



World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES  
CHANGING LIVES

# WFP Sri Lanka Country Brief October 2020



## Operational Context

Sri Lanka has shown steady growth over the last decades with progress on SDGs, reflecting the country's elevation to middle-income status. Presidential elections were held in November 2019 followed by parliamentary polls in August 2020, where the incumbent Government won a convincing majority. Despite the progress, the country faces many socio-economic challenges, including the impact of a nutritional 'double burden' — undernutrition rates unchanged for over a decade in addition to high rates of overweight and obesity.

Sri Lanka is ranked 6th on the Climate Risk Index reflecting the extent and impact of hydro-meteorological hazards brought about by climate change.

Moreover, the outbreak of Covid-19 in March this year, with serious effects on the economy and livelihoods of vulnerable people, will hinder progress towards the country's socio-economic status, as is the case globally.

WFP has been present in Sri Lanka since 1968, working in partnership with the Government for the past 50 years to save lives in times of crises, and improve livelihoods for the future.



Population: **21 million**

2019 Human Development Index: **71 out of 189**

Income Level: **Lower Middle**

Chronic malnutrition: **15% of children between 6-59 months**

## In Numbers

**45 percent** of women in the reproductive age group are overweight or obese

**33 percent** of pregnant and lactating women are anaemic

**US\$ 53,352** paid as cash-based transfers in October.

**771** participants (**3,084** beneficiaries) assisted through cash-based transfers in resilience projects for October 2020.

The next six months (November 2020 – April 2021) funding requirements are fully funded.

## Situation Updates

- After a nationwide respite since August, Sri Lanka was affected by a sudden spike in COVID-19 infections on 4 October, sparked by an incident in a major garment factory in the Gampaha district adjacent to the capital Colombo, and also in a large fish market in Peliyagoda on the outskirts of Colombo.
- In this second wave, the number of people infected by COVID-19 rose steadily during October with the cumulative count increasing from 3,000 cases at the beginning of the month to over 10,000. Seven more people died from COVID-19 in October, raising Sri Lanka's death toll to 21, while 4,399 people had recovered. In addition, 24 of the country's 25 districts have been affected. Health authorities expect the daily count of infections to increase in the coming weeks.
- The Government responded with a targeted approach, isolating and treating patients in local hospitals and rigorously tracing contacts to understand the sources. Gatherings have been banned and strict health guidelines and restrictions on public transport have been reactivated across the country. Schools were closed early for the third term vacation. Localised curfews, including in areas in the capital district Colombo, have been imposed to contain the virus which has started to spread rapidly as clusters across the country. However, the Government has ruled out a blanket lockdown due to the expected economic strain.

## Operational Updates

- To ensure business continuity as well as staff protection during the rapid spread of COVID-19, WFP has activated the work-from-home roster since mid-October, with staff coming into office on a need-to-meet basis.
- In response to COVID-19 induced school closures and disruptions of the national school meals programme, WFP provided take home rations to the households of **77,589** primary school children to ensure continued household food security during the period of July to August 2020. Additionally, to help protect children sitting for October exams, WFP provided the Ministry of Education with personal protective equipment for national examination centres. Similarly, WFP provided USD 12,185 to the Ministry of Education to establish hand washing facilities in schools.

**Contact info:** Tamara Nanayakkara ([tamara.nanayakkara@wfp.org](mailto:tamara.nanayakkara@wfp.org))

**Country Director:** Brenda Barton

Further information: <https://www.wfp.org/countries/sri-lanka>

## Country Strategic Plan (2018-2022)

Total Requirement (in USD)	Allocated Contributions (in USD)	Six Month Net Funding Requirements (in USD)
<b>46.57 m</b>	<b>27.19 m</b>	<b>0 m</b>

### Strategic Result 1: End hunger by protecting access to food

**Strategic Outcome #1:** Crisis-affected people have access to food all year round.

**Focus area:** Crisis Response to ensure humanitarian assistance

**Activities:**

- Provide food assistance to crisis-affected people

**Strategic Outcome #2:** School-age children in food-insecure areas have access to food all year round.

**Focus area:** Root causes of food insecurity and malnutrition among school-age children

**Activities:**

- Provide nutrition-sensitive food assistance, in partnership with the government, to school-age children.
- Provide technical and policy support for the delivery of nutrition-sensitive school meals programmes to the government.

### Strategic Result 2: No one suffers from malnutrition

**Strategic Outcome #3:** Children under 5, adolescent girls and women of reproductive age have improved nutrition by 2025

**Focus area:** Immediate and underlying causes of malnutrition.

**Activities:**

- Provide evidence-based advice, advocacy, and technical assistance to the government and implementing partners.
- Provide technical assistance and advocate the scaling up of the fortification of staple food and specialized nutritious foods to the government and other stakeholders, including the private sector.

### Strategic Result 4: Food systems are sustainable

**Strategic Outcome #4:** Vulnerable communities and smallholder farmers have strengthened livelihoods and resilience in the face of shocks and stresses all year round.

**Focus area:** Resilience building to enable vulnerable communities to better withstand shocks and stresses and to augment government capacity to implement disaster-management and integrated disaster-risk-reduction strategies.

**Activities:**

- Support nutrition-sensitive and gender-transformative livelihood diversification and income generation through integrated resilience-building activities.
- Provide technical assistance for emergency preparedness and response operations to the government.
- Provide technical assistance to the government and related agencies in the building of improved, unified, shock-responsive safety-net systems.

- WFP modified its resilience building activities to support rural communities affected by the COVID-19 induced economic slowdown, to improve home gardening and local production. Contributing to the "Saubaghya" national home gardening programme, WFP continues to distribute seed packages to over 50,000 households (216,016 people) in rural communities.
- Together with COVID-19 safety communication posters and community sensitization, WFP provided water storage tanks

for hand washing, face masks and contactless thermometers to project sites to protect beneficiaries.

- WFP had an opportunity to highlight the resilience activities in the R5n programme when President Gotabaya Rajapaksa visited the Wilgamuwa Divisional Secretariat in Matale in October. Under this programme, WFP is rehabilitating irrigation tanks, constructing agro wells and farm ponds, and providing livelihood assistance for goat, cattle and poultry farming and inland fishing to assist over 1,650 rural farmers in the Wilgamuwa division.
- As WFP continues to closely monitor the socio-economic impact and increased level of vulnerability to hunger and malnutrition in the COVID-19 context, WFP is providing digital technical assistance to improve the "Samurdhi" social safety-net system to be more shock-responsive, working with the Department of Samurdhi Development (DSD). Together with DSD, WFP has so far conducted 95 sensitization sessions which included more than 7,200 households living in flood-prone areas in 11 administrative divisions within Kalutara district.

## Monitoring

- In response to the temporary suspension of the national school meals programme due to COVID-19 induced school closures, WFP supported the Ministry of Education to provide take-home rations for primary school children to continue to meet the children's food requirement during the school closures. Food commodities were procured at the zonal educational level and distribution was done at the schools. The school principal and staff managed the distribution at school level and WFP carried out post distribution monitoring through telephone interviews with parents during September and October.
- The families explained that they were satisfied with the quality and quantity of the items provided in the Take Home Ration and observed that the rations had been helpful to diversify and increase the portion size of the children's meals during the lockdown period.

## Challenges

- The rapidly increasing COVID-19 situation in the country continues to pose challenges to many sectors, particularly to people engaged in tourism and small businesses. WFP is carefully monitoring the markets and food security situation to respond to emerging vulnerabilities and needs.
- The school meals programme continues to be temporarily suspended as schools remain closed due to the increasing COVID situation.

## Donors

SAARC Development Fund, Korean International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), Government of Japan, UN Peace-building Fund, The Earth Group, Italian Comitato, Government of Australia, Office of the US Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA), Government of Denmark, Japan Association for WFP, FEED, DSM N, Johns Hopkins University-USA.