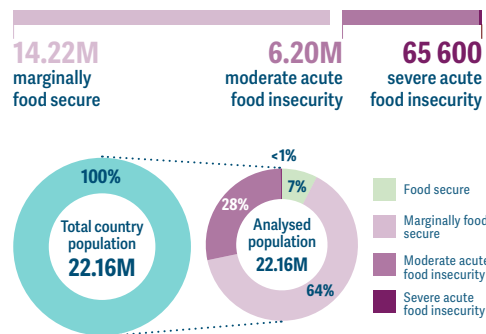


Sri Lanka

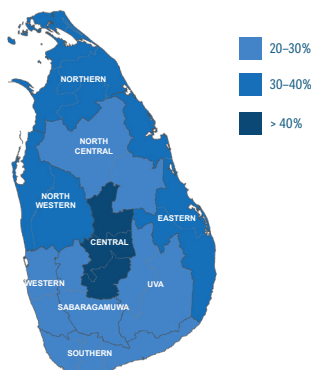
ACUTE FOOD INSECURITY PEAK 2022

6.27M people or **28%** of the analysed population faced moderate or severe acute food insecurity, May–June 2022



Source: FAO/WFP CFSAM, September 2022.

Prevalence of acute food insecurity, 2022



The boundaries and names shown and the designations used on these maps do not imply official endorsement or acceptance by the United Nations.

Source: WFP CARI, September 2022.

Food crisis overview

The unprecedented levels of acute food insecurity in 2022 reflected soaring food prices, reduced income opportunities, poor harvests and severe disruptions to the food supply chain, including shortages of fuel, fertilizers and imported foods, triggered by severe macroeconomic challenges. Around 6.20 million people (28 percent of the population) were moderately food insecure and 65 600 people severely food insecure in May–June 2022, as per WFP CARI methodology (FAO/WFP September 2022).

The highest levels of acute food insecurity were in the estate sector (tea plantations), with 57 percent of the population moderately or severely food insecure, followed by Central (41.6 percent) and Northern (38.5 percent) provinces, and among female-headed households (39.8 percent) and the Tamil population (50.3 percent) (FAO/WFP, September 2022).

The food security situation was expected to deteriorate during the lean season from October 2022–February 2023, driven by poor harvests of staple foods, in particular paddy rice following acute shortage of fertilizer and agrochemicals, and the ongoing economic crisis (FAO/WFP, September 2022). Sri Lanka has been selected for inclusion in the GRFC each year except 2019. However, food insecurity estimates were available only in 2017 and in 2022. This is the first time it has been defined as a ‘major’ food crisis.

Drivers of the crisis, 2022–23

Economic shocks Since 2020, the country has been facing a deteriorating economic crisis caused by reduced government earnings and accumulating debt. The COVID-19 travel restrictions affected tourism, an important foreign exchange earner, and remittances from expatriate workers. The situation was aggravated by political and social turmoil.

Furthermore, global hikes in energy costs, linked to the war in Ukraine, made things worse. The war affected

Sri Lanka’s main export commodity tea, due to sanctions against the Russian Federation, its third-largest market. In March 2022, the Sri Lankan Government imposed daily electricity cuts due to the limited availability of imported fuel needed for electricity generation. Debt levels became unsustainable and in May 2022 there was a declaration of sovereign default (FAO/WFP, September 2022).

Strong depreciation of the national currency coupled with dwindling foreign currency reserves curtailed the country’s capacity to import fuel, medicines, food and agricultural inputs, causing acute shortages and spikes in the prices of essential products (FAO/WFP, September 2022). As fuel shortages worsened, in July, the Government restricted fuel usage to essential services, which incited political unrest and street protests.

Reduced application of agrochemicals as a consequence of both an import ban between May and November 2021 and limited import capacity thereafter was among the main causes of decreased agricultural production (FAO/WFP, September 2022). Paddy rice production, the main food staple, was forecast to decline by 42 percent year-on-year in 2022, the lowest level since the 2017 drought-affected harvest. Maize production, mainly used as animal feed, was forecast at 40 percent below the recent five-year average, with knock-on effects on poultry and livestock production. Vegetables, fruit and export crops, such as tea, rubber, coconut and spice harvests, were also severely affected, causing a significant decline in household income and export revenues (FAO/WFP, September 2022).

Production shortfalls and fuel shortages led to food price spikes and by July 2022, they were 90 percent higher year-on-year. Prices of imported wheat flour, more than tripled their year-earlier levels and were at record levels in July 2022 (FAO/WFP, September 2022; FAO-GIEWS, September 2022). Food inflation was 85.6 percent over the year to October 2022 making food less affordable for households (Colombo Consumer Price Index). High prices and shortages of fuel and other imported goods severely disrupted a wide range of livelihoods, including those of farmer, traders, fishing communities, and

construction and transport workers, among others (FAO/WFP, September 2022).



Weather extremes Uneven rainfall distribution during the 2021/22 main ‘Maha’ season had localized negative effects on crop yields. The Southern and Northwestern provinces received below-average rains in June–July, which, coupled with drainage problems and lack of fuel for pumping irrigation waters, constrained the late cultivation of the ‘Yala’ paddy crops (FAO/WFP, September 2022).

NUTRITION



According to the latest nationally representative nutrition survey, 13.2 percent of children under 5 years were wasted, which is ‘high’ according to the WHO’s classification. This includes 1.7 percent of children with severe wasting. Key micronutrient intake, specifically calcium and vitamin A was inadequate, especially for the 24–36 month age group (Medical Research Institute (MRI), January 2022).

The impacts of the country’s political and economic crisis have likely driven a deterioration in the nutrition situation. As of April 2022, the monthly cost of a nutritious diet increased by 156 percent. Nutritional assistance was temporarily reduced, including the delivery of Thripasha, a nutrition supplement targeting wasted children and pregnant and lactating women (PLW), and the provision of school meals. This left many children untreated and acutely food insecure, with parents struggling in the context of food price hikes and nationwide food rationing. Schools still serving meals significantly cut portion sizes and protein density.

The inability to import medicines due to depleted foreign reserves caused shortages that severely impacted healthcare supplies, and there are disparities in access to water with a national coverage of 84 percent, about 66.8 percent of households in the estate sector do not have access to safe drinking water. Nationally, 48.5 percent nationally do not practise water treatment (OCHA, October 2022).