



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES



FOOD SECURITY ASSESSMENT COLOMBIAN POPULATION

2023

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY
WFP COLOMBIA, FEBRUARY

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Between June and November 2022, the World Food Programme (WFP), conducted two Food Security assessments, one focused on the migrant population and the other on the Colombian population. **This summary presents the main findings of the assessment for the Colombian population**, whose objective was to analyse the food security situation at the national level. For this purpose, information was collected in 29 departments and 118 municipalities¹. The full report will be available in March 2023.

1. HOW MANY PEOPLE ARE FOOD INSECURE?

15,5 
MILLION

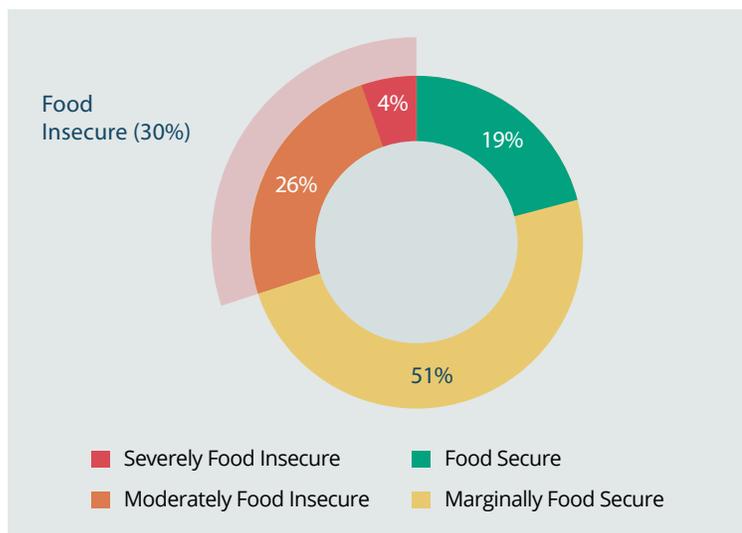
**30% OF THE COLOMBIAN POPULATION IS
MODERATELY AND SEVERELY FOOD INSECURE.**

Food insecure households are unable to access food in a sufficient manner and have difficulty meeting their basic needs, they must resort to unsustainable consumption strategies and face food shortages, hunger, and malnutrition.

Of the 15.5 million Colombians who are food insecure, 2.1 million are severely food insecure and 13.4 million are moderately food insecure. Severely food insecure households have extreme gaps in food consumption and have depleted their livelihoods, while moderately food insecure households have inadequate

food consumption and must adopt survival coping strategies, such as selling their assets to cover their basic needs. Both groups are forced to adopt irreversible coping strategies, with different levels of severity.

Figure 1: Percentage (%) of Food Security Levels



Approximately half of the Colombian population is marginally food secure (see figure 1), which means that their situation could deteriorate if there is no improvement in conjunctural factors (e.g inflation) in the short term.

In comparison to the 2015 ENSIN² analysis, there is evidence of a **significant deterioration** in food security. While the food security indicator of the 2015 ENSIN - constructed mainly by coping strategies - revealed that 54% of households were food insecure, in this study, 67% of households had to adopt such strategies.

1. Phase I of the assessment took place between June and August 2022 and targeted Venezuelan migrants and host communities. Between October and November 2022, WFP completed the collection of information with a total of 8,232 households surveyed, 29 departments and 118 municipalities. Additionally, 31 focus group discussions were conducted in 11 departments and 26 interviews with key stakeholders in the territory.

2. The National Nutritional Situation Survey - ENSIN 2015 was based on the Latin American and Caribbean Food Security Scale (ELCSA).

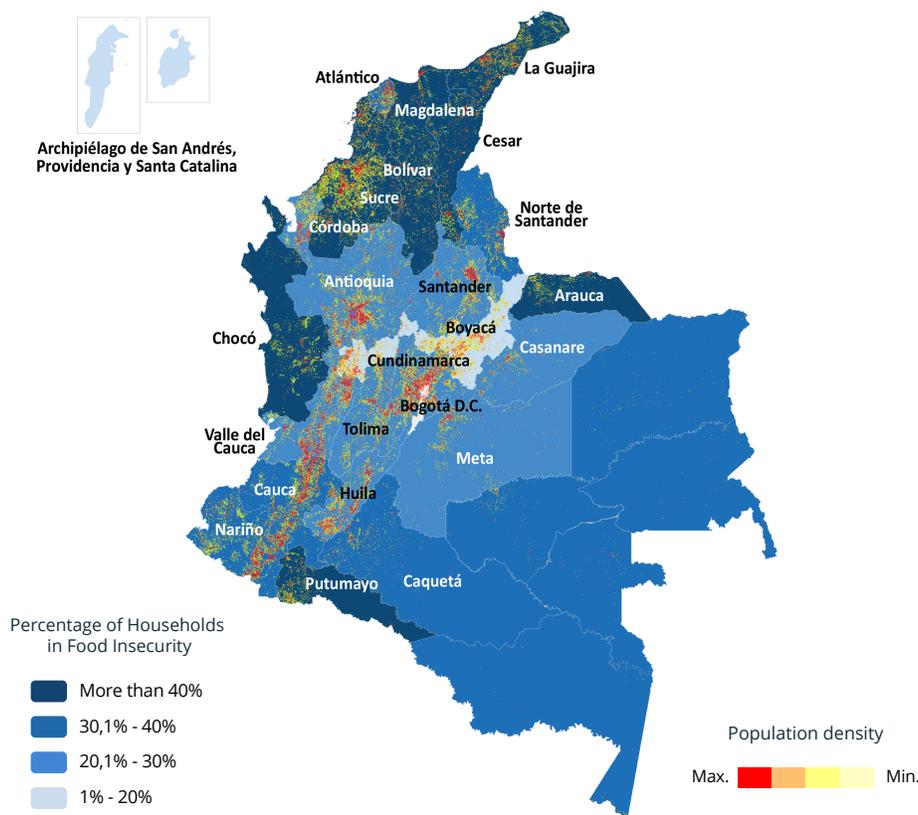
2. WHERE ARE THE FOOD INSECURE?

Due to the combination of structural and conjunctural factors, food insecurity may present different dynamics in the country's departments. Some areas present multiple affectations (including natural disasters and climate affectations, violence and conflict, socio-economic impact of the crisis in Ukraine). The departments with the highest prevalence of food insecurity are concentrated on the Atlantic Coast, the most affected being **Córdoba (70%), Sucre (63%), Cesar (55%), Bolívar (51%) and La Guajira (50%)**. Furthermore, departments such as **Arauca (62%), Putumayo (48%), Chocó (45%) and Norte de Santander (40%)** also have high rates of food insecurity.

According to the last national survey of the nutritional situation (ENSIN2015), some of these departments already had the highest figures of food insecurity, particularly in Chocó, Sucre, La Guajira, and Putumayo. The current assessment shows a change in the ranking of the most affected departments with Córdoba and Cesar standing out for their high prevalence of food insecurity.

On the other hand, it is important to highlight that in absolute terms, **the departments with the greatest number of food insecure people are Antioquia (1.7 million), Córdoba (1.3 million), and the Capital District of Bogotá (1.5 million)**.

Map 1: Food Security Levels by Department



The food insecurity map (see map 1) illustrates the prevalence of food insecurity and population concentration. The data represented in the map are in line with the food insecurity index developed by the National Planning Department (DNP)³, and provides complementary information through indicators of economic access to food

3. DNP, Base of the National Development Plan, version February 2023, pag. 103. Map of Food Insecurity Index.

Food insecurity is not only a rural phenomenon; although the prevalence of food insecurity is the same in urban and rural areas (30% respectively), **the highest number of people affected are concentrated in urban areas** (see table 1).

Table 1: Proportion of Food Insecurity (%) and Absolute Numbers by Main City

| CITY | % FOOD INSECURITY | NUMBER OF FOOD INSECURE PEOPLE |
|--------------|-------------------|--------------------------------|
| Bogotá | 19% | 1,495,504 |
| Medellín | 25% | 642,582 |
| Cali | 22% | 491,548 |
| Cartagena | 45% | 420,913 |
| Barranquilla | 25% | 327,964 |

3. FOOD INSECURITY DRIVERS

Food insecurity in Colombia is explained by different structural and conjunctural factors that generate multiple effects on the population, increasing their vulnerability.

3.1. STRUCTURAL FACTORS



Monetary Poverty

Food insecurity is highly correlated with monetary poverty, which in 2021 stood at 39.3%, while extreme monetary poverty was at 12.2%⁴. This is a consequence of the of the COVID-19 pandemic, which implied a setback in the progress the country had made, in terms of poverty reduction, until 2019. At the territorial level, the highest rates of monetary poverty are found in **La Guajira (67.4%), Chocó (63.4%), Magdalena (61.1%), Córdoba (58.6%) and Cauca (58.3%)**, departments that also have high levels of food insecurity.



Unemployment

A second factor that impacts the economic situation of households and, therefore, food security, is the unemployment rate, which although reduced in 2022 compared to the previous two years, is still close to 10%⁵. Between August and October 2022, the cities with the highest unemployment rates were **Quibdó (24.4%), Ibagué (17.5%), Riohacha (16.7%), Valledupar (16%) and Montería (14.4%)**.



Informality

The unemployment rate is linked to the ratio of labour informality, which for the same period reached levels close to 58%. However, there are cities with much higher rates, such as, **Valledupar, Sincelejo, and Cúcuta (all at 67%), Santa Marta (65%), and Montería (63%)**, all of which are capital cities of the departments with high levels of food insecurity.



Violence, conflict, and displacement

Between 2021 and 2022, there was a 56% increase in the total number of victims of confinement and a 12% rise in the number of victims of mass displacement⁶ adding more people to Colombia's 5.2 million internally displaced people – the fourth largest in the world. In several parts of the country, non-state armed groups (NSAGs) are expanding their territorial control, subjecting local communities to conditions that make it difficult for them to ensure their food security.

4. Poverty and Living Conditions <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/pobreza-y-condiciones-de-vida>

5. DANE Large Integrated Household Survey (GEIH) 2022.

6. OCHA. 2022. Colombia: Impact and Humanitarian Trends between January and October 2022. <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/>

3.2. CONJUNCTURAL FACTORS

 Effects of the crisis in Ukraine
A report by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), released in December 2022 jointly with WFP and the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO), revealed that between 2019 and 2021, **Latin America experienced the largest increase in the prevalence of food insecurity compared to other regions of the world** rising from 31.7% to 40.6%.

Accordingly to the report, the situation remains critical due to several factors triggered by the war in Ukraine, including **high levels of inflation, rising fertilizer, and food costs, against a backdrop of the region's dependence on food imports**. More than 30% of Colombia's fertilizers are imported from Russia and the country has faced shortages of agricultural inputs as a result of this conflict⁷. Data from FAO show that in Colombia during 2022, 71% of agricultural growers experienced difficulties in their production, with access to fertilizers being one of the main reasons⁸ impacting mainly small and medium-sized producers. Additionally, the price of cereals increased significantly as Colombia imports 54%⁹ of this food group.

 Inflation
During 2022 **the country experienced high inflation, which at the end of the year stood at 13.1% overall, and 27.8%¹⁰ for food and non alcoholic beverages**. The food items that showed the greatest variation during 2022 were rice (+54%), milk (+37%), and beef (+20%), basic products of the household food basket. The price increase among these food items have impacted households purchasing power, especially among the most vulnerable.

 Natural and Climate Disasters
Factors related to the La Niña phenomenon and the passage of Hurricane Julia in the Caribbean region have also been affecting food and nutrition security, impacting populations in a large part of the country. During October 2022 alone, **131,000 people were affected by floods, eight times more than in the same month reported in 2021 (15,334)**, mainly in the departments of La Guajira, Bolívar, Atlántico, Magdalena, Córdoba, and Cesar in the Caribbean region; Chocó in the Pacific; and the Orinoco region in general¹¹.

 COVID-19
The COVID-19 pandemic and the containment measures adopted during 2020 and 2021 heavily affected the country's economy, especially the informal sector and left long-lasting impacts for vulnerable households that have yet to recover. A study by the University of Andes found that despite emergency interventions with monetary transfers by the government, the percentage of households living below the poverty line increased between 2019 and 2020. As a result, families were compelled to adapt to reduced food portions and lower quality food consumed¹². According to the Social Pulse survey from the National Statistics Department (DANE), **the percentage of households eating less than three times a day increased from 11% before the onset of the pandemic to 32% in July 2020 - a figure that remains at 26% (November 2022)¹³**.

7. CEPAL, FAO y PMA. 2022. Towards Sustainable Food and Nutritional Security in Latin America and the Caribbean in Response to the Global Food Crisis. <https://www.cepal.org/es/publicaciones/48531-seguridad-alimentaria-nutricional-sostenible-america-latina-caribe-respuesta-la>

8. FAO. 2022. Data in Emergencies (DIEM) Monitoring, Colombia. <https://data-in-emergencies.fao.org/pages/monitoring>

9. WFP. 2022. World Hunger Map. <https://hungermap.wfp.org/22>

10. DANE. Consumer Price Index Bulletin bol_ipc_dic22.pdf (dane.gov.co)

11. OCHA. 2022. Colombia: Impact and Humanitarian Trends between January and October 2022. <https://www.humanitarianresponse.info/>

12. Universidad de los Andes & World Food Programme (2021). Effects of the COVID-19 crisis on the Food Security of Vulnerable Populations in Colombia: an Economic Analysis

13. DANE (2022). Social Pulse survey. November 2022. <https://www.dane.gov.co/index.php/estadisticas-por-tema/encuesta-pulso-social/encuesta-pulso-social-historicos>

4. DIMENSIONS OF FOOD SECURITY

The prevalence of food insecurity in Colombia was measured by analysing food consumption, livelihood coping strategies and economic vulnerability. Below the main findings of each dimension are presented.

4.1. DIMENSION 1: ECONOMIC VULNERABILITY

Income

Due to both internal and external shocks, the country has experienced a high level of economic volatility which is reflected in the change in household incomes. **Overall, 35% reported that their income has decreased in the last 12 months**, a figure which is highest among workers in the informal sector. For example, 42% of domestic employees and daily wage laborers reported a decrease in their income in the last 12 months, while only 23% of government employees and 31% of private sector employees indicated a reduction in their salary. The Social Pulse survey also reported that more than half of the population interviewed (53.6%) considered that their economic situation was worse or much worse compared to 2021 and three in four households (74.9%) believed that the economic situation in the country was worse than in 2021.

Expenditures

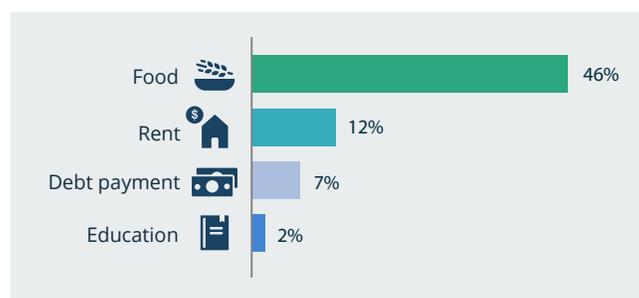
In the context of Colombia, food insecurity is primarily a problem of economic access, considering that **almost half of households (46%) have expenditures below the national poverty line** and the prevalence of food insecurity increases drastically among these households (see table 2).

Table 2: Median Monthly Household Expenditures (per capita) by Level of Food Security

| PERCENTAGE (%) OF HOUSEHOLDS IN EACH LEVEL | 4% | 26% | 51% | 19% |
|--|------------------------|--------------------------|--------------------------|-----------------------|
| FOOD SECURITY LEVEL | Severely Food Insecure | Moderately Food Insecure | Marginally Food Insecure | Food Secure |
| MEDIAN MONTHLY HOUSEHOLD EXPENDITURES | 115,000 COP (26 USD) | 208,000 COP (43 USD) | 399,000 COP (89 USD) | 687,000 COP (153 USD) |

The graph below demonstrates the type of expenditure as a proportion of total household expenses. In general terms, **households spend 46% of their total expenditures on food**. Taking into account the current increase in the cost of food items, it is possible that this proportion will increase in the future, which means that many households will have to reduce their expenditures in other basic needs such as education, health, and other essential services to prioritize their food consumption. This finding is in line with the results from the recent Social Pulse survey where households indicated that they have limited capacity to purchase clothing, shoes, or food, compared to 2021.

Figure 2 : Proportion of HH Expenditures by Type of Expense



Access to goods and services

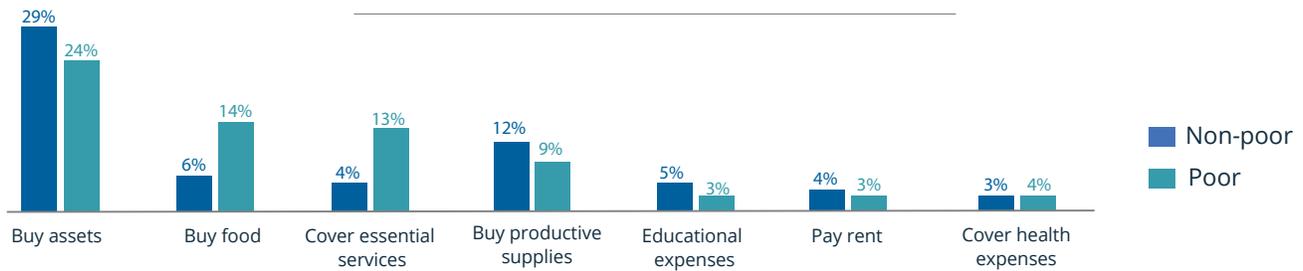
As food insecurity is related to income, it is also linked to other measures of household wealth. Food insecure households have a greater probability of living in conditions of overcrowding and are less likely to be connected

to public infrastructure. Among the food insecure population, **one in three do not have access to water, and two in three do not have an internet connection.** The food insecure are often deprived of certain household goods such as a washing machine, a computer, and have less access to mobility: households without their own means of transportation have a higher ratio of food insecurity (40%), almost the double that those that have a bicycle, a motorcycle, or a car (21%).

Debt

Due to income volatility and the high cost of living, **many households have had to become indebted** to cover their basic expenditures: **44% of households interviewed reported to have a median level of debt that amounts to 3,000,000 COP (612 USD) and is used primarily to purchase assets, food, and pay for basic services.** Non-poor households have become indebted mainly to purchase assets (productive debt), while poor households have borrowed money to buy food and cover other basic needs (see figure 3).

Figure 3: Percentage (%) of Poor and Non-poor Households by Motive of Debt



Poor and vulnerable households do not have access to formal sources of credit and they must often rely on more informal sources, such as gota-a-gota (drop by drop) or personal debt, which typically have much higher interest rates and include greater risks for the borrower. **43% of people borrowed money primarily in the form of gota-a-gota to purchase food and pay basic services,** while in the case of credit cards and banks customers the percentage is lower, 15% and 12% respectively. With high interest rates and rising food prices, the debt burden for these households continues to accumulate, which means that they must progressively continue to reduce their spending on other (often essential) necessities.

4.2. DIMENSION 2: FOOD CONSUMPTION

Due to the different economic situation many Colombians are limiting their food consumption, which represents a large part of expenditures for poor households.



With regards to food consumption, 17% of the population have significant gaps in accessing food –poor or borderline food consumption (see figure 4) – indicating that these households are not consuming basic foods and vegetables every day, and almost never or rarely consume foods rich in protein such as meat or dairy products. **The percentage of households with poor food consumption is greater in the departments of Sucre (16%), Arauca (14%) and Magdalena (12%).**

Figure 4: Household Food Consumption by Category

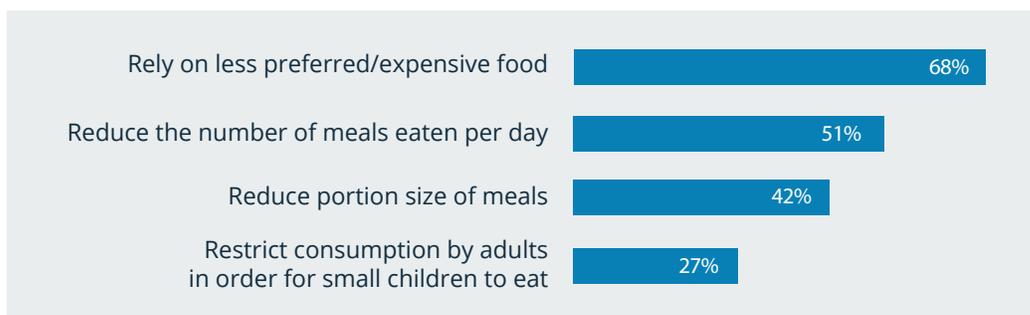


4.3. DIMENSION 3A: CONSUMPTION–BASED COPING STRATEGIES

The majority of the population achieves an acceptable level of consumption, however, they are only able to do so by using coping strategies such as: **purchasing less preferred or cheaper foods, reducing the portions and the frequency of meals consumed.**

More specifically, in the face of soaring food prices and with a high proportion of household income used to buy food, many households are adopting consumption-based coping strategies. **Over half (51%) of households had to reduce their food portions and 42% had to reduce the number of meals consumed during the previous week** (see figure 5). One in four households reported to have reduced adult consumption so that children could eat, a strategy particularly adopted by women-headed households.

Figure 5: Consumption-based Coping Strategies



4.4 DIMENSION 3B: LIVELIHOOD COPING STRATEGIES

The high household economic vulnerability explains why **67% of households need to adopt livelihood coping strategies to meet their basic food needs.** Likewise, 16% of the population is in such a critical situation that they must apply emergency livelihood coping strategies which are irreversible (see figure 6).

In terms of stress coping strategies, those most adopted by households were spending savings (53%), purchasing of food on credit (38%), sending household members to eat with family and friends (16%) and selling household assets (12%). On the other hand the most used crisis coping strategy was to reduce expenditures in health or education (30%) to meet household food needs. Lastly, the most common emergency coping strategies applied were participating in risky activities (12%) and begging in the street (8%).

Households that live in rural areas are more likely to employ crisis and emergency coping strategies (40% and 21% respectively) compared to urban households (32% and 16% respectively) who primarily adopt stress coping strategies such as going into debt and spending savings.

Figure 6: Percentage (%) of households that Implemented Livelihood Coping strategies Stress/ Crisis/ Emergency in the last 30 days



5. SOCIO-DEMOGRAPHIC CHARACTERISTICS CORRELATED TO FOOD INSECURITY

In the context of multiple affectations, the assessment highlights that some groups with specific socio-demographic characteristics are more impacted by food insecurity than others. These groups often face higher barriers to accessing employment or securing their livelihoods, which eventually hinders their ability to meet their food security requirements and other basic needs. Some of these groups include:



Victims of armed conflict

One of the main results of the assessment is that half of those households that were/have been victims of conflict are food insecure, in contrast to 29% of those households that have not been/were not victims of conflict. Victims of conflict typically face greater barriers to access food due to their precarious situation.



Ethnic people/communities

Households, whose head identifies as a member of an ethnic group (**Afro-descendant or Indigenous**) show higher levels of food insecurity (**42% and 40% respectively**); compared to households where the head does not belong to an ethnic group. This observation can be explained with the levels of inequity and vulnerability to which ethnic communities have been historically more exposed to.



Types of employment

Households, in which the principal earner works in the informal sector (**domestic employee or day labourer**), experience higher levels of food insecurity (**44% and 41% respectively**), compared to principal earners who are employed in the private or the public sector (25% and 9% respectively). Informal sector workers are easily subjected to greater shocks compared to those formally employed.



Level of education

Some 42% of households experience food insecurity if the head of that household does not have formal education. In contrast, only 10% of households are food insecure if their head holds a higher level of education. This is due to the fact that typically a higher level of education provides a greater opportunity to find a more stable and better-paid employment.



Female-headed households

Some 35% of households headed by women are food insecure, while, in contrast, some 26% of households headed by men. This can be explained by the structural/institutional barriers more often faced by women when entering the national labour market and the fact that woman ultimately have lower-paid jobs.

6. CONCLUSION

1. At the national level the assessment reveals high levels of food insecurity which is affecting **30% of Colombians (15.5 million)**. Food insecure households are mainly concentrated in the Atlantic and Pacific regions and in departments severely impacted by violence and extreme weather or climatic events. In absolute terms, however, the highest number of food insecure people are found in urban areas, particularly Bogotá (1.5 million people), Medellín (650,000) and Cali (500,000).
2. Food insecurity is caused by **multiple factors and affectations**, among them are: 1) structural factors, such as poverty, unemployment, and exposure to violence, 2) conjunctural factors for example, seasonal, climatic, and extreme weather-related events (e.g La Niña phenomenon), the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic and the crisis in Ukraine, as well as inflation.
3. The analysis of households' coping strategies seems to reveal a **deteriorating food security situation** over time. In fact, in the 2015 ENSIN study, this indicator stood at 54%, while the present assessment highlighted that 67% of households applied such strategies.
4. High levels of food insecurity were prevalent in population groups with specific sociodemographic characteristics, such as **victims of the conflict, ethnic groups, informal workers, households with low educational levels and female-headed households**.
5. In 2023, **food insecurity is likely to remain at high levels**, due to several factors, including Colombia's continued exposure to the effects of the crisis in Ukraine on the cost and availability of agricultural inputs and food imports. The food inflation rate is also expected to remain high, further pushing debt levels and impacting households' purchasing power and their ability to access food.
6. **The increase in the probability of the occurrence of the El Niño** in the second half of 2023, possibly continuing into the first quarter of 2024, is expected to result in reduced precipitations in large parts of the country. This should be monitored, given possible implications on local production and food availability.
7. Due to a combination of structural and conjunctural factors, the food security situation in Colombia has deteriorated. Therefore, integrated, **short to medium-term interventions are needed to mitigate current levels of food insecurity among the most vulnerable segments of the population**. These interventions should include a humanitarian response component in emergency situations, complemented by measures aimed at enhancing agricultural production and market functionality at local and national levels, expanding access to potable water, as well as strengthening and expanding social protection systems, including school feeding. In the medium term, these interventions should aim at mitigating food insecurity, by empowering communities, reducing inequalities and households vulnerability in both urban and rural areas, within the framework of an approach based on the Human Right to Food.

ANNEX

METHODOLOGY

WFP carried out data collection for this evaluation between October and November 2022. In total, 8,232 surveys were conducted in 29 departments and 118 municipalities. Probabilistic sampling was applied with a margin of error of 1% and a confidence level of 95%. The data are representative at the departmental level, as well as at the urban and rural levels for the national total. The evaluation was comprised of two components, the quantitative component based on surveys in urban and rural households, as well as the qualitative component based on 31 focus group discussions and 26 key informant interviews, to enrich/complement the understanding of results.

LEVELS OF FOOD SECURITY

Food security was measured using the CARI¹⁴ methodology, which classifies households into four groups: Food Secure, Marginally Food Secure, Moderately Food Insecure and Severely Food Insecure. Each group is described in the table below:

Annex table 1: Levels of Food Security

| FOOD SECURITY LEVEL | DESCRIPTION |
|--------------------------|---|
| Food secure | |
| Food Secure | Able to meet food needs without <u>engaging in reduced and livelihood coping strategies for food security.</u> |
| Marginally Food Secure | Has minimally inadequate food consumption, <u>relies on reduced coping and applies stress coping strategies to secure food needs.</u> |
| Food insecure | |
| Moderately Food Insecure | Has food consumption gaps and <u>unable to meet required food needs without applying crisis coping strategies.</u> |
| Severely Food Insecure | Has extreme food consumption gaps, OR has <u>extreme loss of livelihood assets will lead to food consumption gaps, or worse.</u> |

14. Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security.
https://docs.wfp.org/api/documents/WFP-0000134704/download/?_ga=2.11617142.336312403.1675698605-1560730371.1638455283

CARI CONSOLE

The prevalence of food insecurity in Colombia was calculated/obtained by analysing food consumption patterns, coping strategies (consumption and livelihood), and economic vulnerability. The indicators demonstrate different behaviours. Detailed in the table below of indicators, food consumption demonstrates that 17% of Colombian households are food insecure. The coping strategy indicators for consumption and livelihoods represent food insecurity at 28% and 39% respectively. Lastly, the economic vulnerability indicator explains 46% of food insecurity classification.

Annex table 2: CARI Console

| | Food Secure | Marginally Food Secure | Moderately Food Insecure | Severely Food Insecure |
|---------------------------------|-------------|------------------------|--------------------------|------------------------|
| Food consumption | 83% | | 11% | 6% |
| Coping strategies - consumption | 33% | 39% | 28% | |
| Coping strategies - livelihoods | 31% | 30% | 21% | 18% |
| Economic vulnerability | 54% | | 32% | 14% |
| Food Security Classification | 19% | 51% | 26% | 4% |

| | | | | |
|--------------------|---|----------------|---|--------------------|
| 13.5 million (26%) | + | 2 million (4%) | = | 15.5 million (30%) |
|--------------------|---|----------------|---|--------------------|