At nearly 49 percent, the labour force participation rate is one of the lowest in the world, especially for women (12 percent) and 15–24 year-old youth (26 percent). The unemployment rate has increased beyond the 2012 level to 9.9 percent in 2017/18, but was nearly 21 percent for women. Underutilization is particularly high among IDPs, with almost 24 percent unemployed or underemployed (WB, April 2019).

The poor performance of the agricultural sector and lack of rural employment have driven migration to urban areas where people face poor public service delivery and increasing poverty (FAO, January 2020). Even though physical market access for IDPs and returnees was good, they were often unable to buy essential goods because their monthly income was lower than the basic needs threshold (MCNA, December 2019). Based on WFP price data, cereal prices remained stable during 2019 except for rice, which peaked in March before dropping. Bread prices peaked in August (WFP, December 2019).

Weather extremes

Heavy rains during March/April caused flooding in several governorates with Salah al-Din, Bara and Missan the worst affected. Floods caused temporary displacement and disrupted clean water supplies in some areas (OCHA, May 2019), affecting an estimated 273,000 people in central and southern governorates overall (USAID, June 2019). However, the 2019 cereal harvest was favourable – estimated at 5.6 million tonnes, over 80 percent above the 2018 harvest and 30 percent above the five-year-average (FAO-GIEWS, December 2019).

NUTRITION OVERVIEW

The 2018 MICS found 'low' prevalence (2.5 percent) of acute malnutrition among children aged 6–59 months. The highest prevalence of 5 percent was found in Najaf and Qadissiyah governorates. Like wasting, stunting was 'low' at 10 percent with the highest levels found in Kirkuk (15 percent) and Thiqar (14.5 percent) (MICS, 2018). Among pregnant and lactating women, only 3 percent were considered as acutely malnourished (CFSVA, 2016).

A very low percentage (25.8 percent) of children under 6 months were exclusively breastfed. Just 34.3 percent of 6–23 month-olds consumed the minimum acceptable diet required for their growth and development (MICS, 2018).

Nationally 93 percent of households had access to at least basic water services, falling to 87 percent in rural areas (MICS, 2018). Access to safe water, however, has been fragile in Basra governorate, which experienced a water crisis in 2018 (HRW, July 2019). Health facilities suffered huge damage during the 2014–2017 conflict with half destroyed in 13 of the 16 assessed cities in Iraq (Word Bank, January 2018). From 1 January through 17 November 2019, Iraq had 1,222 confirmed cases of measles (WHO, November 2019).