



World Food
Programme

AFGHANISTAN FOOD SECURITY UPDATE

1st Quarter March 2024

CHAPTER 01

The data presented in this chapter reference WFP's market monitoring and the World Bank's economic monitor



Inflation

Market Prices Update

Labour Market Update

Afghanistan

Economic Overview

01 Protracted Economic Risks:

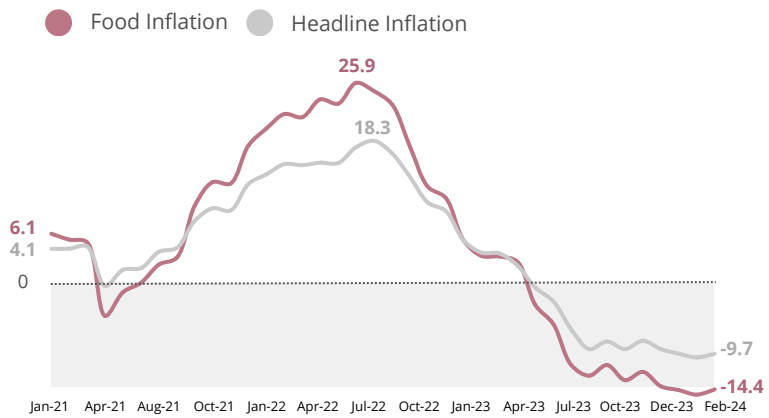
Inflation remained negative amid sustained economic weakness and depressed demand over the year. Since April 2023, a persistent deflationary trend has been evident, marked by dwindling household savings, increased unemployment, and adverse impacts on farmer incomes due to bans on opium cultivation. A reduction in international aid and restrictive policies on women and girls pose risks to Afghanistan's recovery.

02 Gradual Improvements in Key Staple Commodity Prices:

In Afghanistan, there has been a steady decrease in the national average prices of key staple prices throughout previous year. Similarly, the WFP Food Basket prices have declined over the year, marking a 24 percentage point reduction compared to the same period last year. The stabilization of national cereal prices is likely due to a confluence of factors, including a downward trend in global cereal prices, favorable production in Kazakhstan, Iran and Pakistan.

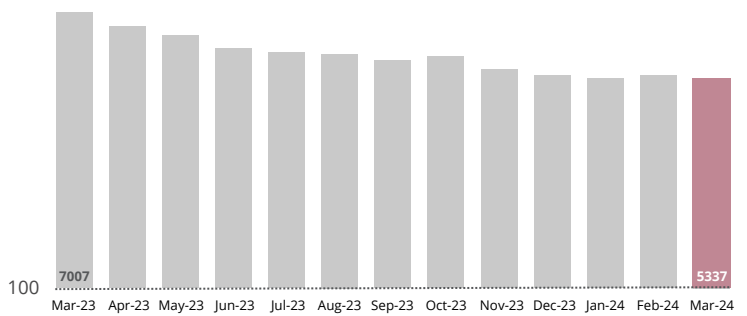
Although the domestic prices for DAP and UREA fertilizers have eased from their peaks in June 2022, they remain at elevated levels. As of March 2024, the domestic prices of DAP and UREA fertilizers were 46 percent and 42 percent higher, respectively, compared to June 2021. This situation places a significant burden on smallholders in Afghanistan. Meanwhile, the prices of improved seeds have significantly decreased, returning to levels similar to those before the collapse.

Change in Food and Headline Inflation¹

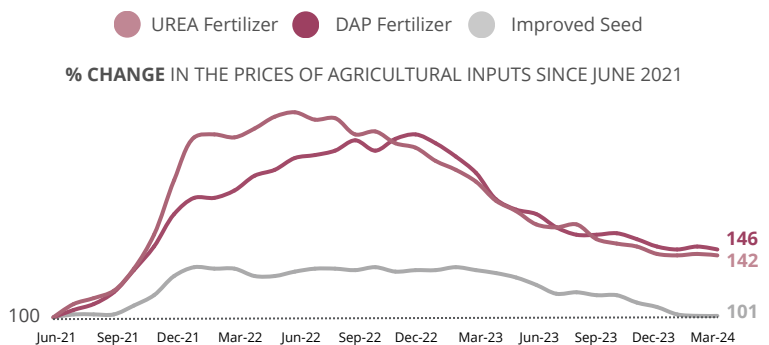


Change in the WFP Food Basket Prices²

March 2023 - March 2024 (AFN)



Prices of agricultural inputs remained significantly higher than the two-year average



1. WFP, Data viz, February 2023.

2. WFP, Afghanistan Monthly Market Monitoring, March 2024.



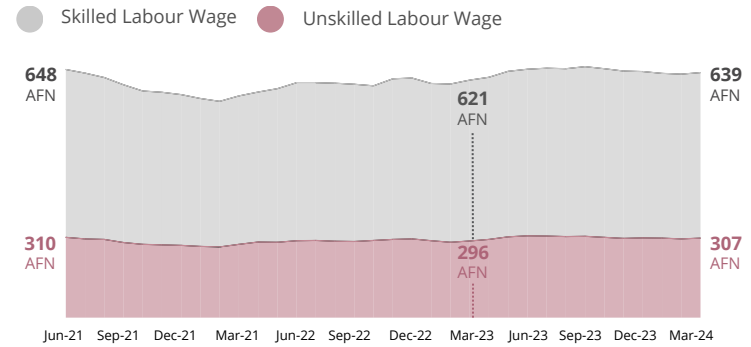
Afghanistan Labour Market Update

03 Stagnant Labor Wages & Unemployment

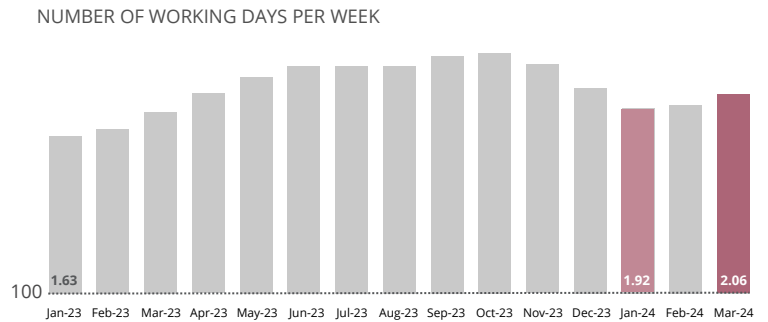
Despite stability in the prices of key food commodities, labor wages have stagnated over the past year, and limited employment opportunities have contributed to a decrease in purchasing power. The wages for unskilled labor have remained nearly unchanged compared to the same period last year. Households are facing financial challenges due to high unemployment, reduced economic activity, and slowing down of labour market during winter lean season.

Above-average precipitation in February and March 2024 has alleviated cumulative precipitation deficits across most of the country, positively impacting spring planting in the eastern, southern, northern, and western regions. Consequently, the average number of available workdays per week nationwide has slightly increased to 2.06 days in March 2024, up from 1.92 days in January 2024. Additionally, the availability in March 2024 represents a 9 percentage point increase compared to the same period last year.

Skilled and unskilled labour wages have stagnated over the past two years



Casual labor opportunities have slightly improved with the start of the spring planting season



CHAPTER 02

The data presented in this chapter are collected via mobile surveys



Restrictions against Women Working
Food Consumption
Coping Strategies
Access to Market and Healthcare
Change in Income

Background and Methodology

WFP has been conducting monthly telephone surveys across all 34 provinces of Afghanistan for over 2.5 years to gain a better understanding of the food security situation and its underlying factors. Starting in 2023, the reporting frequency has shifted to a quarterly basis. This specific report presents data collected from 9 February to 9 March, finalizing data collection before the start of Ramadan.

The methodology has remained consistent throughout the survey rounds, with a few minor adjustments. Since August 21, 2021, panel surveys have been conducted for 80 percent of the respondents in each round. The results are weighted to ensure geographic³ and socio-demographic representativeness. It is important to note that due to the nature of this survey being conducted through mobile phones, the results may have an upward bias on key outcomes, as households with cell phone ownership are more likely to be better off.

Sample population at a glance:
MOST RECENT MONTH (FEB-MAR 2024)

1,502 households surveyed



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



Average household size:
10.2 members



Urban households: 49%
Rural households: 51%



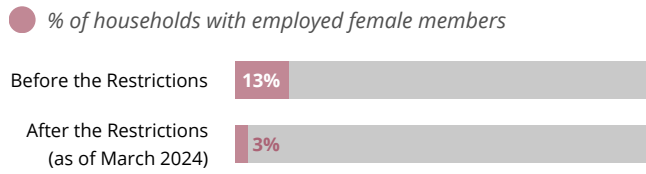
Households reporting having
a member/s with a disability: 16%

3. The data are weighted to ensure geographic representativeness with 9 regions (Central Highland, East, Hirat, Kabul, North, North East, South, South East and West)

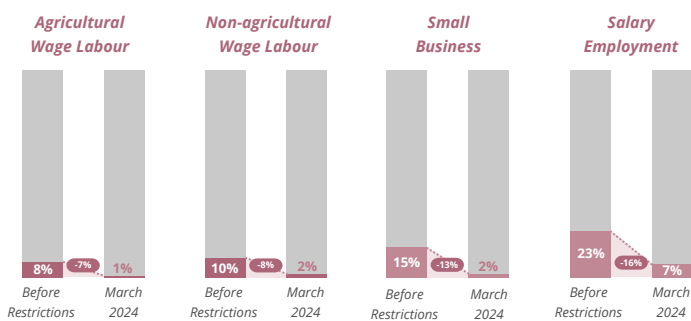


Restrictions against Women Working

Female Employment Before and After the Restrictions

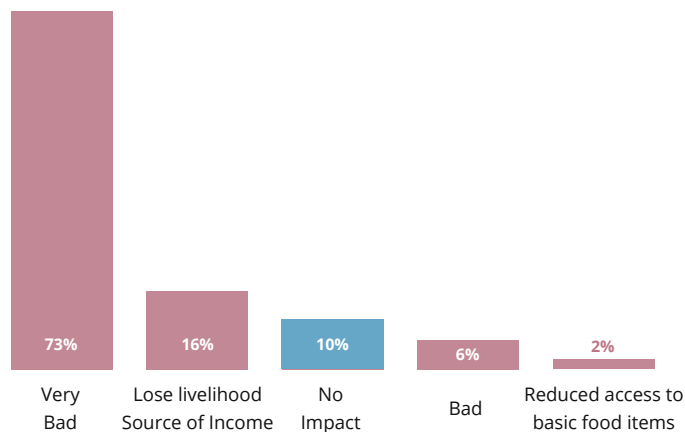


BY PRIMARY INCOME SOURCE



Impact of the Restrictions on Households with Female Members Previously Employed

MARCH 2024



De facto authorities have imposed restrictions on Afghan women, including banning them from most areas of public life, higher education and employment, since taking control of Afghanistan in August 2021. The restrictions were then extended to prevent Afghan women from working at non-governmental organisations and the United Nations in 2023.

Before the restrictions, 13 percent of households had female members who were employed. As of March 2024, this number has decreased to only 3 percent of households with employed female members. Additionally, the households with female members in salaried works were the most significantly affected, dropped from 23 percent before restrictions to 7 percent in March 2024.

About one in ten households with previously employed female members before the restrictions reported a negative impact

Among households with female members who were employed before the restrictions on women working, 73 percent were severely affected by these restrictions. Further, 16 percent reported losing their main source of income, while 6 percent experienced a bad impact, and 2 percent noted reduced access to basic food items. Conversely, only 10 percent of households reported no impact on their household income or purchasing power.

Food Consumption



of people in Afghanistan face inadequate food consumption⁴

Hunger levels have consistently remained at a critical high throughout the year

Despite a slight improvement in food consumption during the spring wheat planting (April-May) and harvest season (July-August), the situation remains dire. The proportion of households experiencing poor food consumption, which had marginally decreased to 48 percent in June 2023, rose again to 54 percent by September 2023 and remained high at 53 percent in March 2024.

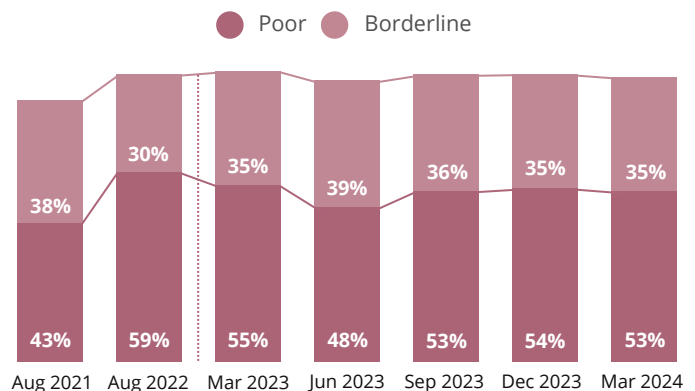
Female-headed households are disproportionately affected by negative food consumption outcomes

As of March 2024, 86 percent of female-headed households are experiencing poor food consumption, which is 34 percentage points higher than that observed in male-headed households.

Food consumption outcome varies by household's primary income source

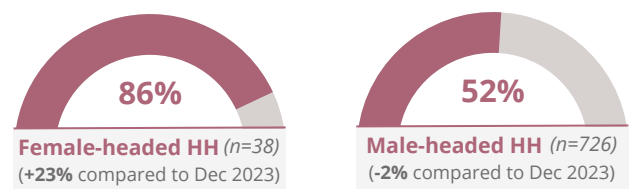
Households relying on non-agricultural wage labor are more likely to experience poor food consumption, with 65 percent reporting poor food outcomes. In contrast, only 37 percent of households with small businesses and 36 percent of households with salaried employment report similar issues.

Food Consumption Group

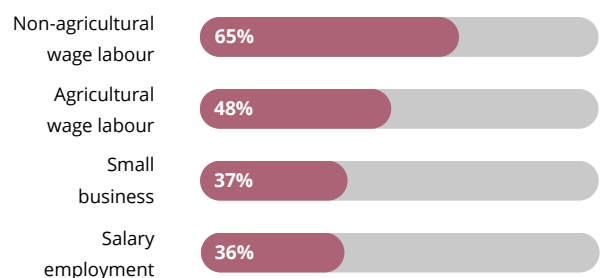


Proportion of Poor Food Consumption by Gender of Household Head⁵

FEMALE VS MALE-HEADED HOUSEHOLDS



Proportion of Poor Food Consumption BY PRIMARY INCOME SOURCE



4. Based on the Food Consumption Score indicator which is calculated according to the types of foods consumed during the previous 7 days, the frequencies with which they are consumed and the relative nutritional weight of the different food groups. Inadequate food consumption refers to the households classified with Borderline or Poor food consumption.

5. With limited sample size for female-headed households, the above findings are only indicative.

Consumption-based Coping Strategies

A gradual improvement in the proportion of households employing high coping strategies has been reported

As of March 2024, 39 percent of households have engaged in high coping strategies under the consumption-based coping strategies scheme, marking an 1 percentage point decrease from the previous round in December 2023. Additionally, this figure represents a 7 percentage point reduction compared to the same period last year.

Over the past year, there have been no significant changes in food consumption. However, a slight improvement in the proportion of households resorting to high coping strategies is noteworthy. This trend indicates a gradual decrease in the likelihood of households limiting their food portions at meal times and reducing the number of meals consumed daily.

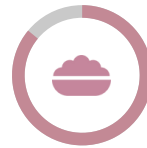
This modest improvement can potentially be attributed to the beneficial effects of local harvests, which have ensured that many households maintain food stocks from their own production. This is further supported by the continuing decline in both global and domestic prices of key food commodities.

Consumption-based Coping Strategies

ONE YEAR COMPARISON

March 2023 VS March 2024

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



Rely on less preferred and less expensive food

86% (-4 pts compared to March 2023)



Borrow food or rely on help from a relative or friend

77% (-1 pts compared to March 2023)



Reduce the number of meals eaten in a day

36% (-7 pts compared to March 2023)



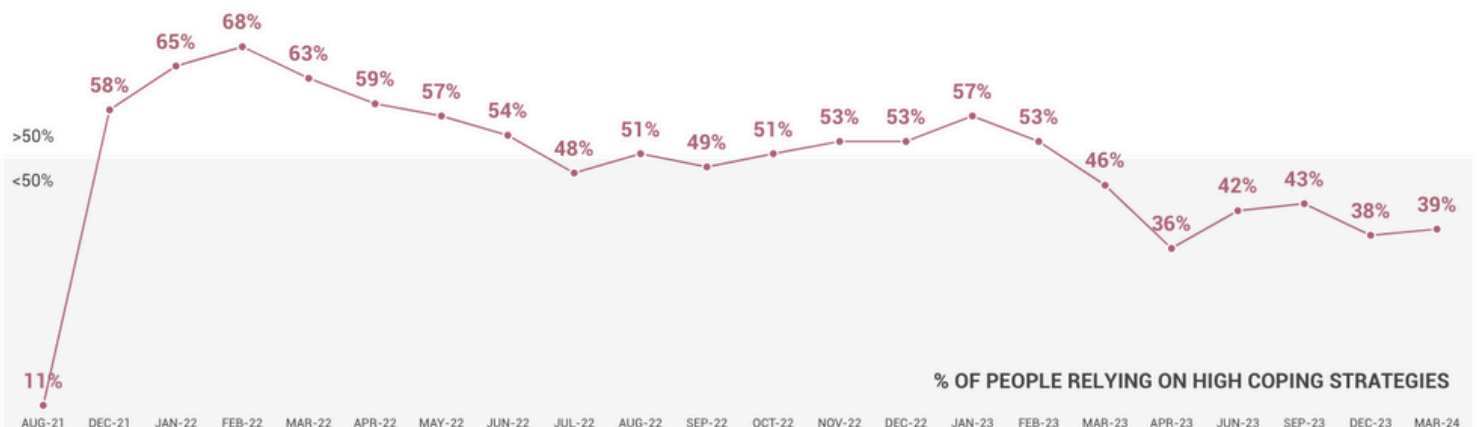
Limit portion size of meals at meal times

57% (-17 pts compared to Mar 2023)



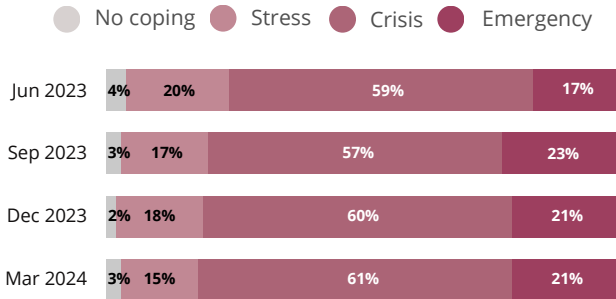
Restrict adult consumption so small children can eat

57% (-8 pts compared to March 2023)



Livelihood Coping Strategies

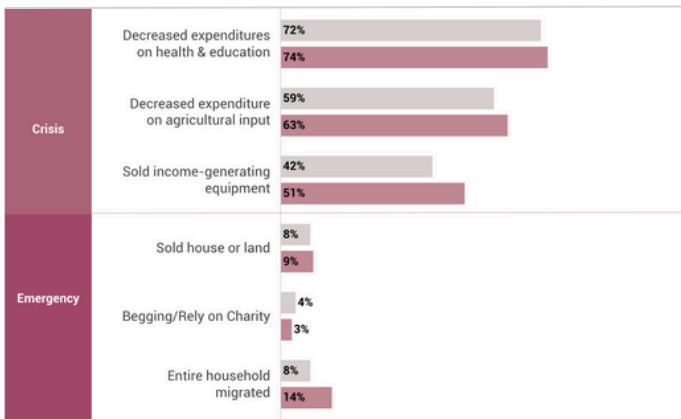
Livelihood Coping Strategies ⁶



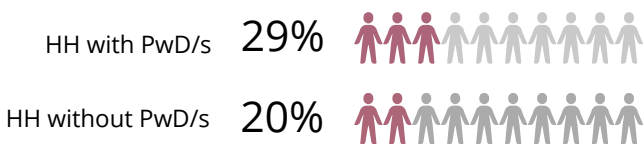
ONE YEAR COMPARISON

March 2023 March 2024

Proportion of households which have used the following strategies at least once in the 30 days



Proportion of Emergency Coping Strategies by Household with PwDs



About one-fifth of households are resorting to emergency coping strategies

In March 2024, the proportion of households employing emergency coping strategies remained same at 21 percent as observed in December 2023. This trend could potentially be associated with the end of the harvest season and reduction in seasonal labor opportunities during the winter lean season.

Households are increasingly selling their income-generating assets

In March 2024, 51 percent of households reported selling their income-generating assets, which represents a 9 percentage point increase compared to the same period last year. The trend of selling income-generating assets has been particularly prevalent in the Central Highlands,⁷ where 61 percent of households have adopted this coping strategy. In this region, the prolonged impacts of droughts have significantly impaired harvests, while cold waves have adversely affected livestock productivity. Furthermore, the proportion of households adopted entire household migration increased from 8 percent in March 2023 to 14 percent in March 2024.

Households with Person with Disabilities (PwDs) remain disproportionately impacted

Households with PwDs are more likely to resort to emergency coping strategies, with 29 percent relying on emergency coping compared to 20 percent of households without PwDs.

6. The livelihood-based coping strategy index is designed to measure the extent of livelihood coping households need to utilise as a response to lack of food or money to purchase food during the 30 days prior to the survey. This includes mid-term changes in income-earning or food production patterns, as well as their actions such as asset sales due to food scarcity.

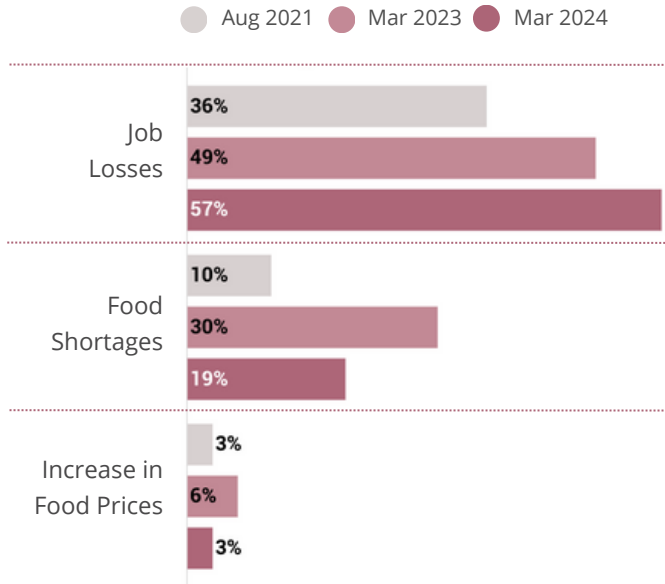
Stress coping indicates a reduced ability to deal with future shocks due to a current reduction in resources or increase in debts. Crisis coping directly reduces future productivity, including human capital formation. Emergency coping affects future productivity but are more difficult to reverse or more dramatic in nature.

7. The central highland region refers to Bamyan, Daykundi, Kapisa, Logar, Maidan Wardak, Panjsher, Parwan Provinces.

Concerns and Access

Top Concerns

% CITING THE TOP CONCERN



An increasing number of households are expressing concern over job losses

As global and domestic food commodity prices have decreased over the past year, household concerns about food price hikes have remained minimal at 3 percent in March 2024. However, the persistent deflation trend throughout year and slowing down of labour market over the winter lean season has heightened concerns about job losses. Job loss worries were more frequently reported in Kabul (69 percent), East (66 percent), and the Central Highland (61 percent). The heightened concern regarding limited working opportunities in these areas can potentially be attributed to various factors: reduced construction activities in Kabul and peri-urban areas during the harsh winter, and intensified competition in the casual labor market due to the influx of returnees.

Market Access

MARCH 2024



12% (+3 pts compared to Dec 2022)
of households facing difficulties in accessing market

Over one in ten households is facing difficulties in purchasing basic needs

Lack of money has been reported as a major reason preventing access to markets at 63 percent, which is a 7 percentage point increase from December 2023.

Health Access

MARCH 2024



32% (+2 pts compared to Dec 2023)
of households facing difficulties in accessing health care

About one-thirds of households have trouble accessing and/or receiving health care.

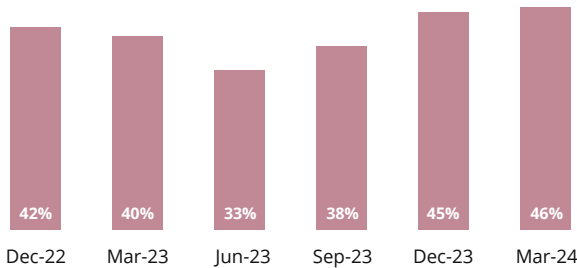
The vast majority of households (82 percent) cited lack of money as a major reason for having difficulties in accessing health care, followed by far distance to hospital (7 percent).



Incomes and Food Expenditure

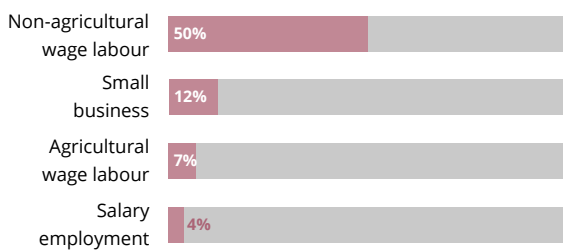
Income Change

% FACING SIGNIFICANTLY DECREASING INCOMES



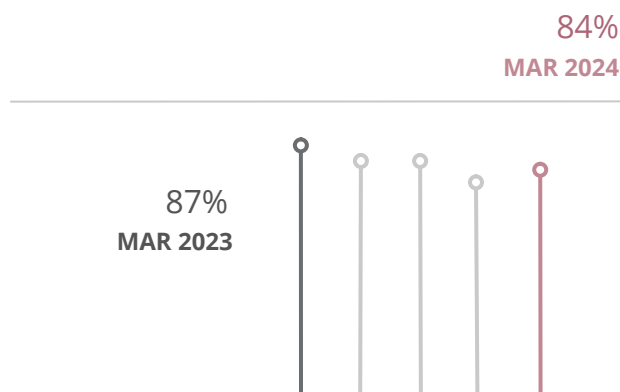
BY PRIMARY INCOME SOURCE

% FACING SIGNIFICANTLY DECREASING INCOMES



The majority of household income is allocated towards food expenses

PROPORTION OF INCOME SPENT ON FOOD (%)



About half of the households has experienced a significant reduction in income

The proportion of households reporting a significant decrease in their income increased from 38 percent in September 2023 to 46 percent in March 2024. This represents an 8 percentage point increase compared to the same period last year. This trend suggests that the reduction in seasonal labor opportunities following the end of the harvest season, coupled with the delayed onset of the winter planting season, places a burden on household incomes.

Additionally, households that rely on non-agricultural wage labor are more likely to experience a significant reduction in their income, with 50 percent affected, compared to only 4 percent of households with salaried employment.

Households continued to allocate more than 80 percent of income on food

Although the prices of key food commodities remained stable, the proportion of income spent on food has consistently been high over the past year, with limited working opportunities and a persistent deflationary trend. In a region-wise analysis, the northern region (Balkh, Faryab, Jawzjan, Samangan, and Sar-e-pul provinces) reported the highest food expenditure share, with 91 percent of income spent on food. This trend can potentially be attributed to the impact of drought and limited casual labour opportunities, further exacerbated by delays in the spring planting season.

This report updates Afghanistan's food security situation based on 24 rounds of data collection via telephone surveys across 34 provinces. Since August 2021, panel surveys are conducted for 80 percent of respondents in each round. Results are weighted to ensure socio-demographic representativity.

WFP Response:

WFP is working to meet the food and nutrition needs of millions of people in Afghanistan. In 2024, WFP requires US\$2.2 billion to deliver emergency food, nutrition, and livelihood support to those in need.

