HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY SURVEY

World Food Programme, Sri Lanka

WFP
World Food Programme

SAVING LIVES
CHANGING LIVES

Foreword

Food security remains a concern for Sri Lanka, particularly in light of the economic and agricultural challenges the country has faced in recent years. The Crop and Food Security Assessment Missions (CFSAM) conducted in 2022 and 2023, jointly by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) and the World Food Programme (WFP), revealed a stark deterioration in household food security due to reduced crop production, constrained access to agricultural inputs, and significant price volatility. These findings have underscored the urgent need for robust, timely, and detailed data to inform national planning and humanitarian response.

This survey presents critical insights into household access to food, dietary diversity, coping strategies, and food expenditure at the district level in December 2024. The data will be instrumental in identifying vulnerable populations and geographical areas most at risk, helping to guide evidence-based interventions and policies to strengthen food security nationwide.

The current survey builds on the lessons and recommendations of the CFSAM and previous rounds of Household Food Security Survey reports and complements national efforts to ensure no one is left behind in the journey toward recovery and resilience. It is also an important step towards Sri Lanka's commitments under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly Sustainable Development Goal 2: End hunger, achieve food security and improved nutrition, and promote sustainable agriculture.

WFP is proud to continue its long-standing partnership with the Government of Sri Lanka in addressing the complex challenges of food insecurity. Through collaborative action and reliable data, we can work together to support communities, safeguard livelihoods, and ensure that all Sri Lankans have the opportunity to lead healthy, nourished lives.

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Overview

Sri Lanka faced an unprecedented economic crisis in 2022, when 28 percent of the population was estimated to be moderately acute food insecure based on the results of the WFP-FAO Joint Crop and Food Security Assessment Mission (CFSAM) 2022. In 2023, WFP and FAO jointly conducted a second CFSAM in March, which reported an improvement in food security (17 percent of the population was moderately acute food insecure). The improvement was attributed to better food consumption stemming from reduced food prices and improved incomes among the farming communities.

During the period of August and September 2023, WFP carried out a household food security survey, when 24 percent of households were estimated to be moderately food insecure, representing a deterioration in the country's food security situation. This survey revealed a seasonal pattern in food security, driven largely by food consumption.

In December 2024, WFP carried out another household food security survey to assess the food security situation in the country. The sample consisted of 15,000 households and included *Aswesuma* (social welfare programme) households. Key findings from the survey are highlighted below.

16% of households were estimated to be **food insecure**

26% of households were consuming **inadequate diets**

51% of households were adopting **food-based coping strategies**

38% of households were adopting **livelihood-based coping strategies**

22% of households were spending over 65 percent of **their expenditure on food**

Sampling Methodology

The food security assessment adopted a stratified two-stage cluster sampling design to ensure district-level representativeness across all geographic sectors (urban, rural, and estate) of Sri Lanka. The survey data collection was conducted from November to December 2024.
The primary objective was to obtain reliable and statistically valid estimates that reflect the food security situation at the district level, while also incorporating specific targeting of households benefiting from the *Aswesuma* social protection programme.

Stratification and sample size

Sri Lanka consists of 25 administrative districts; each is treated as a separate stratum. A total sample size of 15,000 households was determined, with 600 households per district, sufficient to achieve a 5% margin of error, 95% confidence level, design effect of 1.5, and an assumed 50% prevalence rate of food insecurity.

Sampling design

The sampling was conducted in two stages:

- Stage 1: Selection of Primary Sampling Units (PSUs)

Each PSU was defined as a *Grama Niladhari* (GN) Division, selected using Probability Proportional to Size (PPS) based on the number of households per GN division. The sampling frame was provided by the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS). A total of 60 GN divisions per district were randomly selected.

- Stage 2: Selection of Households within GN Divisions

From each selected GN division, 10 households were chosen using a systematic random sampling method:

o Seven (7) households were selected from the complete household list obtained from the GN Office.

o Three (3) households were selected from the official list of *Aswesuma* beneficiaries, ensuring adequate representation of social protection recipients in the sample.

o The non-response rate was approximately 2% and was addressed by replacement sampling / additional weighting adjustments

Survey implementation

A total of 150 enumerators were trained and deployed to conduct face-to-face interviews using a structured questionnaire and the Computer-Assisted Personal Interviewing (CAPI) method. The questionnaire covered demographic and socio-economic characteristics, income and expenditure, food access, livelihood sources (including agricultural), and coping strategies.

Data Quality Assurance

Data quality was ensured through a multi-tiered monitoring system:

- Field-level supervision by team leaders and spot-checks on 10% of households during the first two weeks of data collection.

- Daily remote monitoring of enumerator performance, including mobility tracking, time spent per interview, and anomaly detection in data entry patterns.

- Standard quality control protocols were applied through the CAPI platform.

Weighting and Adjustment

To ensure representativeness and correct for any sampling deviations:

- Base weights were calculated by incorporating the probability of selection at each sampling stage and adjusted for non-response.

- A post-stratification adjustment factor was applied at the GN division level to reflect differences between the Estimated Measure of Size (MoS) from the sampling frame and the Actual MoS observed in the field.

The final normalized household weights were computed using the following formula:

$$Weight\_GN = ((N\_dist / n\_dist) / (N / n)) \times (act\_MoS / est\_MoS)$$

Where:

N_dist = Total households in the district

n_dist = Sampled households in the district

N = Total households in Sri Lanka

n = Total sample size (15,000)

act_MoS = Actual number of households observed in the GN division

est_MoS = Estimated number of households from DCS

For *Aswesuma* households, specific weighting adjustments were made based on their selection probability to ensure appropriate representation in analytical outputs.
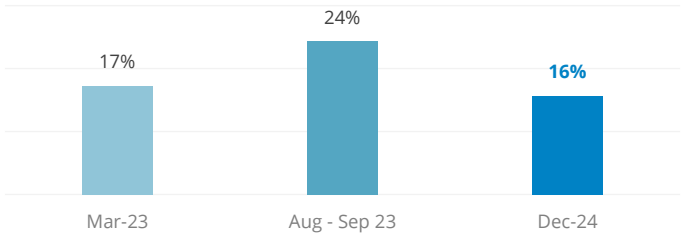
1. Food Security

Food insecurity exists when people do not have access to enough safe and nutritious food for normal growth and development. There are four core factors that affect someone's food security: use, access, availability and stability.

Food insecurity was assessed utilizing the Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Security (CARI), a WFP indicator known for providing a concise overview of various food security levels within a population. CARI methodology is used to analyze and classify households using individual-level food security indicators into different levels of food security groupings (Food Secure, Moderately Food Secure, Marginally Food Insecure and Severely Food Insecure). The indicators include FCS (food consumption score), rCSI (reduced coping strategy index), LCS (livelihood coping strategies) and FES (food expenditure share) all measured at the household level.

Nationally, 16 percent of households were estimated to be moderately food insecure in December 2024.

This represents a large improvement in the food security situation compared to the previous survey in August-September 2023, when 26 percent of households were food insecure. The decrease in food insecurity can be attributed to households' overall improved economic well-being, price reductions of certain essential food commodities and lower usage of livelihood-based coping mechanisms. This highlights the greater impact of seasonal factors on rural households owing to their primary livelihood strategies, which are mostly agriculture-based.
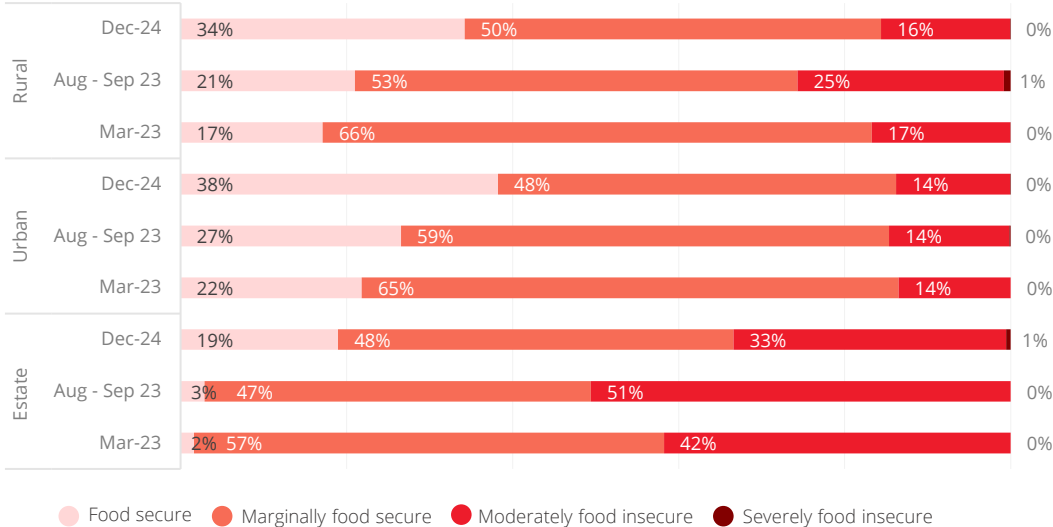
Fig 1: Percentage of food insecure households

Food insecurity by sector and household characteristics

The highest prevalence of food insecurity exists in the estate* sector, where 34 percent of the households were reportedly food insecure. This was followed by the rural and urban sectors, where 15 and 14 percent of households were food insecure, respectively. The estate area has the smallest percent of food secure households compared to urban and rural areas. However, compared to the previous round (August-September 2023), the percentage of food secure households in the estate sector has increased by 16 percentage points, from 3 percent to 19 percent. Similarly, the percentage of rural and urban households that are food secure has also seen an increase, by 13 and 11 percentage points, respectively.

*The estate sector primarily consists of areas with large tea plantations (> 20 acres and > 10 residential labourers) mainly located in the central highlands of Sri Lanka, particularly in regions like Nuwara Eliya, Kandy, and Badulla. This sector employs a considerable number of people, particularly from the Tamil ethnic minority, who often reside in housing provided by the estates themselves. Five percent of the total population reside in estate areas while 77 percent reside in rural areas. (Department of Census and Statistics)

Fig 2: Food security rates by sector as a percentage of households compared to the previous surveys

In terms of household composition, 18 percent of female-headed households were food-insecure, which is a reduction of 14 percentage points from late 2023. In comparison, 15 percent of male-headed households were food insecure, also an improvement from the previous round, when 23 percent were food insecure.

Fig 3: Food security rates by household head as a percentage of households compared to the previous surveys
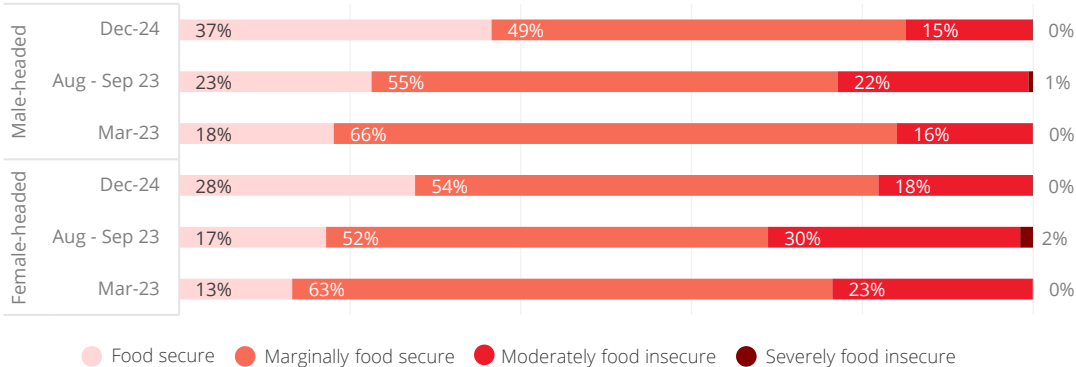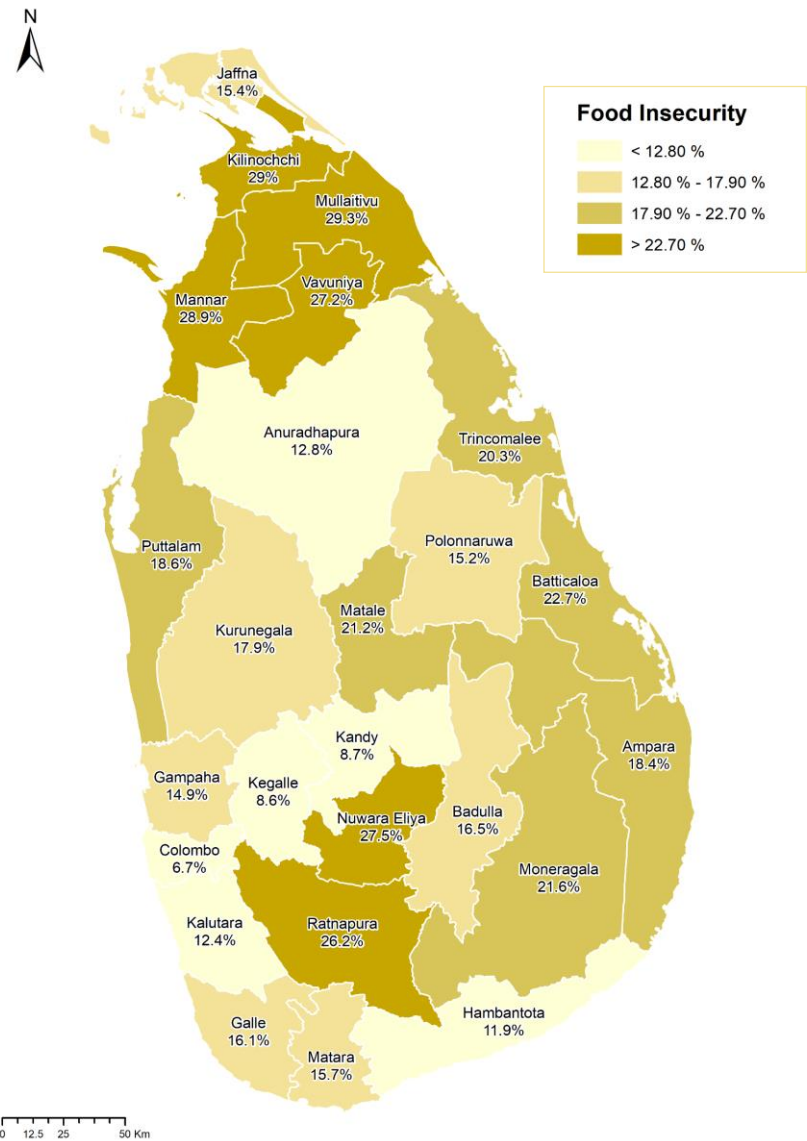
Food insecurity by districts

According to the survey, the districts with the highest levels of food insecurity (29 percent) were Mullaitivu, Killinochchi and Mannar, immediately followed by Nuwara Eliya (28 percent), Vavuniya (27 percent), and Ratnapura (26 percent). The districts with the lowest levels of food insecurity were Kandy (9 percent), Kegalle (9 percent) and Colombo (7 percent).

Compared to the survey conducted in March 2023, the food security situation has seemingly declined in a few districts; however, according to the latest survey, the majority of districts have improved food security.

Map 1: Percentage of food insecure households by district

Food Insecurity
- < 12.80 %
- 12.80 % - 17.90 %
- 17.90 % - 22.70 %
- > 22.70 %

Jaffna 15.4%
Kilinochchi 29%
Mullaitivu 29.3%
Mannar 28.9%
Vavuniya 27.2%
Anuradhapura 12.8%
Trincomalee 20.3%
Puttalam 18.6%
Polonnaruwa 15.2%
Batticaloa 22.7%
Matale 21.2%
Kurunegala 17.9%
Ampara 18.4%
Kandy 8.7%
Gampaha 14.9%
Kegalle 8.6%
Badulla 16.5%
Nuwara Eliya 27.5%
Colombo 6.7%
Moneragala 21.6%
Kalutara 12.4%
Ratnapura 26.2%
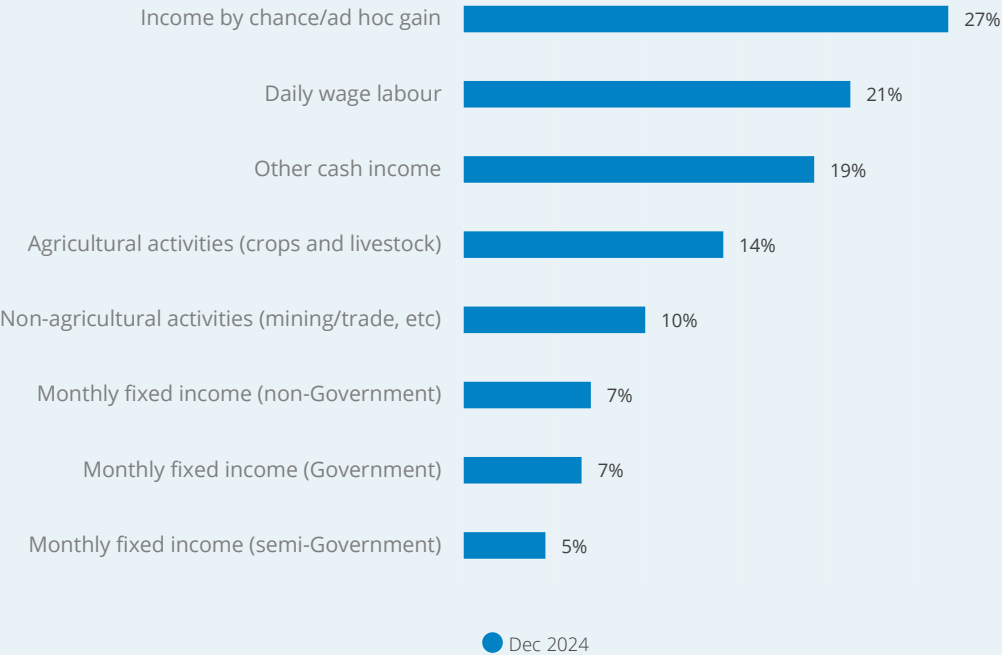Hambantota 11.9%
Galle 16.1%
Matara 15.7%

*District-level food insecurity was not measured in the August - September 2023 round of surveys. Overall comparison with 2023 March and December 2024 results do not showcase significant differences in food security status.

Food insecurity by income group

A closer look at household income groups and food insecurity reveals that households relying on income by chance or ad hoc gain had the highest prevalence of food insecurity (27 percent). This is followed by households dependent on daily wage labour (21 percent) and other means of cash income (19 percent). In contrast, households with stable and regular income sources from public employment and owning businesses had the lowest levels of food insecurity, including those relying on a pension.

Overall, the survey findings show an improvement in food security across different income groups.

Fig 4: Food insecurity by income group as percentage of households

Income group	Percentage
Income by chance/ad hoc gain	27%
Daily wage labour	21%
Other cash income	19%
Agricultural activities (crops and livestock)	14%
Non-agricultural activities (mining/trade, etc)	10%
Monthly fixed income (non-Government)	7%
Monthly fixed income (Government)	7%
Monthly fixed income (semi-Government)	5%

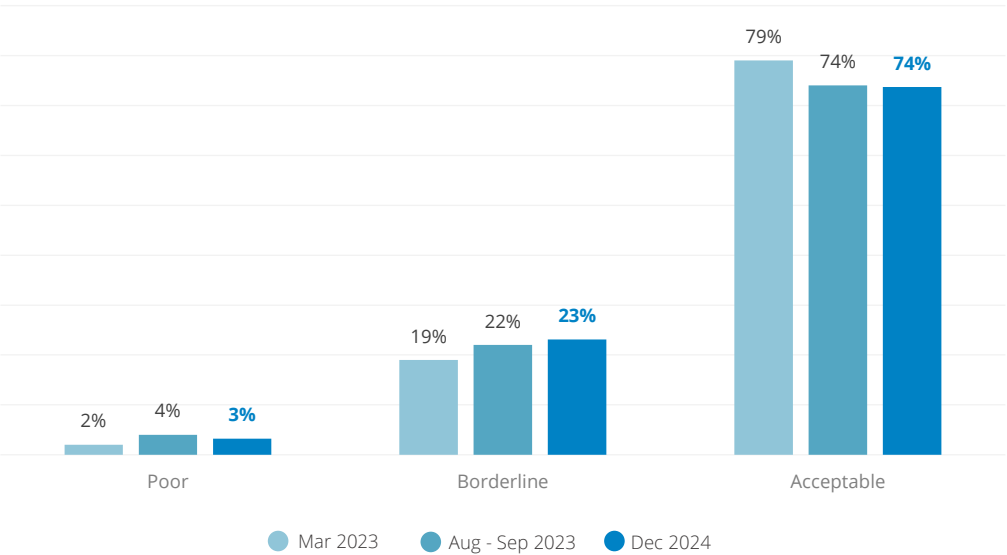● Dec 2024

2. Food Consumption

Household food consumption is calculated using the Food Consumption Score (FCS) indicator, which considers diet diversity and food frequency of the food groups consumed. Households are asked about the number of days each of the eight food groups was consumed in the last 7 days preceding the survey. Based on the responses, a score is calculated for each household, and a fixed threshold is used to then classify them as having either poor, borderline or acceptable consumption.

Inadequate food consumption, as measured by the Food Consumption Score (FCS) used by WFP, refers to not having enough food to meet basic nutritional needs for an active and healthy life.

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During December 2024, 26 percent of households consumed an inadequate diet, calculated as the sum of poor and borderline consumption.
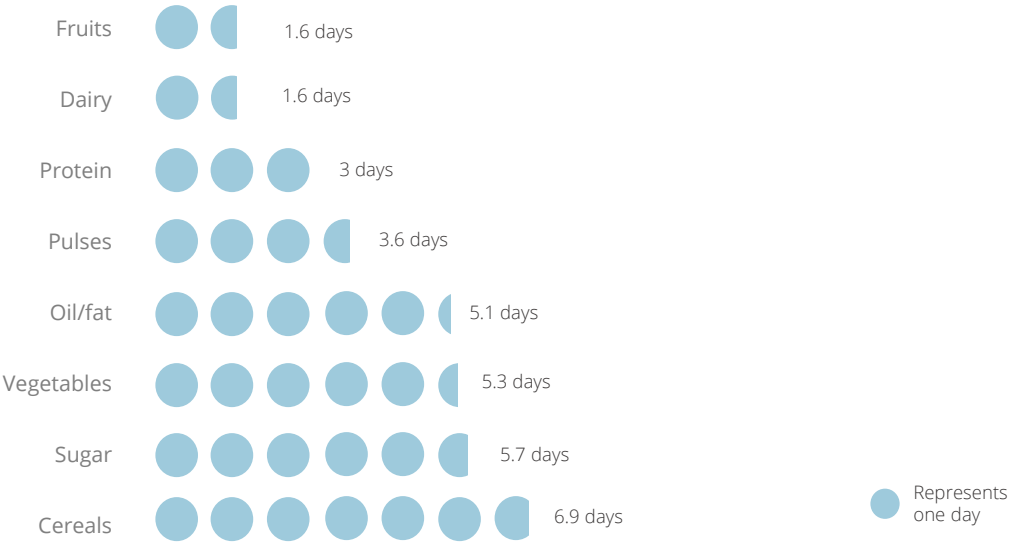
Inadequate food consumption remained stable from August-September 2023 but reflects a 5-percentage-point increase compared to March 2023, when 21 percent of households were not consuming an adequately diversified diet. A slight rise was also observed in the proportion of households falling into the borderline consumption category.

Fig 5: Inadequate food consumption levels as a percent of households

Poor: 2% (Mar 2023), 4% (Aug - Sep 2023), **3%** (Dec 2024)
Borderline: 19% (Mar 2023), 22% (Aug - Sep 2023), **23%** (Dec 2024)
Acceptable: 79% (Mar 2023), 74% (Aug - Sep 2023), **74%** (Dec 2024)

● Mar 2023   ● Aug - Sep 2023   ● Dec 2024

The daily household dietary intake typically consisted of cereals, oil, sugar and vegetables. In general, milk, dairy products and fruits were consumed three or fewer than three days a week. This was found to follow a similar trend in the previous rounds of surveys, with fruits are dairy consistently being the least consumed food groups. Food groups consisting of cereals, vegetables, sugar, and oils were the main constituents of household daily diets and were consumed almost every day by the households.

Fig 6: Number of days food groups were consumed in the last 7 days (Dec 2024)

| Food group	Days
Fruits	1.6 days
Dairy	1.6 days
Protein	3 days
Pulses	3.6 days
Oil/fat	5.1 days
Vegetables	5.3 days
Sugar	5.7 days
Cereals	6.9 days

● Represents one day

Food consumption by sector and household characteristics

Inadequate food consumption is most prevalent in the estate sector, affecting 47 percent of households.

This is followed by the rural sector at 27 percent, while the urban sector records the lowest rate at 21 percent. Compared to August-September 2023, the proportion of households with inadequate food consumption increased in both the urban and estate sectors, while remaining stable in rural areas. Specifically, the urban sector saw an 8 percentage point increase, and the estate sector experienced 6 percentage point rise.

Fig 7: Inadequate food consumption levels by sector as percent of households

Poor   Borderline   Acceptable
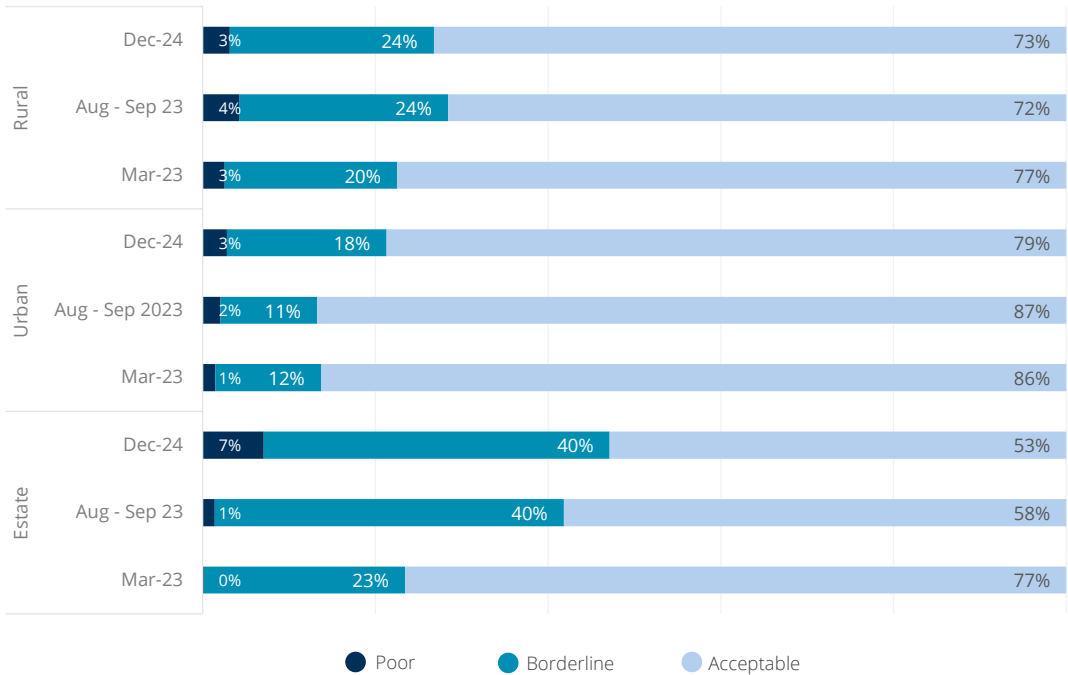
More than one-third of female-headed households (34 percent) consumed inadequate meals compared to male-headed households (25 percent). This is a 3-point percentage increase compared to September 2023, when 31 percent of female-headed households experienced inadequate consumption. Inadequate consumption in male-headed households did not change compared to August–September 2023.

Fig 8: Inadequate food consumption levels, by gender of household head

Poor   Borderline   Acceptable
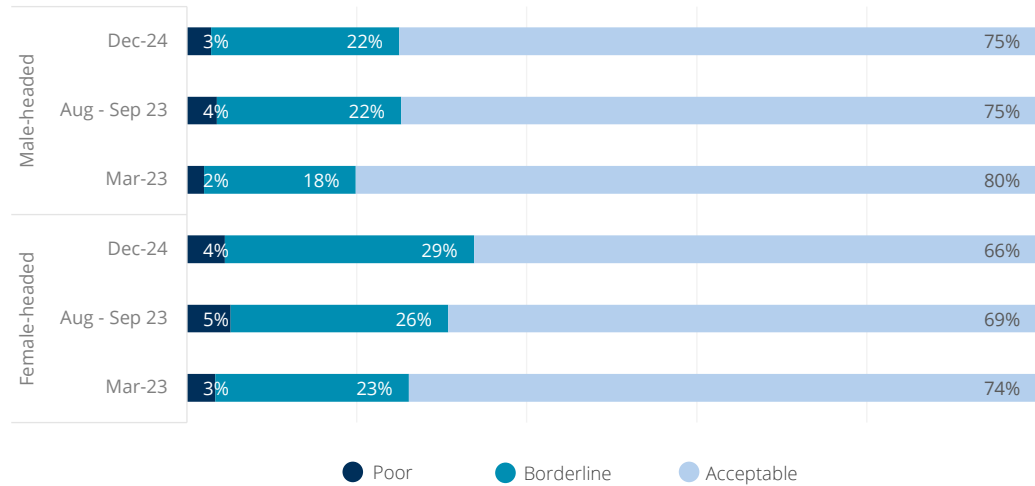
A closer look at Figure 8 shows a marginal decrease in acceptable food consumption levels among female-headed households compared to the previous rounds of surveys. However, acceptable consumption levels have remained the same in male-headed households, compared to August–September 2023. Female-headed households display greater volatility in their food consumption levels.
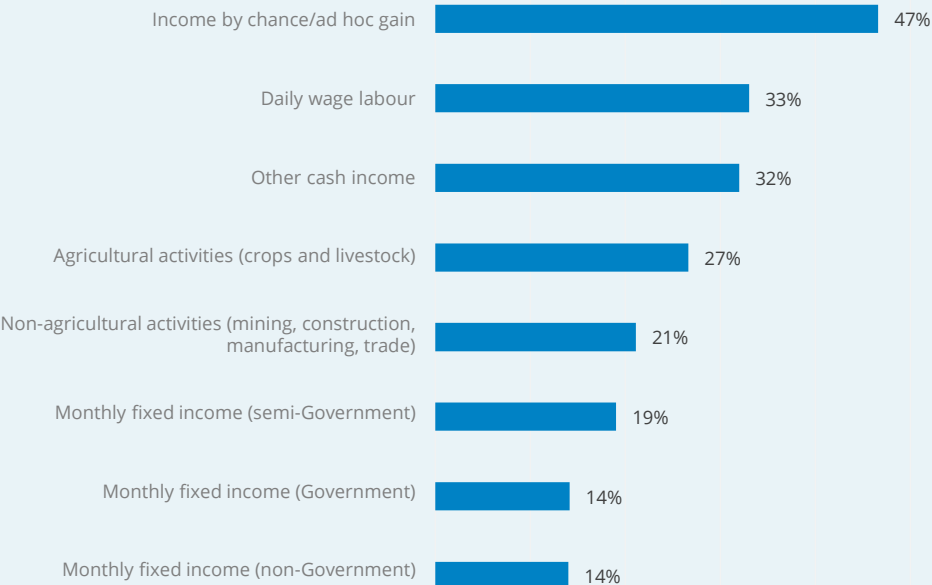
Households are categorized into "poor," "borderline," and "acceptable" based on their FCS scores. Specifically, a score of 0-28 is typically considered "poor," 28-42 is "borderline," and over 42 is "acceptable,"

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Food consumption by income group

According to the findings, households relying on irregular and unpredictable sources of income report the highest level of inadequate food consumption (47 percent), followed by households depending on daily wages (33 percent). The lowest affected groups are those with monthly fixed incomes, government and non-government employees, revealing the lowest prevalence of inadequate food consumption (14 percent).

An inverse relationship between income regularity and food insecurity is revealed, where groups with unstable or informal income sources show higher rates of food inadequacy.

Fig 9: Inadequate food consumption levels by income group, as percent of households

Income group	Percent
Income by chance/ad hoc gain	47%
Daily wage labour	33%
Other cash income	32%
Agricultural activities (crops and livestock)	27%
Non-agricultural activities (mining, construction, manufacturing, trade)	21%
Monthly fixed income (semi-Government)	19%
Monthly fixed income (Government)	14%
Monthly fixed income (non-Government)	14%

● Dec 2024

Food consumption by district

A significant proportion of the population in several districts across Sri Lanka, particularly in the North, East, and Central regions, experience inadequate diets, highlighting geographic disparities in food security.
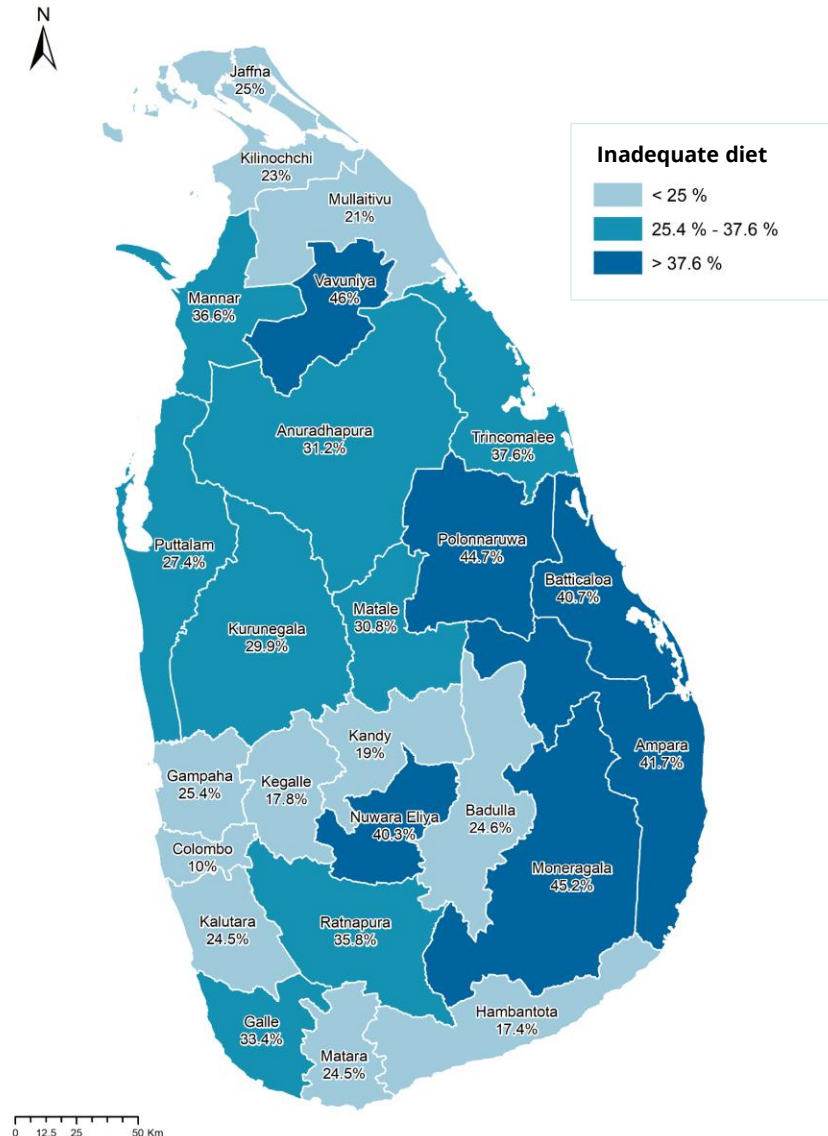
The map highlights regional disparities in food security across Sri Lanka, with several districts, particularly in the Northern, Eastern, and Uva provinces, such as Vavuniya (46 percent), Polonnaruwa (45 percent), Moneragala (45 percent), and Ampara (42 percent), reporting high levels of inadequate diets, affecting over 40 percent of their populations. These findings suggest heightened vulnerability in rural and estate sectors. In contrast, urban districts like Colombo (10 percent) and Kandy (19 percent) show relatively better food consumption.

The observed seasonal deterioration aligns with known agricultural lean seasons and annual fluctuations in food prices typically observed during November and December in Sri Lanka. Due to distinct rainfall patterns, the dry zone is likely to experience greater seasonality in food prices and availability compared to the wet zone or uplands. Additionally, the increased remoteness of northern regions may lead to weaker market integration, further contributing to seasonal fluctuations in both food prices and availability.

A lower household food expenditure share may indicate reduced food consumption, particularly in contexts where overall income is low. When households spend a smaller proportion of their total expenditure on food, it can reflect limited access to sufficient or diverse food items. This often results in poor dietary quality and quantity. In vulnerable or food-insecure areas, a lower food expenditure share may therefore be a signal of inadequate food consumption, as households prioritise other essential non-food expenses or simply lack the resources to meet basic food needs.

Map 2: Percentage of households consuming inadequate diets by district

Inadequate diet
- < 25 %
- 25.4 % - 37.6 %
- > 37.6 %

Jaffna 25%
Kilinochchi 23%
Mullaitivu 21%
Vavuniya 46%
Mannar 36.6%
Anuradhapura 31.2%
Trincomalee 37.6%
Puttalam 27.4%
Polonnaruwa 44.7%
Batticaloa 40.7%
Kurunegala 29.9%
Matale 30.8%
Kandy 19%
Ampara 41.7%
Gampaha 25.4%
Kegalle 17.8%
Nuwara Eliya 40.3%
Badulla 24.6%
Colombo 10%
Moneragala 45.2%
Kalutara 24.5%
Ratnapura 35.8%
Hambantota 17.4%
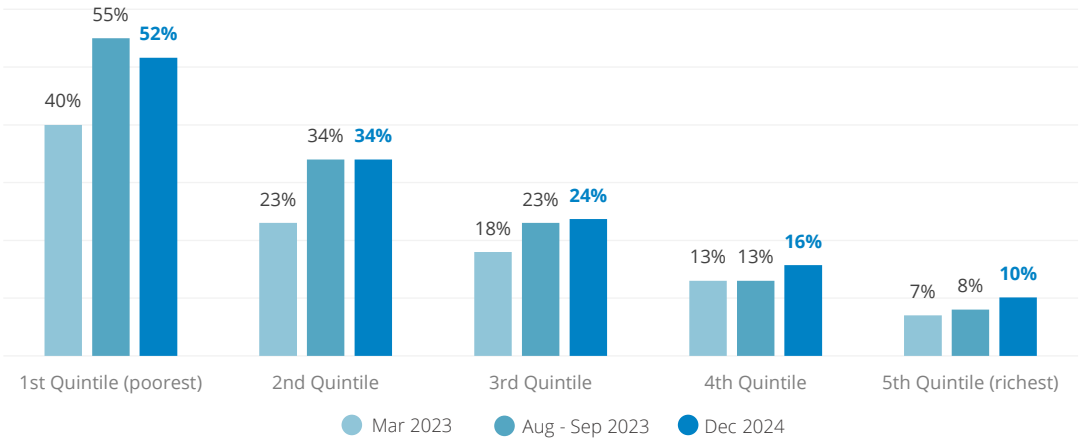Galle 33.4%
Matara 24.5%

0 12.5 25   50 Km

Food consumption by quintiles

Food consumption by the poorest households has improved by three percentage points. The proportion of households with inadequate food consumption declined with an increase in monthly per-capita expenditure. For example, for August - October 2023, the lowest expenditure group (1st quintile) had 52 percent of households with inadequate food consumption, which is significantly higher than the largest expenditure group (5th quintile), at only 10 percent.

Per capita expenditure was calculated using detailed information about household total food and non-food expenditures in Sri Lankan Rupees (LKR) over the reference period of 30 days. Expenditure quintiles were then created by dividing the total monetary value, including household purchases, home production and credit purchases, etc, into five classes (quintiles). Since consumption expenditure is often used as a proxy for poverty, it is expected that poorer households will exhibit poorer food consumption patterns.

Inadequate food consumption among households in the lowest expenditure group decreased by 3 percentage points since August-September 2023. Conversely, households in the highest expenditure groups (4th and 5th quintiles) experienced an increase in inadequate food consumption by 3 percent and 2 percent, respectively. The 2nd and 3rd quintiles remained unchanged compared to August-September 2023.

Fig 12: Percent of households with inadequate food consumption, by expenditure quintile

	1st Quintile (poorest)	2nd Quintile	3rd Quintile	4th Quintile	5th Quintile (richest)
Mar 2023	40%	23%	18%	13%	7%
Aug - Sep 2023	55%	34%	23%	13%	8%
Dec 2024	52%	34%	24%	16%	10%

# 3. Vulnerability and coping strategies

The reduced Coping Strategies Index (rCSI) is an indicator used to compare the hardship faced by households due to a shortage of food. The index measures the frequency and severity of the food consumption behaviours the households had to engage in due to food shortage in the 7 days prior to the survey.

Households turn to food- and livelihood-based coping strategies to manage food shortages or lack of access to food.

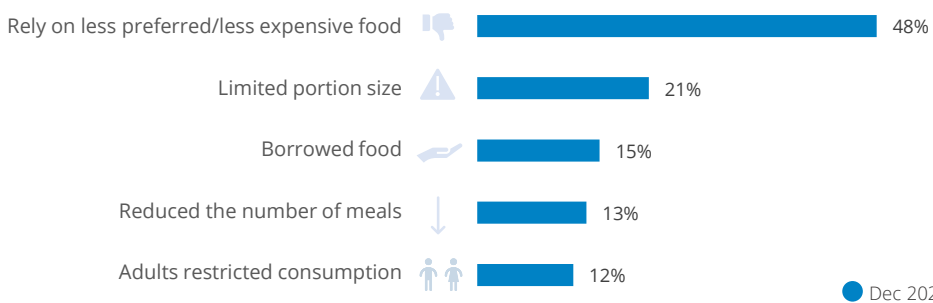## 51 percent of households were turning to at least one food-based coping strategy.

Although this is a deterioration compared to the previous survey, when 42 percent of households employed at least one food-based coping strategy, the percentage of households adopting high and medium coping has reduced. However, the percentage of households adopting low coping strategies, such as relying on less preferred or less expensive food, has increased by 9 percentage points. This means that while households do turn to food-based coping, the severity of the coping mechanisms has decreased.

Fig 13: Percentage of households adopting food-based coping mechanisms
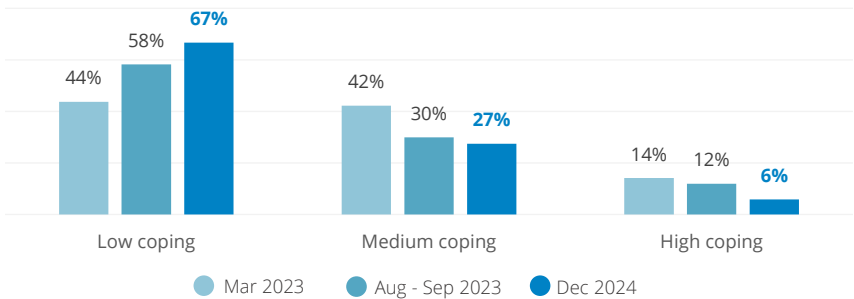
The findings revealed that a large proportion of households (48 percent) relied on less preferred food, followed by limiting portion sizes (21 percent) and borrowing food (15 percent). Adults restrict consumption in 12 percent of households, allowing children to eat more.

Fig 14: Percentage of households employing different food-based coping mechanisms

Rely on less preferred/less expensive food	48%
Limited portion size	21%
Borrowed food	15%
Reduced the number of meals	13%
Adults restricted consumption	12%

● Dec 2024

The high, medium and low food-based coping strategy categories are derived based on the frequency and severity of one of the five coping strategies employed by the households as a result of food shortage in the households.
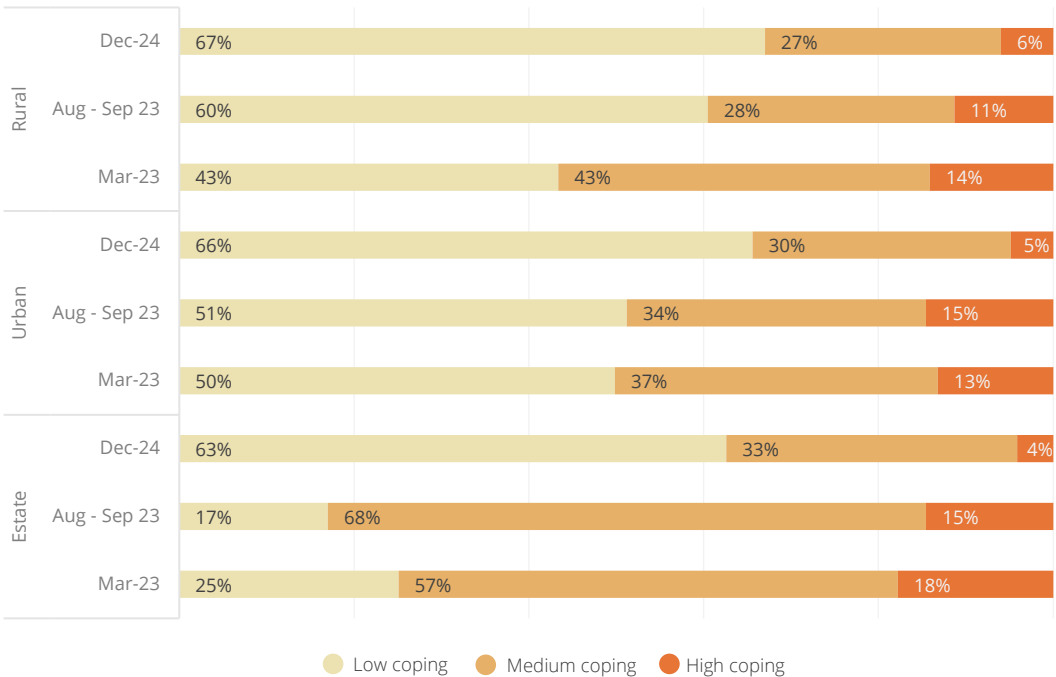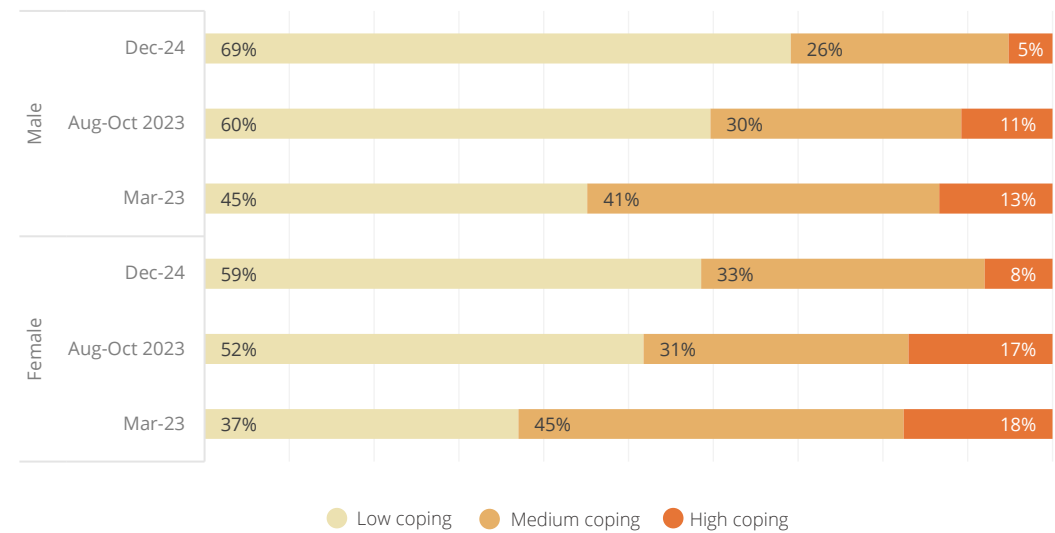
Food-based coping by sector and household characteristics

Six in ten estate households (60 percent) were adopting food-based coping strategies. This is a 23 percentage point improvement, compared to 2023, when 83 percent of estate households reported using food-based coping mechanisms. 51 percent of rural and urban sector households were turning to food-based coping.

All three sectors had households employing "high severity coping" mechanisms, highlighting the presence of vulnerable households in all sectors. However, compared to the previous rounds, the percentage of said households has decreased. Compared to August-October 2023, there is a 35 percentage point decline in the percentage of estate households employing "medium severity coping", the largest reduction compared to other sectors.

Fig 15: Percentage of households adopting food-based coping strategies by sector

		Low coping	Medium coping	High coping
Rural	Dec-24	67%	27%	6%
	Aug - Sep 23	60%	28%	11%
	Mar-23	43%	43%	14%
Urban	Dec-24	66%	30%	5%
	Aug - Sep 23	51%	34%	15%
	Mar-23	50%	37%	13%
Estate	Dec-24	63%	33%	4%
	Aug - Sep 23	17%	68%	15%
	Mar-23	25%	57%	18%

● Low coping   ● Medium coping   ● High coping

Over half of the assessed female-headed households (58 percent) were adopting food-based coping mechanisms, an increase of ten percentage points compared to the last round. An increase was also noted in male-headed households taking up food-based coping mechanisms, from 40 percent to 49 percent, a similar increase to female-headed households.

Similar to the overall findings, the percentage of households adopting medium and high coping mechanisms has decreased, while the uptake of low coping mechanisms has increased.

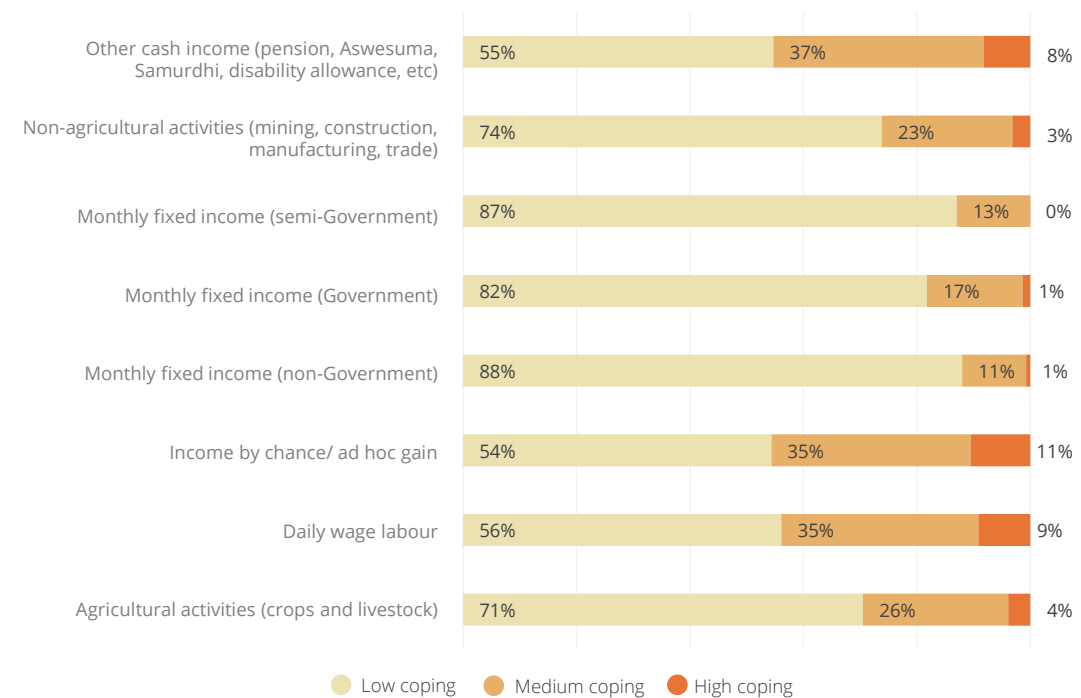*Fig 16: Percentage of female- and male-headed households adopting food-based coping strategies*

		Low coping	Medium coping	High coping
Male	Dec-24	69%	26%	5%
	Aug-Oct 2023	60%	30%	11%
	Mar-23	45%	41%	13%
Female	Dec-24	59%	33%	8%
	Aug-Oct 2023	52%	31%	17%
	Mar-23	37%	45%	18%

● Low coping ● Medium coping ● High coping

The results reveal that there are still sections of the population that exhibit high vulnerability to food insecurity over longer periods.

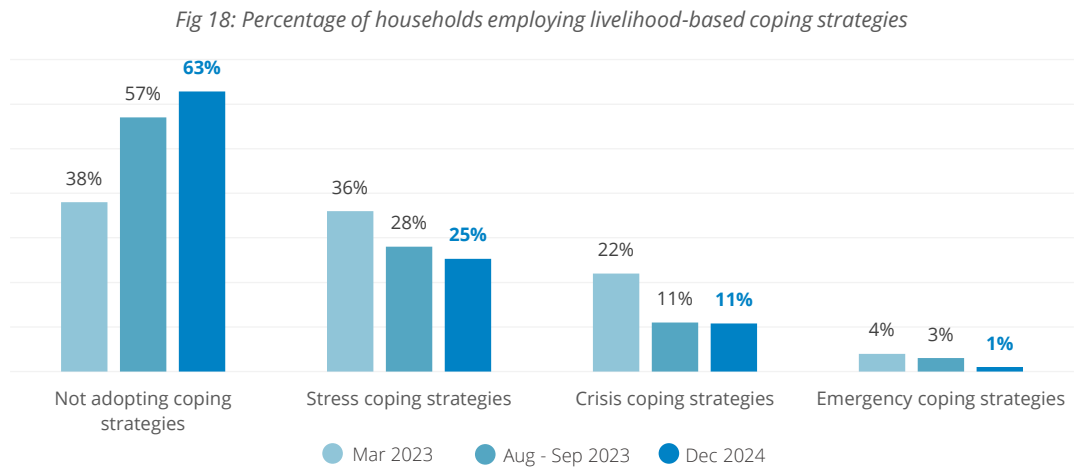*Food-based coping by income group*

In terms of income groups, a considerable percentage of households employed low coping mechanisms. Small proportions of households dependent on income by chance or ad hoc gain (11 percent), cash incomes such as social protection programmes (8 percent) and daily wage (9 percent) relied on high coping mechanisms. In comparison, households with a monthly fixed income had the lowest percentage of households adopting high coping mechanisms.

Fig 17: Percentage of households (by income group) adopting food-based coping strategies

	Low coping	Medium coping	High coping
Other cash income (pension, Aswesuma, Samurdhi, disability allowance, etc)	55%	37%	8%
Non-agricultural activities (mining, construction, manufacturing, trade)	74%	23%	3%
Monthly fixed income (semi-Government)	87%	13%	0%
Monthly fixed income (Government)	82%	17%	1%
Monthly fixed income (non-Government)	88%	11%	1%
Income by chance/ ad hoc gain	54%	35%	11%
Daily wage labour	56%	35%	9%
Agricultural activities (crops and livestock)	71%	26%	4%

● Low coping ● Medium coping ● High coping

To cope with the lack of food, 38 percent of households employed at least one livelihood-based coping strategy.
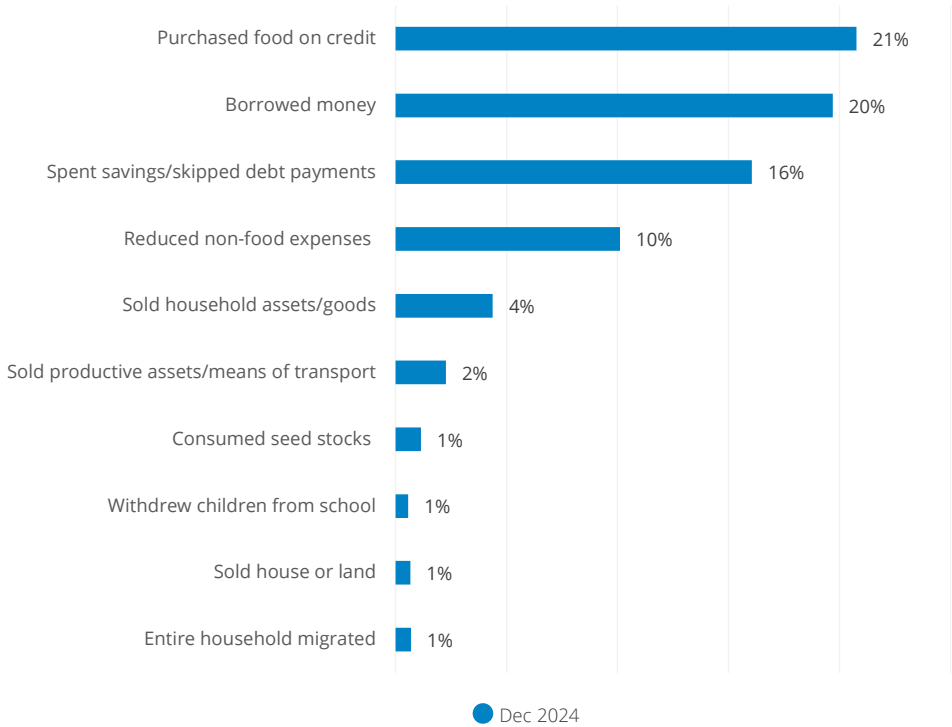
This significantly improved compared to Aug-Sep 2023, where 43 percent of households adopted livelihood coping strategies. The severity of the strategies employed has decreased, although the percentage turning to crisis coping strategies has remained the same since the last survey round (11 percent).

Fig 18: Percentage of households employing livelihood-based coping strategies

	Mar 2023	Aug - Sep 2023	Dec 2024
Not adopting coping strategies	38%	57%	63%
Stress coping strategies	36%	28%	25%
Crisis coping strategies	22%	11%	11%
Emergency coping strategies	4%	3%	1%

Fig 19: Percentage of households adopting various livelihood-based coping strategies

Strategy	Dec 2024
Purchased food on credit	21%
Borrowed money	20%
Spent savings/skipped debt payments	16%
Reduced non-food expenses	10%
Sold household assets/goods	4%
Sold productive assets/means of transport	2%
Consumed seed stocks	1%
Withdrew children from school	1%
Sold house or land	1%
Entire household migrated	1%

The survey results found that the highest proportion of households (21 percent) were purchasing food on credit, followed closely by borrowing money from a formal lender or bank due to a lack of food (20 percent). This was followed by skipping debt payments (16 percent) and reducing non-food expenses such as health and education (10 percent). While an overall decrease in household employment of livelihood-based coping was recorded, a slightly higher percent of households (4 percent) sold household goods, compared to the previous survey. All other categories saw at least a marginal decrease or remained the same.

The largest decrease was in the percentage of households borrowing money, which dropped by seven percentage points. The livelihood-coping strategies adopted least by households continue to be consuming seed stocks, withdrawing children from school, selling house or land and migration.
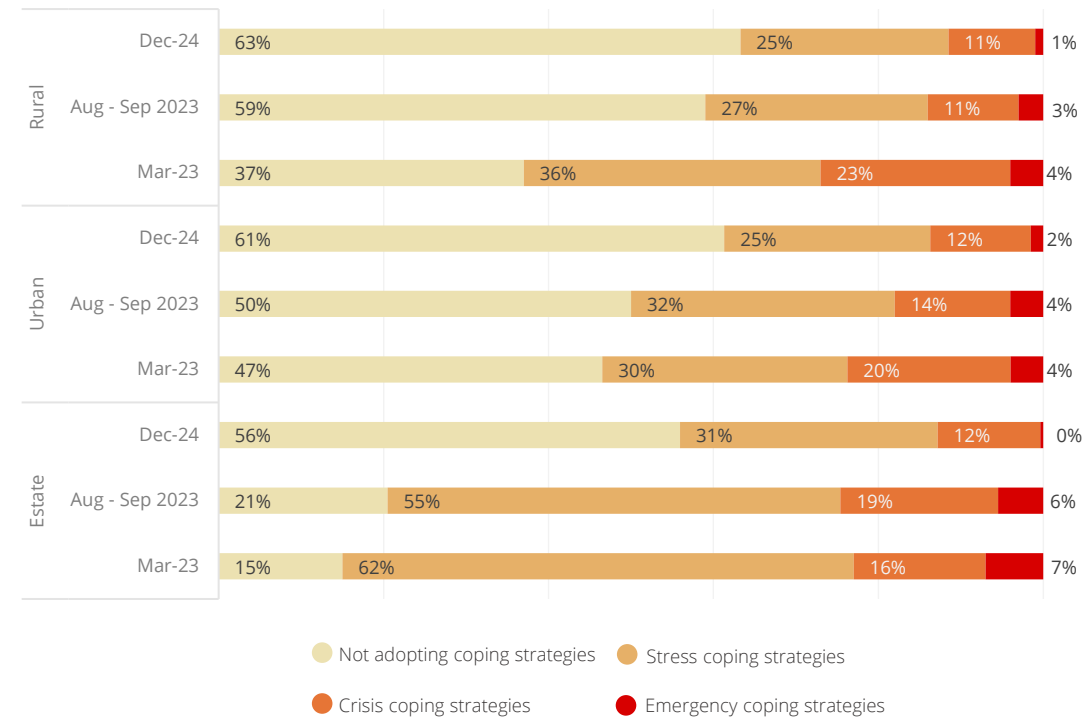
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Livelihood-based coping by sector and household characteristics

A large proportion of estate households (44 percent) were adopting livelihood-based coping strategies, followed by 39 percent of urban households and 37 percent of rural households. Compared to the previous survey rounds in 2023, a larger number of households are not adopting coping strategies in all three sectors, with the largest increase noted in the estate sector of 35 percentage points, compared to August-September 2023.

Interestingly, no households in the estate sector reported resorting to emergency coping strategies, while 2 per cent of urban and 1 per cent of rural households were adopting emergency coping strategies.

37 percent of female- and male-headed households were turning to livelihood-based coping strategies. However, more male-headed households used stress coping strategies compared to female-headed households.

However, compared to 2023, a higher proportion of both female- and male-headed households were not adopting any livelihood coping strategies. 63 percent of both female- and male-headed households were not adopting coping strategies, compared to 58 and 57 percent, respectively, during August-September 2023, signifying an improvement. In terms of stress and crisis coping strategies, a reduction was observed in both female- and male-headed households, with a bigger reduction in male-headed households for stress coping. These observations suggest an overall decline in households relying on livelihood-based coping strategies to provide for their food needs.

Fig 20: Percentage of households adopting livelihood-based coping strategies by sector

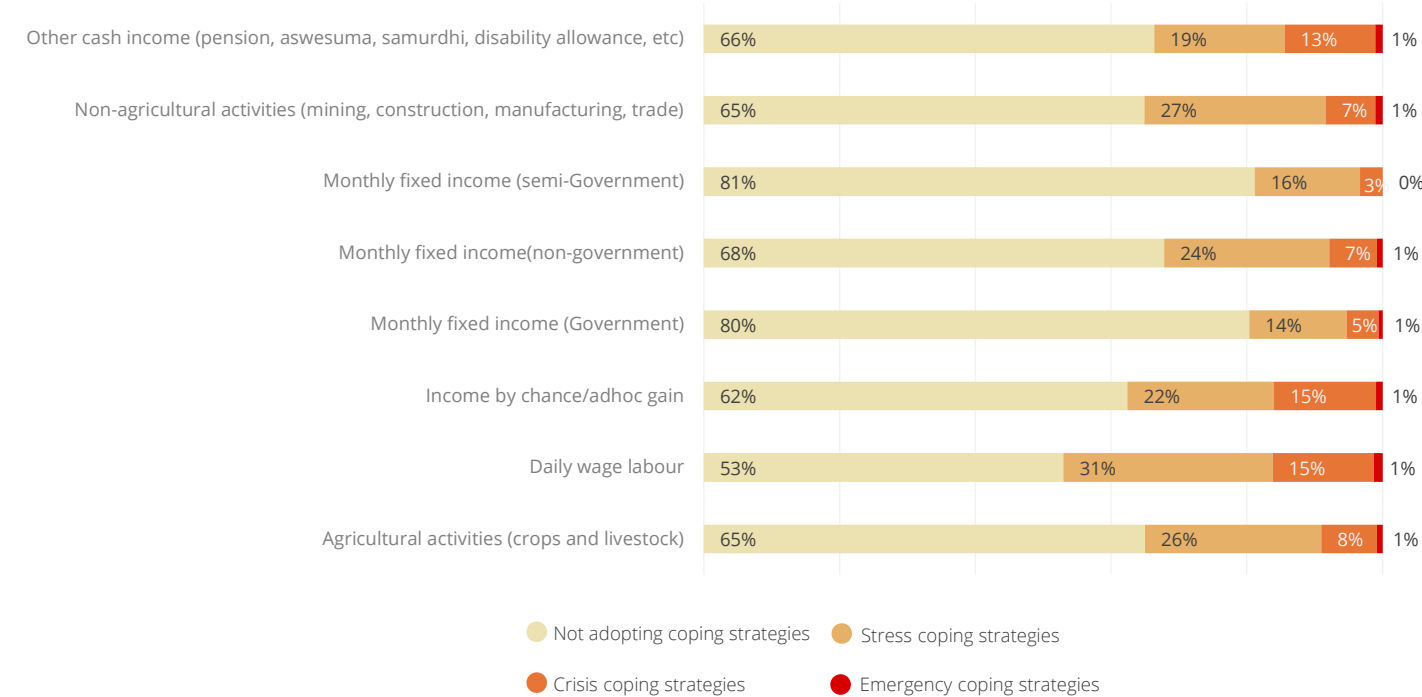*Fig 21: Percentage of households adopting livelihood-based coping strategies by gender*
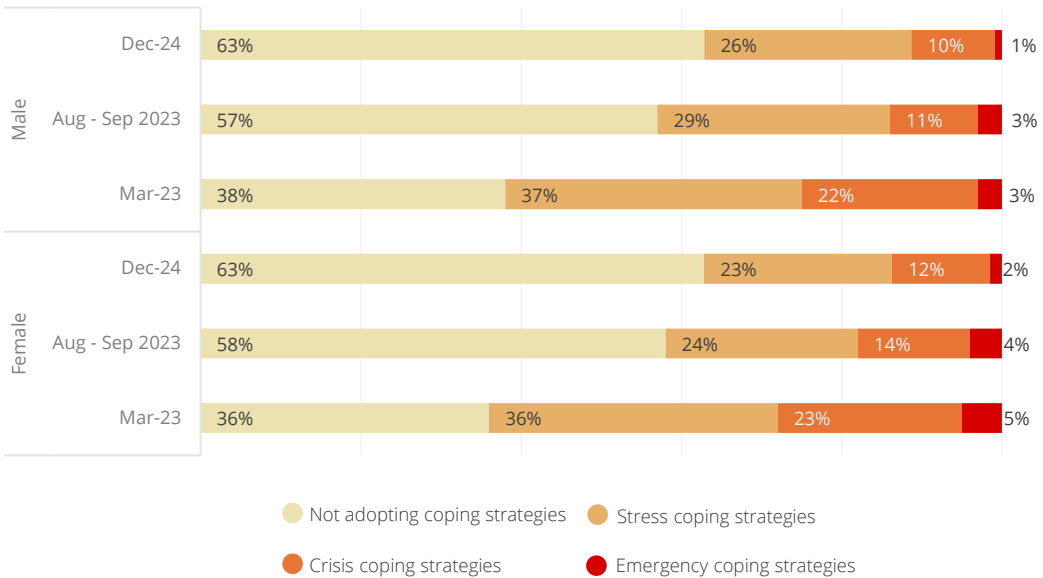
Livelihood-based coping by income group

Overall, in terms of livelihood groups, 47 percent of households relying on daily wage labour were adopting livelihood coping strategies. This was followed by households relying on ad hoc gain (48 percent) and non-agricultural activities such as mining, construction, manufacturing, etc. (46 percent).

Households relying on daily wage labour have the highest percentage of households relying on stress coping (31 percent), crisis coping (15 percent) and emergency coping strategies (1.3 percent).15 percent of households relying on income by chance/ad hoc gain aid/gifts employed crisis coping strategies. Household heads employed by the Government and those who were self-employed or worked in liberal professions utilized minimal emergency coping strategies, compared to other income groups.

Fig 22: Percentage of households employing livelihood-based coping mechanisms by income group

Income group	Not adopting	Stress	Crisis	Emergency
Other cash income (pension, aswesuma, samurdhi, disability allowance, etc)	66%	19%	13%	1%
Non-agricultural activities (mining, construction, manufacturing, trade)	65%	27%	7%	1%
Monthly fixed income (semi-Government)	81%	16%	3%	0%
Monthly fixed income(non-government)	68%	24%	7%	1%
Monthly fixed income (Government)	80%	14%	5%	1%
Income by chance/adhoc gain	62%	22%	15%	1%
Daily wage labour	53%	31%	15%	1%
Agricultural activities (crops and livestock)	65%	26%	8%	1%

- Not adopting coping strategies
- Stress coping strategies
- Crisis coping strategies
- Emergency coping strategies

4. Food expenditure

WFP uses the Food Expenditure Share (FES) as a key indicator to assess household vulnerability to food insecurity. FES calculates the percentage of a household's total expenditure that is spent on food. A higher FES indicates a greater vulnerability, as the household is spending a larger proportion of its income on food, potentially leaving less for other essential needs.

Overall, households were spending more than 54 percent of total expenditure on food.

According to the survey, this is a decline of eight percentage points compared to August – September 2023. Households which bear a high proportion of expenditure on food are likely to be economically vulnerable than households that spend a low proportion of expenditure on food. The analysis of food expenditure as a proportion of household income enables the monitoring of trends in food spending relative to income over time.

Female- and male-headed households allocated an equal portion - 54 percent of their income on food. Compared to August-September 2023, both exhibited a decrease in the share of income used. Female-headed households saw a decrease of 11 percentage points, while male-headed households' expenditure on food reduced by seven percentage points.

Fig 23: Household total expenditure on food

Fig 25: Household food expenditure share by gender of the head of household

Female-headed households   Male-headed households
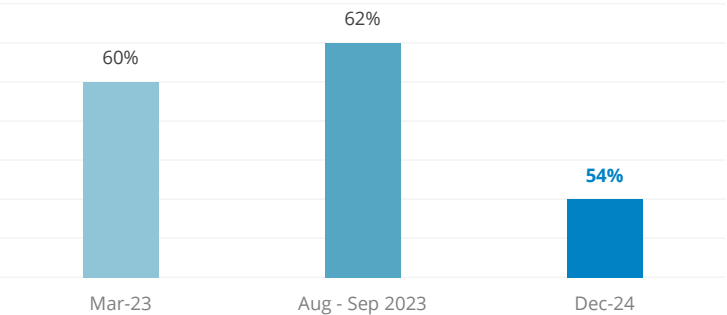
Food expenditure share by sector and household characteristics

Among the sectors, households in the estate sector spent 58 percent on food of their income on food, which is 4 percent higher than the overall household expenditure on food, which was 54 percent. In contrast, households in the rural and urban sectors reported slightly lower food expenditure shares, 54 and 52 percent, respectively.

Fig 24: Household food expenditure share by sector

● Dec 2024

Food expenditure share by district

The highest expenditure on food was from households in Kilinochchi (52 percent) followed by Mullaitivu (41 percent).

The northern districts are showing higher shares of household expenditure spent on food, specifically Kilinochchi, Mullaitivu and Jaffna, exceeding 34.3 percent of total expenditure. In contrast, districts in the east and south, including Batticaloa (8.7 percent), Hambantota (10.5 percent) and Ampara (14.3 percent), record the lowest percentages for food expenditure.

The differences observed between the food security and food consumption maps can be attributed to variations in economic stability, particularly evident in districts where food consumption is inadequate. This is also influenced by the differing measurement approaches: food insecurity is assessed using four indicators, whereas food consumption is based on a seven-day recall of household consumption.

Map 3: Household food expenditure share by district

Expenditure
- < 19.8 %
- 19.8 - 34.3 %
- > 34.3 %
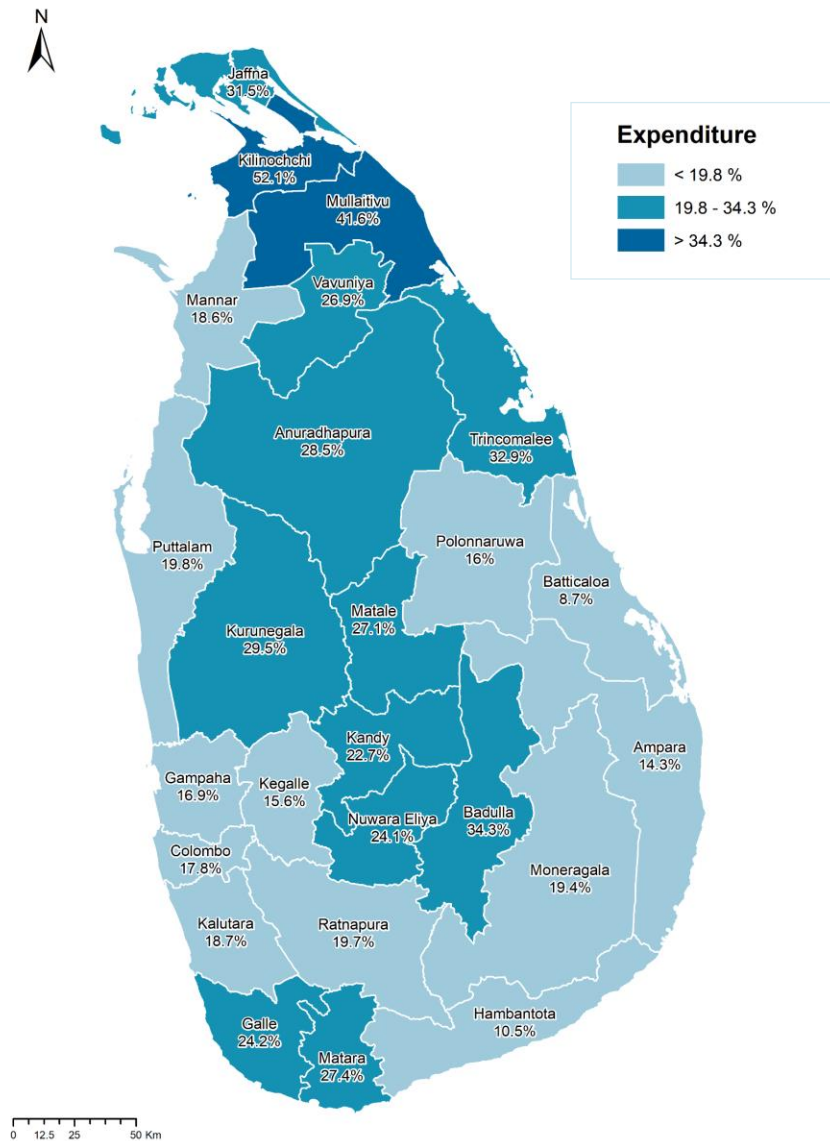
22 percent of households spent more than 65 percent of their total expenditure on food, a reduction compared to the previous survey rounds.

The proportion of households spending more than 65 percent of their total expenditure on food significantly decreased by 20 percentage points in December 2024, compared to August - September 2023.
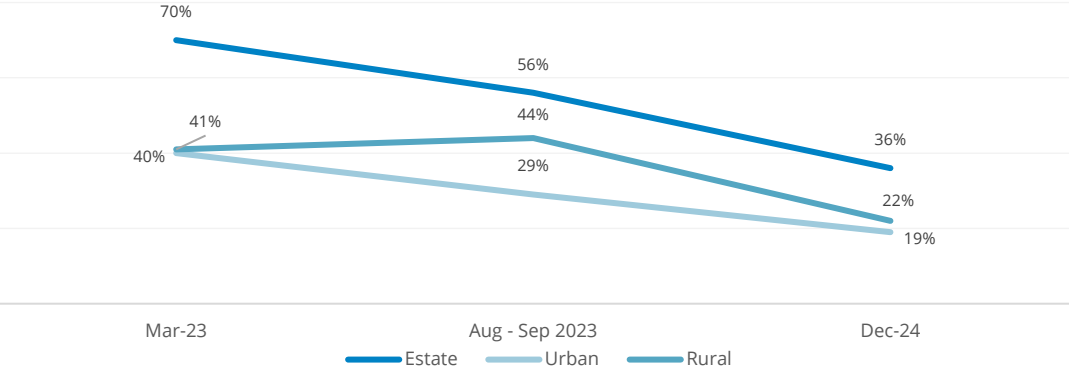
Fig 26: Percentage of households spending over 65 percent of total expenditure on food

42%   42%   **22%**

Mar-23   Aug - Sep 23   Dec-24
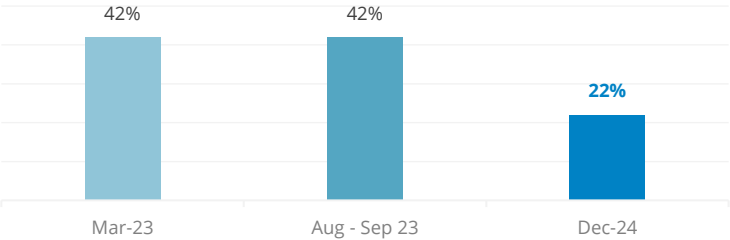
Food expenditure share (over 65 percent) by sector and household charachteristics

The estate sector in Sri Lanka recorded the highest proportion of households spending more than 75 percent of their total expenditure on food (36 percent), highlighting a significant level of economic vulnerability. However, this is a steep reduction compared to August–September 2023. Figure 27 reveals a clear declining trend for estate and rural households. The largest decrease was observed in rural households (22 percentage points).

Fig 27: Percentage of households spending over 65 percent of total expenditure on food by sector

70%
56%
41%   44%
40%   29%   36%
                22%
                19%

Mar-23   Aug - Sep 2023   Dec-24

Estate   Urban   Rural

22 percent of male-headed households allocated more than 65 percent of their total expenditure to food, while a slightly lower proportion (21 percent) of female respondents did the same. These figures represent a decline across genders compared to both March and August-September 2023 findings.

Fig 28: Percentage of households spending over 65 percent of their total expenditure on food by gender of household head

51%   50%
40%   40%   21%
              22%

Mar-23   Aug - Sep 2023   Dec-24

Male   Female
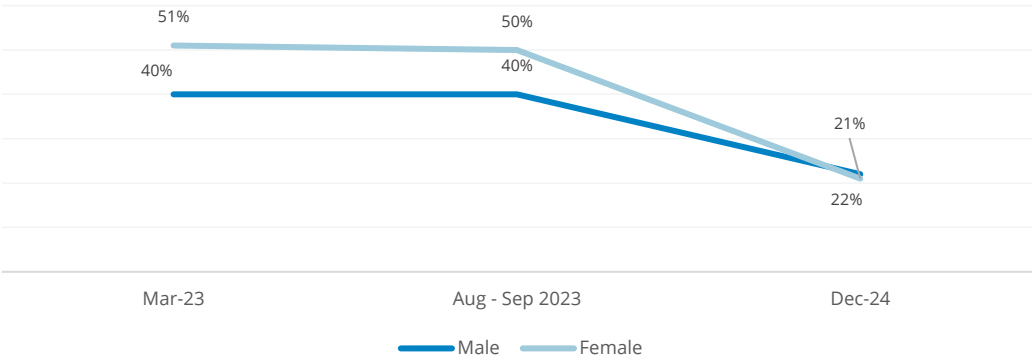
The share of food expenditure was found to be relatively similar between female-headed and male-headed households, indicating consistent spending patterns across genders. Among female-headed households, approximately 5.5 percent allocated more than three-quarters of their total expenditure to food, underlining the financial strain faced by these households in meeting essential nutritional needs.
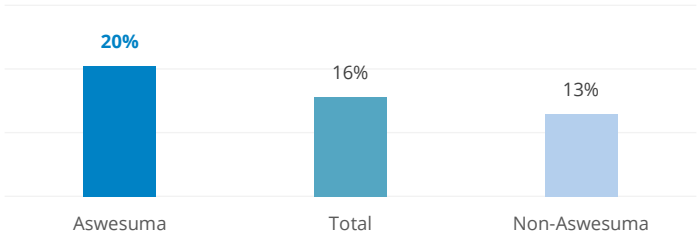
5. Aswesuma beneficiaries

Aswesuma is a social welfare programme in Sri Lanka, aiming to reduce poverty, improve social welfare and household resilience, especially during periods of economic instability. The Aswesuma programme replaces the previous Samurdhi scheme and is implemented by the Welfare Benefits Board, Sri Lanka. Aswesuma employs six criteria measured by 22 indicators to determine if a household is eligible for assistance.

Food insecurity among *Aswesuma* beneficiaries: A comparison with the general population

This section will focus on the food security and nutrition situation of *Aswesuma* households, in comparison with the *non-Aswesuma** and total households in the sample. Households receiving *Aswesuma* support experience higher levels of food insecurity compared to the general population. According to the survey, 20 percent of *Aswesuma* beneficiary households are food insecure, a rate significantly higher than the 16 percent observed in the overall population. When compared with *non-Aswesuma* households, a 7 percentage point difference exists.

Fig 29: Percentage of food-insecure households

FOOD CONSUMPTION

Dietary diversity among *Aswesuma* households is low, with 34 percent of households consuming an inadequate diet, 7 percentage points higher than the total population and 9 percentage points above *non-Aswesuma* beneficiaries.

Fig 30: Percent of households consuming inadequate diets
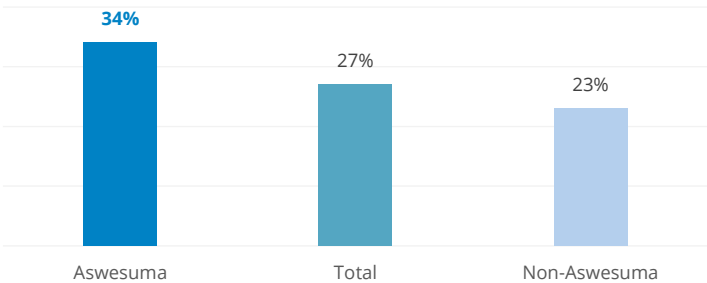
*Non-Aswesuma households are those that do not receive any form of assistance from the Aswesuma social welfare programme.

Considering the consumption patterns of different food groups, the intake of proteins, dairy, and fruits is significantly lower than that of the total and *non-Aswesuma* groups. Additionally, consumption of vegetables, oils and fats, and pulses is lower among *Aswesuma* beneficiaries, underscoring nutrition disparities. Cereal and sugar consumption remains similar across groups.

Fig 31: Average number of days per week different food groups are consumed among households

Average number of days
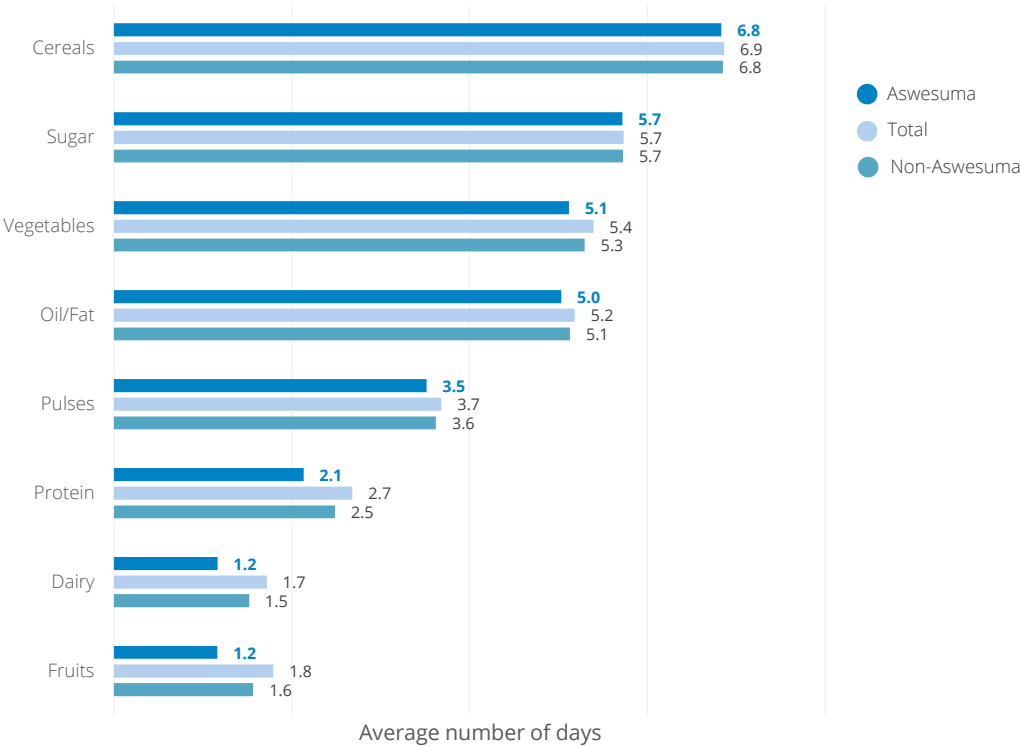
Despite receiving support through the *Aswesuma* programme, the persistently high levels of food insecurity among beneficiary households may reflect a combination of factors, including limitations in transfer value, household size, competing financial priorities, market access, and the way assistance is utilized.
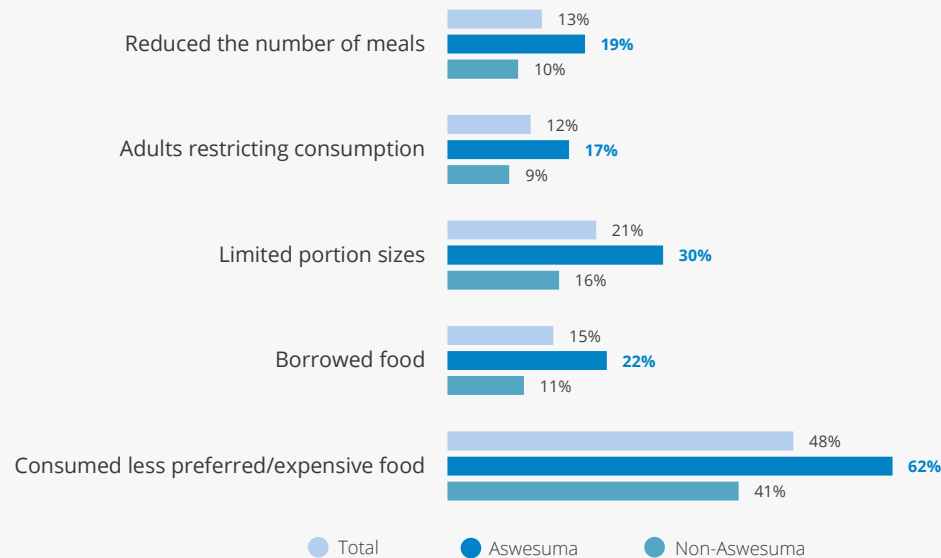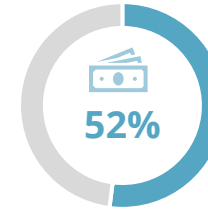
FOOD-BASED COPING STRATEGIES

66%
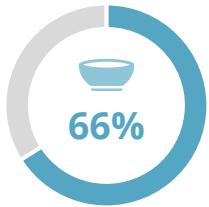
Findings indicate that 66 percent of *Aswesuma* households adopt at least one food-based coping strategy, compared to 43 percent of households that are not receiving *Aswesuma*. This is 23 percentage points higher than *non-Aswesuma* beneficiaries and 15 percentage points higher than the total sample.

Among *Aswesuma* beneficiaries, the use of food coping strategies is notably higher. These include limiting portion sizes, restricting food consumption among adults to prioritize children, and reducing the number of daily meals. The higher reliance on these strategies highlights the increased vulnerability of *Aswesuma* households in maintaining adequate food access compared to the general population.

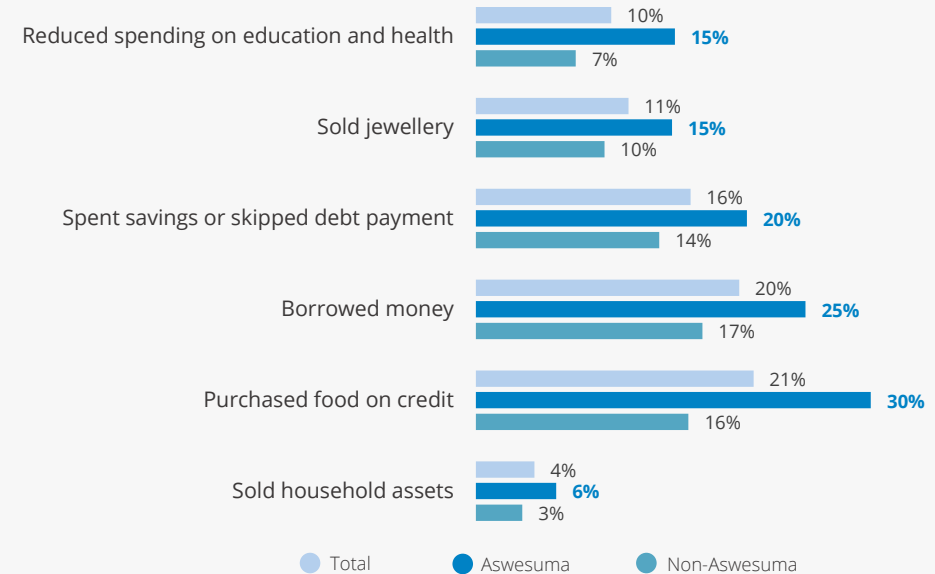*Fig 32: Percent of households using food coping strategies*

Reduced the number of meals
- 13%
- **19%**
- 10%

Adults restricting consumption
- 12%
- **17%**
- 9%

Limited portion sizes
- 21%
- **30%**
- 16%

Borrowed food
- 15%
- **22%**
- 11%

Consumed less preferred/expensive food
- 48%
- **62%**
- 41%

● Total   ● Aswesuma   ● Non-Aswesuma

LIVELIHOOD-BASED COPING STRATEGIES

52%

In terms of livelihood-based coping, just over half of the assessed *Aswesuma* households were adopting at least one livelihood-based coping strategy. *Aswesuma* beneficiary households are unable to avoid livelihood-based coping strategies compared to the general population, highlighting economic vulnerability.

The most utilized strategies include purchasing food on credit (30 percent), borrowing money (25 percent), and spending savings or skipping debt payments (20 percent), all notably higher than among non-beneficiaries. Crisis coping mechanisms, such as selling jewellery to buy food (15 percent) and reducing spending on education and health (15 percent), are also more widespread among *Aswesuma* households.

Fig 33: Percent of households using livelihood coping strategies

Reduced spending on education and health
- 10%
- **15%**
- 7%

Sold jewellery
- 11%
- **15%**
- 10%

Spent savings or skipped debt payment
- 16%
- **20%**
- 14%

Borrowed money
- 20%
- **25%**
- 17%

Purchased food on credit
- 21%
- **30%**
- 16%

Sold household assets
- 4%
- **6%**
- 3%

● Total   ● Aswesuma   ● Non-Aswesuma

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FOOD EXPENDITURE SHARE

There is little difference between *Aswesuma* and *non-Aswesuma* beneficiary households in terms of food expenditure share. Among *Aswesuma* beneficiaries, 37 percent spend less than half of their income on food. In comparison, a similar 38 percent of *non-Aswesuma* beneficiaries also allocate less than half of their income to food. This indicates that receiving *Aswesuma* assistance does not significantly alter the proportion of household income spent on food.

Fig 34: Proportion of households by food expenditure share category

More than 65%
22%
22%
22%

50%-65%
41%
41%
41%

Less than 50%
37%
37%
38%

● Total   ● Aswesuma   ● Non-Aswesuma
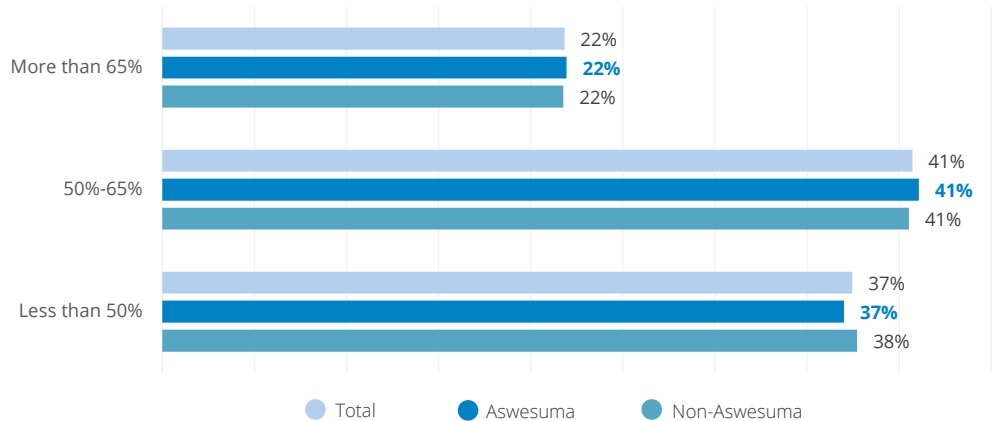
FOOD INSECURITY BY QUINTILE

The proportion of food insecurity among *Aswesuma* beneficiaries declines with an increase in monthly per-capita expenditure. For example, in the highest expenditure group (90th–100th percentile), only 11 percent of households are food insecure, compared to 33 percent in the lowest expenditure group (0–10th percentile). As expenditure levels rise, there is a clear shift from food insecurity to marginal and full food security.

Among the lowest 30 percent of households, over 30 percent are food insecure, but this figure steadily drops to below 20 percent from the 50th percentile upward. Notably, the share of food-secure households also increases with higher expenditure, rising from just 12 percent in the lowest decile to 35 percent in the highest decile. This trend highlights the strong link between household economic capacity and food security status among *Aswesuma* beneficiaries.

Fig 35: Levels of food insecurity among Aswesuma households by income quintile

	Lowest 20% (0-20th percentile)	20-40th percentile	40-60th percentile	60-80th percentile	Highest 20% (80-100th percentile)
Food insecure	29%	21%	14%	8%	5%
Marginally food secure	54%	57%	55%	49%	34%
Food secure	16%	22%	31%	43%	60%

● Food secure   ● Marginally food secure   ● Food insecure
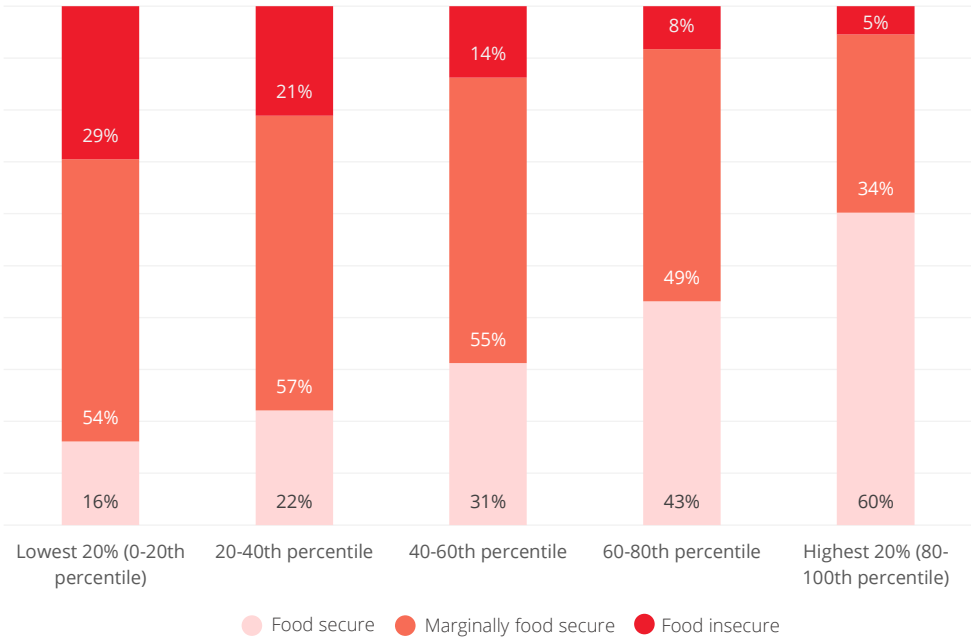
5. Recommendations

Recommendations

The food security situation in Sri Lanka has shown signs of gradual improvement between 2022 and 2024. The proportion of food-insecure households decreased from 28 percent in early 2022 to 16 percent by the end of 2024. This was accompanied by a reduction in household food expenditure share and coping strategy adoption, indicating improved economic stability at the household level. However, despite these positive trends, food consumption scores for many households remain below acceptable thresholds, signalling persistent vulnerability and fragility in food access, especially among specific socio-economic groups. Based on these findings, the following sector-specific recommendations are proposed.

Rural livelihood diversification: The survey revealed that households dependent on wage labour, particularly in the agriculture sector, had poorer food security outcomes. Agriculture is inherently seasonal and vulnerable to shocks such as weather fluctuations and market changes, leaving many labourers without a stable year-round income. The promotion and support of rural livelihood diversification through vocational training, promotion of micro-enterprises, and off-farm employment opportunities is important. Encouraging skills development and entrepreneurship can provide rural populations with consistent income streams throughout the year, reducing reliance on unstable seasonal employment. Special attention should be given to designing livelihood interventions tailored to local market demand and accessible to the most food-insecure groups.

Regular monitoring: While national-level food security improved in 2024, a large segment of economically and socially vulnerable households continues to experience food insecurity. Many of these households remain highly sensitive to external shocks—economic, climatic, and political—which can quickly reverse gains in food access. It is vital to establish a systematic and frequent food security monitoring system focusing on communities vulnerable to food insecurity. Monitoring should capture the impact of policy shifts, price volatility, and global economic changes on household-level food access. Data from this system will enable timely and targeted interventions for the most affected populations and will help refine national policies to reduce the risk of food insecurity relapse.

Food price stablization: The stabilization of essential food commodity prices through market-based interventions and effective inflation management could mitigate economic shocks, particularly benefiting households highly vulnerable to price fluctuations.

Strengthening safety nets: Analysis of the *Aswesuma* beneficiaries scheme reveals that the food security levels of targeted households are higher than the national average. To strengthen the targeting approach of social protection schemes, food insecurity proxy indicators could serve as an accurate proxy for identifying vulnerable households, thereby improving targeting accuracy in the *Aswesuma* scheme. Additionally, integrating nutrition education and behavioural change communication into social protection programs can promote healthier food choices within available resource constraints. Raising awareness and enhancing access to nutritious food through targeted communication campaigns will significantly improve the effectiveness of safety net programs. Periodic reassessment and enhanced targeting of the *Aswesuma* beneficiary list should be undertaken to ensure the assistance reaches the most vulnerable and responds dynamically to changing socio-economic conditions.

Gender-sensitive programming and women's empowerment: Female-headed households were disproportionately affected by food insecurity, reflecting systemic gender disparities in access to resources, income opportunities, and social safety mechanisms. Mainstream gender equality across food security and rural development programmes. Promote women's access to land, credit, inputs, and decision-making in agricultural value chains. Tailor capacity-building programs to the specific needs of women and provide platforms for leadership and participation. Empowering women leads to improved household food security and nutritional outcomes, particularly for children and other vulnerable members.