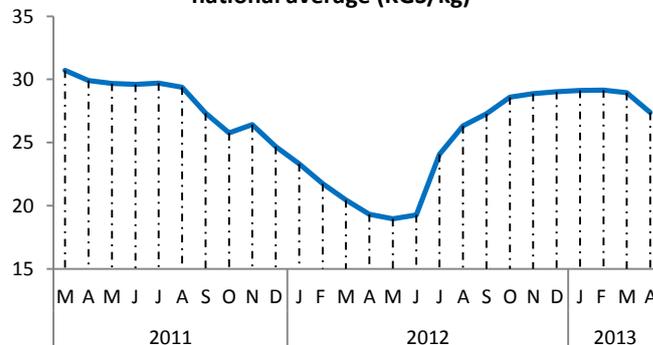


Background

- The Kyrgyz Republic is a least-developed, low-income food deficit country, with a population of 5.5 million. The country ranks 125th on the UNDP Human Development Index.
- The poverty rate has increased for the last three years from 31.7% in 2009 to 33.7% in 2010 and 36.8% in 2011. Consequently, approximately two million people now live below the poverty line. Over two thirds of the population live in rural areas, where the poverty rate averaged 40.4% in 2011.
- The country was affected by the 2007/8 global food price crisis followed by the fuel and global financial crisis, and 2010 civil unrest and drought in Russia and the CIS.
- Since mid-2012, food prices increased significantly particularly those of wheat flour, a staple for most of the population. The retail price of wheat flour in April 2013 was 42% higher than the same month in 2012, and was only 11% lower than its peak level in March 2011 (*Figure 1*).
- WFP has been conducting a nation-wide Food Security Assessment (FSA) twice a year to provide a timely evidence-basis for planning food and nutrition security interventions. The first FSA was conducted in August 2010 during the civil unrest crisis. In March 2013, the sixth FSA was conducted. In total, 2,000 households were interviewed nationwide, applying WFP's standard food security assessment methodology.

Figure 1. First grade wheat flour retail price, national average (KGS/kg)



Methodology

- Statistically representative data at national and oblast levels were obtained. The sample comprised 2,000 households, including 652 in urban areas (33%) and 1,348 in rural areas (67%). The urban to rural distribution of the sample is close to the national average (31% to 69%, respectively). In each oblast and in Bishkek city, 250 households were randomly selected.
- Food insecurity levels were determined by combining a Food Consumption Score (frequency and diversity of food intake) with the level of income as the economic food access indicator. Food insecure household included: 1) Households with poor food access and poor food consumption; 2) Households with good food access but extremely poor food consumption; and 3) Households with sufficient food consumption but extreme poor food access.

How many people are food insecure or at risk of becoming food insecure?

- An estimated **24%** of households (4% severely food insecure, 20% moderately food insecure) were found to be food insecure (*Figure 2*). This means that about **1.3 million people** were food insecure during the March 2013 assessment. The proportion of food insecure households remained almost unchanged from September 2012 (25% food insecure). However, this is a deterioration compared to the same month in 2012 (1 million people).
- In addition to 24% of food insecure households, **16% of food secure households used negative coping strategies** for accessing food, such as limiting portion sizes, reducing number of meals, or reducing adult consumption so small children could eat. This is a slight increase from September 2012 (13%). These households could be at-risk of becoming food insecure in the event of further shocks (e.g. further price increases, upsurge of conflict, natural disasters), meaning an additional **665,000 people face the risk of food insecurity**.

Figure 2. Estimated proportion of food insecure households

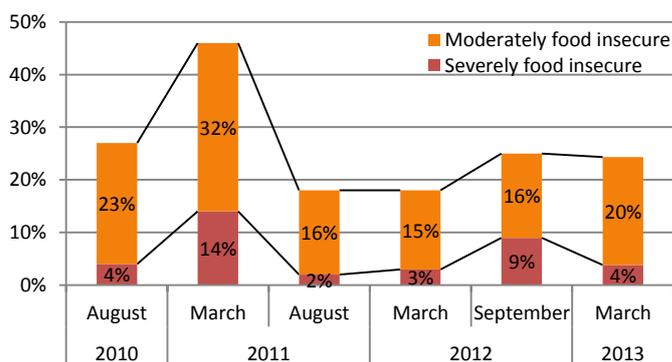
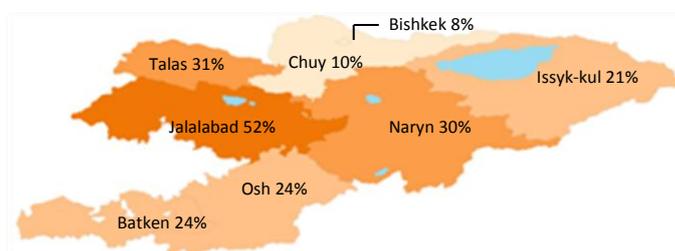
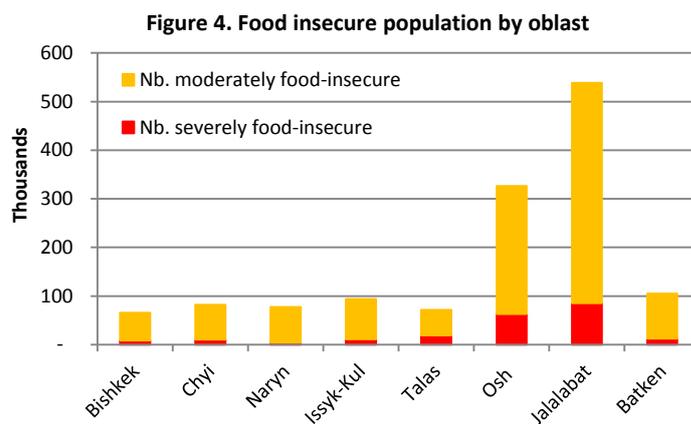


Figure 3. Estimated proportion of food insecure households by oblast



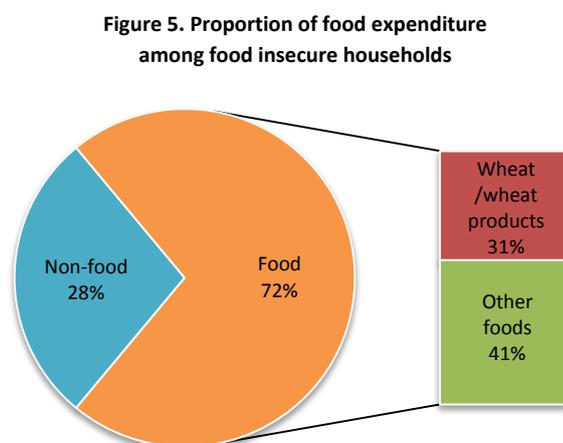
Where are the food insecure people?

- Food insecurity has continued to be more prevalent in rural areas since the beginning of the assessment in 2010. However, the proportion of food insecure household **increased in urban areas** from 9% in September 2012 to 12% in March 2013, while the proportion **decreased in rural areas** from 35% to 31% during the same period.
- The highest proportion of food insecure household was found in **Jalalabad** (52%), **Talas** (31%), and **Naryn** (30%) (**Figure 3**).
- The proportion of food insecure household remains relatively low in Bishkek city and Chuy oblast. However, the situation deteriorated from 1% to 8% in **Bishkek city** and 8% to 10% in **Chuy** oblast.
- The bulk of the food insecure population was located in **Osh** and **Jalalabad** oblasts reflecting the higher levels of food insecurity and the large population in these oblasts (**Figure 4**).



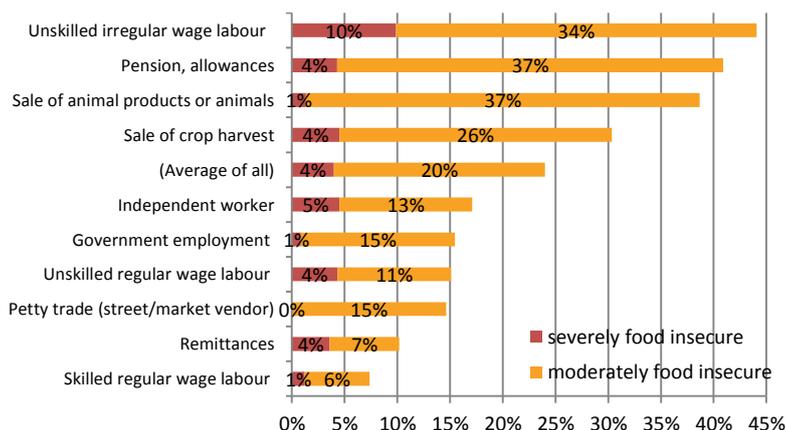
Why are they food insecure and vulnerable?

- Household food stocks** from winter and early spring harvests are crucial for households particularly when food price are high. In March 2013, the average food insecure household had wheat stocks for only 18 days. This is **lower than** in September 2012 (22 days) and March 2012 (21 days). A similar trend was observed for potato stocks. The average food insecure household had 18 days of stock in March 2013, compared with 39 days in September 2012 and 28 days in March 2012. This is likely due to reduced harvest in 2012 compared with 2011 and high prices in local markets since mid-2012.
- Food insecure households **spent 72% of their budget on food** (**Figure 5**). This is significantly higher than in September 2012 (61%) when households spent a significant proportion of their budget on education and social events. This indicates higher dependency on food purchases and therefore increased vulnerability to the recent price hikes. Wheat flour and its products accounted for **31%** of the budget of food insecure households. This is also higher than in September 2012 (22%).



- 42% of households had income below the poverty line.** This is consistent with the most recent official statistics (37% in 2011). This is a slight deterioration compared to September 2012 (38%) likely due to limited income generating opportunities during winter.
- As it was observed in previous rounds, food insecure households relied on **irregular cash income** such as unskilled labour. Meanwhile, more food secure households were found among those who had income from regular wage labour, remittances, business and employment in the public sector (**Figure 6**).

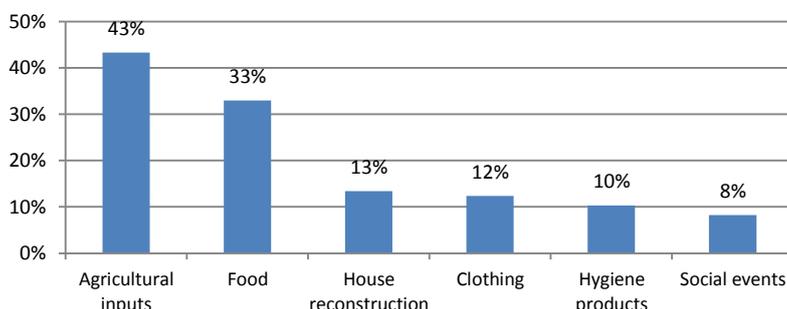
Figure 6. Proportion of food insecure households by main income source (%)



- Remittances** play an increasingly important role for households to meet their daily needs. **24%** of total households reported to have at least one labour migrant. This is higher than in the previous round (22% in September 2012) and similar to March 2012 (24%).

- 22%** of food insecure households reported that they have debts to reimburse. The most important reason for taking debt among food insecure households was to buy agricultural inputs (43%) and food (33%) (**Figure 7**).

Figure 7. Main reasons of taking debt among food insecure households



- Compared to September 2012, dietary diversity and frequency improved in rural areas and remained almost the same in urban areas. Food insecure households consumed meat more frequently (2.9 days a week) compared to September 2012 (2.4 days).
- Deteriorated food security in Jalalabad, Naryn, Bishkek and Chuy reflects **decreased income. The proportion of households that had monthly income below the poverty line increased from 62% to 69% in Jalalabad, 37% to 61% in Naryn, 5% to 10% in Bishkek, and 17% to 26% in Chuy.** Income opportunities are limited in winter, and the inflow of remittances tends to decrease because many labour migrants temporarily return to their homeland during winter and early spring. Harvesting of wheat was less successful in Jalalabad (16% of households planned to plant wheat but only 2% harvested before September 2012).
- Food security in Talas decreased from 8% in September 2012 to 31% in March 2013, reflecting a **seasonal deterioration of consumption as well as decreased income.** The number of households consuming an inadequate diet increased from 2% to 14% between September 2012 and March 2013. The same trend was observed in 2012 (from 4% in September 2011 to 22% in March 2012). The proportion of the households who had income below the poverty line also increased from 31% in September 2012 to 44% in March 2013.

Is the situation likely to change in the coming months?

- The situation is expected to improve towards the summer in most areas, as the production outlook for winter crops is good, generally as a result of favourable weather in March and April 2013. Sowing of summer crops started earlier than an average year, and a positive forecast has been made for the domestic harvest of wheat.
- However, **the high prices of wheat flour remain a risk to food insecurity.** The export price of wheat flour in Kazakhstan showed a downward trend in April, but remained at a near-record level. This will keep domestic prices of wheat flour in the Kyrgyz Republic at a high level. It is unlikely that the prices of basic foods will decline to pre-2007/8 crisis levels during the next few months.
- **Slowed economic growth in the first quarter of 2013 and forecasted reduced growth in Russia** may affect the food access of households who rely on income from labour migrants.

Recommendations for interventions

- A combination of short- and medium-term interventions is necessary to address both immediate food needs and the main causes of food insecurity. The most vulnerable groups need immediate support to fill caloric needs as well as help ease the burden of increasing expenditures for basic food items. At the same time, support should be provided to small-scale farmers to achieve sustainable agricultural production and improve their resilience to natural disasters and high food prices.
- Food security assistance will likely be required for the 1.3 million people estimated to be food insecure at the time of the survey. WFP already targets 123,200 people in four oblasts through its Vulnerable Group Feeding spring programme.
- Considering the important role of social transfers to alleviate poverty and household food insecurity, measures to strengthen the social assistance system are essential, including an expansion of the government-provided Monthly Benefit in coverage and size, and better targeting of those who receive this social safety net.
- Strengthening the national system for monitoring food security and nutrition is essential in order to better predict and respond to food insecurity. Special attention should be paid to potential risks to food security (food prices, production and remittance inflow) and impacts on food security (consumption, diversity and expenditure).