

HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY SURVEY

Preliminary findings | December 2023



Overview and Methodology

In 2022, Sri Lanka faced an unprecedented economic crisis, coupled with high inflation, soaring prices, unfavourable harvests and depleted foreign reserves which resulted in a substantial impact on food security. This resulted in 28 percent of the population estimated to be food insecure, according to the WFP-FAO Joint Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM - May 2022).

In 2023, WFP and FAO jointly conducted a second CFSAM in March 2023, where a significant improvement in food security was noted, with 17 percent of the population estimated to be food insecure. This 11-percentage point decrease is attributed to better food consumption due to reduced prices and improved income during the harvesting period.

Between August and October 2023, WFP conducted a panel survey of 8,741 households that were interviewed in March through a face-to-face data collection approach to produce representative estimates at national and regional levels. The survey employed a 2-stage stratified cluster sampling methodology in which a fixed number of primary sampling units (PSUs) were randomly selected at the first stage and within each PSU, 10 households were selected for interview.

This preliminary report provides an update on the overall food security situation since March 2023, and it comes as part of WFP's efforts to expand its evidence-generation initiatives to inform the response among government and humanitarian/development partners in Sri Lanka.

WFP-FAO's Joint CFSAM reports for 2022 and 2023 can be viewed [here](#) and [here](#).



Food insecurity remains at concerning levels.

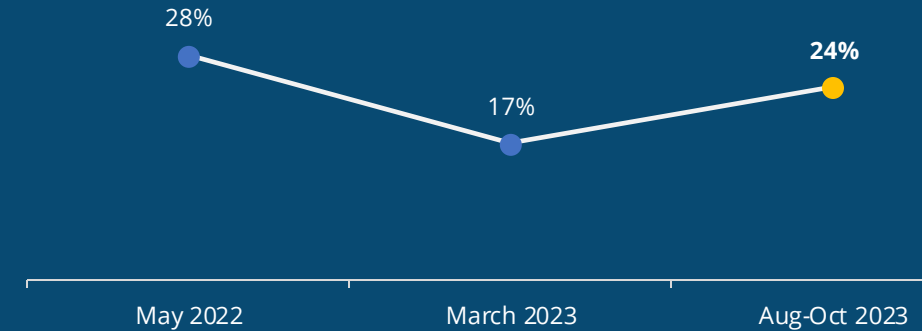
24 percent of households are estimated to be moderately food insecure. This represents a slight deterioration compared to March 2023, where 17 percent of households were food insecure. The increase in food insecurity levels is mainly due to reduced levels of food consumption among vulnerable groups including social assistance program beneficiaries and daily wage labourers. Compared to March, which was the Maha harvest, farmers also reported reduced food consumption reflecting a seasonal pattern.

Improvements are seen in coping strategies where the percent of households adopting food-based coping strategies dropped by 14 percentage points compared to March 2023. A similar trend is observed in livelihood-based coping strategies.

The highest levels of food insecurity are in the estate sector, where 51 percent of the households are reportedly food insecure. This is followed by the rural sector, where 26 percent of households are food insecure. The urban sector has the lowest levels of food insecurity, at 15 percent.

A larger percent of female-headed households are food insecure than households headed by men at 31 percent, which is an eight-percentage point difference compared to male-headed households (23 percent). In March 2023, 23 percent of female-headed households were food insecure, which is an 8-percentage point decline.

Food insecurity over the months





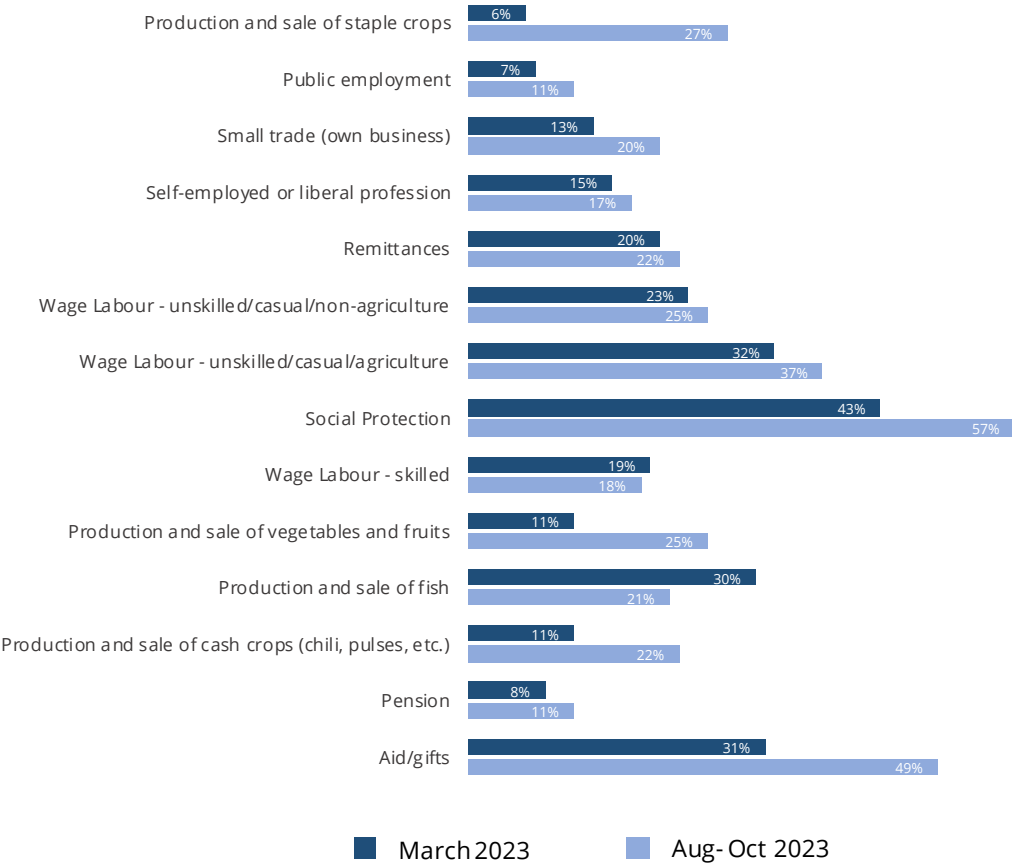
Food insecurity stretches across several livelihoods.

According to the survey, households relying on social protection schemes, such as Samurdhi, as their main source of income have the highest levels of food insecurity (57 percent), followed by households dependent on humanitarian assistance(49 percent), and unskilled agricultural labour (37 percent). The lowest percentage of food insecure households are among those who have regular and stable income sources.

When comparing the survey results with March 2023, agricultural producers reported a significant deterioration in their food security status. For instance, a larger proportion of households relying on the production and sale of vegetables and fruits, and staple crops such as rice are food insecure during the current reporting period compared to March which was Maha harvest season.



Food insecurity by livelihood group



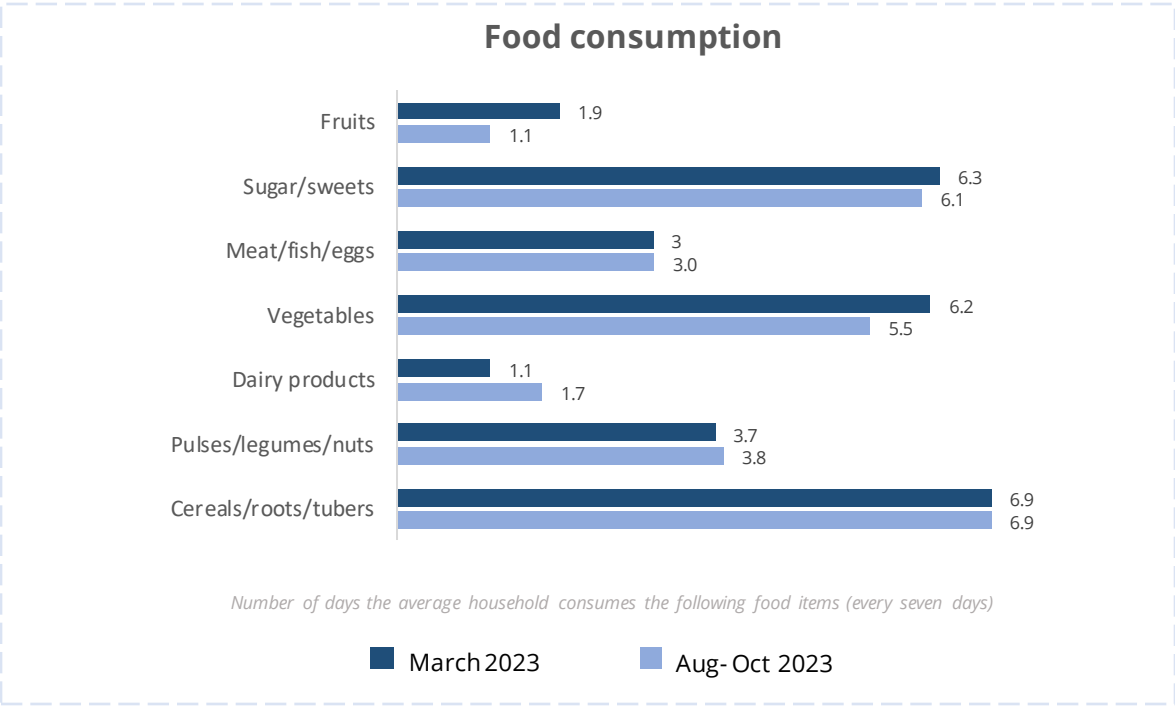
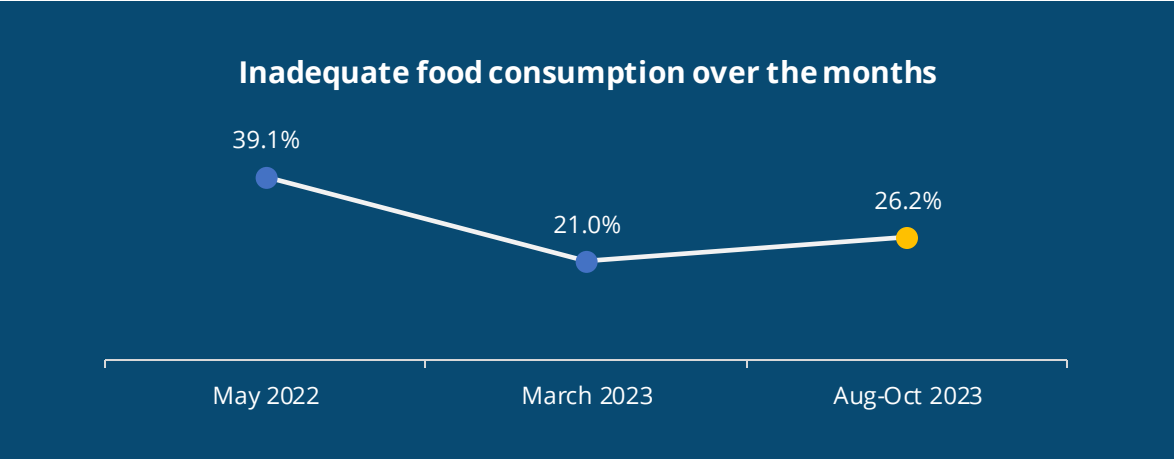


Over two in ten households are consuming insufficient diets.

26 percent of households are consuming inadequate diets. This is a 5-percentage point increase compared to March 2023, where 21 percent of households were not consuming adequate diets. The lowest-consumed food groups were proteins, dairy products and fruits, all of which were consumed three or less than three days a week. In comparison to March 2023, households are consuming more dairy products but less fruits.

Inadequate food consumption in the estate sector is highest at 42 percent of households. This is followed by the rural sector at 28 percent and the urban sector, which has the lowest levels of inadequate food consumption at 13 percent. Compared to the urban and rural sectors, the estate sector’s consumption of protein, dairy and fruits is poor (consumed only 1 or less than 1 day a week).

31 percent of female-headed households consume inadequate meals, compared to male-headed households (26 percent). This is a deterioration compared to March 2023, where 26 percent of female-headed households were experiencing inadequate consumption. Similarly, inadequate consumption in male-headed households has also increased by 6 percentage points compared to March 2023.



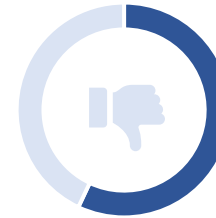


Four in ten households are resorting to food-based coping mechanisms.

42 percent of households were turning to food-based coping strategies such as skipping meals, eating less preferred food or limiting portion sizes. This is a considerable improvement of 14 percentage points from March 2023, where 56 percent of households turned to coping strategies. Nearly six in ten households are relying on less preferred food or buying less expensive food.

A striking 83 percent of estate households are adopting food-based coping strategies, compromising on the quality of their diets. This is compared to 49 percent of urban households and 40 percent of rural households adopting food-based coping strategies.

Female-headed households are disproportionately turning to coping strategies. Significant differences exist between female- and male-headed households turning to food-based coping strategies. According to the survey, 48 percent of female-headed households turn to food-based coping strategies, compared to 40 percent of male-headed households.

**57%**

rely on less preferred
or less expensive food

**27%**

limit their portion
sizes

**18%**

borrow food

**16%**

reduce the number
of meals

**14%**

restrict adult food
consumption, to ensure the
children are fed

Percentage indicates households



There is an overall reduction in the proportion of households adopting livelihood-based coping strategies

43 percent of households were adopting livelihood-based coping strategies.

This is a substantial improvement from March 2023, where 62 percent of households were applying at least one livelihood-based coping strategy to cope with the lack of adequate food. Borrowing money to buy food and purchasing food on credit were the most commonly adopted strategies, by 27 and 26 percent of households, respectively. Despite a reduced reliance on coping strategies, households remain vulnerable to future shocks and stressors.

According to the survey, a **high proportion of estate households (80 percent) adopted livelihood-based coping strategies**, followed by 50 percent of urban households. In the rural sector, 41 percent of households are resorting to coping strategies.

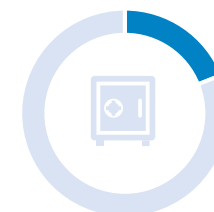
In terms of household characteristics, **43 percent of male-headed households and 42 percent of female-headed households are turning to livelihood-based coping strategies**. While this is not a significant difference, a larger proportion of female-headed households are adopting more severe coping strategies compared to male-headed households such as selling assets and spending savings.



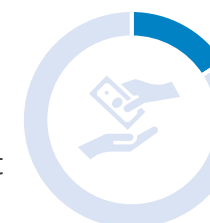
27%
borrow money



26%
purchase food on credit



19%
spend savings or
skipped debt payment



16%
sold jewelry to
buy food



14%
reduce spending
on education and
health



5%
sold household
assets

Percentage indicates households

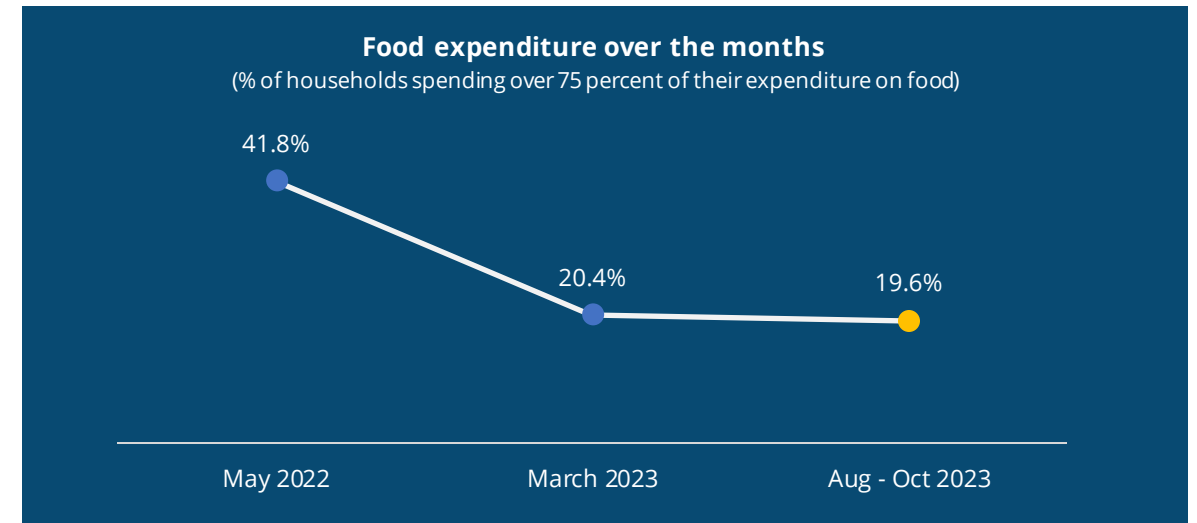


Two in ten households spend over 75 percent of their expenditure on food.

Household expenditure on food has stabilized, compared to 2022. In 2023, 19.6 percent of households spend over 75 percent on food expenses. Households with a high proportion of expenditure on food compromise their capacity to cover other essential needs and are highly susceptible to future shocks.

Twenty-one percent of the households in estate and rural areas spend over 75 percent of their expenditures on food expenses. This is much higher compared to urban areas where it is 11 percent.

Twenty-six percent of female-headed households spend over 75 percent on essential food items. In terms of male-headed households, 19 percent of households spend over 75 percent on food expenses.





This brief was developed by WFP in December 2023, comparing the survey results with the Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) results collected in March 2023. A more comprehensive report will follow.