
Afghanistan Welfare Monitoring Survey

ROUND 1¹



¹ Report prepared by the World Bank Afghanistan Poverty and Equity team. Contributing authors are Ghazala Mansuri, Cesar Cancho, and Erwin Knippenberg. The technical team included Zihao Wang, Anais Dahmani-Scuitti, Baqir Fateh, Sardar Ahmadzai, Nishtha Kochhar, Liza Maharjan and Raihana Tareen. Data collection was financed by a grant from the Global Financing Facility for Women, Children and Adolescents, a multi-stakeholder global partnership housed at the World Bank. Survey collection was administered by ATR consulting. Sistemas Integrales supported the calculation of sampling weights. Special thanks to Andrea Dall'Olio, Andrew Dabalen and Elena Karaban for providing critical feedback.

Introduction

This brief reports on the results of a household survey conducted by the World Bank in the fall of 2021 [October to December] to assess changes in basic living conditions in Afghanistan in the early days of the Taliban Interim Administration. The survey, conducted by phone, re-interviews a sample of households previously interviewed in representative household surveys conducted by the National Statistics Information Authority (NSIA) in 2019-20 and the spring of 2021. The survey provides a representative sample of Afghan households covering all regions of the country.

The methodology and survey modality are described below. Follow-up rounds are planned, with the second round starting in spring 2022. Round 1 of the survey covered the following welfare indicators: Employment and Labor Earnings; Food Security and Access to Safety Nets; School Attendance by Boys and Girls; and Access to Health Services.

The household-level data collected in the fall of 2021 suggests that welfare outcomes in Afghanistan are being driven largely by a sharp decline in overall economic conditions, more so than by specific actions introduced by the interim administration.

Data indicate that overall, more people report being at work, particularly in rural areas where the benefits of increased security are more evident. At the same time, unemployment grew significantly in urban areas, and earnings have fallen dramatically for 70 percent of workers. This is due at least in part to inconsistent salary payments.

The decline in incomes, compounded by the ongoing drought, is leading to very high levels of food insecurity. The share of respondents reporting that their households were unable to cover basic food and non-food needs had reached 70 percent over the survey period, as compared to 35 percent reported for May 2021.

While disparity in overall school attendance by gender remains high, data indicate that at the primary level, more girls are in school, with attendance levels overall higher for both boys and girls, compared to the situation in the fall of 2019. The increase in attendance is concentrated in rural areas, where baseline attendance rates were lower, likely due to high levels of insecurity.

Access to health services has remained high, with 94 percent of those needing health care able to access a local public or private health facility. Data indicate no discernible differences in access by gender or by location in urban or rural areas.

Overall, the results suggest that while the Afghan population is still able to find work and access some key public services, the situation is quite fragile, and that an imminent and dramatic decline in welfare outcomes and access to services could occur unless salaries, at least for key services, can be restored and food security improved.

Highlights

Employment and Labor Earnings

- The number of people looking for employment has increased in both rural and urban areas.
- However, employment opportunities in urban areas are limited and the unemployment rates have increased.²
- In rural areas, employment has increased, possibly due to improving security and a return to work, on or off the farm. At the same time, the number of people looking for jobs has also increased.
- The share of public sector employment has decreased, due to a decline in employment in the armed forces, police, security services and other employees in administration, while the share of households reporting self-employment has risen.
- Employed workers across all sectors and in all regions of the country report a significant decline in earnings. This is consistent with reported lags in the payment of salaries.

Food Security and Access to Safety Nets

- The share of respondents reporting that their households were unable to cover basic food and non-food needs has doubled to 70 percent, as compared to about 35 percent in May 2021.
 - Of these, more than half (37 percent) were unable even to cover food expenses, indicating a doubling of extreme impoverishment, as compared to May 2021.
 - Another half or so of these households (33 percent) were unable to cover both food and non-food needs, as compared to just 18 percent in May 2021.
- Households in both urban and rural areas also report a significant decline in the quality and quantity of food consumed.
 - The share of households reporting a switch to lower-quality or less expensive food rose from 56 percent, as reported by the World Food Programme (WFP) in July–August 2021, to 85 percent by October–December 2021.
 - Similarly, the share of households reporting a reduction in the number of meals consumed each day rose to 46 percent by October–December 2021, up from 26 percent as reported by the WFP for July–August 2021.
- Access to social assistance remains limited, with available support coming predominantly from United Nations agencies or international nongovernmental organizations.

² Whereas “unemployed” refers to those who are not employed but are actively looking for work, “economically inactive” refers to those who are not engaged in paid work and are also not looking for a job or available to start work. This includes students, retired persons, and those who are too ill to work, but also discouraged workers, who drop out of the labor market for a variety of reasons.

School Attendance among Boys and Girls

- School attendance for both boys and girls of school age [6-18] has increased nationally.
 - The share of households reporting sending their boys to school increased by 10 percentage points between fall 2019 [October-December] and fall 2021 [October-December] and the gains are roughly the same in both urban and rural areas.
 - The share of households reporting sending their girls to school also increased by 10 percentage points in the same time period, but there are large differences between rural and urban areas
 - In urban areas, the proportion of households sending their girls to school stayed flat at 53 percent, but the share of households sending only primary age girls to school rose while the share of households sending their girls to both primary and secondary school declined.
 - In rural areas, in contrast, the proportion of households sending their girls to school increased by 13 percentage points, with gains for both primary and secondary school girls, but larger gains concentrated at the primary level.

Access to Health Services

- Among people needing medical attention, 94 percent were able to obtain it in fall 2021 [October-December], with little variation between men and women or by urban and rural location.
- Both private and public providers played an important role in the provision of medical services, with private providers serving over half of the people who reported needing medical attention.

Methodology and Survey Modality

The AWMS relies on a sample of households interviewed previously for the **Income, Expenditure, and Labor Force Surveys (IE-LFS)**, administered by the **National Statistics Information Authority**. These are the core nationally representative household surveys conducted in Afghanistan. The first survey was administered in person in 2019–20. The second was administered in the spring and early summer of 2021 but was only partially completed, as data collection was halted in August 2021. The phone numbers of household heads were collected during these surveys, with the intention of conducting follow-up surveys using different modalities. Together, this provides a total sample of 10,130 phone numbers.

The AWMS attempted to reach all 10,130 households to administer a phone survey. Of these, 4,937 interviews were successfully completed, 1,928 in urban areas and 3,009 in rural areas. The response rate was 49 percent. Most non-response (90 percent) was due to

a non-working (80 percent) or non-responding (10 percent) phone number. Only a small subset of respondents who were reached refused to be interviewed. Active phone numbers and, consequently, households with completed surveys, are more likely to be urban, come from larger households, and belong to higher consumption quintiles. The sampling weights from the original household surveys were adjusted accordingly to allow for these differential response rates (Figure 2). Weighted survey results are consistent with regional population shares and cover all 34 provinces and 321 out of 401 districts (Figure 1).

FIGURE 1 Province level coverage of AWMS sample

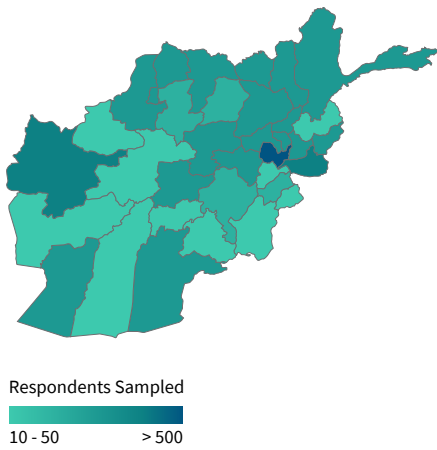
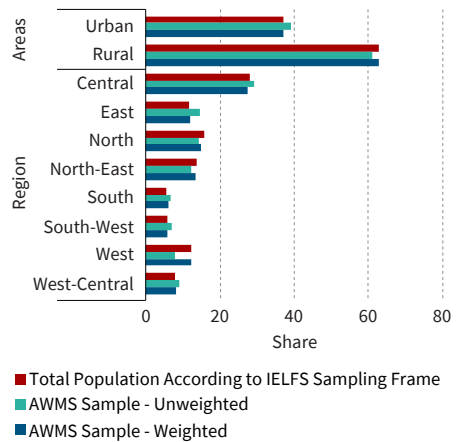


FIGURE 2 Distribution of total population and AWMS sample, by areas and region



Source: AWMS 2021.

The AWMS sought to interview the household head. When the household head was not available, another member of the household was interviewed. Interviewees provided information for themselves in the employment and income module, and for the entire household in the modules on food security, access to safety nets, school attendance, and access to health services. Over three-quarters (78 percent) of respondents self-identified as household heads, and 98 percent of interviewed household heads were male. Results from the full sample are reported unless otherwise specified.

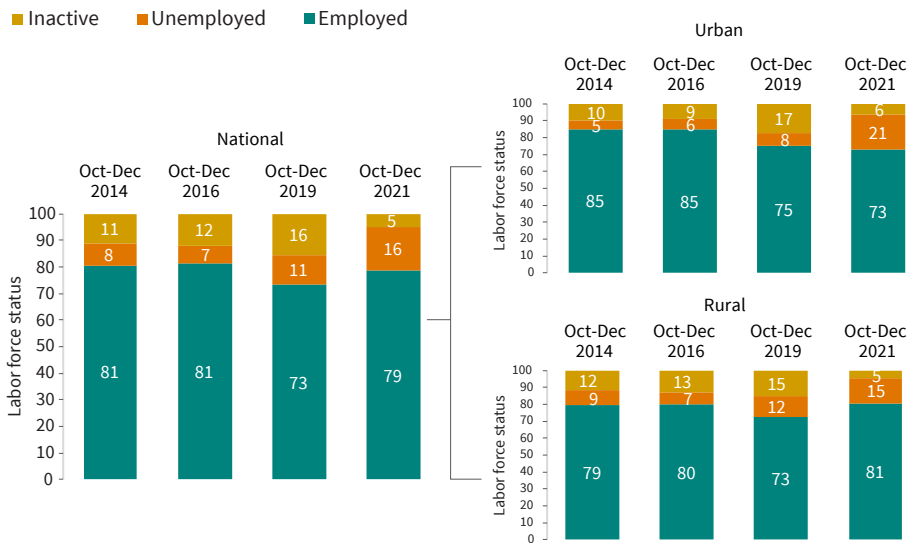
The questionnaire was designed by the World Bank and administered by ATR Consulting. The survey was administered in Dari and Pashto using a computer-assisted telephone interview (CATI) questionnaire based on an Open Data Kit (OPK) app. All enumerators were female, working remotely from within the country. Households were informed of the reason for their selection and the purpose of the survey, and verbal consent was obtained before proceeding with the interview. Each survey took an average of 25 minutes to administer. All respondents were compensated with a phone credit worth AFN 80 (~ USD 1 at the time of the survey) upon completion of the survey.

Main Results

Employment and Labor Earnings

Employment has increased at the national level, driven largely by an expansion of employment in rural areas. The AWMS collected information on employment status and the type of jobs held by household heads in the country. In doing so, it used the same questions asked in the previous rounds of the national household surveys, thus allowing for comparisons over time. Results show that 79 percent of household heads were employed in October–December 2021, higher than the 73 percent reported in the IE-LFS 2019–20 for the period October–December 2019 (Figure 3). Behind this increase lie dynamics that vary between urban and rural areas. In urban areas, the level of employment among household heads has declined slightly from 75 to 73 percent. In rural areas, by contrast, the share of employed household heads grew by eight percentage points from October–December 2019 to October–December 2021, possibly due to increased security and a return to farm or non-farm activities by some households.

FIGURE 3 Labor market status of household heads, 15–65 years old



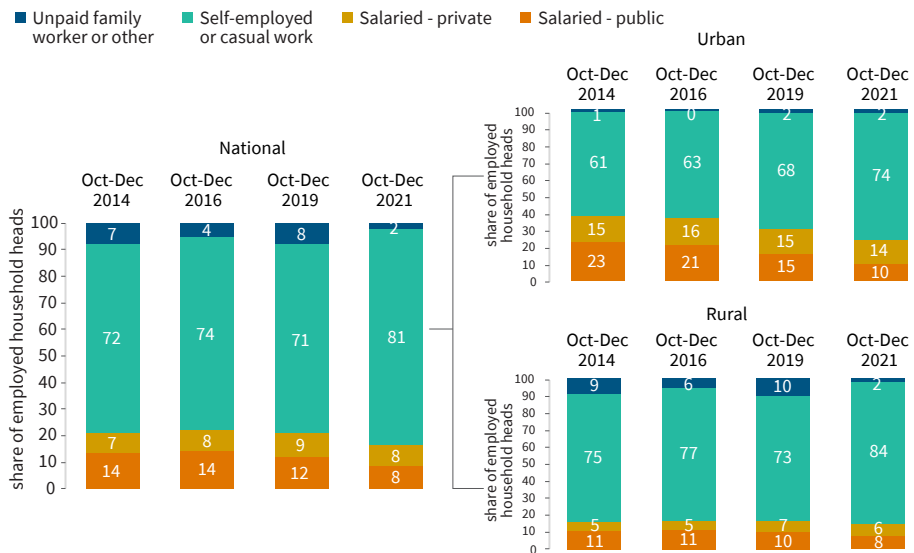
Source: Afghanistan Living Conditions Survey (ALCS) 2014–15 for 2014; ALCS 2016–17 for 2016; IE-LFS 2019–20 for 2019; AWMS for 2021.

Unemployment has increased, due in large part to a decline in the economically inactive population of working age in urban areas. In parallel with employment dynamics, there has been an increase in the share of household heads looking for employment in both urban and rural areas. In urban areas, the share of household

heads looking for jobs increased from 8 to 21 percent between October–December 2019 and October–December 2021, while in rural areas this share increased from 12 to 15 percent over the same period. The increase in unemployment is explained by a decline in the share of economically inactive household heads between 2019 and 2021, from 17 percent to 6 percent in urban areas, and from 15 percent to 5 percent in rural areas. The increase in job search, is consistent with a need to supplement household income, due to decreased earnings, a decline in remittances³ and the ongoing drought.

Public sector employment has decreased, owing to a drop in employment in the armed forces, the police, and security services, while self-employment has risen. Information collected on the type of employment shows significant changes in the composition of employment. Between October–December 2019 and October–December 2021, salaried employment declined in both the public and private sectors. The decrease was more pronounced in the public sector, with the share of household heads employed in the public sector dropping from 12 to 8 percent (Figure 4). Behind this decline is a large contraction of the security sector (which encompasses the armed forces, police, and security services), whose share among employed household heads shrank from over 3 percent in October–December 2019 to one percent in October–December 2021 (Figure 5). The share of public employees working in the administration also declined, from 2.8 percent to 0.9 percent

FIGURE 4 Type of Employment (Employed household heads, 15-65 years old)

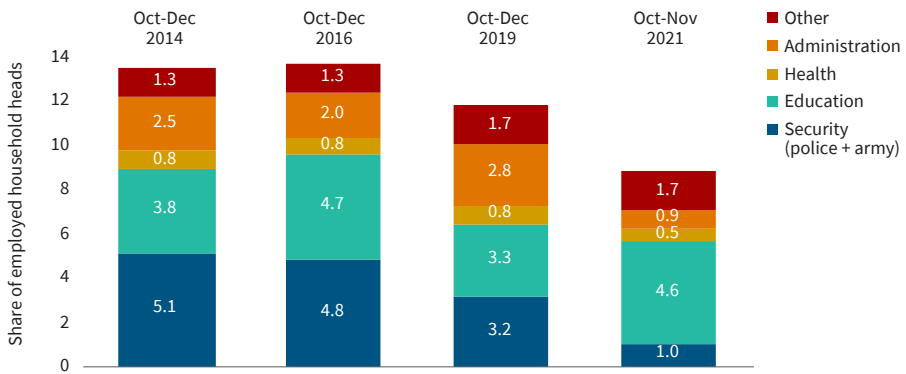


Source: ALCS 2014–15 for 2014; ALCS 2016–17 for 2016; IE-LFS 2019–20 for 2019; AWMS for 2021.

³ Remittance data is shown below.

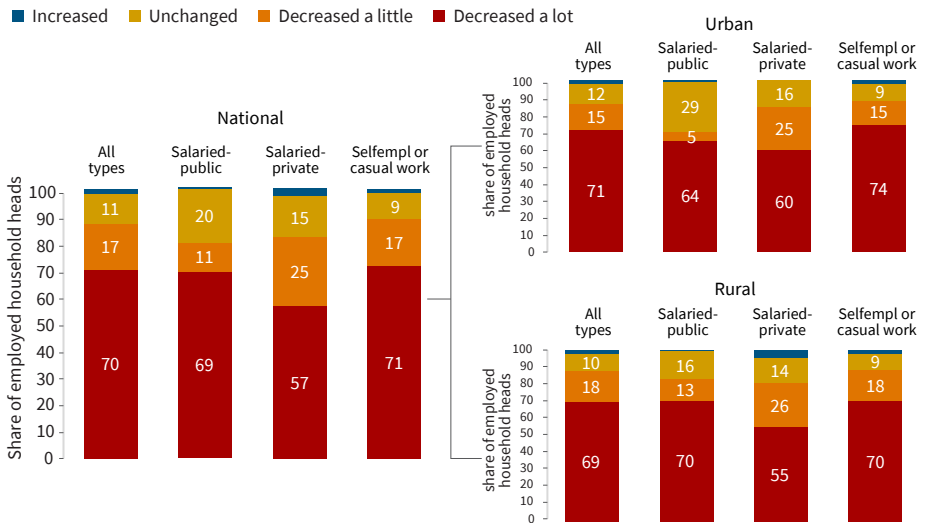
in the same period. The decline in private sector salaried employment has been smaller in magnitude (from 9 to 8 percent). Finally, self-employment (including casual work) has expanded in both urban and rural areas, increasing from 68 to 74 percent and from 73 to 84 percent, respectively, in the same time period.

FIGURE 5 Composition of Public Employment
(Share of employed household heads, 15-65 years old)



Source: ALCS 2014–15 for 2014; ALCS 2016–17 for 2016; IE-LFS 2019–20 for 2019; AWMS for 2021.

FIGURE 6 Change in labor earnings in the last 30 days
(Employed household heads, 15-65 years old)



Source: ALCS 2014–15 for 2014; ALCS 2016–17 for 2016; IE-LFS 2019–20 for 2019; AWMS for 2021.

Note: Labels with percentages not shown for “Increased” category.

In sharp contrast to the rise in employment and job search, workers across all sectors and in all regions of the country reported a significant decline in earnings. Labor earnings among employed household heads in the previous 30 days deteriorated across the board. Over four-fifths (87 percent) of employed household heads interviewed in October–December 2021 reported a decline in labor earnings in the last 30 days, with 70 percent reporting a substantial decline and 17 percent reporting a slight decline (Figure 6). Across employment types, those who were self-employed or in casual work saw the largest decline, with 88 percent of them reporting a drop in earnings. Those employed in salaried jobs also experienced a decline in income, with 80 percent of salaried workers in the public sector and 82 percent of salaried workers in the private sector reporting a drop in labor earnings.

These patterns repeat when disaggregating by urban and rural areas. The only exception is an increase in the share of public workers in urban areas that reported no changes in salary (29 percent). Even in this case, close to 70 percent of urban public workers report a decline in their labor earnings. When looking at employed household heads' responses by sector of activity, only minor differences arise. 89 percent of workers in industry reported a decline in earnings, as compared to 87 and 86 percent among those employed in agriculture and in services.

Food Security and Access to Safety Nets

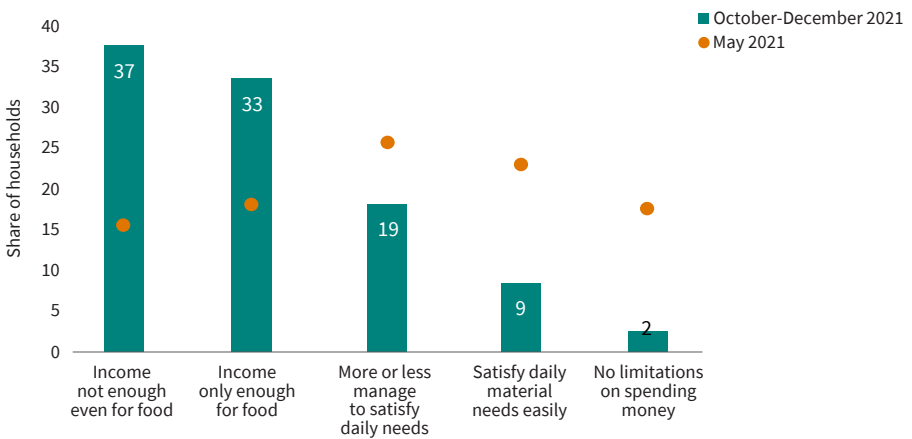
In line with the deterioration in labor earnings, most household heads interviewed in October–December 2021 reported a decline in their ability to cover basic food and non-food needs as compared to their recall for the month of May 2021. Over two-thirds (70 percent) of respondents indicated that their household was unable to cover basic food and non-food needs, as compared to about 35 percent in May 2021 (Figure 7). Of these, more than half (37 percent) were unable to cover food expenses—as compared to just 16 percent in May 2021. Similarly, 33 percent were unable to cover both food and non-food needs as compared to 18 percent in May 2021.

Households in both urban and rural areas also reported a decline the quantity and quality of food consumed. To enable a comparison with food security indicators collected by the WFP,⁴ the AWMS collected information on household-level food security using the same variables. The share of households reporting a switch to lower-quality or less expensive food rose from 56 percent, as reported by the WFP in July–August 2021, to 85 percent in October–December 2021 (Figure 8). Similarly, the share of households reporting a reduction in the number of meals consumed each day rose from 26 percent, as reported by the WFP, to 46 percent over the same period. An increase in the price of staple foods in recent months

⁴ WFP. 2021. Afghanistan Food Security Update. September 10. Available [here](#).

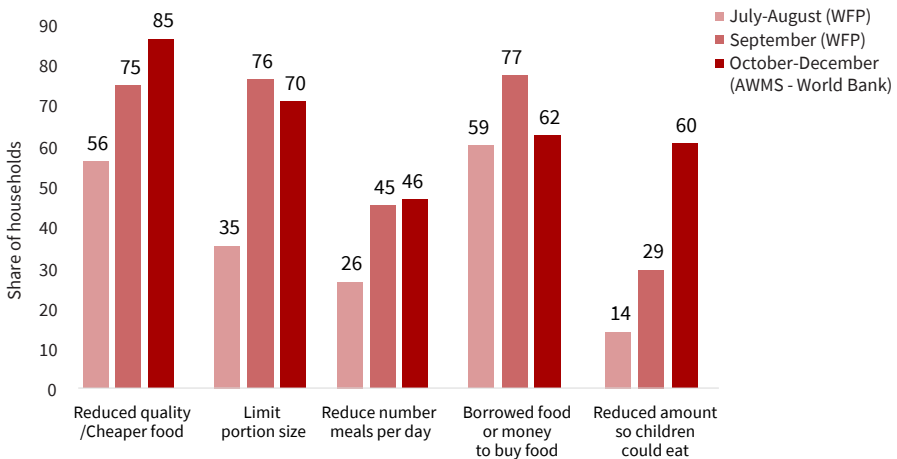
has exacerbated the decline in real purchasing power. Over 90 percent of household heads interviewed in October–December 2021 reported an increase in the price of cooking oil over the previous 30 days, while 88 percent reported an increase in the price of wheat flour in the same period. Most households reported substantial increases for other food staples, including chicken (74 percent), rice (62 percent) and green tea (61 percent) during the same reference period.

FIGURE 7 Self-reported household capacity to cover food and non-food expenses (May 2021 and October-December 2021)



Source: AWMS 2021.

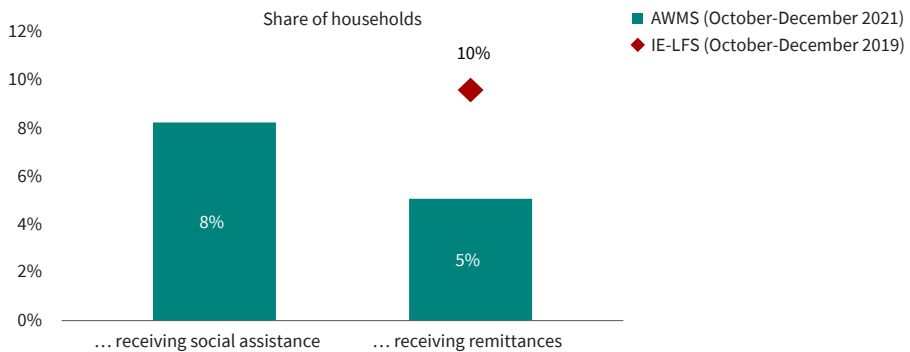
FIGURE 8 Household Food Security



Source: WFP and AWMS.

Access to social assistance remains limited. Only 8 percent of households in AWMS reported receiving some form of assistance (Figure 9), with minor differences across urban (9 percent) and rural areas (7 percent). The main sources of support reported by households include United Nations agencies and international nongovernmental organizations. Among households that reported receiving assistance, 71 percent indicated that it was provided by these institutions, 13 percent reported receiving it from the government, 5 percent were unable to identify who provided the assistance, and the remaining 11 percent reported receiving assistance from other sources, such as extended family, local communities, or religious institutions. When prompted about their preferred form of assistance, and allowing multiple responses, household heads chose in-kind food aid (77 percent) followed by cash transfers (41 percent). The share of households receiving private remittances has also declined substantially, halving from 10 percent in December 2019 to 5 percent in AWMS (Figure 9).

FIGURE 9 Access to social assistance and remittances



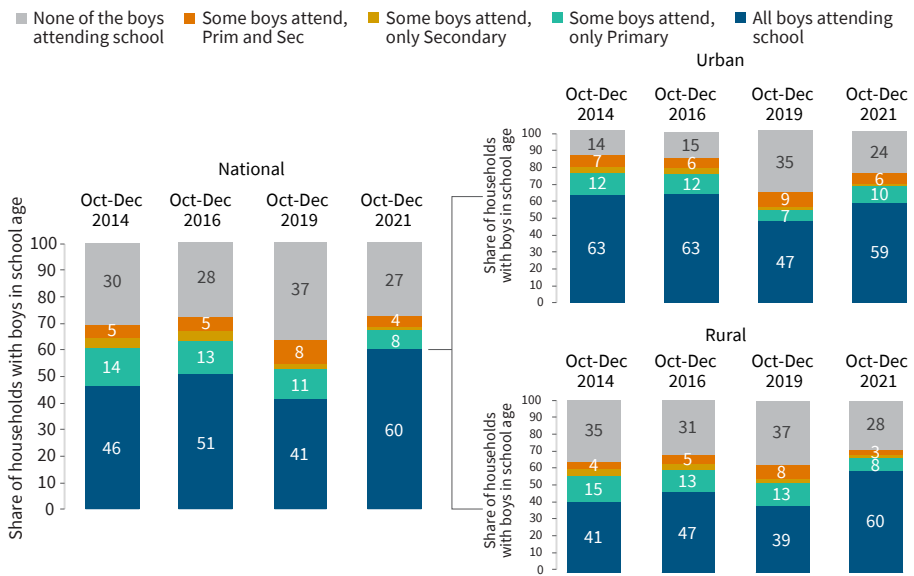
Source: IE-LFS 2019–20 for 2019; AWMS for 2021.

School Attendance among Boys and Girls

School attendance among boys of school age increased in October–December 2021 compared to October–December 2019, in both urban and rural areas. The AWMS collected information on school attendance for boys aged 6 to 18 in the household. This information was collected at the household level and refers to attendance at the moment of the interview. In contrast, information from previous rounds of the national household survey, which was used as a benchmark, was collected at the individual level and referred to attendance in the previous school year. Still, the information collected provides critical national-level information to assess changes in access to basic education in recent months. The information collected shows that, at the national level, the share of households, with boys

of school age, that reported that their boys were attending school in October–December 2021 was 73 percent—10 percentage points higher than the 63 percent reported by households interviewed in October–December 2019 for the preceding school year (Figure 10). As in previous rounds, the share of households sending their boys to school, was somewhat higher in urban areas (76 percent) than in rural ones (72 percent). Among households sending their boys to school in 2021, the vast majority sent all their boys to school, regardless of their age. Households that sent only some of their boys to school, prioritized schooling for those at the primary school level, across both urban and rural areas.

FIGURE 10 School attendance at the household level, households with boys between 6 and 18 years old

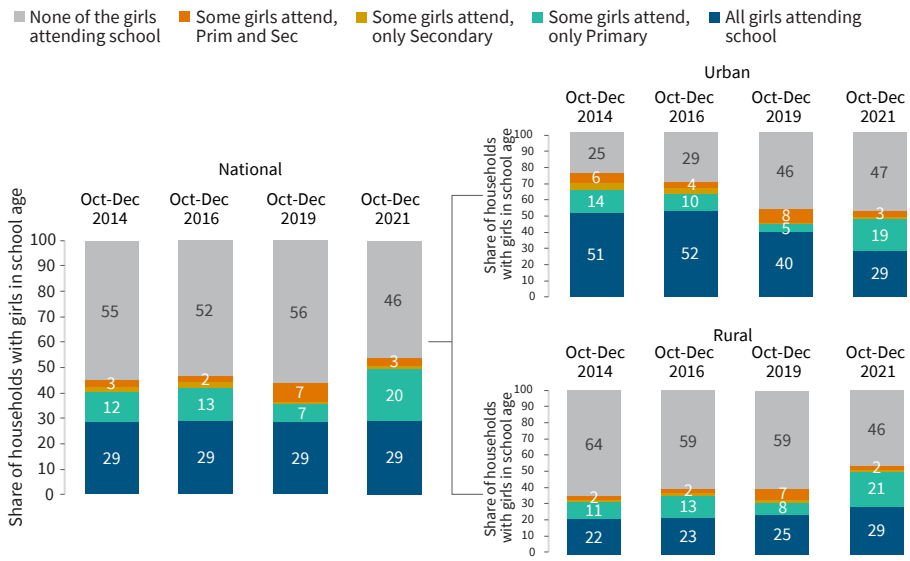


Source: ALCS 2014–15 for 2014; ALCS 2016–17 for 2016; IE-LFS 2019–20 for 2019; AWMS for 2021.
Note: Labels with percentages not shown for “some boys attend, only secondary” category.

School attendance among girls of school going age also increased in October–December 2021 as compared to October–December 2019. At the national level, the share of households sending their girls to school in October–December 2021 was 54 percent, up from 44 percent in the school year leading up to the national survey in October–December 2019 (Figure 11). In contrast to boys, however, there are significant differences between rural and urban areas and by school level. In urban areas, the share of households that sent their girls to school stayed more or less constant at around 53%. However, the share of households sending only primary school girls to school increased from 5 to 19 percent. In rural areas, on the other hand, there are clear gains in girls’ school attendance. The total

share of households sending their girls to school increased from 41 to 54 percent over the time period under review, and there are gains in both the share of households sending girls only for primary education (8 to 21 percent) and those sending all their girls to school (25 to 29 percent).

FIGURE 11 School attendance at the household level, households with girls between 6 and 18 years old

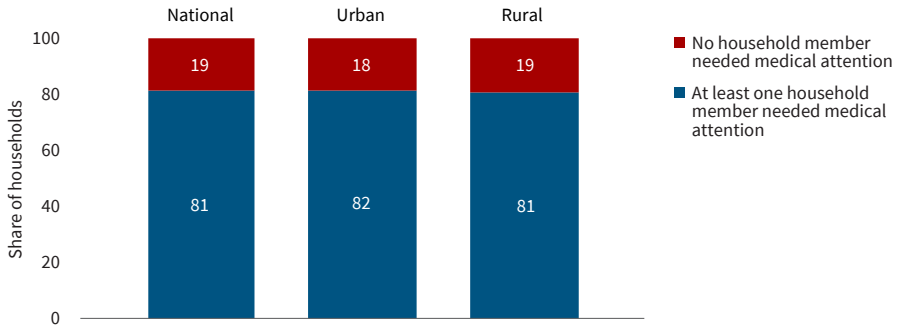


Source: ALCS 2014–15 for 2014; ALCS 2016–17 for 2016; IE-LFS 2019–20 for 2019; AWMS for 2021.
Note: Labels with percentages not shown for “some girls attend, only secondary” category.

Access to Health Services

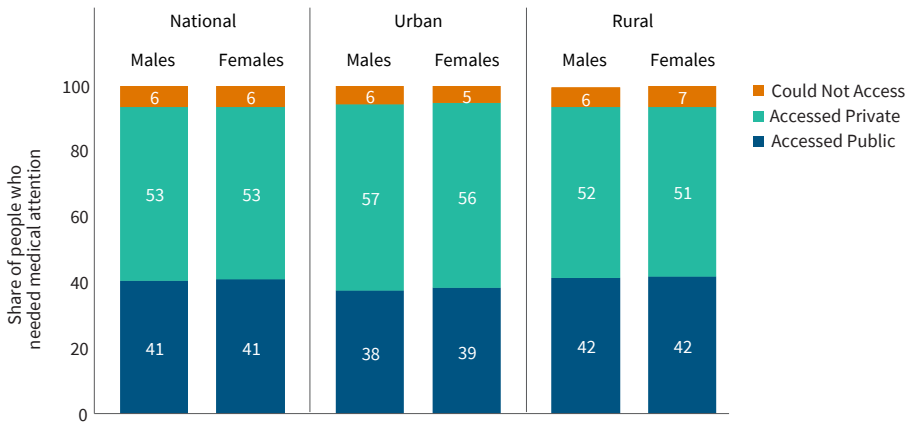
The vast majority of people who reported needing medical attention were able to obtain it in October–December 2021, with only minimal differences across gender and location. The AWMS collected information about household members that needed medical attention in the preceding 30 days. 81 percent of households interviewed reported that at least one household member needed some medical attention during that time frame (Figure 12). For those needing attention, over 90 percent were able to obtain the medical attention needed (Figure 13), either from a public provider (for example, a public hospital, basic health clinic, or community health clinic) or a private one (such as a private clinic, doctor’s office, or pharmacy). Results indicate virtually no difference between men and women or between rural and urban areas, though the use of public providers is somewhat higher in rural areas.

FIGURE 12 Households with a household member that needed medical attention in last 30 days



Source: IE-LFS 2019–20 for 2019; AWMS for 2021.

FIGURE 13 Access to health services by location, gender and service provider



Source: AWMS 2021.

