Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations

Policy Brief

Timor-Leste Fish Consumption Survey TL-FCS (2024/25)

Improving nutrition and food security is a national priority for the Government of Timor-Leste. Fish and other aquatic foods are a key part of the solution. They are rich in protein, vitamins, minerals, and healthy oils that support child growth, women's health, and brain development. Small-scale fisheries and aquaculture can also provide jobs and support sustainable development.

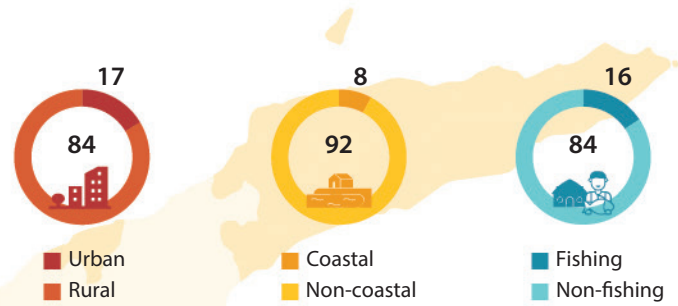
The Government of Timor-Leste aims to raise fish consumption to over 10 kg/capita/year and increase aquaculture production, a bi-partisan policy objective.

This policy brief presents analysis from the 2024/25 Timor-Leste Fish Consumption Survey (TL-FCS), the first nationally representative study on aquatic food intake. The survey measured what aquatic foods people ate across all municipalities in both dry and wet seasons.

Over 4,200 households

Nationally representative data, collected in October 2024 (dry season) and February-March 2025 (wet season).

% of survey participants by category



Fish consumption has increased in Timor-Leste since 2011

6.1
kg/capita/year
2011*

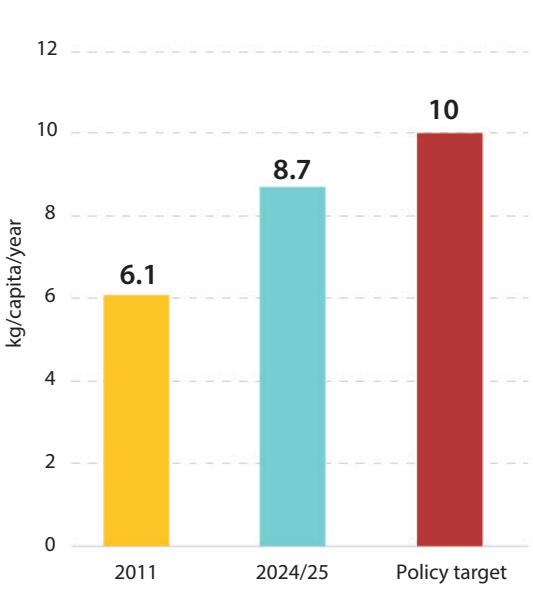
8.7
kg/capita/year
2024/25

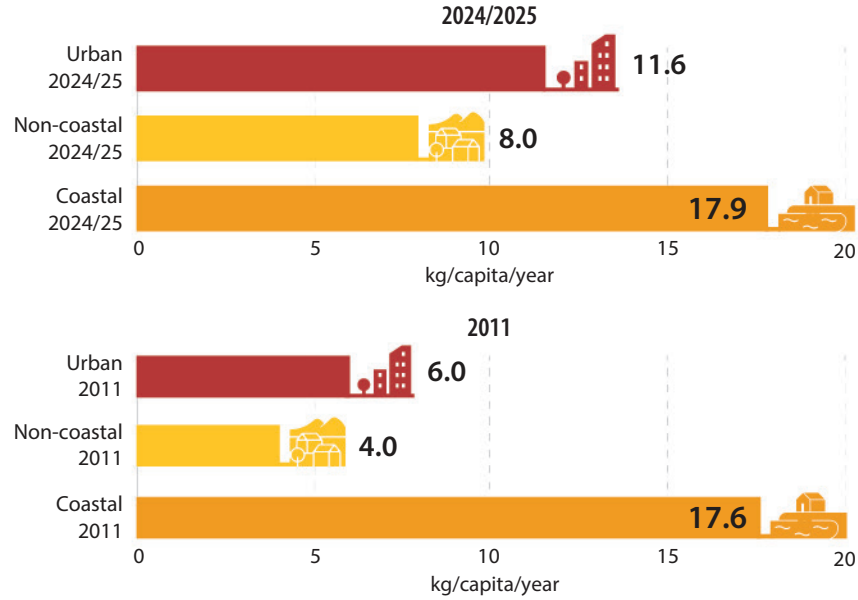
10
kg/capita/year
Good progress towards the policy target

Consumption in non-coastal and urban households has nearly doubled over the last 15 years, demonstrating a positive increase.

** AMSAT International, 2011. Fish and animal protein consumption and availability in Timor-Leste, RFLP (GCP/RAS/237/SPA). Regional Fisheries Livelihoods Programme for South and Southeast Asia and FAO. Dili, Timor-Leste.*

Timor-Leste per capita fish consumption, policy target and 2024/25 compared with 2011





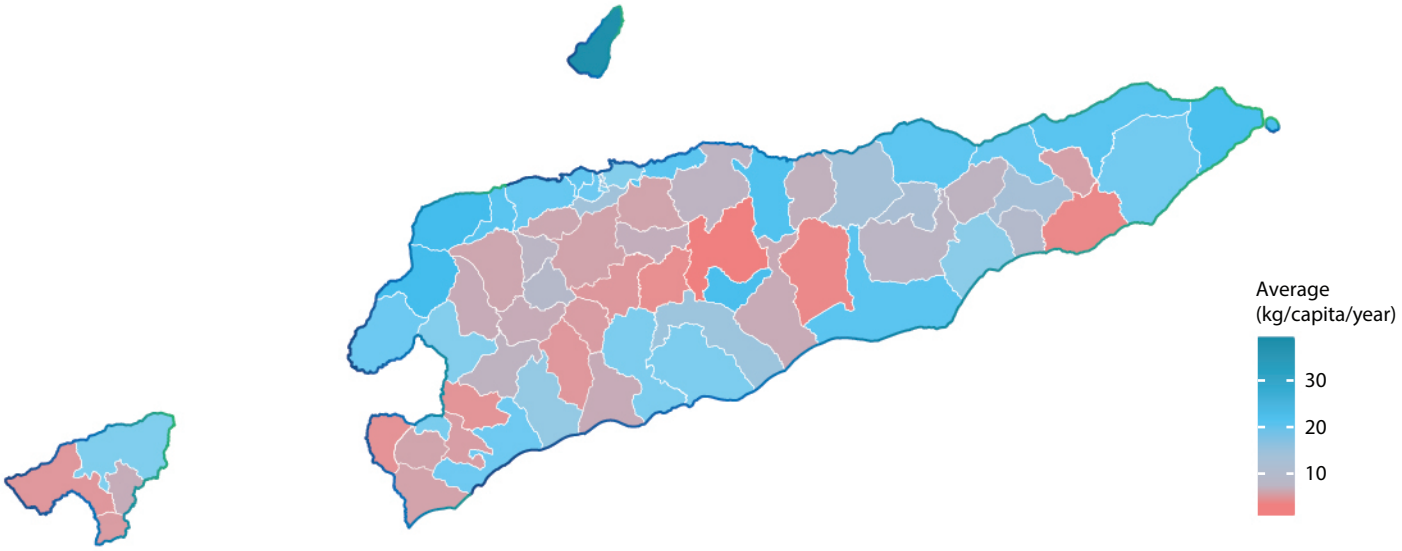
Note: The comparison between 2011 and 2024/25 is for key high level trends only, because the methodology and scale of each of these surveys were different.

Aquatic food consumption has increased in Timor-Leste over the last 15 years. However, many rural, inland, and poorer households still struggle to physically and financially access aquatic foods. Food security, nutrition and fisheries policies should focus on improving affordable supply, supporting livelihoods that produce aquatic foods, encouraging greater inclusion of fish in school meals, and ensuring nutrition benefits reach everyone, especially low-income, inland communities during the wet season.

Where people live affects how much fish they eat

- Coastal households and households involved in aquatic food production (e.g., fishing, gleaning, aquaculture) eat more fish compared with households living inland and non-fishing households.

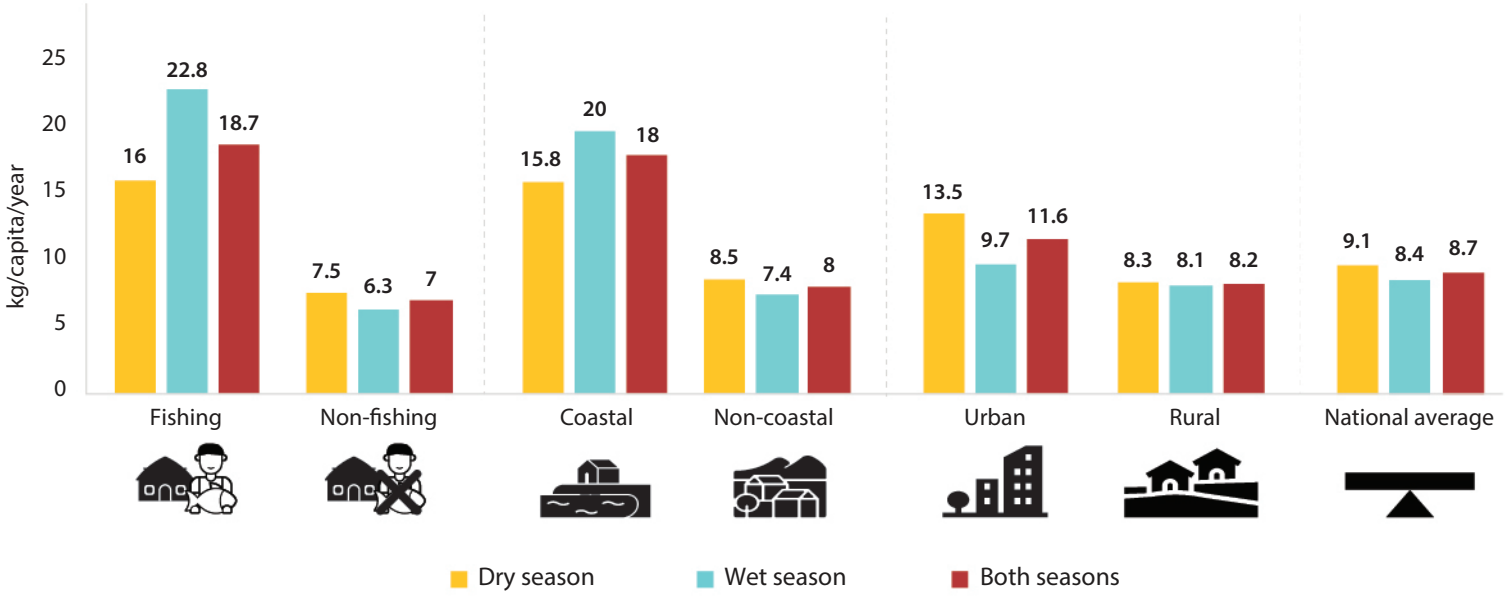
Timor-Leste per capita fish/aquatic food consumption by administrative post (2024/25)



Not everyone has equal access to fish

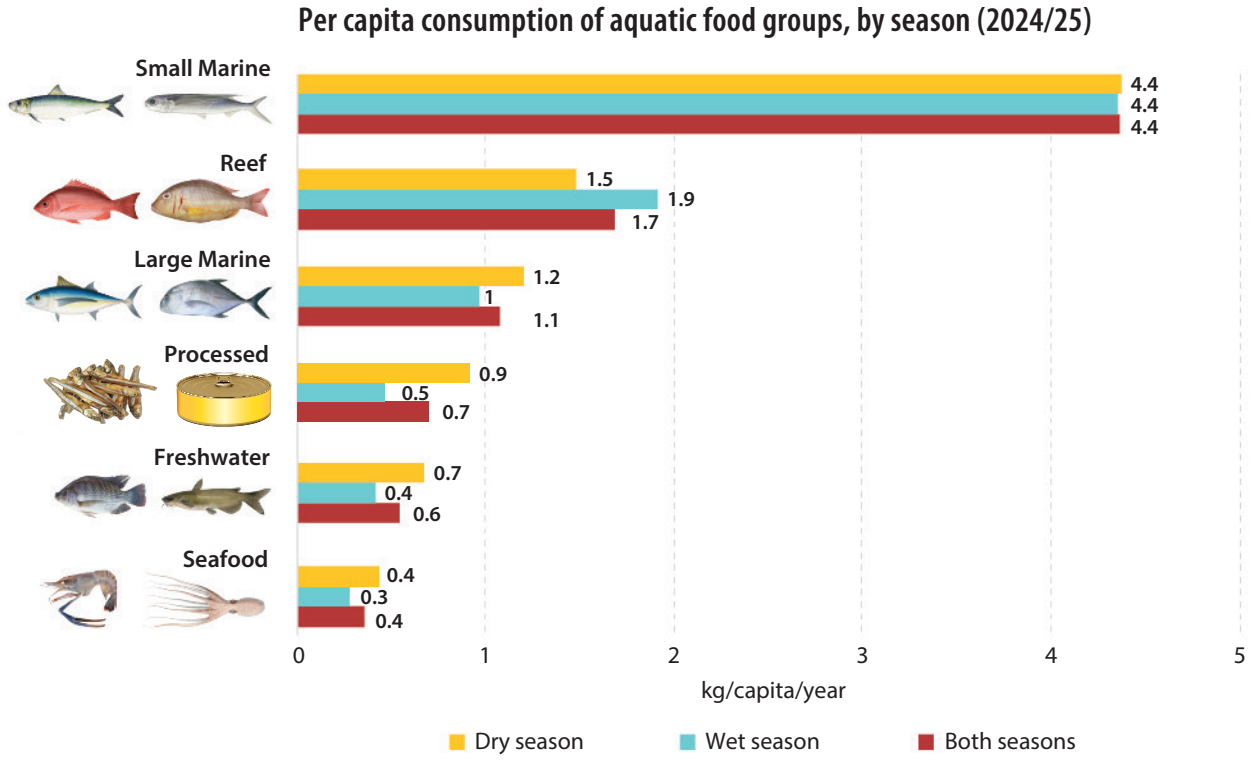
- People in urban households eat more fish and other aquatic foods than those in rural households.
- People in richer households eat more fish and other aquatic than those in poorer households (but not as much as those involved in aquatic food production).

Per capita fish/aquatic food consumption by season (2024/25)



Highly nutritious small marine pelagic fish (like sardines, garfish, flying fish and mackerel scad) are the most consumed aquatic food

- Small marine fish make up about half of all aquatic foods consumed.
- This is good news because small marine pelagic fish are nutrient rich, more resilient to climate change than reef fish, and one of the more environmentally sustainable groups of species.



Most aquatic foods eaten are purchased

- Two-thirds of aquatic foods eaten are purchased.
- Aquatic foods produced by the household are very important for households who fish, glean or farm fish.

Barriers to eating fish are mostly cost and lack of availability

- Many households cannot afford fish, or it is not available in their local markets, especially during the wet season.

Households like eating fresh fish

- Most households demonstrated a strong preference for fresh fish.
- However, very few adults had heard any health promotion messages explaining the positive nutrition and health benefits of eating aquatic foods.

School meals provide an opportunity for increasing fish consumption among nutritionally vulnerable groups

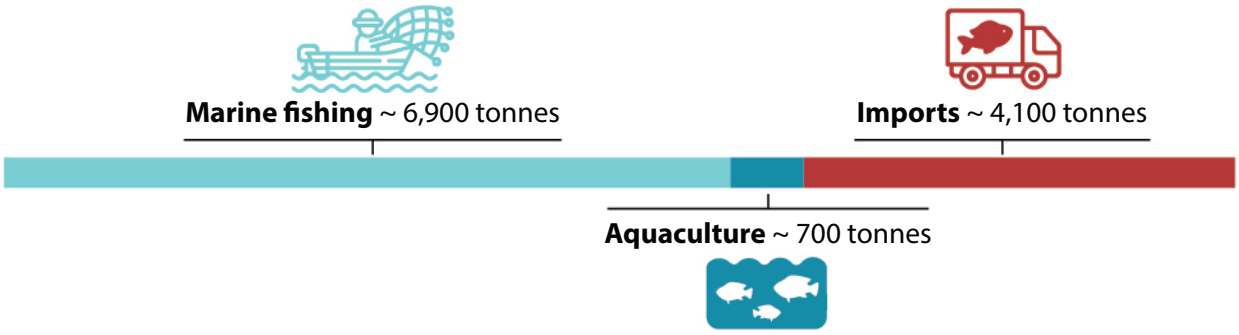
- Almost half the surveyed households reported one or more children eating a school meal in the past week, and of these 24.1 % included fish.
- Fish in school meals was identified in all municipalities, though inclusion rates varied.

Fisheries production and fish availability

The annual supply of fish in Timor-Leste is estimated at **11,700 tonnes**, including **7,600 tonnes** from domestic production.

- Marine fisheries production fluctuates annually and small pelagic fish are the main catch.
- Aquaculture production has great potential for expansion and increasing access to fresh fish in inland areas.
- Fish imports—frozen, tinned, and dried fish such as anchovies—have doubled in recent years, indicating strong demand for fish.

Estimated annual supply of fish in Timor-Leste from marine fisheries, aquaculture and imports



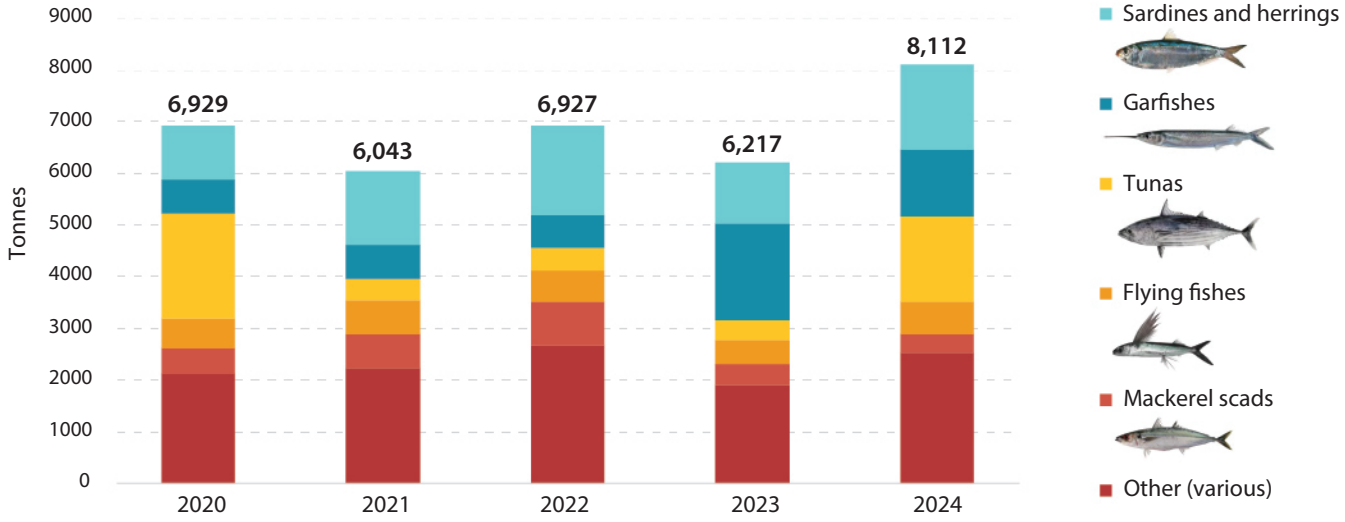
Note: Quantities are estimated using the methods below and are subject to change.

Annual marine fisheries production estimate (5-year average 2020-24), source: PeskAAS, Timor-Leste's national catch monitoring system (accessed August 2025). https://timor.peskas.org

Annual aquaculture production estimate (2022-23, plus 15% due to sector growth), source: Rapid Assessment of Aquaculture Situation in Timor-Leste (MALFF & PADTL2, 2024).

Annual fish imports estimate (5-year average 2020-24), source: GoTL trade data for two product categories (frozen aquatic foods, HS3; tinned and dried fish, HS16), converted from average dollar values (USD 4.35M and 8.77M minus 20% assumed meat products for HS16) using best available conversion rates (USD 2.5/kg and 3/kg). Fish was not among the top five exports and is assumed to be zero. https://inetl-ip.gov.tl/external-trade-statistics

Timor-Leste annual marine small-scale fisheries catches 6,846 tonnes (5-year average)



Source: PeskAAS data, https://timor.peskas.org

Citation

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