

# **Assessment of the Sri Lankan government's commitment to its crisis-response policies in 2022.**



# What is this assessment?

This assessment tracks the government's performance on delivering on its crisis-response policies made in 2022 at the peak of Sri Lanka's economic and political turmoil. The assessment tracked 3 key areas in which citizens acutely experienced difficulties.



Photo credits: AP



# What is its purpose?

In short, **the goal** is to provide the public with information on the implementation status of tracked policies.

- Poor public finance management was a key catalyst of Sri Lanka's crisis.
- Citizens are being squeezed of tax money in the name of economic recovery, they have a right to know where it is being spent. .
- The government has a consistent reputation for being inefficient and unaccountable.



Photo credits: AP

# What was tracked?

3 ways that Sri Lanka's crisis was most visible and burdensome to citizens was through; (1) shortages of essential medicine; (2) shortages/prices hikes of essential food (3) lengthy power cuts, and shortages/price hikes in gas. We tracked cabinet decisions and proposals in these sectors:

**Health and  
Medicine**

**Food and  
Agriculture**

**Fuel and Power**



# What was tracked?

<b>Health &amp; Medicine</b>	<b>Food &amp; Agriculture</b>	<b>Fuel &amp; Power</b>
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Purchase of locally produced Sterile Liquid Small Volume Parenterals - SLSVP - Injectables for the State sector</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Paddy purchasing programme in Maha Season 2021/22</li><li>• Construction of an organic fertilizer manufacturing yard</li><li>• Distribution of agricultural seeds to households</li><li>• Writing off the non-performing loans obtained by paddy farmers</li><li>• Appointing district-level committees to tackle food shortages through the use of vacant plots of government land for agricultural purposes</li><li>• Methodology of paying the incentive for utilization of green agricultural inputs during Maha Season - 2021/2022</li><li>• Procurement of chemical and organic fertilizer required for the paddy cultivation of Maha Season 2022/23</li><li>• Ekwa Wawamu-Rata Dinawamu' - The Crop Production National Drive - 2022</li><li>• Agricultural crop cultivation programmes launched by the Department of Prisons and the Bureau of the Commissioner General of Rehabilitation</li></ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Supply of crude oil for the Sapugaskanda oil refinery</li><li>• Samata Viduliya</li><li>• Achieving self-sufficiency in electricity generation through renewable energy</li><li>• Special relief programs for fisheries and transportation sectors affected by the fuel price hikes</li><li>• Program to distribute kerosene oil among low-income groups, estate sector workers, and fishermen</li></ul>



# What was tracked?

The assessment covered both expenditure proposals with allocations and regulatory proposals that were introduced in 2022.



## 15 PROPOSALS IN TOTAL

They were selected via

- Cabinet Decisions
- Hansards









## THE FOLLOWING INFORMATION WAS REQUESTED VIA THE RTI ACT NO. 12 OF 2016

- Timeline for implementation
- Funds allocated for implementation
- Physical and financial progress
- Other relevant information to assess implementation

# How did we track it?

**Is the government  
saying what it is doing?  
- OPENNESS -**

**Is the government  
doing what it is saying?  
- PROGRESS -**

	<b>Closed</b>		<b>Undisclosed</b>
	<b>Restricted</b>		<b>Poor</b>
	<b>Open</b>		<b>Partial</b>
			<b>Substantial</b>
			<b>Fulfilled</b>

# Findings

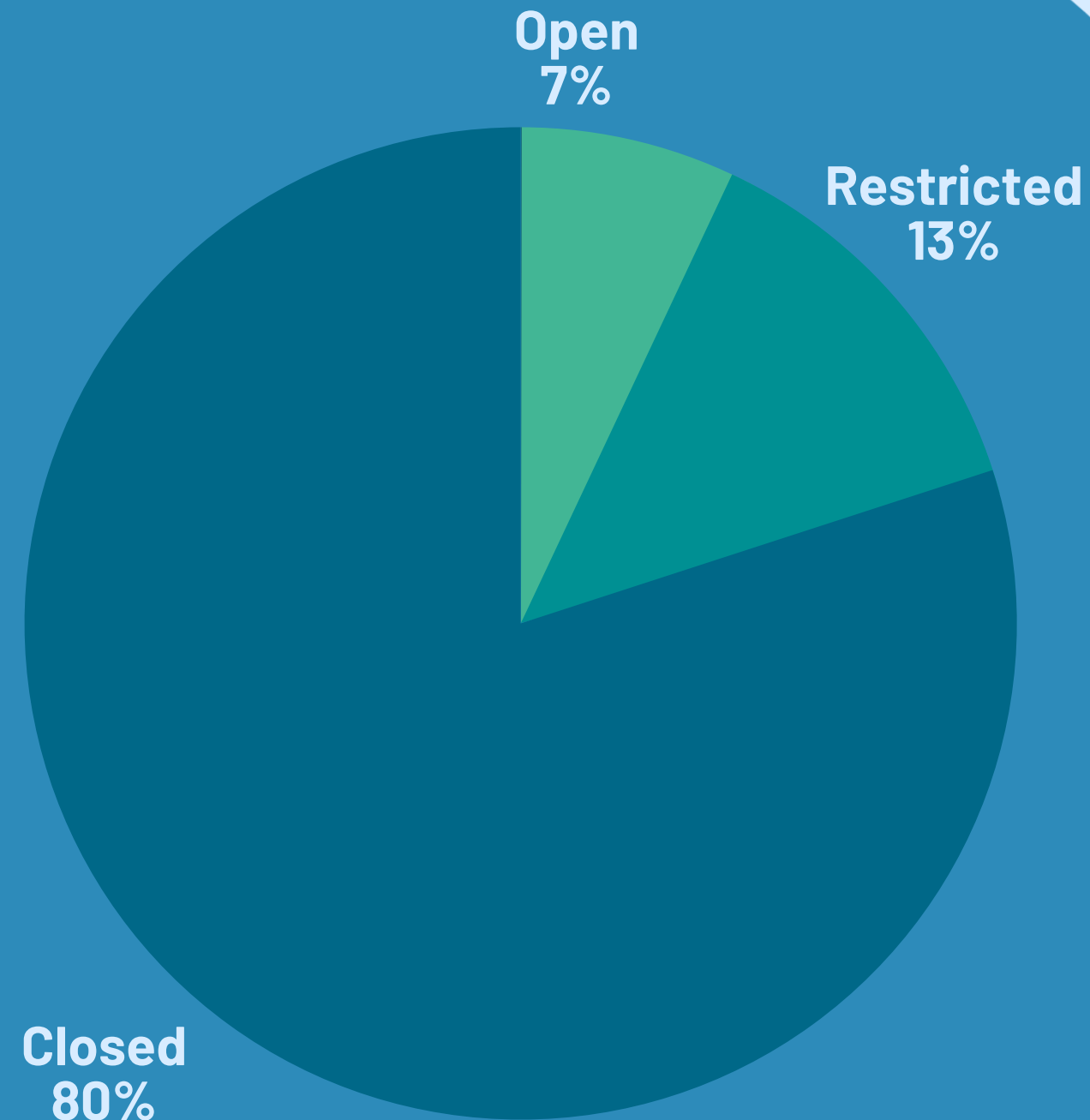
Did the government implement the policies proposed during Sri Lanka's economic crisis in 2022?





Policies disclosed, implementation closed.

When RTI requests were filed, **just 3 responses were received** (20%). Just **1 (7%) of the responses provided useful information** to assess progress.



# Department of Development Finance

## PROGRESS

**4th July 2022:** Cabinet Decision taken to write off principal amount of loans obtained from govt banks for paddy cultivation in the blocks of land in extent of two hectares or less and has become difficult to repay

**30th August 2022:** Interim Budget 2022 allocated **LKR 350 Mn** to write off outstanding loans amounting to **LKR 688 Mn**

**21st November 2022:**

**Physical Progress** – Loans of 25,775 out of 28,259 farmers [**91.21%**]

**Financial Progress** – LKR 561 Mn written off out of LKR 688 Mn [**81.54%**]

**Overall Progress – 86.38%**

## OPENNESS

Information Provided:

Timeline

Physical Progress

Financial Progress

**Fully Usable [100%]**

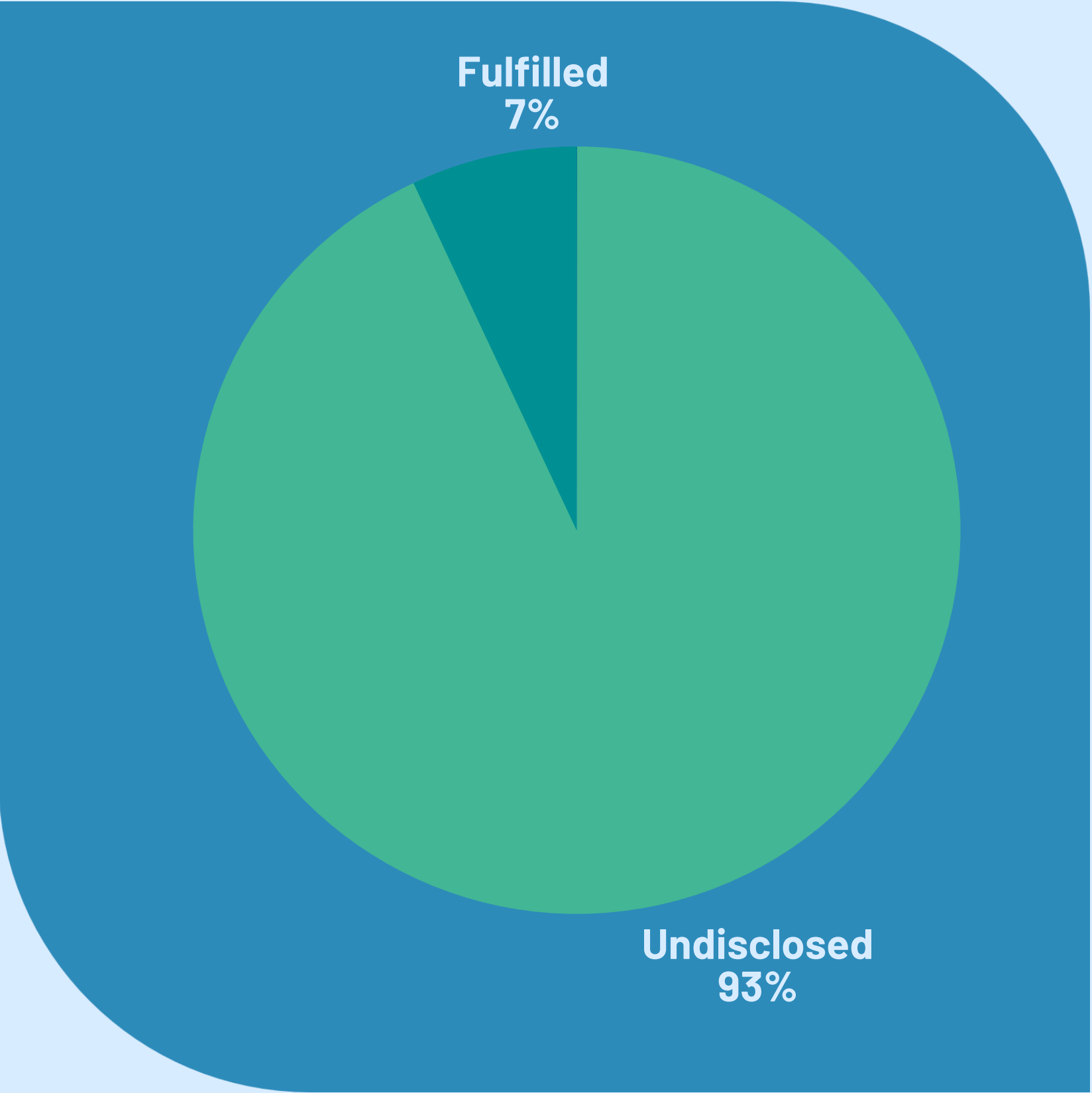
Timeliness of Response:

Information received after 14 days but within 21 days from filing the RTI

**Satisfactory [50%]**

**Overall Openness – 75%**





**The public is in the dark regarding the implementation status of 93% of policies tracked...**





**Numerous implementing ministries were confused on proposals that fell within their purview and were non-compliant with the RTI request**



# Ministry of Agriculture

- 4th Nov 2022: 4 RTIs filed with Department of Agriculture
- 22nd Nov 2022: RTIs transferred to the Ministry of Agriculture
- 25th Nov 2022: Officers assigned to draft information - Additional Secretary Agri Development and Director General (Planning)
- 14th Dec 2022: Information Officer is unreachable and information not received.

<b>RTI response acceptance period</b>	4th Nov - 16th Dec 2022 (28 working days)
<b>Follow-up attempts</b>	x7
<b>Responses to calls</b>	x5
<b>False promises made</b>	x4



# Paddy Marketing Board

- 4th Nov 2022: 3 RTIs filed
- 15th Nov - 8th Dec 2022: (false) Reassurance of information being shared
- 13th Dec 2022: Informed that only 1 RTI is within their purview
- 15th Dec 2022: Information Officer is unreachable and information not received.

RTI response acceptance period	4th Nov - 16th Dec 2022 (28 working days)
Follow-up attempts	x7
Responses to calls	x6
False promises made	x6





# Why is this lack of accountability significant?



**01**

One of the **core demands of the 2022 people's protests** in Sri Lanka was increased accountability and transparency from government on the use and management of public funds. The lack of willingness to change, by both policymakers and bureaucrats despite the crisis, citizens' suffering and public demand is concerning.

**03**

The **Right to Information Act, No. 12 of 2016** was gazetted during the **Yahapalanaya government** in which the current President was Prime Minister. Therefore, to see the act undermined, such that even after filing an RTI, information that should be public, is not, is concerning.

**02**

In September 2022, The President's Secretary Saman Ekanayake **informed all Secretaries of Ministries that it is the prime responsibility** of all the ministries and government officials **to work for the convenience of the public** and that it is mandatory to create a response programme in all the ministries and government institutions by providing an efficient service without inconveniencing anyone.





# If it's business as usual for the government, how is a sustainable economic recovery possible?

Lack of transparency and accountability breeds public distrust, and facilitates misuse of power and public funds – which were key catalysts of the crisis in the first place.





