



Remote Household Food Security Survey Brief (m-VAM)


Sri Lanka

JANUARY 2026



World Food Programme

SAVING
LIVES
CHANGING
LIVES



This brief was prepared by WFP in January 2026 to assess the impact of Cyclone Ditwah on household food security in affected communities. The analysis compares findings from the December 2024 Household Food Security Survey to understand changes over time. This is a longitudinal study, meaning it tracks the same indicators across different periods to measure trends and impacts.



Sri Lanka: IN NUMBERS

Food security is at concerning levels



24%

OF HOUSEHOLDS ARE FOOD INSECURE (rCARI)*

People are relying on coping strategies to put food on the table



57%

RESORTING TO COPING STRATEGIES
Food-based coping strategies



55% are relying on less preferred food



14% are borrowing food



17% are reducing portions

Households are consuming inadequate diets



31%

of households reported poor and borderline food consumption



Households are consuming dairy, fruit and protein **less than three days a week**

* Remote Consolidated Approach for Reporting Indicators of Food Insecurity (rCARI).

Overview

Cyclone Ditwah made landfall in Sri Lanka on 28 November 2025, bringing several days of continuous rainfall, flash floods, landslides, and heavy winds.

With over 2.1 million people affected across the island and a rising death toll*, the cyclone rendered several areas inaccessible for days due to infrastructure damage, causing the most destruction in the central highlands of the Central Province and Kandy district.

WFP, together with other UN agencies and national disaster management authorities, conducted a [Joint Rapid Needs Assessment \(JRNA\)](#) of the impact within 72 hours of the cyclone. Phase II of the JRNA drew on field-level data to enable a comprehensive understanding of impacts and needs across 10 key sectors. According to the JRNA, nearly 1.5 million people live in high-impact areas, which were already classified as medium to high levels of food insecurity, based on results from WFP's Household Food Security Survey conducted in late 2024.

WFP activated remote household food security surveys (mVAM) to supplement the Government's response and provide real-time analytics on the food security situation on the ground.

*Disaster Management Centre

Methodology

The mVAM survey was conducted from 12 to 18 January 2026, representing the second round of data collection. The first round took place in December 2025, immediately following the cyclone's impact. The current round continues the panel survey approach, allowing for tracking of the same households over time to assess changes in food security, coping capacities, and market functionality.

To design a representative sample for the rapid food security assessment in flood-affected areas, WFP adopted a stratified multi-stage sampling approach. First, districts were ranked by total number of flood-exposed households using the most recent disaster impact data.

Districts above the 75th percentile (P75) of exposure were classified as High-Impact. Within each selected district, Divisional Secretariat Divisions (DSDs) were categorized into High, Medium, and Low exposure strata based on tertiles of flood-exposed households relative to the district distribution.

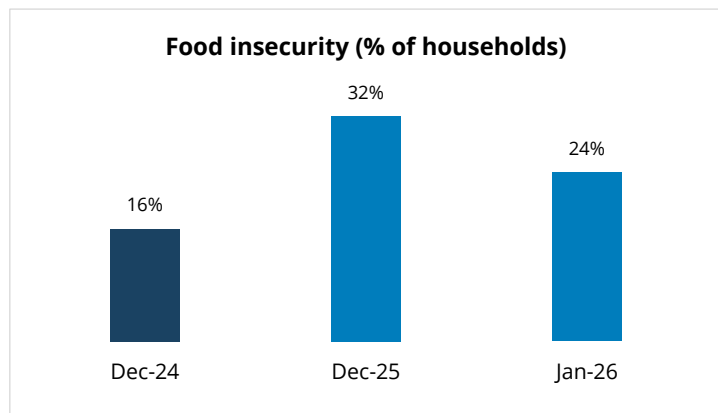
A total sample of 1,100 households were allocated proportionally across districts according to their exposure burden, with a minimum of two clusters per district to guarantee coverage. Within each district, clusters were distributed proportionally across strata and selected using Probability Proportional to Size (PPS), where DSDs with higher exposure had greater selection probability. Each cluster comprised 10 households, ensuring operational feasibility and statistical representativeness.

This design balances precision in highly impacted areas with inclusivity across exposure levels, enabling robust comparative analysis of food security outcomes. Additionally, the same group of households were extracted (longitudinal dataset) from the food security survey sample conducted in late 2024, allowing WFP to track changes and understand evolving patterns in food security.

Date	Method	Sample Size
Dec 24	Face-to-face	15,000 HHs
Dec 25	Phone	420 HHs
Jan 26	Phone	1,100 HHs

In Brief

Cyclone Ditwah has deepened the risk of food insecurity. Findings show that 24 percent of households are food insecure. This is an improvement compared to December 2025, in the immediate aftermath of the cyclone, when food insecurity was at 32 percent. However, the food security situation after the cyclone, both in December and January, remains much worse than pre-cyclone levels.



Consumption of adequate diets remains low. Thirty one percent of households are now facing inadequate food consumption, with many consuming less diverse and nutritious diets.

Loss and/or reduction of income remains a primary concern in several affected areas. Nearly half the surveyed households reported lost employment and working opportunities as a challenge.

Households are applying coping strategies to keep food on the table. Nearly six in ten households reported turning to at least one food-based coping strategy.

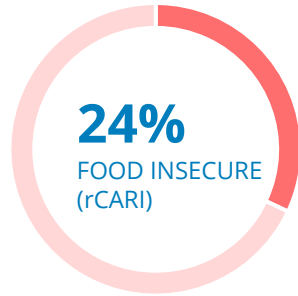
Forty two percent of assessed households are adopting livelihood- coping strategies. Compared to the previous survey in December 2024, the percentage of households adopting emergency coping strategies has seen an uptick.



**The 2025–2026 mVAM food security estimates are only partially comparable to the 2024 figure, as their methodology differs from the CARI approach applied in 2024.*

Findings

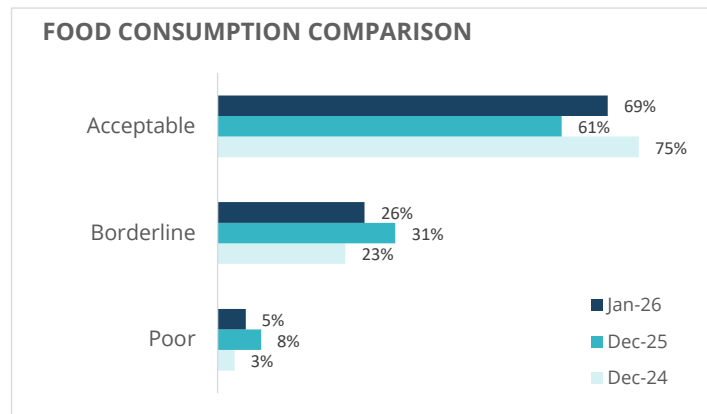
Food security has improved



According to WFP's latest remote household food security survey, 24 percent of households are food insecure. This is an improvement from December 2025, when 32 percent of households were food insecure in the immediate aftermath of the cyclone. The eight-percentage point improvement in food security could be attributed to improved food consumption, better market access and lower reliance on negative coping strategies. However, food insecurity levels remain higher than pre-cyclone levels.

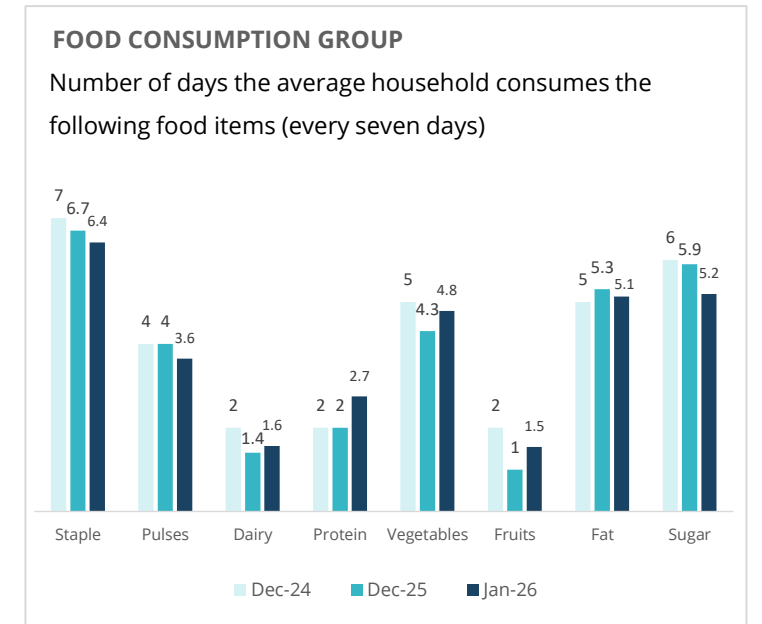



Nearly three in ten households are facing insufficient food consumption. In December 2025, 39 percent of households were consuming inadequate diets. By January 2026, this figure had dropped by 8 percentage points, reflecting a modest improvement. Consumption of dairy, protein, and fruits also improved marginally compared to December. Nevertheless, food consumption levels remain concerning when viewed against 2024, when only 26 percent of households were consuming inadequate diets.



In January 2026, households continued to rely heavily on staple foods, consuming them an average of 6.4 days per week, slightly lower than previous periods. Consumption of pulses also declined to 3.6 days.

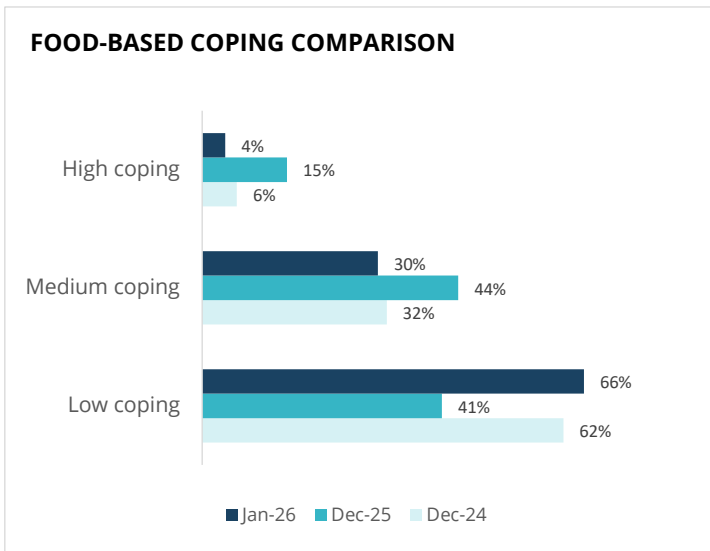
Dairy, protein, and fruit consumption remained very low, averaging 1.6, 2.7, and 1.5 days per week respectively. Vegetable consumption increased slightly to 4.8 days per week, while sugar and fat intake both declined. Overall, these trends underscore persistent nutritional gaps across households.



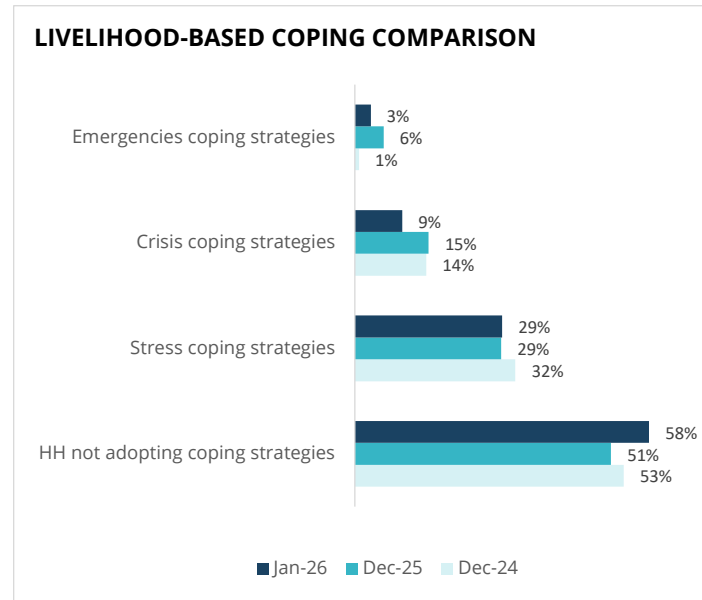


Over half of the assessed households are adopting coping strategies

Nearly six in ten households (57 percent) are turning to food-based coping mechanisms, a marginal decrease of two percentage points compared to December 2025. Large proportions of households are consuming less nutritious foods, limiting portion sizes and reducing the number of meals eaten a day.








Forty two percent of households are adopting livelihood-based coping strategies, a decrease of seven percentage points from December 2025. Households are purchasing food on credit, borrowing money and spending their savings.



Continued use of negative coping strategies heightens vulnerabilities to future shocks and disasters.

STRATEGIES EMPLOYED BY HOUSEHOLDS

-  **55%** rely on less preferred/nutritious food
 -  **14%** borrowed food
 -  **17%** reduced portion sizes of their meals
 -  **13%** reduced the number of meals eaten in a day
 -  **8%** of adults restricted adult consumption to allow children to eat
-
-  **25%** purchased food on credit
 -  **19%** spent savings and/or skipped debt payments
 -  **22%** borrowed money from a bank/lender (or pawned goods)
 -  **16%** sold gold jewellery because of a lack of money/food
 -  **9%** had to reduce spending on education and health

Households are adopting more than one negative coping strategy

**INCOME CHANGE**

41% of households reported reduced income since the cyclone




Four in ten households reported a decrease in total income compared to the months before the cyclone.

Households relying on wage labour (both agricultural and non-agricultural), skilled labour, and small- to medium-sized business ownership accounted for the largest share of those reporting income decreases.

Income decreases of over 75 percent was reported by households relying on their own small, medium or large businesses. The survey indicates that the largest proportion of households faced an income decline between 10 and 25 percent, mostly by households relying on agricultural and non-agricultural wage labour.




MAIN CHALLENGES REPORTED:

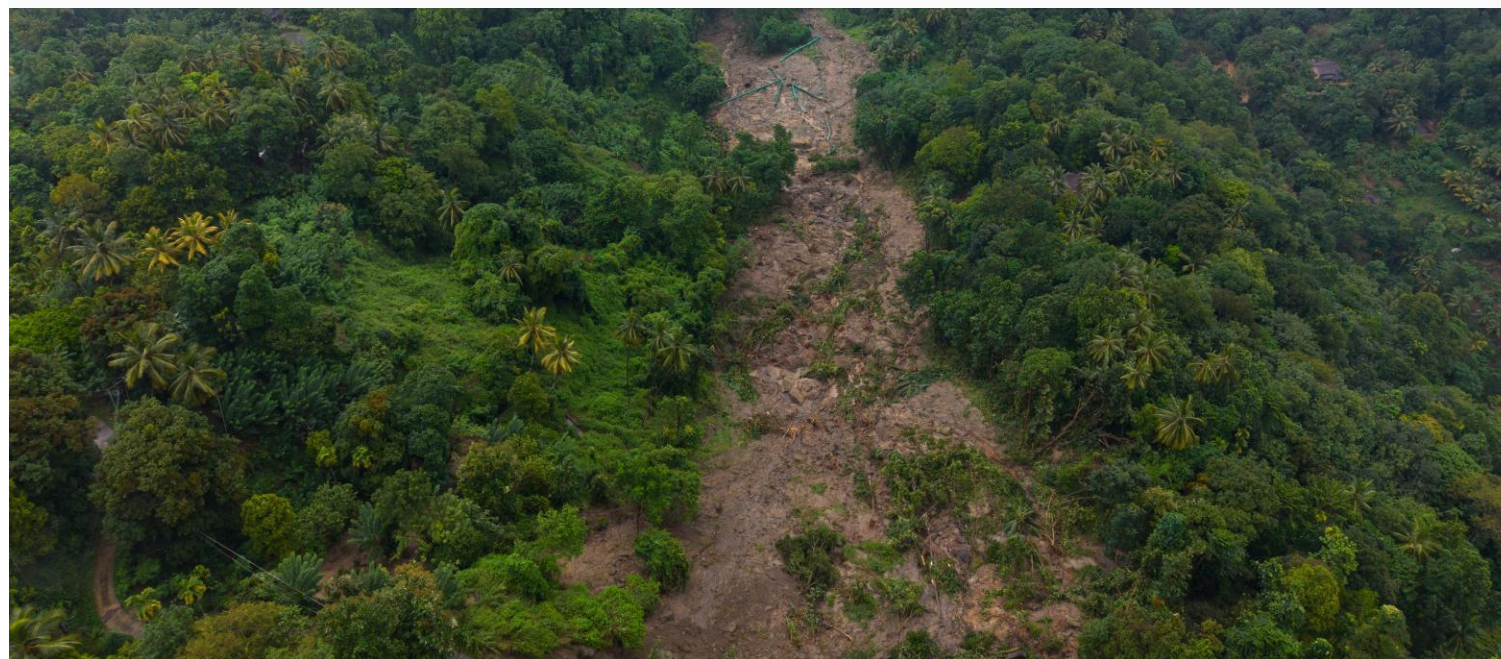
Households reported the following four as present/immediate concerns:

-  **50%** - Loss of livelihood
-  **50%** - Extreme weather events (floods/landslides)
-  **40%** - Increase in food prices

IMPACT ON HOUSEHOLDS:

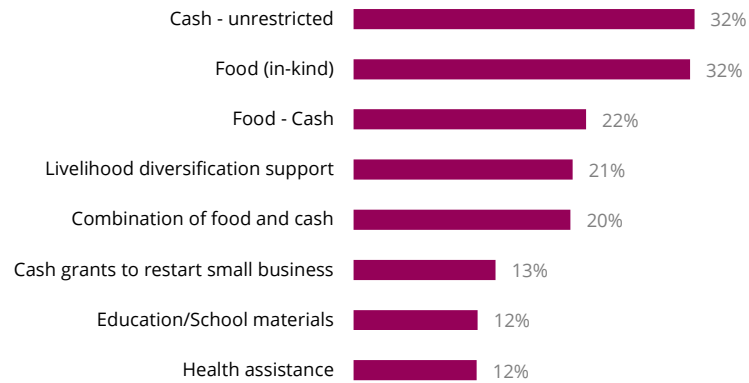
The direct impact on the surveyed households:

-  Nearly **half of the households** reported loss of livelihood
-  **23%** reported partial damage to homes
-  **14%** mentioned loss of household items



Assistance preference

TYPE OF ASSISTANCE PREFERRED

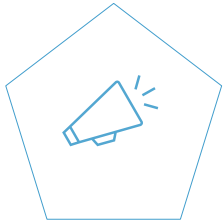


A large proportion of households reportedly prefer unrestricted cash and food (in-kind) assistance (32 percent). This was followed by cash assistance to purchase food (22 percent), livelihood support and a combination of cash and food.



Annex: Resources

Additional WFP Sri Lanka products for more insight:



SITUATION REPORTS

A regular update on the situation and WFP's response to the crisis.



HOUSEHOLD FOOD SECURITY SURVEYS

Household surveys providing regular insight into household food security.

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