



APRIL - MAY 2021



How are relief beneficiaries in Myanmar faring since the start of the crisis?

From Post-distribution Monitoring in Chin, Kachin, Central/Northern Rakhine, and Shan

KEY MESSAGES

In April 2021, WFP reached 350,000 vulnerable households affected by conflicts in border areas with food or cash assistance. In April-May 2021, WFP interviewed over 1,600 of them to find out about their food security situation and compared the results with previous assessments conducted before the start of the current political crisis.

- > **FOOD CONSUMPTION** Overall, despite receiving assistance, **household food security of WFP's beneficiaries in border areas has deteriorated** as compared to the pre-crisis period in most places, with almost half of beneficiary households having unacceptable food consumption in Chin and Shan, and deterioration most notable in Central Rakhine and Kachin.
- > **INCOME / LIVELIHOODS** Households are **clearly facing a harder time meeting their food needs**, as a majority (63%) reported a reduction in income or no income at all and, the proportion of households with debt increased to 66% as compared to pre-crisis (61%). Among those who saw a decrease in income, a majority (81%) experienced a decrease of over 25%. Credit was overwhelmingly used to buy food (64% of households) and cover health expenses (23%).
- > **COPING** Households have to **rely on more extensive use of negative coping strategies** with a higher proportion (29%) of households borrowing food compared to pre-crisis (22%) and more than half of beneficiary households relying on less preferred/expensive food, while 13% restrict adults' consumption for children, and 13% limit their portion size. The proportion of households using at least two of the five consumption-based coping strategies also increased to 30%, compared to 25% pre-crisis.
- > **FOOD EXPENDITURE** Households are **spending 73% of total household expenditure on food**. It is also worth noting that 33% of beneficiary households reduced expenditure on health or education over the last 30 days to meet their food needs.
- > **RURAL/URBAN** Households in rural and urban areas are facing a similar level of food insecurity although a **higher share of urban households is experiencing more severe hardship**. Almost twice as many urban households have poor food consumption, and twice as many of them begged or sold household assets or goods over the last 30 days to meet their food needs. A drop in income is found to be more severe for those in urban areas.

Recommendations

Based on the PDM findings, it is recommended that WFP:



Continue assistance to conflict-affected beneficiaries in border states, while considering adjustments to the current assistance value to compensate for higher food prices and the loss of income and livelihood opportunities in the different areas of interventions;



Increase livelihoods support for households who have lost income earning opportunities in the last few months;



Keep the distribution schedule regular to allow beneficiary households to plan the use of assistance accordingly;



Increase monitoring frequency to monthly (with a smaller sample of households) to enable near-real time monitoring of changes in food consumption, coping strategies and livelihood opportunities;



Conduct a specific study to further understand the levels of household debt.



A beneficiary receiving relief assistance from WFP checks his ration in Rakhine State.

©WFP / Fumito Morinaga

OVERVIEW OF ASSISTANCE AND SURVEY APPROACH

Relief assistance, with the purpose of life-saving and emergency assistance in the form of in-kind food and/or cash, has been provided to internally displaced persons (IDPs) or vulnerable persons affected by conflicts in Chin, Kachin, Rakhine, and Shan states of Myanmar since 2011. WFP has been continuing in-kind food and cash assistance amidst the recent crisis and **reached 350,000 people** in border areas in the past month.

WFP interviewed 1,616 of the beneficiary households to assess their food security situation

since the start of the crisis. The post-distribution monitoring (PDM) survey was conducted remotely via live calls with 84, 376, 539, 357, and 260 households interviewed from **Chin, Kachin, Central Rakhine, Northern Rakhine, and Shan states** respectively.

This round of PDM data is compared with four previous rounds – 2019 Round 3 and 2020 Rounds 1-3; results from Chin in 2021 Round 1 and Shan in 2020 Rounds 1 and 2 are only indicative. More details on the survey approach and limitations are provided in the last page.

FINDINGS

Household demographics

Around 20% of beneficiary households are found to be female-headed, though this proportion climbs to 42% and 33% in Kachin and Shan respectively. The overall average household size is six. Overall, 14% of households are found to have at least one member of a person with a disability (PwD), though the proportion of households with PwD varies across states reaching 25% in Kachin and 23% in Shan. 60% of beneficiary households have at least one child under five years old. The proportion differs by region, as high as 76% in Northern Rakhine and as low as 36% in Kachin.

Food security

Household food consumption has deteriorated compared to the pre-crisis period in most places, with almost half of beneficiary households having unacceptable food consumption in Shan and Chin, the latter seeing a major increase in household with 6.3% reporting poor food consumption up from 1.4% in pre-crisis. Beneficiary households in Central Rakhine and Kachin have seen a major increase in their food insecurity reaching respectively 26% (up from 7%) and 25% (up from 16%); most noticeable is the drastic increase in severe food insecurity (poor food consumption) in Kachin at 12% when no households were in that category pre-crisis.

Household food consumption by State Relief beneficiaries in border states in Myanmar



Beneficiary households appear to have a **harder time meeting household food needs after the crisis**, with a higher proportion of households having to rely increasingly on negative coping strategies to meet their food needs. **Borrowing food has become more common** as compared to last year with 29% of beneficiary households having to borrow food in April/ May 2021 up from 22% in pre-crisis. In addition, 53% of them are found to rely on less preferred and less expensive food, 13% of them restrict adults' consumption for children, and 13% limit their portion size.

Beneficiaries in Shan appear to be facing the most dire situation to meet their food needs with 30% borrowing food (up from 9%) and 63% relying on less preferred/ expensive food (up from 32%) as compared to pre-crisis. Central Rakhine also sees a jump in beneficiaries having to borrow food (36%, up from 24%).

The data collection period overlapped with Ramadan, which might have inflated household food consumption in both Central and Northern Rakhine.

Households in rural and urban areas are facing a similar level of food insecurity although a higher share of urban households is experiencing more severe hardship. In proportion, almost twice as many urban households have poor food consumption, and twice as many begged or sold household assets or goods over the last 30 days to meet their food needs.

Income/livelihoods

Only one person per household earns an income on average, similar to before the crisis. When asked about a primary source of income, 37% of beneficiary households are found to be non-agricultural day labourers, followed by 15% fully relying on WFP and other external assistance. **Reliance on external assistance is found to be most severe** for those in Kachin and Shan where 35% of beneficiaries' primary source of income is external assistance.

"Nowadays, it is difficult to earn an income, so they are saving and eating what they have saved in the rainy season."

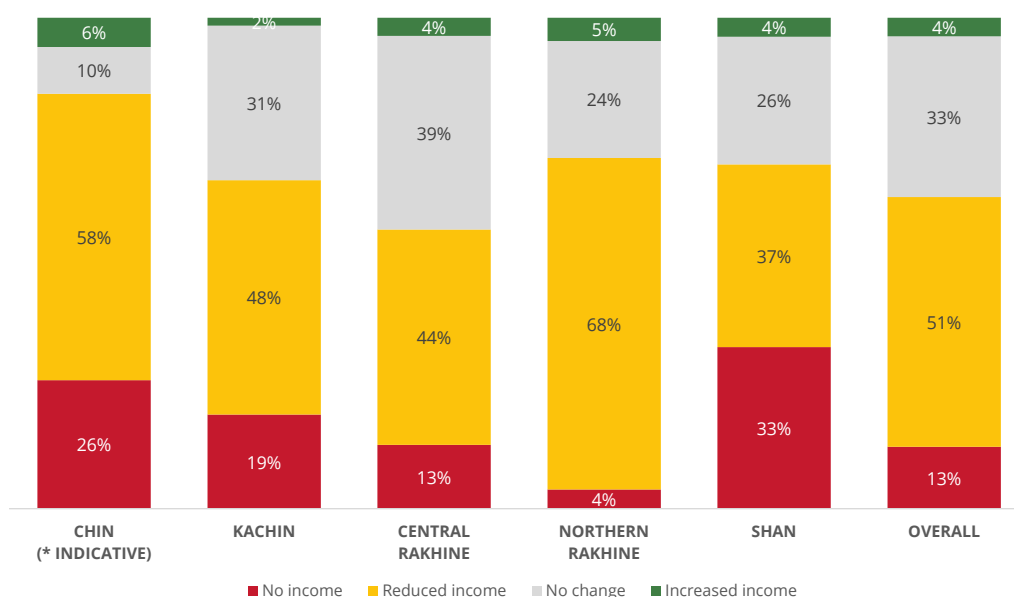
a respondent from Kachin

64% of our beneficiary households saw a reduction in income or had no income over the past 30 days as compared to pre-crisis. Of those reporting a

reduction, 81% of beneficiary households reported a drop of income of over 25%, while 29% reported a drop of over 50%. Notably, over 60% of those whose primary income source is agricultural and non-agricultural wage, and those who primarily engage in fishing, sale of animals, informal trades/street sales, and small-scale trade and commercial businesses, and those who rely on migrant remittances experienced a reduction in income. **The drop in income is more pronounced among beneficiary households in urban areas**, with 88% of those who saw a reduction in income reporting a drop over 25% as compared to 77% in rural areas.

Income change in the last 30 days, April - May 2021

Relief beneficiaries in border states in Myanmar



Shan state is especially vulnerable with almost 33% of beneficiary households with no income and another 37% having experienced a reduction in income, some mentioning inability to no longer forage or accessing forests. In Northern Rakhine, the majority (68%) experienced a reduction in income over the last 30 days or had no income (4%). In Northern Rakhine, many report no longer having access to fishing, forest, bamboo-cutting, which is a major seasonal livelihood opportunity. Some even mentioned rebel groups asking for illegal

“My main work is bamboo cutting and this year [it] is not regular; some times [I] go or sometimes [I] can’t. For that my income is very less [due to] this crisis.”

a respondent from Northern Rakhine

taxation to access the forest. Beneficiaries in Chin appear to be in a dire situation with 84% experiencing income reduction or having no income, though this is only indicative. Among those who saw a decrease in income, a majority (81%) experienced a decrease in income of over 25%.

Average monthly household income during the last 30 days is found to be 120,558 MMK (78 USD), while average monthly expenditure is reported to be higher at 136,648 (88 USD). The average food expenditure share is found to be 73%, indicating **high vulnerability to income change and price volatility**. Food expenditure share varies between 80% in Kachin to 62% in Northern Rakhine.

The impact of the crisis on income and access to livelihood opportunities has affected the ability of households to meet their essential needs. Overall, the proportion of beneficiary households who had to rely on crisis or emergency level coping strategies has doubled

to 42% up from 23% in pre-crisis period. Not surprisingly, half of households had to purchase food on credit or borrow food, and close to half had to borrow cash to meet their needs. The proportion of households with debt increased from 61% to 66% from Quarter 4 last year to April-May this year. **The main reason for taking debt is to buy food (64%) and to cover health expenses (23%)**. It is also worth noting that 33% of beneficiary households reduced expenditure on health or education over the last 30 days to meet their food needs.

Urban beneficiary households rely more than rural households on credit for food (57% vs. 47%) and selling household goods and assets 28% vs. 15%).

The responses to the open-ended question regarding the most significant change in households’ food security and livelihoods corroborate quantitative findings. Many mention high food prices, movement restrictions, and difficult access to markets as some of the major challenges in household food security and livelihoods since the start of the crisis.

“[Earning a] livelihood [is] more difficult than before and my son [is] afraid to go outside if the arm[ed] conflict happened in the areas”

a respondent from Shan



WFP consults with conflict-affected beneficiaries to understand more about their concerns and needs in Rakhine State.

©WFP / Fumito Morinaga

ANNEX — detailed notes on survey methodology

Number of households surveyed by Round and Region

| ROUND | PERIOD | CHIN | KACHIN | CENTRAL RAKHINE | NORTHERN RAKHINE | SHAN | TOTAL |
|----------------|----------------|------------|--------------|-----------------|------------------|--------------|--------------|
| 2019 R3 | Nov-Dec 2019 | 0 | 3,601 | 0 | 0 | 766 | 4,367 |
| 2020 R1 | Mar-June 2020 | 0 | 470 | 380 | 287 | 55* | 1,192 |
| 2020 R2 | June-July 2020 | 0 | 337 | 197 | 0 | 43* | 577 |
| 2020 R3 | Oct-Dec 2020 | 213 | 372 | 300 | 311 | 251 | 1,447 |
| 2021 R1 | April-May 2021 | 84* | 376 | 539 | 357 | 260 | 1,616 |
| TOTAL | | 297 | 5,156 | 1,416 | 955 | 1,375 | 9,199 |

- » **Remote monitoring:** The post-distribution monitoring (PDM) survey was conducted remotely via 1,616 live calls interviewing households in five regions: Chin (84 calls), Kachin (376), Central Rakhine (539), Northern Rakhine (357), and Shan (260).
- » **Rounds:** This round of PDM data is compared with four previous rounds – 2019 Round 3 and 2020 Rounds 1-3. Round 1 or 2 (April-July) from 2020 serves as a comparison point of similar period last year; Round 3 2020 (October-December) being the most recent pre-crisis data.
- » **Small sample sizes:** (*) The results from Chin in 2021 Round 1 and Shan in 2020 Rounds 1 and 2 are only indicative due to insufficient sample sizes.
- » **PDM Timing:** The PDM is typically conducted 2-3 weeks after distributions (i) to understand the effectiveness of the assistance provided and (ii) to identify areas of programmatic improvement including issues related to protection, accountability to affected populations. However, this PDM is conducted right after distributions in some areas or right before the upcoming distributions in some others, due to urgent data needs and fluctuating distribution schedule.
- » **Selection bias:** Given that this PDM is conducted remotely, selection bias of including only those who has access to phones might affect the PDM findings as well as comparison against the face-to-face 2019 R3 PDM. Unstable phone connectivity might also exacerbate selection bias.
- » **Thingyan 2020:** For the 2020 R1 round, data collection did not overlap with the Thingyan holidays except for some cases in Kachin. Data collection fully overlapped with Ramadan for Central Rakhine, while it did not for Northern Rakhine. Both the Thingyan holidays and Ramadan could inflate household food consumption.
- » **Thingyan 2021:** For the 2021 R1 round, data collection did not overlap with the Thingyan holidays except for Northern Rakhine where one-third of the surveys covered household food consumption during the Thingyan holidays. Data collection fully overlapped with Ramadan for Central and Northern Rakhine.
- » **Rural/Urban:** The analysis comparing results from urban areas to rural areas is only indicative as this is based on two-thirds of data collected.

Cover photo: ©WFP / Laltnan Sanga

Caption: In Rakhine State, women labourers show strength and resilience playing a critical part of WFP food distributions.