LAO PDR

FOOD SECURITY MONITORING

WFP World Food Programme

SEPTEMBER 2023

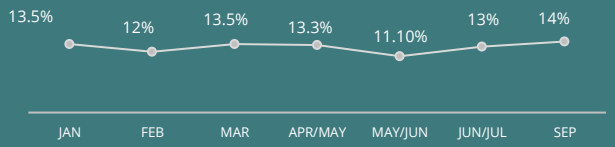
Remote Household Food Security Survey Brief

This brief was developed by WFP and the Ministry of Agriculture in December 2023, based on remote household food security surveys conducted in September 2023, in collaboration with UNICEF.

Lao PDR:
IN NUMBERS

Nearly one in seven households are currently food-insecure

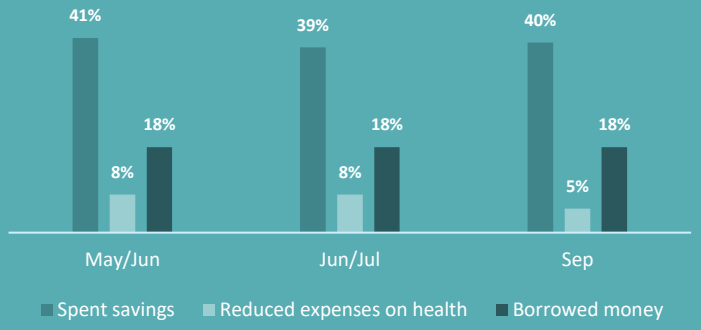
14%
OF PEOPLE ARE FOOD-INSECURE (rCARI)[1]



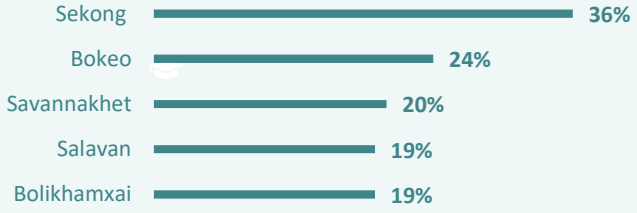
16%
of households in rural areas are food-insecure, compared to 9 percent of those in urban areas

People are relying on coping strategies to buy food

58%
RESORTING TO COPING STRATEGIES
**Livelihood-based coping strategies*



Food security varies across different parts of the country



1 Remote Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Insecurity (CARI).

Findings

Sekong province continues to have the highest prevalence of food insecurity in the country.

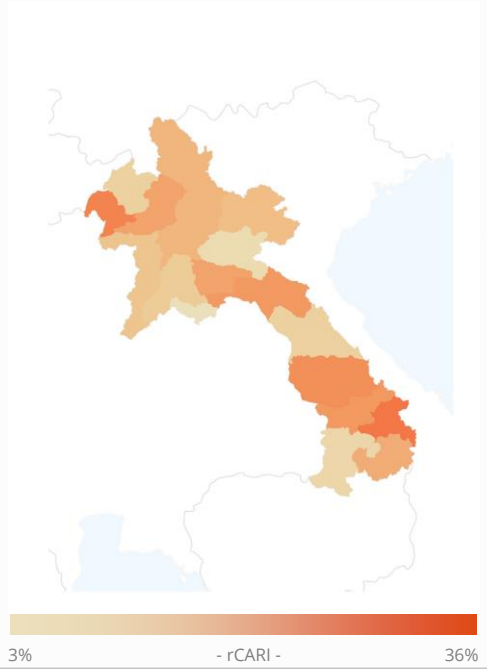
Nearly one in seven households (14 percent) are food insecure, with the majority of these being moderately food insecure. The overall national level food security trend remains stable, with variations visible at provincial level. The overall stability of the food security situation could be a result of minimal changes in factors affecting food insecurity in the assessed population.

The prevalence of food insecurity remains uneven across the country. Even though the inflation rate is slightly decreasing, Sekong province continues to have high prevalence of food insecurity (36 percent), followed by Bokeo and Savannakhet with a prevalence of 24 percent and 20 percent, respectively. Just like the previous rounds, Vientiane Capital continues to have the lowest prevalence of food insecure households with 3 percent. Based on the provincial trends, Sekong, Oudomxay, Houaphanh and Attapeu have consistently shown high prevalence of food insecurity.

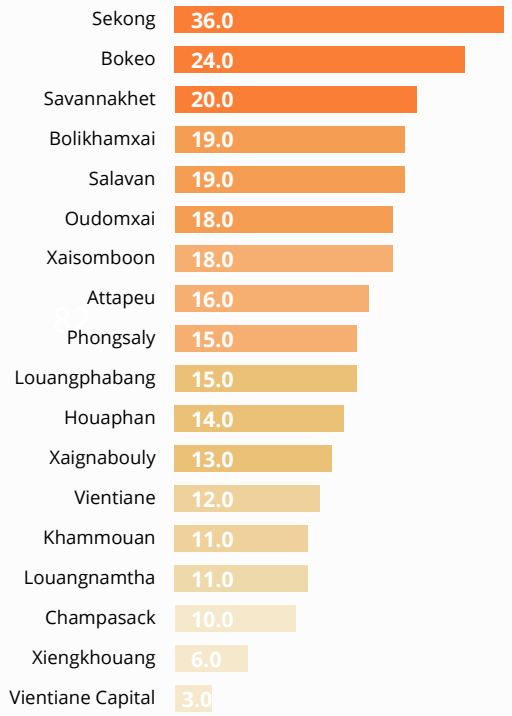
Similar to previous rounds, households in rural areas are often more vulnerable to food insecurity than those in urban areas. Just like in June/July, one in six households (16 percent) are food insecure compared to nearly one in ten households in the urban areas. This could be attributed to reliance on poor farming practices, limited access to markets and poverty.

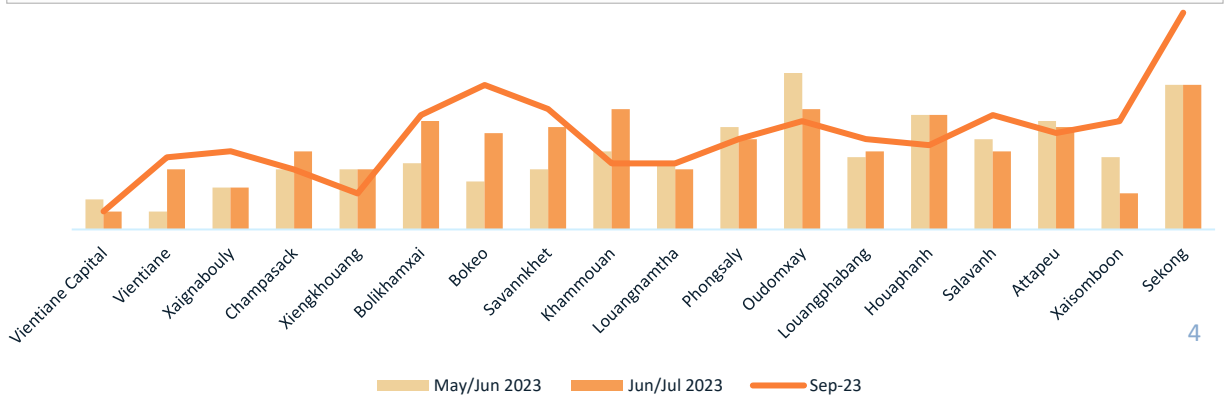
Provincial distribution

of food insecurity across Lao PDR



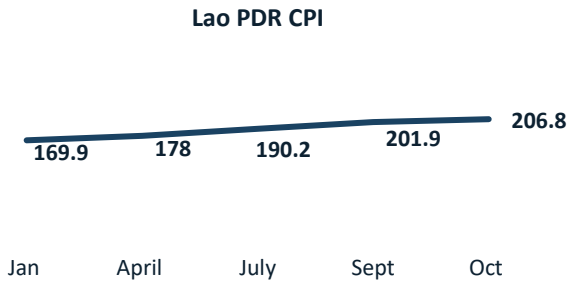
FOOD INSECURITY BY PROVINCE (%)





In Brief

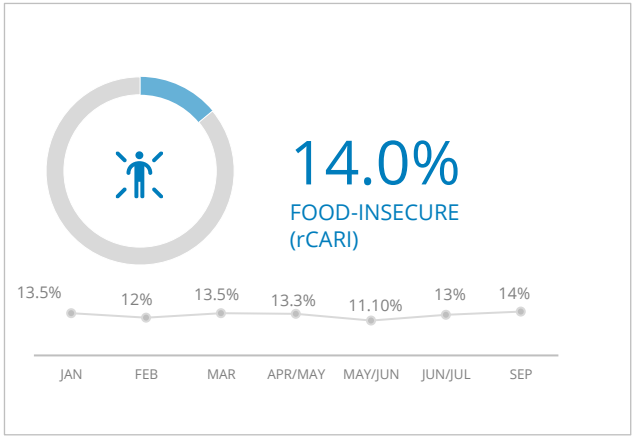
Nearly one in seven households are food-insecure (14 percent).[1] The Consumer Price Index (CPI) in Lao PDR is on an upward trend, while the overall food security situation shows relative stability. The CPI in Lao PDR increased from 195.1 points in August to 201.90 points in September 2023.[2] While overall food security might appear stable, upward trend of the CPI could disproportionately impact poor households and populations who rely on markets as a source of food compared to households that rely on own production. The CPI is used to measure change over time in the prices paid by consumers for a representative basket of goods and services.



Households with high and medium dependency ratios [3] remain more food-insecure (with 15 and 14 percent respectively facing food-insecurity). Households that have experienced a decrease in income, regardless of the amount, are more likely to face food insecurity compared to households with stable income levels.

Numerous households continue to employ diverse coping strategies (both food-based and livelihood coping strategies) to bridge their food needs. Resorting to livelihood-based coping mechanisms highlights the restricted capacity of many households to cope with food shocks. The continued use of livelihood coping strategies is likely to have longer-term effects on the overall household's resilience to cope with future shocks.

Higher food prices and employment instability overall remain the main concern raised by the majority of households. The majority of households in rural areas are more concerned with access to markets (24 percent), while concerns about food prices are reported by 22 percent. Households in urban areas continue to be more concerned about food prices (29 percent) compared to their rural counterparts. This might be explained due to urban households' tendency to rely on markets as the main source of food.



1. This September 2023 figure is based on a remote Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security (rCARI). More detail on the CARI is available here.

2. Laos Inflation Rate - October 2023 Data - 1989-2022 Historical - May Forecast (tradingeconomics.com)

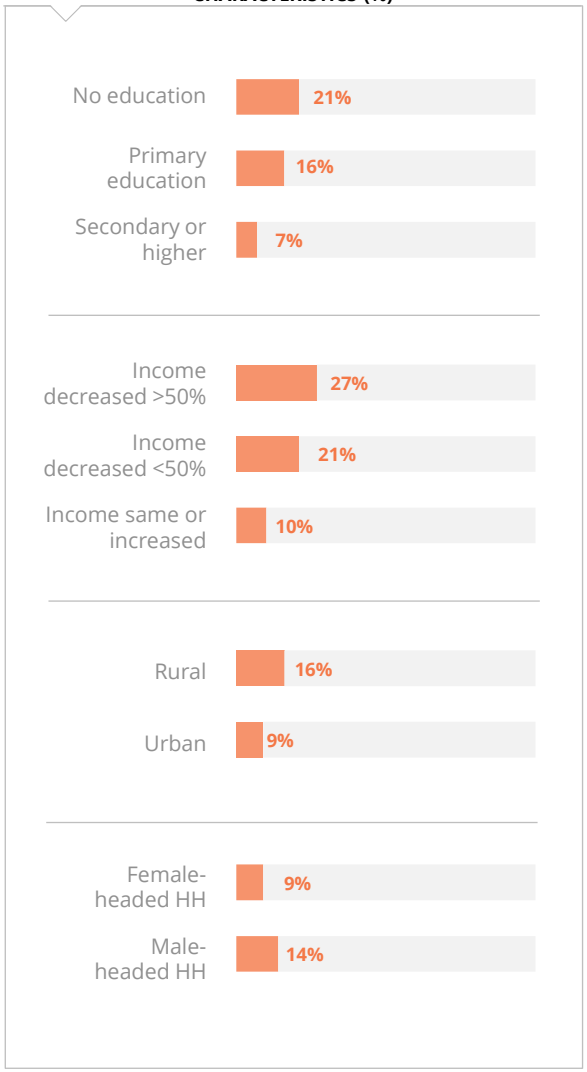
3. Dependency ratio is calculated as the ratio of non-working-age members (I.e., children, elderly) to working-age members in a household.

Heads of households with no education are likely to be more food insecure. The findings show that households led by individuals with no education (21 percent), or only primary level education (16 percent) were more likely to experience food insecurity compared to those led by someone with secondary or higher education (7 percent).

Any reduction in households' income, regardless of the amount, exposes the household to food insecurity compared to those households with steady or rising incomes. Households with a head of household who experienced an increase or stable income source are more likely to be food secure.

Currently, male headed households are more likely to be food insecure (14 percent) compared to female headed households (9 percent). This could be attributed to various factors like lack of access to affordable food and economic hardships affecting all families.

SEPTEMBER FOOD INSECURITY BY HOUSEHOLD CHARACTERISTICS (%)



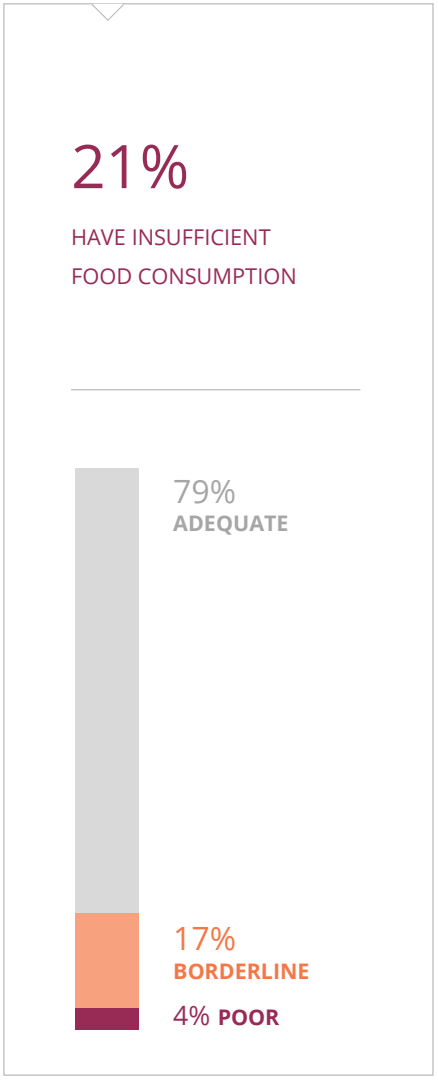
One in five households have inadequate food consumption.

Consumption of inadequate diets has increased from 18 percent in June/July to 21 percent in September. Twenty-one percent of households in Lao PDR are consuming an inadequate diet with 17 percent of households reporting borderline consumption and 4 percent consuming a poor diet. The consumption of inadequate diets by these households could be attributed to low income, limiting the households' purchasing power and access to diverse and nutritious foods.

Diet lacks diversity. A majority of the diets consumed by households lack pulses and dairy products, with the consumption of these at most once per week. The poor consumption of pulses and dairy products is mostly attributed to sociocultural norms and preferences. These are foods that are not commonly consumed in Lao PDR.

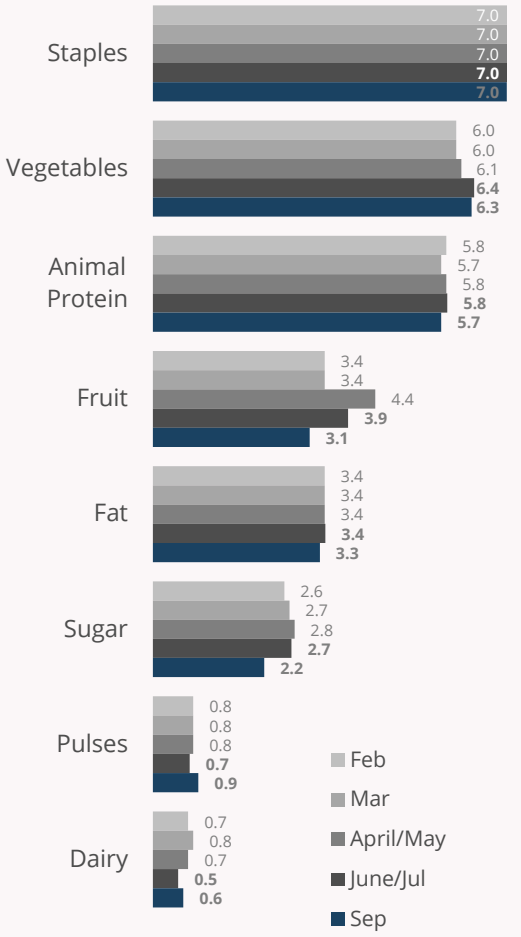
Rural households are more likely to have inadequate dietary intake than urban dwellers. Twenty-five percent of rural dwellers tend to consume a less varied diet, while only 12 percent of urban households consume an inadequate diet.

FOOD CONSUMPTION [4] GROUP



FOOD CONSUMPTION

Number of days the average household consumes the following food items (every seven days)



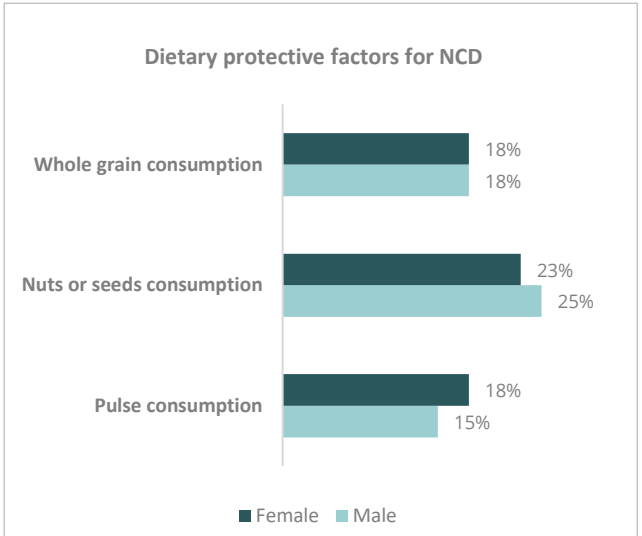
4. The household food consumption score is calculated according to the types of foods consumed during the previous seven days, the frequencies with which they are consumed and the relative nutritional weight of the different food groups.

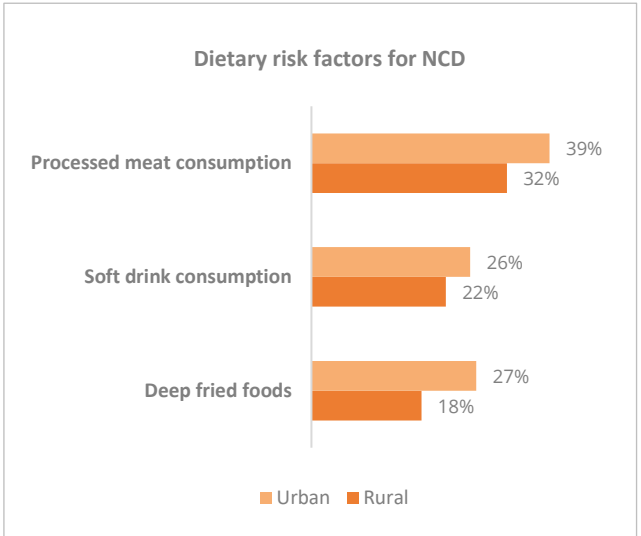
The quality of diets consumed by households is of moderate quality.

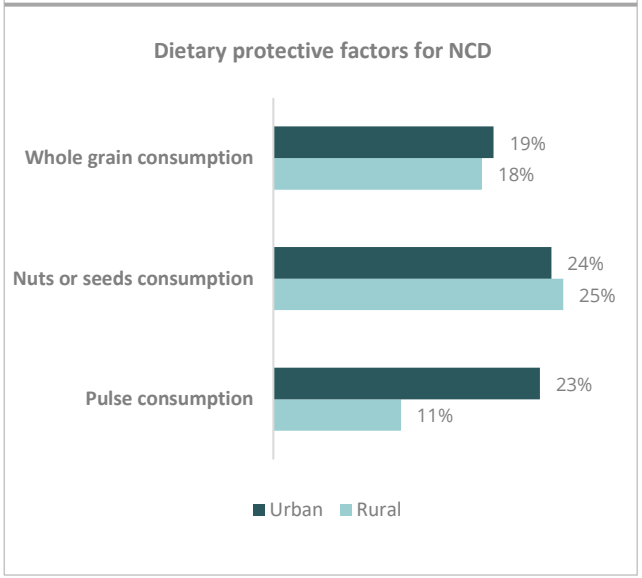
The overall Global Dietary Recommendation (GDR)[5] score of the households is 9.09 out of 18, indicating a moderate quality of diet consumption across urban, rural, female, and male groups. In terms of Non Communicable Diseases (NCD) NCD-Protect,[6] urban areas show slightly elevated protective factors (0.39) compared to rural areas (0.38). Regarding NCD-Risk, females consistently present a lower risk (0.23) compared to males (0.29), and urban areas display slightly higher risk factors (0.3) than the rural group (0.28).

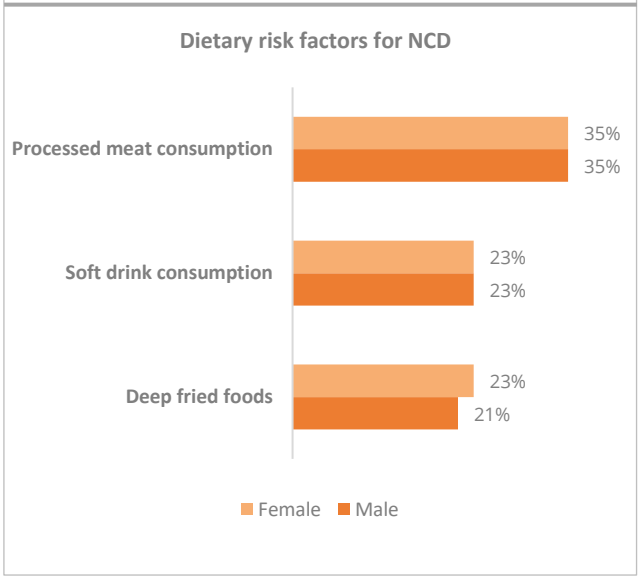
Dietary protective factors for non-communicable diseases (NCDs) indicates 15 percent pulse consumption, 25 percent nuts and seeds consumption, and 18 percent whole grains consumption. Pulse consumption is higher in females (18 percent) than males (15 percent), with urban areas (23 percent) showing more preference than rural areas (11 percent).

In terms of dietary risk factors for non-communicable diseases, the population has an overall consumption of 35 percent processed meat, 21 percent deep-fried foods, and 23 percent soft drinks. Rural areas closely follow, with the consumption of processed meat at 32 percent and deep-fried foods at 18 percent. Gender disparities are minimal, except for a slightly higher preference among females (23 percent) for deep-fried foods compared to males (21 percent).









5. https://www.advancingnutrition.org/resources/diet-assessment-tool/diet-quality-questionnaire-dq-q

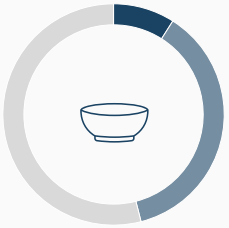
6.NCD-Protect may refer to a scoring system that measures adherence to 11 global dietary recommendations proposed by the World Health Organization (WHO). These recommendations focus on reducing intake of free sugars, saturated fat, processed meats, and increasing consumption of fruits, vegetables, whole grains, legumes, nuts and seeds.

Nearly half of the households turn to food-based coping strategies, such as eating less preferred foods.

Fewer households used livelihood coping strategies in September (58 percent) compared to the previous round (62 percent). Approximately 39 percent of households are employing stress strategies such as relying on spending savings (40 percent) or borrowing (18 percent), which is similar to the period of June/July. Another 7 percent of households are using emergency coping strategies, while 3 percent are sending children to work.

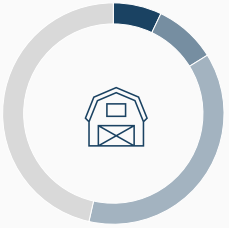
A larger proportion of rural households are engaging in livelihood-based coping strategies (63 percent) compared to urban households (54 percent). This may be due to the levels of poverty compelling households to engage in coping strategies to make ends meet.

Just like in the June/July report, almost half (46 percent) of households in Lao PDR continue to engage in food-based coping strategies. These include consuming less preferred food (49 percent), limiting portion sizes (19 percent) and sacrificing adult meals for children (16 percent).



46%
relying on **food-based** coping strategies

High Medium Low/No



58%
relying on **livelihood-based** coping strategies

Emergency Crisis Stress None

STRATEGIES EMPLOYED IN THE LAST SEVEN DAYS BECAUSE OF A LACK OF MONEY OR FOOD IN SEPTEMBER

- **49%** are relying on less preferred food
- **19%** are limiting portion sizes
- **16%** have adults sacrificing meals so children can eat

STRATEGIES EMPLOYED IN THE LAST 30 DAYS TO COPE WITH A LACK OF FOOD OR MONEY IN SEPTEMBER

- **40%** spent savings
- **8%** reduced expenses on health
- **18%** borrowed money

Households continue to report high levels of concern with food prices and job instability.

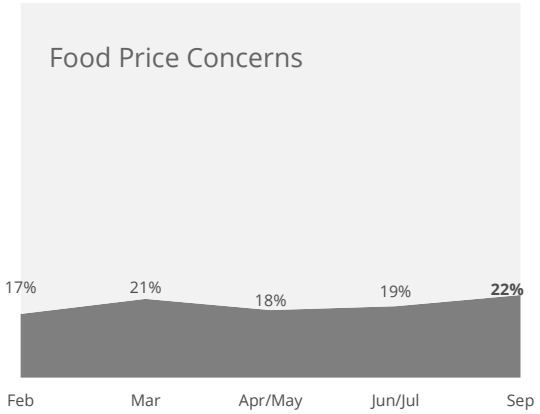
Around one in five households are worried about high food prices in Lao PDR. Households are concerned about spending a greater share of their income on food. Apart from concerns about high food prices, concerns around job stability (15 percent) continue to be frequently reported.

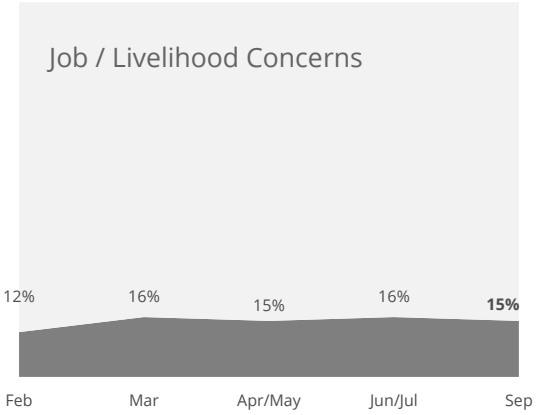
Rising food prices continue to be considered the top concern among urban residents with around 29 percent of urban inhabitants citing this issue as their top concern. Meanwhile, 19 percent of rural dwellers share the same concern. Urban dwellers tend to be net buyers, which could explain this difference.

Accessibility to essential services is still a concern among some households. Approximately 24 percent have indicated difficulties in accessing markets, 10 percent have indicated difficulties in accessing health services. Concerns about accessibility to markets and healthcare services are more prevalent in rural households compared with urban households.

CONCERNS

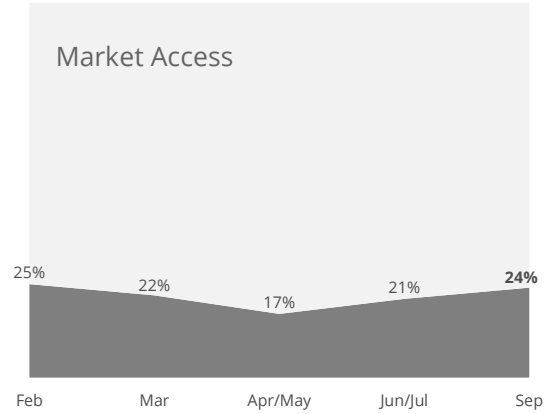
% WITH CONCERN

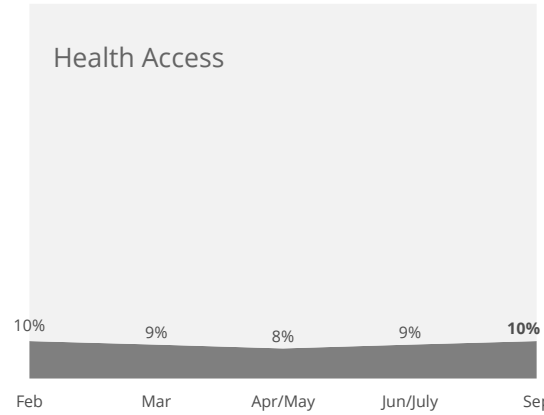




ACCESS

% WITH ACCESS ISSUES





Background and Methodology

Lao PDR's inflation rate is among the highest in Southeast Asia.[7,8] The cumulative effects from COVID-19's socioeconomic impacts and the global food crisis have exposed Lao PDR to macroeconomic instability, heightened financial risks, and negative trends in state expenditure.

The inflation rate stood at 25.7 percent in September, which is a slight improvement compared to August (25.9 percent). The continued instability of the LAK has weakened the purchasing power of the poor households in Lao PDR. However, the Ministry of Industry and Commerce has taken steps to ease the burden on households through working with local companies, by offering essential consumer items at discounted prices to mitigate the impact of rising food costs. [9]

In this context, WFP is rolling out household food security surveys through mobile vulnerability analysis and mapping. These remote surveys use a phone-based methodology to understand the changes in the food security situation and underlying factors across the country. The September 2023 round consisted of 2,101 surveys across all 18 provinces. The final results are weighted to ensure that results for provinces are statistically representative.

This comes as part of WFP's efforts to expand its evidence generation initiatives and inform the response among government and humanitarian/ development partners in Lao PDR.

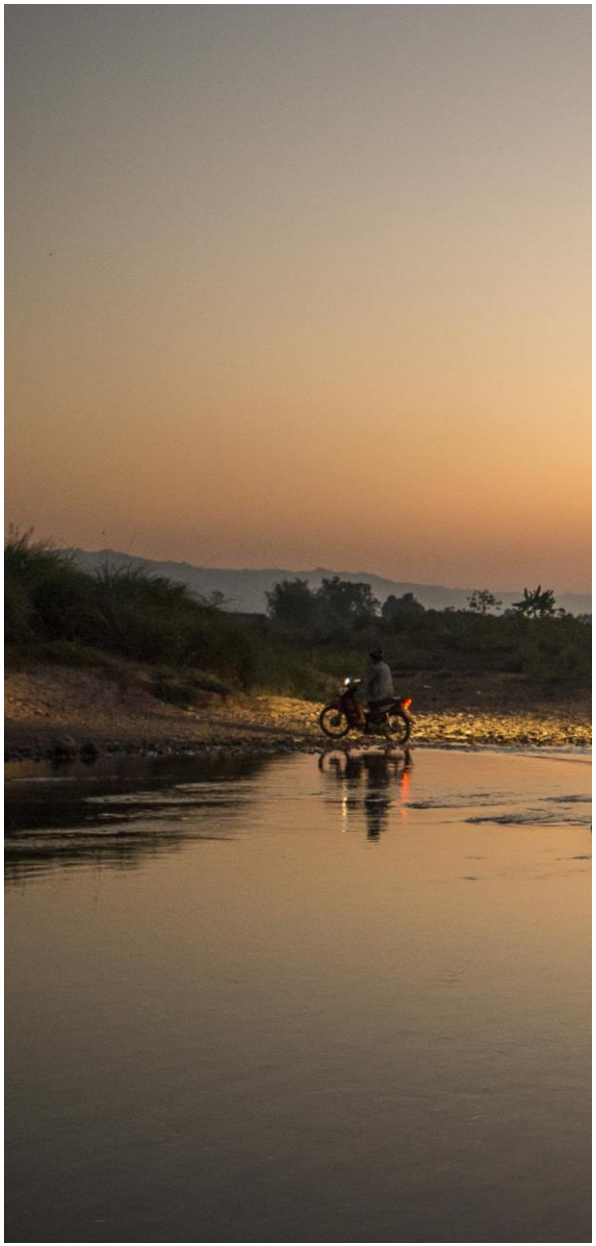
Other Resources

ECONOMIC EXPLORER

An overview of prices across different markets (Select Lao PDR)

COUNTRY BRIEFS

A monthly overview of WFP's activities in Lao PDR, including situational and operational updates



7. Trading economics

8. Consumer Price Index, Lao PDR General Directorate of Statistics

9. https://kpl.gov.la/En/detail.aspx?id=77238

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Contact: wfplao@wfp.org

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