



TONGA



SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

mVAM Bulletin

The data presented here was collected through the World Food Programme's mobile Vulnerability Analysis and Mapping (mVAM) survey. Data was collected via telephone interviews conducted across five administrative divisions using random-digit dialing between October and November 2024.

HOUSEHOLD FOOD CONSUMPTION

Food security in Tonga remained stable throughout the first three quarters of 2024, with no major shocks or disasters impacting livelihoods. Nonetheless, persistent challenges such as high food costs, elevated poverty rates in rural areas and poor diet quality—contributing to diet-related non-communicable diseases (NCDs)—continued to affect the food security, livelihoods and savings of households and communities.

In the 2024–2025 national budget, the Government of Tonga allocated substantial resources to enhancing agricultural productivity and strengthening food security nationally. Additionally, remittances play a critical role in supporting household food security.

In October 2024, food consumption patterns of **91 percent** of Tongan households were at an **acceptable level**, reflecting a slight (2 percent) decline compared to September 2023, when 93 percent of surveyed households reported adequate food intake. **Seven percent** of households had **borderline** consumption, and 2 percent experienced **poor** consumption levels, based on a seven-day recall.

However, despite this positive statistic for consumption levels, **dietary diversity** remained inadequate, with many households still relying on a limited range of foods, with essential nutrients for a balanced diet.



91% OF HOUSEHOLDS IN TONGA HAVE ACCEPTABLE FOOD CONSUMPTION

In October 2024, the consumption of staple and protein-rich foods remained stable. While the intake of fats and sugars slightly declined compared to September 2023, the consumption of fruits, dairy products, and pulses—required for a balanced and healthy diet—remained at low levels.

In seven days, the average Tongan household in October 2024 consumed:

STAPLES	VEGETABLES	PROTEIN	SUGARS
6.8 days up from 6.6	4.7 days up from 4.5	6.3 days down from 6.2	3.2 days down from 4.9
FRUITS	FATS	DAIRY	PULSES
2.3 days down from 2.4	2.5 days up from 3.2	2.8 days down from 3.1	2.1 days up from 1.9

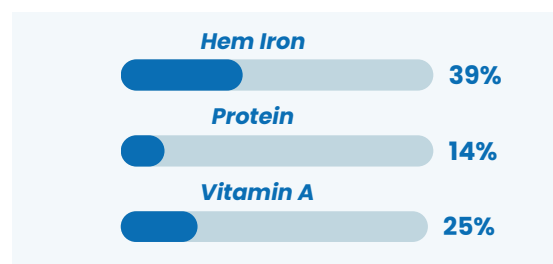
A slight improvement in vegetable consumption was reported by respondents. Households in 'Eua and Ha'apai consumed vegetables and dairy more frequently—over five days per week—while households in Vava'u reported a higher intake of pulses, averaging 2.5 days in the past week.

The inadequate consumption of nutrient-rich foods, particularly those containing **hem iron**, remains a significant concern. In October 2024, **39 percent** of respondents reported **low or no intake** of hem iron—23 percentage points higher than in September 2024 (15 percent)—indicating a sharp decline.

Daily iron consumption was higher among **rural** households (64 percent) compared to **urban** households (50 percent).

Hem iron is typically found in animal based proteins such as meat, poultry, fish and is a crucial macronutrient essential for the prevention of anemia.

Percentage of interviewed households with low or no intake of nutrient rich food



Insufficient intake of **Protein** was reported by **14 percent** of respondents, slightly lower—by 1 percent, compared to September 2023.

Insufficient **Vitamin A** consumption (1–6 days in the past week) was reported by **20 percent** of interviewed households, while **5 percent** had not consumed **any Vitamin A-rich foods** in the last seven days. Compared to the previous survey in September 2023, the proportion of households with adequate daily Vitamin A intake declined by 10 percent.

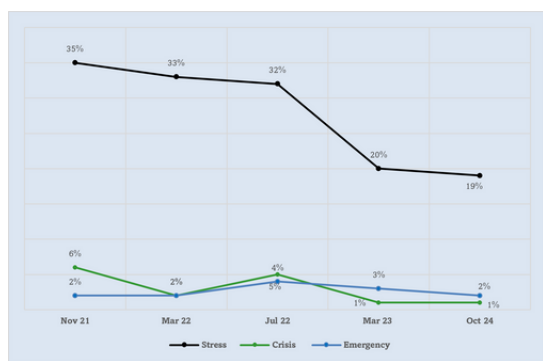
A higher proportion of households in **rural** areas of Tonga (78 percent) consume **Vitamin A-rich foods daily** compared to those in urban areas (65 percent).

LIVELIHOOD-BASED COPING STRATEGIES (LCS)

The Livelihood Coping Strategy (LCS) identifies the negative coping mechanisms households adopt to secure food and access essential needs—such as shelter, education, and healthcare—when facing a shock or disaster, emphasizing their detrimental effects on households' mid- to long-term ability to sustain livelihoods and fulfill basic needs.

In Tonga, nearly **80 percent** of the households interviewed in October 2024 reported **not resorting** to negative coping strategies to meet their food and other essential needs. This indicates households maintained their livelihoods and sustained capacities, when affected by shocks or disasters.

Percentage of households resorting to coping strategies



Use of **Stress** strategies, such as borrowing money or depleting savings by households, have decreased from above 30 percent in mid-2022 to **19 percent** in October 2024. This suggests an improvement in households' ability to manage future shocks, likely due to an increase in available resources or a reduction in debt.

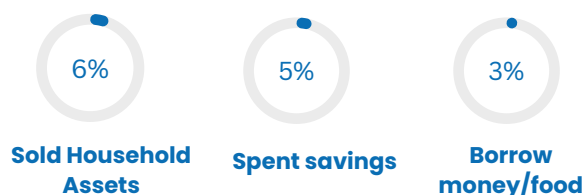


2.7%
of respondents employing
Livelihood Coping Strategy
Crisis or Emergency

Among households using negative coping strategies, the proportion resorting to **Crisis** strategies—such as selling productive assets or means of transport, reducing spending on health (including medications) and education, or withdrawing children from school—as well as **Emergency** strategies, like selling major productive assets or the last female animal, declined by 1 percent in October 2024 compared to the same period last year.

Around **3 percent** of households reported using these strategies, indicating that the food security of these households remains susceptible to shocks and crises.

The **top three** negative coping strategies adopted by Tongan households in October 2024 included selling household assets, spending savings and borrow money and/or food.



The use of negative coping strategies by households was driven by several factors. An **increase in food prices** was cited as a primary concern by **3 percent** of respondents. Notably, there has been a sharp decline in the proportion of households reporting high food prices as a major concern over the past 2.5 years, dropping from 18 percent in July 2022 to 3 percent in October 2024.

However, high food costs continue to affect household affordability and dietary choices. In addition to rising food prices, lack of employment opportunities and disruptions to livelihoods further contributed to financial strain.

Interviewed Households Top Three Concerns



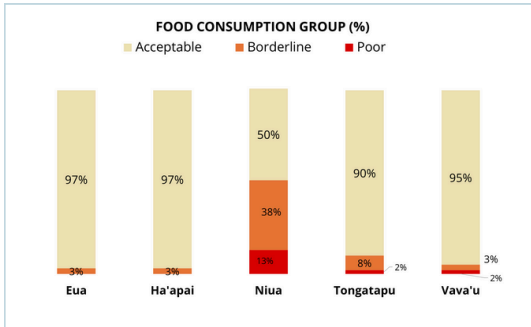
In October 2024, **2 percent** of interviewed households reported **reduced income**, remaining at similar levels as in September 2023, but with an improvement compared to March 2023, when 5 percent of households reported reduction in income.

In October 2024, **63 percent** of interviewed households reported receiving **remittances** in the past 30 days. This additional income likely played a crucial role in stabilizing consumption and providing a financial safety net. Remittances also significantly supported households in sustaining productive assets, maintaining livelihoods, and reducing reliance on negative coping strategies during shocks and disasters.

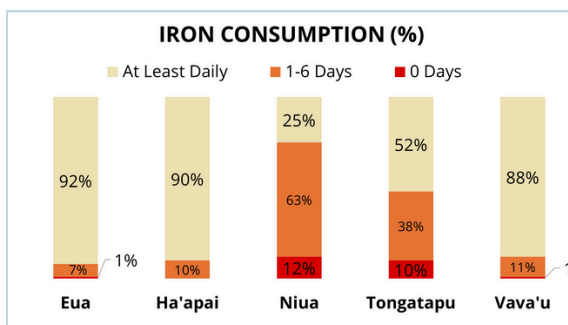
The proportion of **female-headed households** receiving remittances was higher than that of male-headed households, at **68 percent** and 63 percent, respectively.

SUB-NATIONAL ANALYSIS

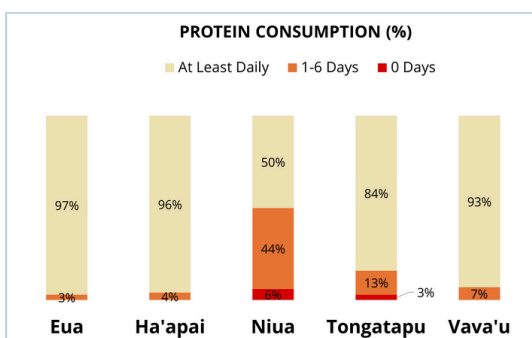
Food consumption and diversity patterns of households were generally at acceptable levels, exceeding **90 percent** in most divisions, with the exception of Niua.



Niua (also known as Ongo Niua), consisting of the three most remote islands—Niuafo'ou, Niuatoputapu and Tafahi—and with slightly over 1,100 people, reported **half** (51 percent) of its households having **inadequate** food consumption levels. Of these, 38 percent fall into the **borderline** category, while 13 percent face **poor** diet intake. **Tongatapu** followed with **10 percent** of households with borderline (8 percent) and poor (2 percent) levels of food consumption. Meanwhile, 'Eua and Ha'apai recorded the lowest levels of food consumption frequency and diversity across main food groups.



Insufficient **iron** intake was reported in two divisions, Niua and Tongatapu. In the seven days preceding the survey, **32 percent** of households consumed iron-rich foods on 1–6 days, while **8 percent did not consume** them at all. The highest proportions of households with zero iron intake were recorded in Niua (12 percent) and Tongatapu (10 percent).

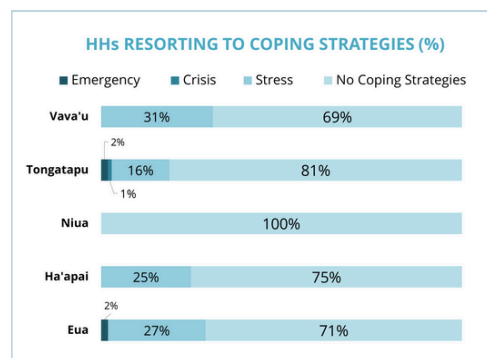


More than **40 percent** of households in **Niua** and **13 percent** in **Tongatapu** consumed **protein-rich foods** only 1–6 days per week, indicating insufficient intake.

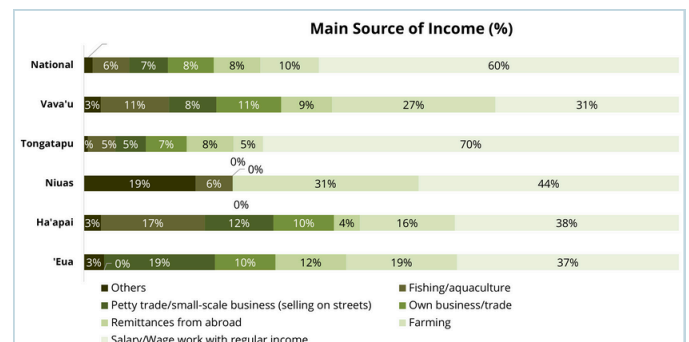
Additionally, 6 percent of households in Niua and 3 percent in Tongatapu reported no consumption of **protein-rich** foods in the past seven days.

Households in five provinces of Tonga used **coping strategies** to maintain their consumption patterns and livelihoods, when faced with a shock or a disaster.

The severe coping strategies — **Emergency** and **Crisis**, were used by fewer than **3 percent** of households in Tongatapu and 'Eua. The majority of households, however, resorted to **Stress** coping strategies, such as borrowing money or spending savings. These strategies were employed by **27 percent** of households in 'Eua, 25 percent in Ha'apai and **31 percent** in Vava'u.



Respondents in Ha'apai, Tongatapu, and Vava'u reported **increased food prices** as a top concern, followed by **lack of work** and **disruption to livelihoods**, which were also highlighted by the same three divisions. These concerns were similarly reported at the national level.



Salary/wages were the primary source of income for **60 percent** of respondents. Another **10 percent** of interviewed households reported earning their income from **farming**.

Remittances and **self-employment** (own business) remained key income sources for 8 percent of households. As a vital source of income, remittances helped households cover food and other essential needs in both rural and urban areas.

In the month preceding the October 2024 survey, a higher proportion of **rural** households (69 percent) received remittances compared to **urban** households (59 percent).

Methodology:

This mVAM Bulletin presents data collected in October and November 2024 through remote data collection via telephone interviews. Telephone numbers were generated using random digit dialing, resulting in a sample of **1,208** households. The survey conducted in participants' preferred language, either Tongan or English. The questionnaire covered key topics, including household livelihoods, food consumption, nutritional quality, livelihood-based coping strategies, remittances, and debt. Additionally, a final open-ended question allowed respondents to share any concerns about food security disruptions in their communities. The data collected through mobile interviews may be subject to bias, particularly regarding gender representation and households subscribed to the phone provider.

Other Resources: [Tonga mVAM Dashboard](https://resources.vam.wfp.org)
<https://resources.vam.wfp.org>

Bulletins & Dashboard:



Sample Population at a glance :



Survey Respondents: 1,208 households



Urban Households: 80 percent
Rural Households: 20 percent



Male-headed households: 86 percent
Female-headed households: 14 percent



Households reporting having a member/s with disability: 30 percent

Level of education of the head of the household:

- Primary education: 3 percent
- Secondary education: 74 percent
- Tertiary education: 20 percent
- Vocational Training: 1 percent
- None: 1 percent



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