



# HURRICANE MELISSA AND THE RISE OF HOUSEHOLD VULNERABILITY IN HAITI



## Key Message



### Food Security Crisis Deepens Across Affected Communes

Food insecurity has sharply intensified, with 72% of households in the hardest-hit areas now classified in IPC Phase 4 (emergency), compared to 65% in non-affected zones. Severe hunger affects half of all households, particularly in Nippes, Grand'Anse, and Sud, where poor food consumption and extreme coping strategies have surged—underscoring the urgent need for immediate, targeted food assistance to prevent further deterioration.



### Displacement and Migration Pressures Escalate

Internal displacement increased by over 2% following Hurricane Melissa, and 61% of households now express a desire to migrate due to the loss of shelter, disrupted livelihoods, and limited access to essential services—signaling rising instability and underscoring the urgent need for coordinated efforts to stabilize affected communities and prevent further displacement.



### Collapse of Local Food Systems and Market Access

Although markets remain operational in areas affected by Hurricane Melissa, 15% of households lost access, leading to reduced consumer demand and widespread loss of perishable goods. This disruption has significantly weakened local food systems, deepening household vulnerability and hindering recovery efforts.



### Critical Gaps in Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene (WASH)

In the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa, 60% of households are relying on natural water sources or wells, often facing shortages due to broken systems, while 67% practice open defecation and only 33% use latrines—conditions that expose communities to health risks and potential disease outbreaks, underscoring the urgent need for investment in WASH infrastructure to restore safe and dignified living conditions.



### Health System Overwhelmed and Under Resourced

In the wake of Hurricane Melissa, 57% of healthcare services require out-of-pocket payment, and no mental health or psychosocial support is available. Common illnesses such as diarrhea, skin diseases, dengue, and gastric conditions are surging due to poor hygiene and unsafe environments, while health centers remain under-resourced and largely inaccessible—particularly for pregnant women and children—hindering effective post-disaster care.



### Protection Risks Intensify for Women, Girls, and Youth

Protection risks have intensified, with 33% of localities reporting women and girls forced to beg or travel alone for food, and 42% citing cases of early or forced marriage. Sexual exploitation and youth coercion into violence are on the rise, highlighting the urgent need to strengthen protection systems and accountability mechanisms to safeguard vulnerable populations.

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## CONTEXT

On October 24, 2025, Hurricane Melissa struck southern Haiti, unleashing widespread disruption across key sectors and compounding existing vulnerabilities. While markets remained operational in many areas, access was severely limited for a portion of the population, leading to reduced consumer activity and losses in perishable goods. These disruptions undermined local food systems and heightened food insecurity in communities already facing fragile conditions. The hurricane also triggered a wave of internal displacement, with many households losing shelter and livelihoods, prompting a growing desire to migrate in search of safety and essential services.

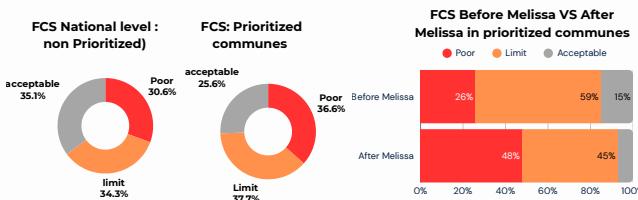
The storm further exposed critical gaps in water, sanitation, and healthcare infrastructure. Many households rely on unsafe water sources and lack access to basic sanitation, increasing the risk of disease outbreaks. Health facilities are underequipped, financially inaccessible for many, and unable to provide mental health support. As a result, preventable illnesses and malnutrition are on the rise, particularly among children and pregnant women. Vulnerable groups—including women, girls, and youth—face heightened protection risks, including exploitation and violence. The departments of Nippes, Grand'Anse, and Sud have been particularly affected, underscoring the urgent need for coordinated humanitarian action and long-term resilience strategies to stabilize communities and restore essential services.



# FOOD SECURITY AND HOUSEHOLD VULNERABILITY IN THE WAKE OF HURRICANE MELISSA

## FOOD CONSUMPTION

Households in communes affected by Hurricane Melissa have experienced a sharp deterioration in food security, as reflected by a significant rise in poor Food Consumption Scores. Post-storm assessments show an increase of over 20 points in these scores, indicating a substantial decline in dietary diversity and meal frequency. This surge highlights the deepening crisis in areas already struggling with fragile food systems and limited access to nutritious food.

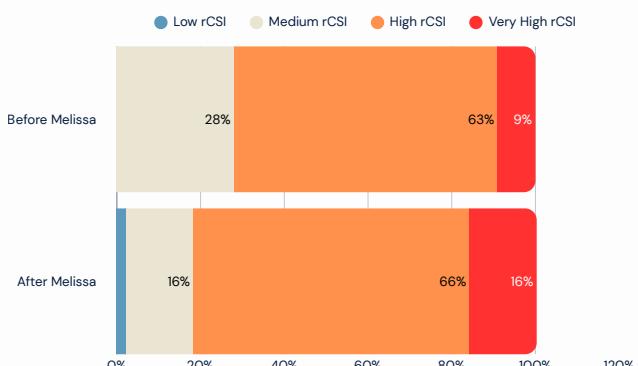
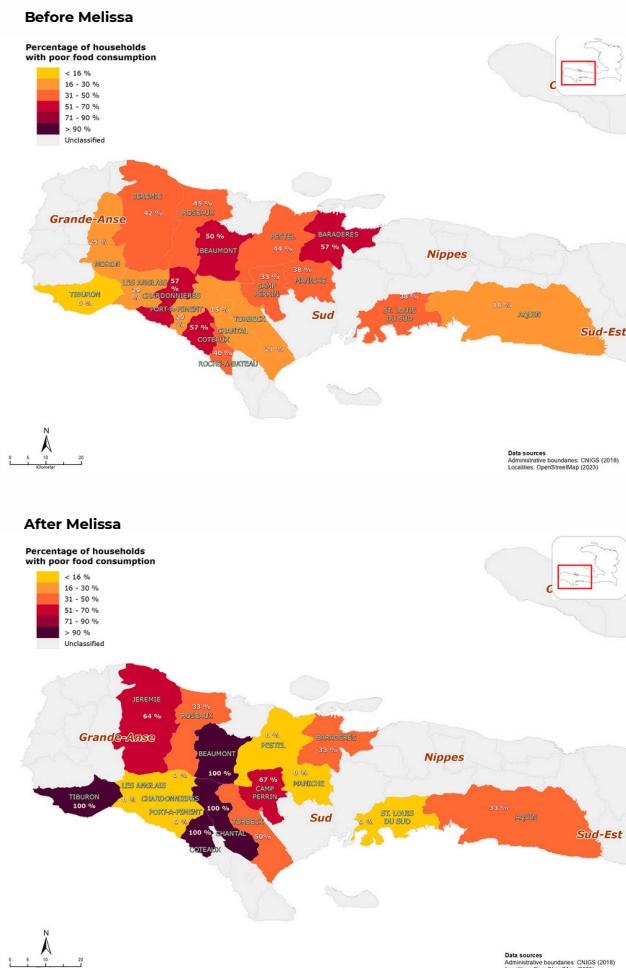
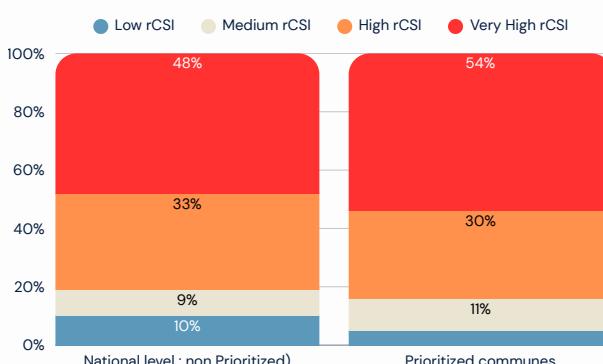


WFP, mVAM 2025

The worsening consumption patterns underscore the hurricane's impact on household resilience and coping capacity. With local markets disrupted and livelihoods severely affected, families are increasingly unable to meet basic nutritional needs. This trend not only signals immediate humanitarian concerns but also points to long-term risks for health, development, and stability in the most vulnerable communities.

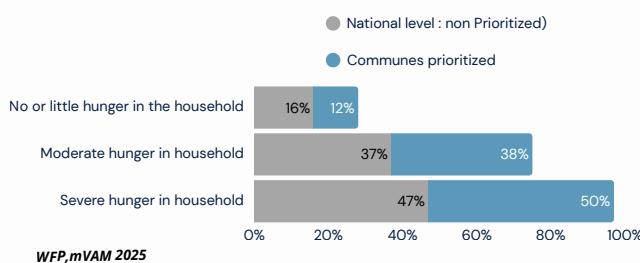
## REDUCED COPING STRATEGIES

Following Hurricane Melissa, food security in Haiti has sharply deteriorated, as evidenced by a rise in high-level food coping strategies among affected households. **The proportion of families resorting to extreme measures—such as skipping meals, reducing portion sizes, or relying on less nutritious foods—increased from 9% to 16%. This escalation is particularly pronounced in the departments of Nippes, Grand'Anse and Sud, where the storm's impact was most severe. These figures reflect the growing strain on household resilience and the urgent need for targeted food assistance and recovery efforts.**

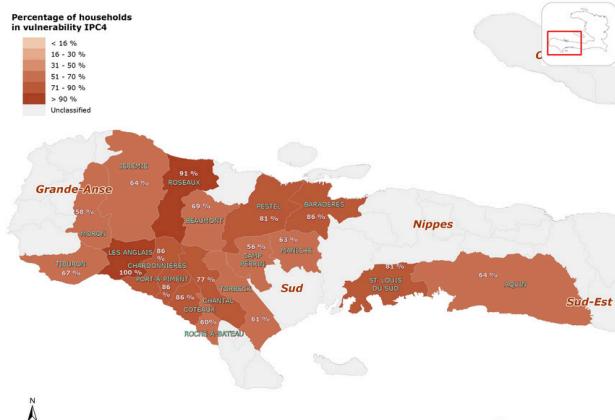


## HUNGER SCALE

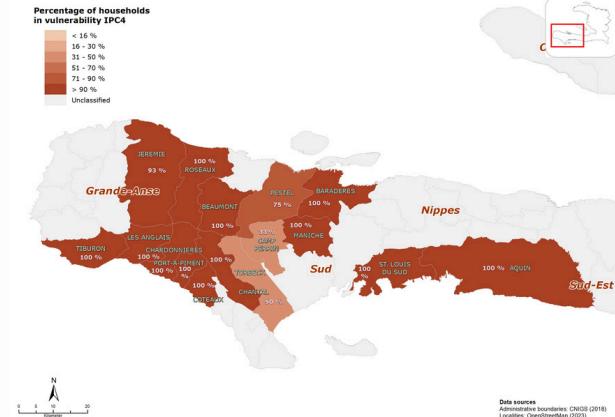
The hunger scale reflects the **severity of food deprivation experienced by households**. In Haiti, the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa has intensified this vulnerability. **In the most affected communes, 50% of households are experiencing severe hunger, compared to 47% in non-affected areas.** While the difference may seem modest, it underscores how Melissa has pushed already fragile communities further into crisis, amplifying food insecurity and straining coping capacities.



Before Melissa



After Melissa



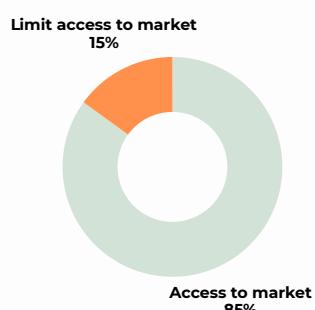
The results reflect households facing emergency levels of food insecurity, marked by severe hunger, limited food access, and urgent need for assistance. In Haiti, the impact of Hurricane Melissa has intensified this crisis.

In the most affected communes, 72% of households are now classified under IPC4, compared to 65% in non-affected areas. This stark difference highlights how Melissa has deepened vulnerability in already fragile regions. Moreover, a 2% increase in IPC4 prevalence was observed in these communes following the hurricane, signaling a worsening emergency that demands immediate and targeted humanitarian response.

# MULTISECTORAL VULNERABILITIES AND ACCESS TO BASIC SERVICES

## MARKET ACCESS

In the aftermath of Hurricane Melissa, markets in the affected communes remained largely operational, offering a semblance of continuity amid widespread disruption. However, a significant portion of households (15%) lost access to these markets due to the shock, resulting in a sharp decline in consumer demand. This sudden drop not only disrupted local trade dynamics but also led to substantial losses of perishable goods, particularly fruits and vegetables, which could not be stored or sold in time.



*WFP, ERM Oct, 2025*

The breakdown in market access and supply chains further weakened already fragile local food systems, compounding the vulnerability of households that were struggling even before the hurricane. With fewer options to purchase or sell food, communities faced heightened food insecurity and reduced resilience. These cascading effects underscore the urgent need for targeted interventions to restore market functionality, support livelihoods, and stabilize food access in the most affected areas.

## DISPLACEMENT

Hurricane Melissa triggered a notable rise in internal displacement across affected communes in Haiti, with IDP rates increasing by **more than 2%** compared to pre-shock levels. This surge reflects growing instability as households grapple with the loss of shelter, disrupted livelihoods, and limited access to basic services. The storm's impact has left many families in precarious conditions, unable to meet essential needs or recover without external support.

Alarmingly, **over 61% of households in the affected areas now express a clear intention to migrate**, driven by the search for safer living conditions and access to vital resources. This trend underscores a deepening vulnerability and signals the potential for further displacement if immediate stabilization efforts are not implemented. Coordinated humanitarian action is urgently needed to restore services, rebuild livelihoods, and prevent the erosion of community resilience.

## ACCESS TO WATER

In the communes affected by Hurricane Melissa, access to safe drinking water has become a critical concern. **While 41% of the population relies on piped water, the majority—60% of households—depend on natural sources or wells to meet their daily needs.** These sources are often unreliable, and frequent shortages caused by damaged water systems have severely disrupted access, leaving many communities without consistent or safe water supplies.

The hurricane has further exacerbated this fragile situation, exposing the vulnerability of existing infrastructure and deepening public health risks. The lack of safe drinking water not only compromises hygiene and sanitation but also increases the likelihood of waterborne diseases. Immediate investment in water system repairs and sustainable WASH solutions is essential to restore access and protect the health and dignity of affected populations.

## ACCESS TO SANITATION

Sanitation conditions have deteriorated significantly, exposing communities to serious health and environmental risks. Data shows that **67% of individuals practice open defecation, often in bushes or outdoor areas, while only 33% have access to traditional latrines.** This stark imbalance highlights the widespread lack of basic sanitation infrastructure and the urgent need for improved facilities.

The impact of Hurricane Melissa has further exacerbated these challenges, damaging existing systems and limiting efforts to restore safe hygiene practices. Without immediate investment in sanitation infrastructure and community-based solutions, the risk of disease outbreaks and long-term public health consequences will continue to rise, especially among vulnerable populations already facing compounded hardships.

## ACCESS TO HEALTHCARE

In the areas affected by Hurricane Melissa, access to healthcare remains limited and uneven. **Only 58% of localities report having a health center or dispensary, and even where facilities exist, they are often underequipped and difficult to reach—requiring an average travel time of 1.5 hours.** This distance poses a significant barrier for vulnerable populations, especially in the aftermath of a disaster when timely medical attention is critical.

**Moreover, 57% of healthcare services require out-of-pocket payment,** making them inaccessible for many households already facing economic hardship. **None of the existing facilities offer mental health or psychosocial support,** despite the growing need for such services in post-crisis settings. The absence of essential medical services further limits the capacity of health centers to respond to urgent needs, highlighting the necessity for immediate investment in accessible, comprehensive, and affordable healthcare.

## COMMON HEALTH PROBLEMS

Public health conditions in affected areas have deteriorated. **Diarrhea** has emerged as a widespread concern, driven by **unsafe water sources and poor sanitation.** **Skin diseases** are increasingly reported due to prolonged exposure to contaminated environments and lack of hygiene infrastructure. *These conditions reflect the growing strain on health systems already struggling to meet basic needs.*

**Dengue fever** cases have also risen, likely linked to stagnant water and increased mosquito breeding following the storm. In addition, **gastric conditions** are prevalent across affected communes, pointing to declining food quality and compromised water safety. These health issues underscore the urgent need for improved WASH services, disease prevention measures, and strengthened healthcare capacity to respond to the growing burden of illness.

## NUTRITIONAL SITUATION

Child malnutrition has become a pressing concern in the wake of Hurricane Melissa, with cases reported in over half of the affected localities. Despite the growing need, no nutritional supplies are available to support treatment or care for malnourished children, leaving families without essential resources to address this life-threatening condition. The absence of targeted nutritional support is deepening the crisis and putting vulnerable children at heightened risk.

Compounding the situation, **more than 60% of localities report that pregnant women and children under five lack access to healthcare services.** This critical gap in maternal and child health support has been worsened by the hurricane's impact, which disrupted already fragile health systems. Without urgent intervention to restore services and provide nutritional aid, the long-term consequences for child development and maternal health could be severe.

## PROTECTION OF VULNERABLE POPULATIONS

Protection risks for women and girls have escalated sharply across affected areas. **In 33% of localities, women and girls are reportedly forced to beg or travel and work alone to obtain food—coping strategies that expose them to heightened risks of violence, exploitation, and loss of dignity.** These conditions are a direct consequence of deepening food insecurity and the breakdown of community safety nets.

Additionally, 42% of localities report cases of early or forced marriage, while instances of sexual exploitation, including survival sex, have emerged as distressing outcomes of extreme vulnerability. These alarming trends underscore the urgent need for robust protection measures, including safe access to food, psychosocial support, and community-based mechanisms to safeguard the rights and well-being of women and girls in crisis-affected areas. *8% of localities reported cases of youth being approached or coerced into dangerous or violent activities.* All individuals possess valid civil documentation.

## ACCESS TO HUMANITARIAN ASSISTANCE

In the wake of Hurricane Melissa, troubling reports have emerged regarding the accessibility and integrity of humanitarian assistance. In 8% of localities, communities believe that aid is not entirely free and may require payment or favours, undermining the principles of impartial and equitable relief. Disturbingly, some women have reportedly entered into marriages solely to gain access to aid, reflecting the extreme vulnerability and desperation faced by affected populations. These informal and exploitative practices often go unreported due to fear, stigma, and a lack of trust in existing accountability mechanisms. The reluctance to speak out highlights a critical gap in protection oversight and the need for transparent, community-based complaint systems. Strengthening these mechanisms is essential to ensure that humanitarian assistance reaches those in need safely, fairly, and without coercion.

# TARGETING APPROACH

## Community Targeting Guidance – Hurricane Melissa Response

### Step 1: Awareness and Information Sharing

Local authorities and key stakeholders (mayors, CASEC/ASEC, school directors, health staff, religious leaders, etc.) are informed about the objectives, duration, targeting criteria, and type of assistance. Community awareness is also promoted through posters, meetings, and radio to ensure transparency and ownership.

### Step 2: Formation of Community Targeting Committees

Committees of 5–7 trusted individuals (at least 50% women) are formed in each locality. Members are selected through participatory meetings and must not benefit from the assistance. Each committee signs an agreement outlining roles and responsibilities.

### Step 3: Committee Orientation

Committee members are trained on their roles, emphasizing transparency, impartiality, and voluntary participation. They are reminded that assistance is free and no compensation can be requested from beneficiaries.

### Step 4: Establishing Targeting Criteria

Two categories of criteria are used:

- **Category 1: Households affected by Melissa** (e.g., loss of income, damaged homes, displaced)
- **Category 2: Socioeconomic vulnerability** (e.g., female-headed households, rural location, disability, poor housing) Eligibility requires meeting at least one shock-related criterion and three vulnerability criteria, or being displaced in a shelter.

### Step 5: Household Listing and Validation

Committees compile household lists based on agreed criteria. WFP verifies a random sample (15%)—lists are validated if 80% meet the criteria. Final lists are signed by all involved during the community validation process.

## METHODOLOGY APPROACH

This analysis is based primarily on real-time data collected between July and October 31, 2025. A total of 350 household surveys were conducted from October 1 to 31, enabling the calculation of key indicators both before and after the crisis, including the Food Consumption Score (FCS), Coping Strategies Index (CSI), and Household Hunger Scale (HHS).

In addition, a rapid multisectoral assessment (MSA) was carried out immediately following Hurricane Melissa. This assessment included focus group discussions across 18 prioritized communes, particularly in the departments of Grand'Anse, Nippes, and Sud. The main objectives of the MSA were to:

- Understand the living conditions of affected households
- Identify their most urgent needs
- Determine the necessity for targeted support to the most vulnerable groups
- Recommend the most appropriate forms of assistance

It is important to note that the assessment did not include an agricultural component and therefore does not evaluate the hurricane's impact on the agricultural sector.

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