

Crisis and Recovery

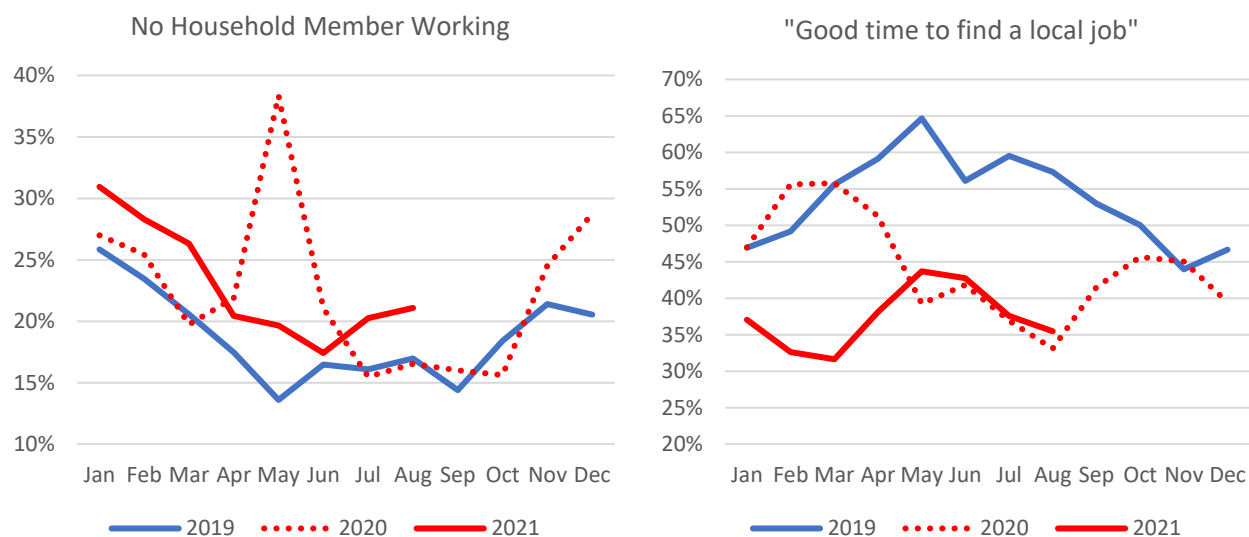
Economic and Social Monitoring from Listening to Tajikistan

Although recovery continued through August 2021 for some measures of wellbeing, Tajikistan's labor market remained weak, and food insecurity more prevalent than was typical before the pandemic. Employment quickly regained lost ground after the initial shock of the COVID-19 outbreak, but a second surge in joblessness took hold in November 2020 and has thereafter remained abnormally high. In August 2021, about 33 percent of households still reported reducing food consumption due to cost, and more than 40 percent that they were worried about obtaining enough food. But 2021 also brought several bright spots and improving conditions. A rebound in migration and remittances provided substantial relief as the share of migrants actively working in 2021 surpassed pre-pandemic levels. As of August, households reporting that one or more members were abroad for work also approached levels last reached in 2019. Progress in COVID-19 vaccinations maintained an auspicious trend, with about 83 percent of adults saying they were either vaccinated or planned to be in August 2021. A plurality of vaccine hesitant respondents said they believe they should not be vaccinated due to pre-existing health conditions, which is anomalous by global standards. But about 30 percent of these said they would consider vaccination if a healthcare worker advised it, and the authorities may wish to review official public guidance and standards for healthcare workers regarding eligibility criteria.

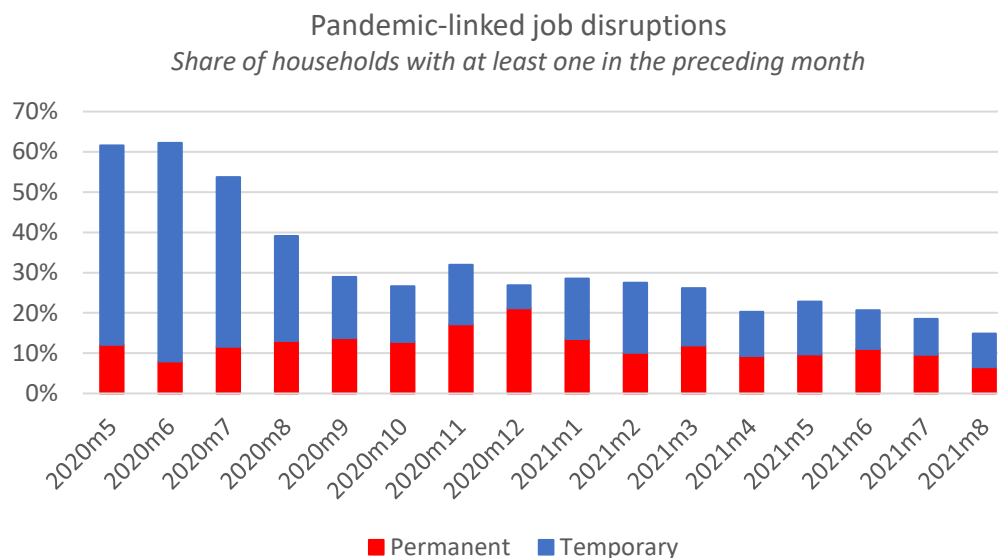
Jobs and employment

Despite regaining lost ground, the labor market remained unusually weak through the 3rd quarter of 2021.

The share of households who reported that no household member was actively working spiked to nearly 40 percent of households in May 2020 and has remained markedly worse than pre-pandemic conditions since November 2020, despite a quick initial recovery. After remaining uniformly worse than pre-pandemic trends throughout the year, in August 2021 this measure remained 4 percentage points above the same period in 2019. Subjective assessments of the local job market being "good" remained depressed, remaining nearly 20 percentage points below 2019 levels over the first 8 months of 2021.



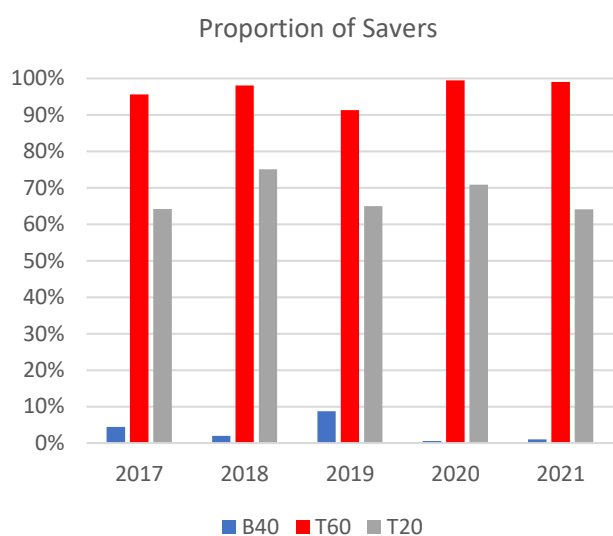
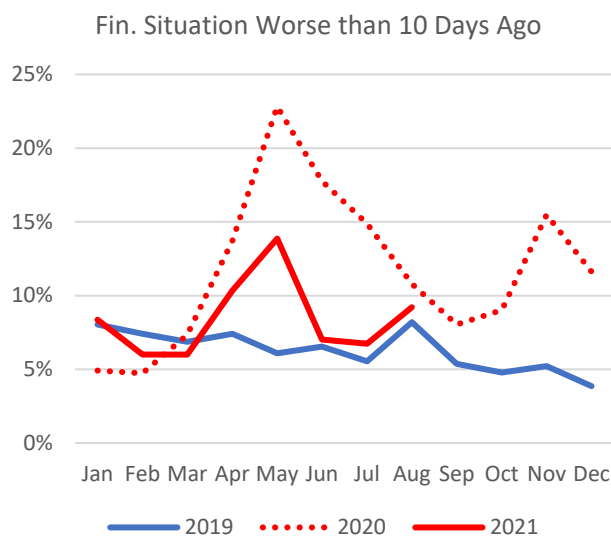
Work disruptions have been much less pervasive in 2021 compared to the first months of the pandemic but are often long-term when they do occur. In May 2020, about 62 percent of households reported at least one member had some type of work disruption due to the pandemic. By August 2021 this had fallen to about 15 percent of households. But while in the first months of the pandemic only about 18 percent of job disruptions were thought to be long-term, a surge in long-term job disruptions beginning in November and December 2020 pushed employment away from its pre-pandemic norm, and the trend continued throughout 2021. In 2021, nearly half (46 percent) of pandemic-disrupted jobs were reported as “unlikely to resume.” Since May 2020, between 7 and 21 percent of households reported at least one long-term disruption linked to the pandemic.



Household Finances

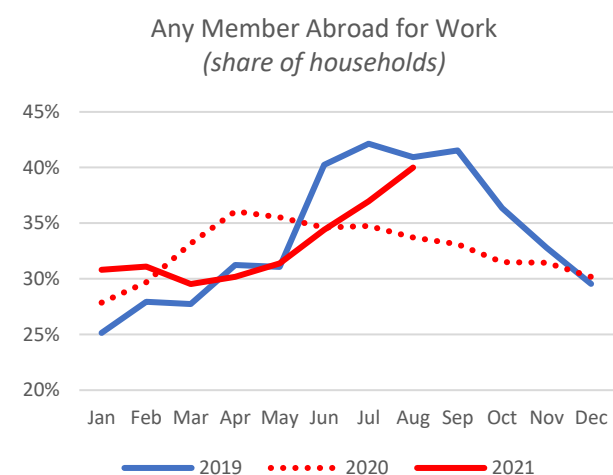
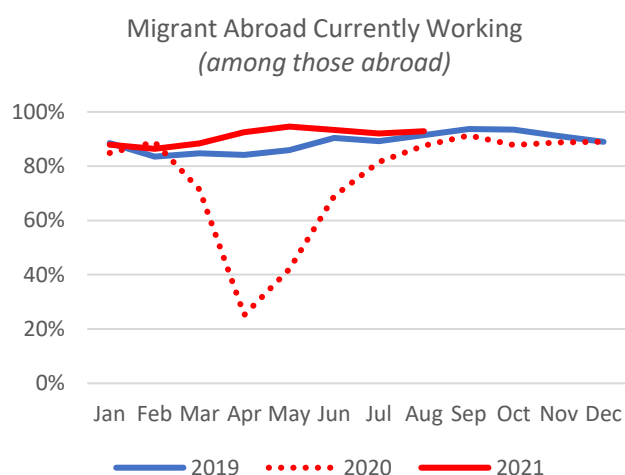
Household finances recovered lost ground for higher-income respondents but have remained fragile for the poorest 40 percent. The share of respondents reporting a worse household financial situation rose swiftly following the outbreak of COVID-19 and peaked in May 2020. Deteriorating finances again surged during the same period of 2021, albeit less severely. But some measures of financial resilience have improved, particularly among higher-income households. The share of respondents who said they made some savings in the preceding month reached about 8.5 percent on average in the first 8 months of 2021 compared to 5.7 percent over the same period in 2019. This improvement was concentrated almost entirely among those with above average income: throughout this time there were nearly no savers among those in the lowest income quintile, and more than 64 percent of savers were in the highest fifth of incomes in 2021. The share who believed they could pay an emergency expense of 100 somoni (about \$9) steadily improved from 43 percent in May 2020 to 70 percent on average throughout 2021, but again distributed unevenly, with more than 80 percent of the top income quintile able to pay compared to less than 63 percent among the poorest 40 percent. Those who received social assistance were more likely to report an ability to pay for an emergency expense but were no more likely than other households to report savings.





Migration and Remittances

Migration and remittances offer a bright spot in Tajikistan’s economic recovery. During the early months of the pandemic, temporary job loss was common among migrants even as remittances proved a source of resilience for households that received them. The share of migrants reported as actively working initially fell from 89 percent in February to 25 percent in April 2020. Working gradually recovered among those already abroad, converging to 2019 levels by the end of the year, but among fewer total migrants as travel restrictions limited out migration from Tajikistan. As the labor market worsened in late 2020, self-reported interest in future migration abroad rose above pre-pandemic levels. By 2021, active employment was higher among migrants than typical levels pre-pandemic, and with borders again open, seasonal migration swiftly rose, by August 2021 nearly matching 2019 levels.

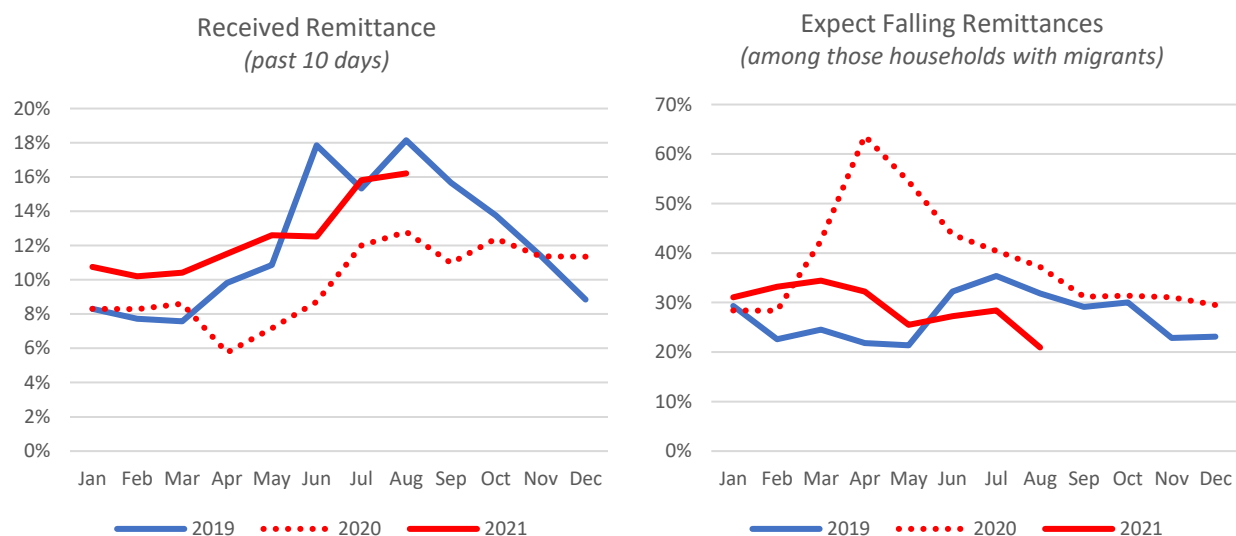


Although remittance income fell early in the pandemic, recovery came with surprising quickness, averting more severe impacts on wellbeing in Tajikistan. The share of migrants sending remittances home over the preceding 10 days caught up to the 2019 level at the end of 2020 and was slightly higher than the 2019 average throughout the first 8 months of 2021. Rebounding from 62 percent of recipient households reporting a decline in remittances in April 2020 (the highest share ever recorded in the L2T survey), expectations for remittance



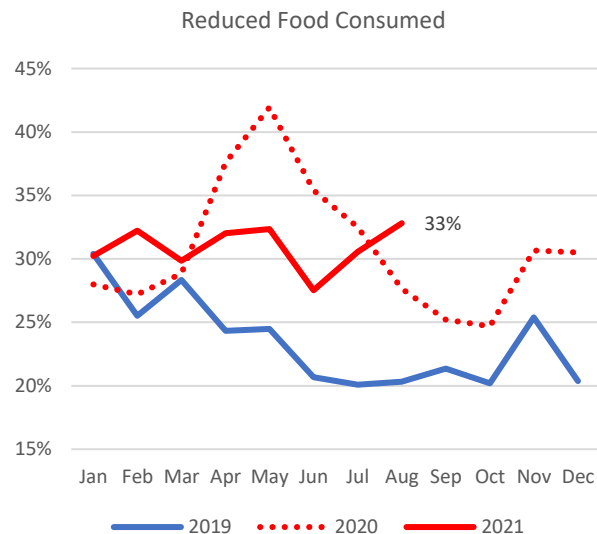
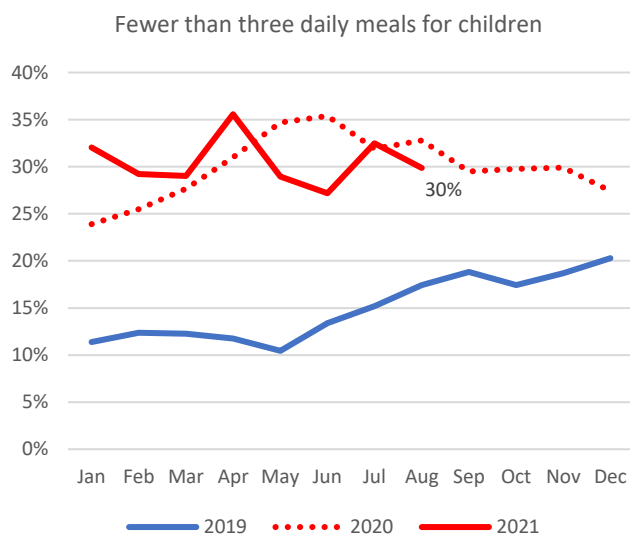
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income surpassed 2019 levels in June 2021. By August 2021 only 21 percent of households expected their remittance income to decline in the coming month. These are auspicious trends for poverty reduction. Poor households in Tajikistan typically depend much more on remittances than the better off do (indeed many households that are not poor are so due primarily to remittance income), and more than 80 percent of households that receive remittances reported that they primarily spend them on food and other necessities.

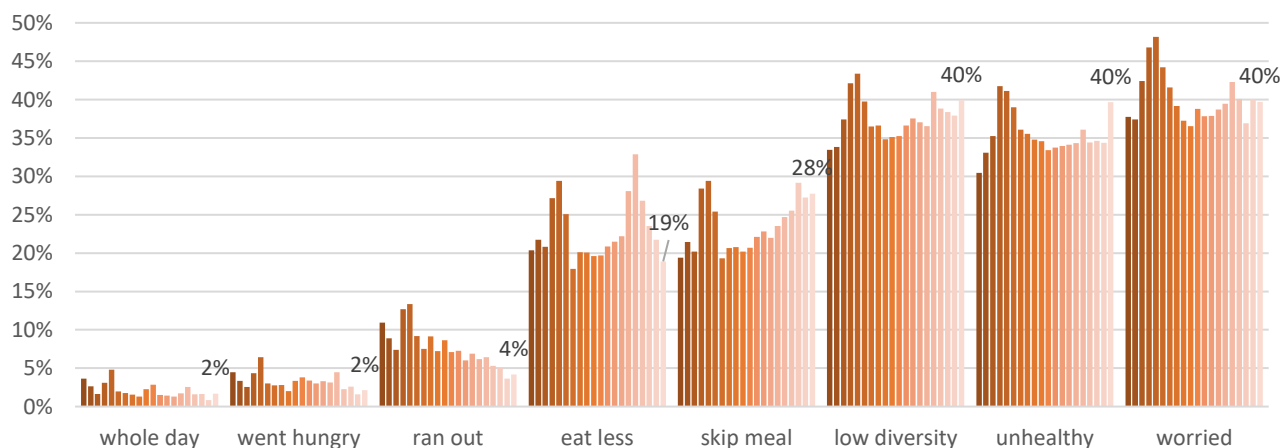


Food Security and Spending

Reports of reduced food consumption spiked twice in 2020 and remained as much as 13 percentage points above pre-pandemic levels through August 2021. More than 30 percent of households reported that children in their household ate fewer than 3 full meals in 2021 and compared to 2019 this measure of food insecurity has continuously remained elevated. Overall food security deteriorated sharply during the peak of the crisis across a range of indicators, with rising shares reporting going hungry, reducing dietary diversity, and worries over obtaining enough food. Similar increases in vulnerability were seen in reduced ability to pay for utilities, and in coping mechanisms such as selling assets and reduced spending on medical care. Although most such non-food coping strategies stabilized and returned to their typical levels by 2021, food insecurity remains alarmingly high and well above the pre-pandemic norm. While very few households reported local shortages of basic goods, every measure of food insecurity reported in L2T was strongly (negatively) associated with income, suggesting that cost and insufficient income is a key driver of reported food deprivation. When in economic distress, eating less or fewer types of food are some of the more common coping strategies, while more severe deprivation such as going without food for an entire day or running out of food are less frequent.



Measures of Food Insecurity (January 2020-August 2021)

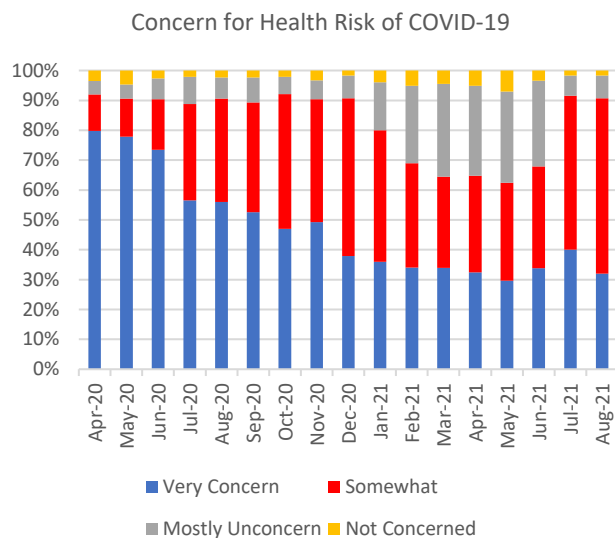
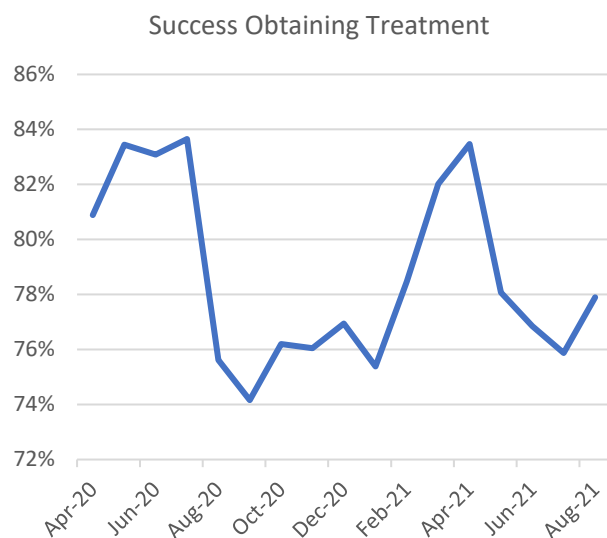


Notes: all questions referring to the preceding month: i) members went without food for a whole day, ii) hungry but did not eat, iii) ran out of food, iv) eat less than respondent felt they should, v) skipped meals due to cost, vi) only ate a few kinds of foods, vii) unable to eat nutritious food due to cost, viii) worried would not have enough food to eat.

Health Services

During COVID-19 waves, high shares of those in need of medical care said they were unable to get it. In the early months of the pandemic, as many as 30 percent of households per month reported that at least one member needed in-person medical treatment. However, many respondents reported that they were unsuccessful getting the treatment they sought. Service availability appears to be strongly linked to pandemic conditions: in July 2021, only 76 percent reported success, rising to 78 percent in August. Reports of inability to access care were higher in urban areas (23 percent of attempts vs. 17 percent in rural areas).



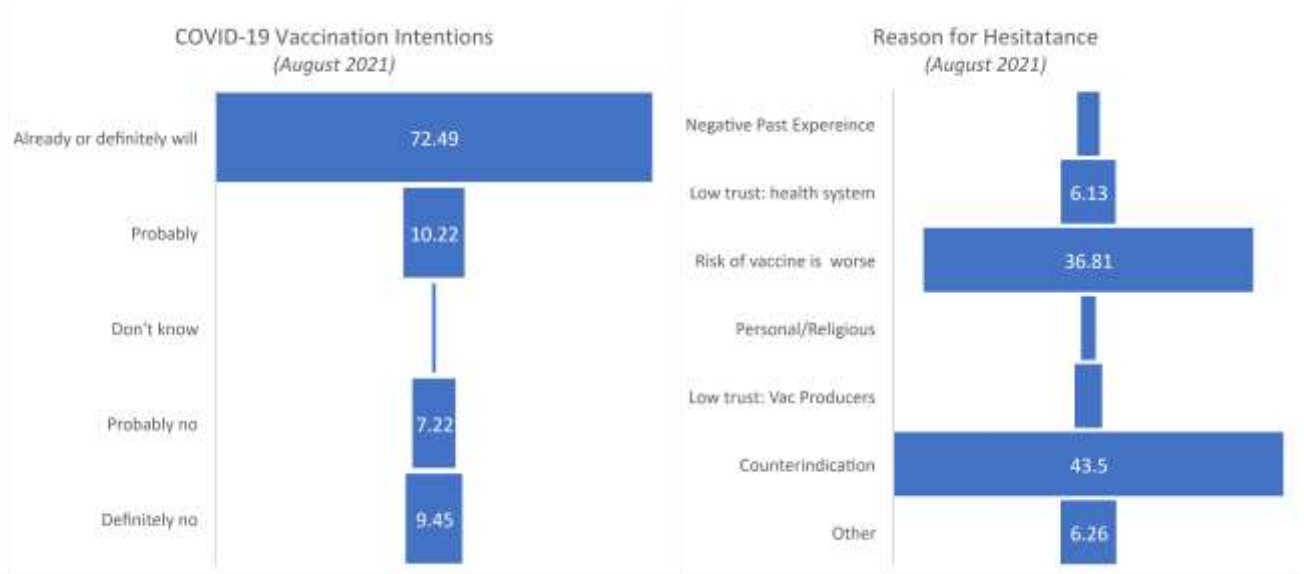


Public concern about the health risks from the pandemic is responsive to pandemic conditions. In the early days of the pandemic, about 80 percent of respondents reported being very concerned about the health of their family. By January 2021, the share had fallen to about 35 percent, largely replaced by those saying they are “somewhat” concerned. But with the spread of the delta variant in Central Asia over the summer months of 2021, a rising share of respondents expressed health worries, with the share of those mostly or totally unconcerned falling from about 36 percent in March 2021, to only 9 percent in August 2021. A respondent reporting health concerns has remained positively correlated with precautionary behavior, including reported mask wearing, and social distancing.

Knowledge, Education, and Behavior

At more than 72 percent in August 2021, a relatively high share of respondents (all of whom are adults) say they are either already vaccinated or plan to be. Only about 17 percent of respondents said they either probably or definitely would not be vaccinated, and more than 87 percent that the vaccine was both locally available and that all adults were eligible. The predominant reason given for not planning to be vaccinated was “contra-indication or pre-existing health condition” which accounted for more than 43 percent of negative responses. Among the vaccine hesitant, about 30 percent said they would be more willing to be vaccinated if a health worker told them they should be vaccinated, and another 17 said they may be willing if encouraged to do so by family and friends. This openness to being persuaded by a medical professional is potentially associated with the belief that a health problem prevents the respondent from being vaccinated, however more interview rounds are needed to confirm the strength of this link.





Direct messaging about COVID-19 is associated with more risk reducing behaviors. During the pandemic, the Mobile Engage initiative led by the Ministry of Health and Social Protection and sponsored by the World Bank sent public health focused SMS messages to the population through the three largest telecom providers in the country. Reporting having received information (through either SMS and/or in-person healthcare campaigns) was strongly associated with greater reporting of risk reducing behavior. Looking in more detail at changes in individual reporting: going from receiving no SMS message in the previous interview to receiving a message in the week before the following interview increased reporting of mask wearing, safety-related changes to work patterns, reducing visits with friends and relatives, reducing other travel, and safer greetings (fewer handshakes, etc.).

