the East and Central Highland regions, this was even higher at 37 percent and 32 percent respectively.



## Outlook and Response

**The world is facing an unprecedented global food crisis.** Conflict, COVID-19, the climate crisis, and rising costs have combined in 2022 to drive food insecurity to unprecedented levels. The crisis is escalating as the war in Ukraine drives up the costs of food, fuel, and fertilizers. Globally, costs are also at an all-time high: WFP's global operating costs are US\$73.6 million above their 2019 average – a staggering 44 percent rise.

**The ripple effects have already reached Afghanistan.**

Food and fuel prices are already at exorbitant prices. Meanwhile, funding is limited. While humanitarian food assistance has helped to keep food security from deteriorating even further, this is under threat. Agencies like WFP have already been forced to reprioritize their assistance, or to increase cash transfer values to keep up with high inflation. The cost of WFP's food basket is already over 50 percent higher than in the previous year.

**The outlook for the upcoming winter remains bleak.**

Humanitarian agencies still require further funding to preposition enough food before the snow blocks off roads. At the same time, food and fuel prices could still increase. Recurrent drought and erratic climatic shocks are expected to result in a below-average harvest.<sup>19</sup> Without continued funding and support, humanitarian agencies will be limited in their ability to reach vulnerable people with lifesaving assistance.

**The months of sustained hunger must be brought to an end, before the situation worsens further yet.**



**LEARN MORE**

about WFP's ongoing response here.



19. Afghanistan Key Message Update: Rainfed crops and pasture significantly impacted by drought in north and northeast, May 2022, [FEWS NET](#)

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21 AUG 2021  
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NOV 2021



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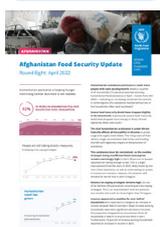
FEB 2022



MAR 2022



APR 2022



MAY 2022



JUN 2022



JUL 2022



**Full  
collection**





#### **Acknowledgements**

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**World Food Programme**

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