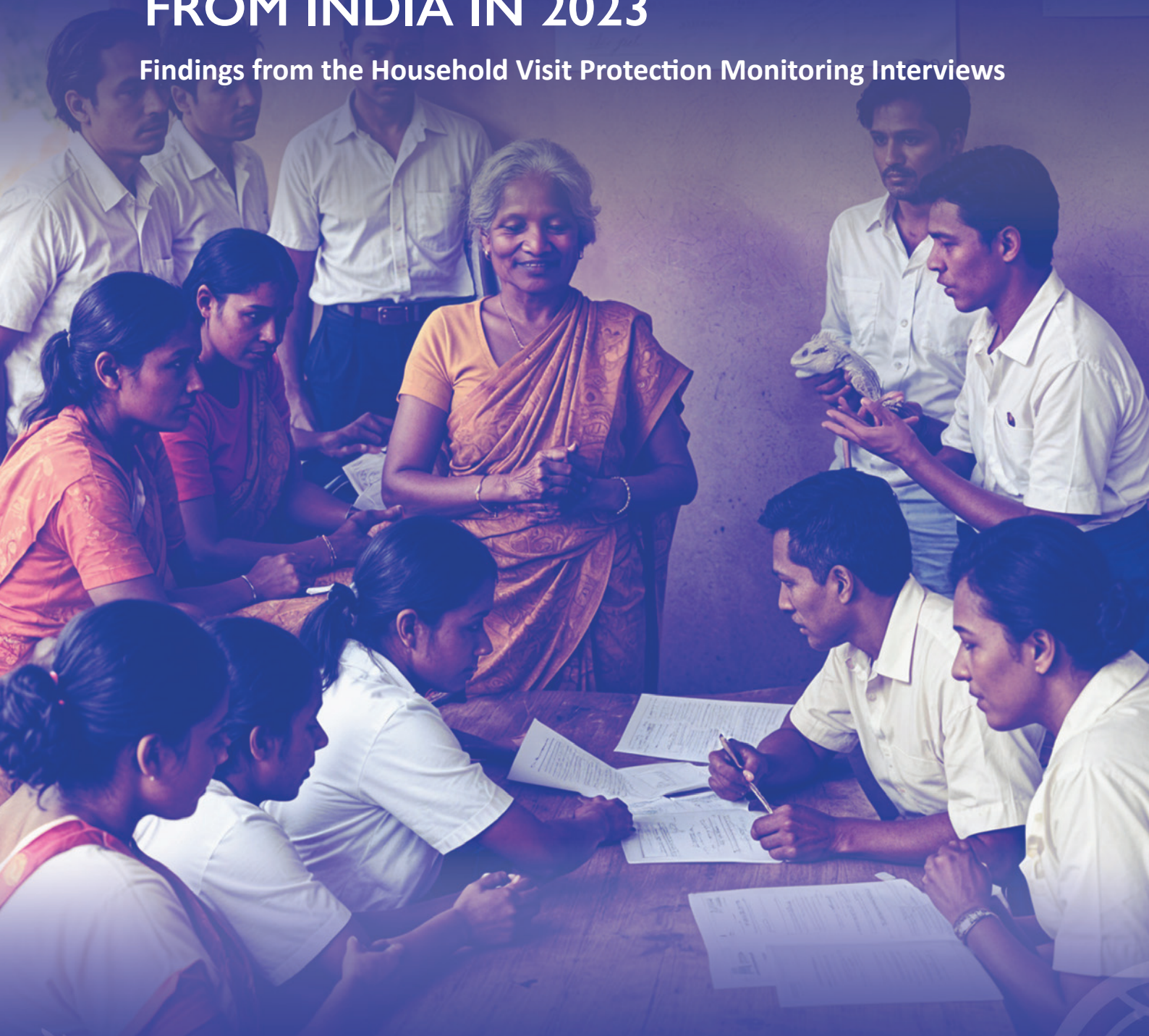


PROTECTION MONITORING ASSESSMENT ON SRI LANKAN REFUGEE RETURNEES FROM INDIA IN 2023

Findings from the Household Visit Protection Monitoring Interviews



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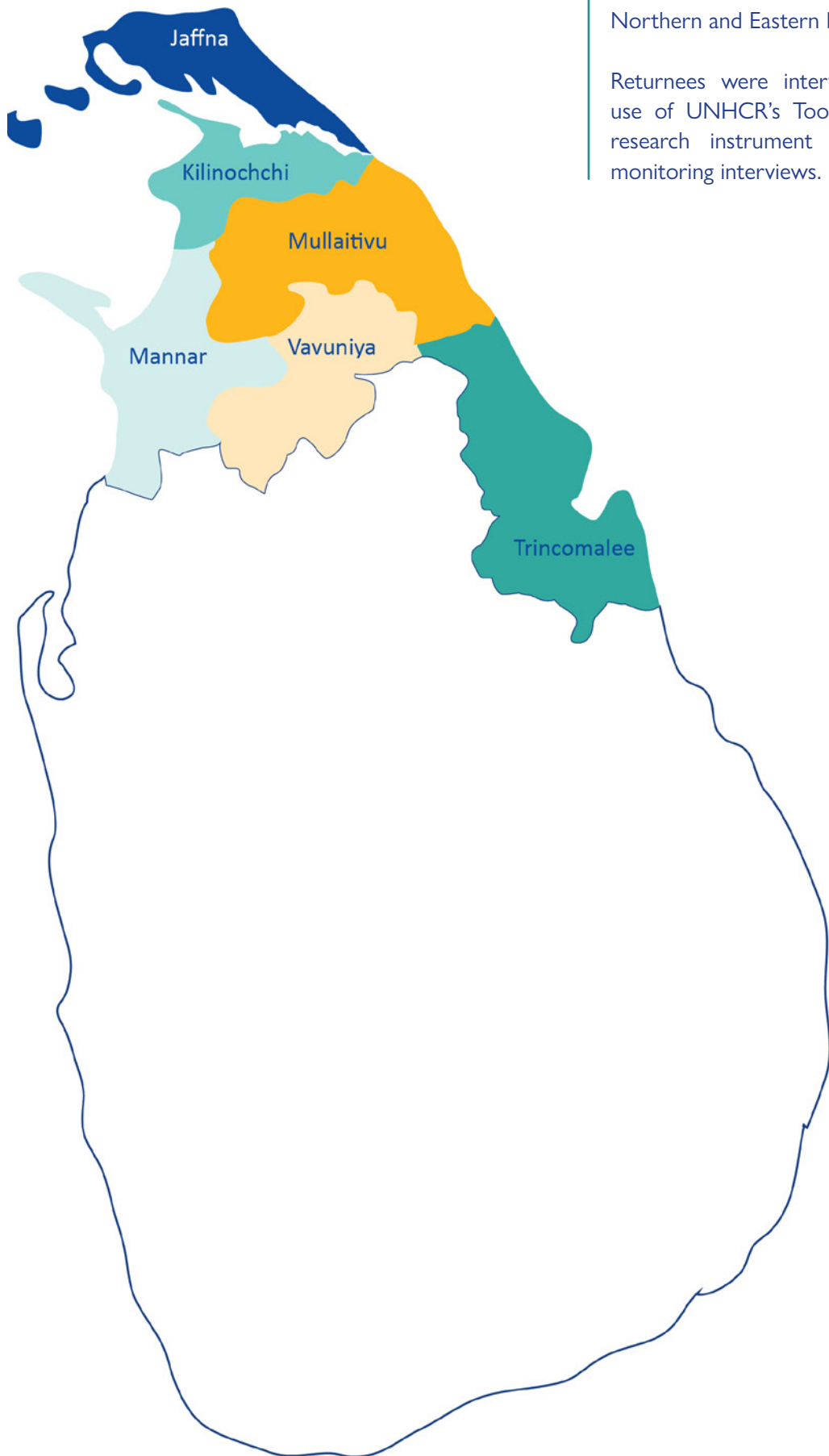
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Almost all refugee returnees have been settled in these six districts of the Northern and Eastern Provinces.

Returnees were interviewed via the use of UNHCR's Tool 2 quantitative research instrument for protection monitoring interviews.



INTRODUCTION

Background

Since the end of the armed conflict in Sri Lanka in May 2009, increasing numbers of Sri Lankan refugees and asylum-seekers outside the country have been considering the possibility of voluntary repatriation. Responsive to this demand, the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) Sri Lanka in cooperation with UNHCR offices in countries of asylum, particularly in Tamil Nadu, India, have continued to facilitate the voluntary repatriation of Sri Lankan refugees.

This programme for the reintegration of Sri Lankan Refugee returnees from India in 2023 was implemented by the International Organization for Migration (IOM) Sri Lanka as well as by UNHCR Sri Lanka, with funding from and in coordination with UNHCR Sri Lanka. IOM's overall project objective was to facilitate sustainable reintegration of Sri Lankan refugees returning from Tamil Nadu.

A total of 327 beneficiaries returned to Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu during January to October 2023 with UN assistance: 75 returning with the assistance of UNHCR and 252 returning with the assistance of IOM. The 252 returnees that returned through IOM consisted of 125 families.

In order to gain a realistic understanding of refugee returnees' reintegration experiences, opinions and the challenges that they faced, IOM undertook a 'protection monitoring survey' among the returnees in 2023 who came to Sri Lanka with IOM assistance. This survey was conducted in January to March 2024 using UNHCR's Tool 2 survey instrument. (In 2023 too, the Tool 2 survey instrument was administered by IOM among refugee returnees who had returned to Sri Lanka in 2022, however with UNHCR support.) IOM undertook this survey in 2023 with support from UNHCR under the project "Sustainable Reintegration of the Sri Lankan Refugees from India". This 2024 report is therefore based on the reintegration experiences, opinions and challenges faced by refugee returnees from Tamil Nadu with IOM assistance in 2023.

An attempt was made to interview all the Heads of Household (HoHs) or another responsible adult in the 125 families who returned with IOM assistance in 2023, but due to a few families not being contactable (as they had largely moved elsewhere from their registered address, or due to other reasons), a total of 112 HoHs or other responsible adults were interviewed.

The Tool 2 household survey posed questions on different aspects of returnee refugees' conditions such as source of livelihood, skills, ownership of properties, disabilities and the difficulties faced in reintegration in their community, and provides credible factual data regarding the return and reintegration experience of those who have already returned.

This report assists UN staff in countries of asylum to better counsel refugees and asylum-seekers considering 'return' to the current country context and any challenges linked to voluntary repatriation, so as to ensure that any decision to be repatriated is an informed one. This document would also be a key advocacy tool to be shared with donors and government entities to highlight gaps which could be addressed by donor driven and government assistance programmes.

Supportive actions for returnees are outlined below, and information on returnees' experiences with these aspects are also collected in the research.

- For facilitated voluntary repatriation, UNHCR / staff in the country of asylum counsel prospective returnees and verify the voluntary nature of their decision, and then provide air transport for refugees who wish to return. UNHCR Sri Lanka is in contact with each of the facilitated returnees on arrival at the airport and provide protection counselling and social advice to the returnee.
- Upon return, returnees received a reintegration cash grant from IOM to meet their immediate needs.
- Returnees also receive counselling on reintegration support, including procedures to obtain essential civil documentation, such as birth certificates and National Identity Cards. Referrals are made to government authorities and specialised NGOs / agencies to obtain further assistance.
- Some refugees return spontaneously. Although spontaneous returnees are not eligible for UNHCR cash grants or NFI assistance, UNHCR have encouraged them to approach UNHCR for protection monitoring purposes, and provides referrals to specialised NGOs / agencies that can support their reintegration process



METHODOLOGY

Responses were recorded by IOM staff and hired enumerators via pen and paper interviews. Individual household visits were made to administer the survey. Confidentiality of the individuals/respondents were duly maintained. Questionnaires were scrutinized and keyed into a Microsoft Excel data base and data analysis was carried out using a combination of Microsoft Excel and SPSS.

As mentioned previously, in the attempted census of 125 returnee households, 112 successful interviews were undertaken with the balance 13 families not being contactable, Reasons recorded by enumerators for these respondents not being contactable were as follows (Table 1).

Table 1: Reasons for not interviewing respondents

Reasons	Count
Returned, but since moved elsewhere in Sri Lanka	4
Returned, but since moved to India / overseas	4
Returned but since moved to an unknown location	1
Never lived at this address	1
Could not locate address	1
Head of household had passed away	1
Head of household refused to be interviewed as she was ill	1
Total	13

The breakdown of the 112 sample is shown in table 2 below. Eight families had moved to other districts.

Table 2: Sample size and composition by district

Current district	Count
Jaffna	35
Vavuniya	16
Kilinochchi	7
Mullaitivu	6
Mannar	18
Trincomalee	22
Other (Colombo, Batticaloa)	8
Total	112

Since the sample is almost a census, covering 90% of the universe (planned sample) of 125 returnees in 2023, the sample is representative of the population and therefore responses from small bases can be looked at.

ABBREVIATIONS

BC	Birth Certificate
CID	Criminal Investigation Department
CRPO	Child Rights Promotion Officer
DS	Divisional Secretary
GN	Grama Niladhari
HH	Household
HoH	Head of Household
HRCSL	Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka
HSZ	High Security Zone
IDP	Internally Displaced Person
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
IOM	International Organisation for Migration
LDO	Land Development Ordinance
MOH	Medical Officer of Health
MRE	Mine Risk Education
NFI	Non-Food Item
NGO	Non-Governmental Organization
NIC	National Identity Card
PWSN	Person with Specific Needs
SL	Sri Lanka
TID	Terrorist Investigation Division
UNHCR	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UXO	Unexploded Ordnance
WDO	Women Development Officer

Points to be kept in mind in reading this report

Refugee returnees, not IDP returnees

This report reflects the experiences and views of 2023 refugee returnees and it should not be assumed that the findings reflect experiences and views of IDP returnees. Throughout this document, the term 'returnee' only refers to refugee returnees. Although each group was forcibly displaced, there are significant differences in their displacement situations, including the duration they were away from the area of origin, educational and work opportunities while in displacement, documentation needs (e.g., birth certificates), as well as programme assistance during the period of return and reintegration.

This report is based on responses of those who returned with assistance from IOM

As mentioned earlier in the background section of this report, a total of 327 beneficiaries returned to Sri Lanka from Tamil Nadu during January to October 2023 with UN assistance: 75 returning with the assistance of UNHCR and 252 with the assistance of IOM. The 252 returnees that returned through IOM consisted of 125 families and of them, the survey was conducted among HoHs or other responsible adults from 112 families representing 232 family members. This report is therefore based on responses from these 112 respondents who returned with assistance from IOM.

Comparisons with survey findings among 2023, 2022 and 2020 returnees: impact of COVID-19 and the Sri Lankan economic crisis of 2022

This report is based on responses received from the 2023 returnee sample of 112 households and these survey findings are compared with those from the two previous Tool 2 surveys conducted in 2023 (among 2022 returnees) and in 2022 (among 2020 returnees), where the sample sizes were 115 (out of 139 returnee families) and 69 (out of 97 returnee families) respectively.

In comparing survey responses across returnees from different years, it should be kept in mind that the 2020 returnees were administered the survey instrument before the impact of the 2022 Sri Lankan economic crisis, but they would have been impacted by COVID-19 prevailing at the time. On the other hand, 2022 returnees would have been impacted by the Sri Lankan economic crisis during that year. It should also be noted that the number of returnees in 2020 was lower than in previous years due to restrictions in travel between India and Sri Lanka due to COVID-19.

Data is self-reported

All data is as reported by the refugee returnee respondents. Interviewers did not attempt to verify answers provided by respondents (e.g., independently inspect shelter for damage). Data is therefore accurate only if the respondent was truthful in response.

Rounding off data

Decimals have been rounded off to the nearest whole number, and therefore in some instances totals may not add up exactly to 100%.

Multiple responses

For questions where multiple responses are possible, the sum of responses could exceed 100%.

District wise reporting

District wise reporting is presented only for the sample of 2023 returnees from six districts, the five districts in the Northern province and the Trincomalee district in the east of Sri Lanka, and excludes district wise responses from the small number of six households in the Colombo and Batticaloa districts. However, in reporting at the total sample level of 112 households, responses from these households in the Colombo and Batticaloa districts are included.

Kindly note that the data and resultant analysis does not incorporate the return and reintegration experience of sample households who had moved elsewhere. Their experiences may be different, possibly more negative than those who were interviewed and represented in this survey report.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1. All 2023 returnees and 83% of 2022 returnees were facilitated returnees who returned by air. Although the number of returnee households (facilitated or otherwise) were similar among 2023 and 2022 returnees (112 among 2023 returnees and 115 among 2022 returnees), the demographics of the 2023 refugee returnees differed from those who returned in 2022. The former group had more children and less single occupant households and consequently a larger household size of 2.1, compared to a household size of 1.9 among 2022 returnees. Perhaps due to these demographic differences, there was a lower percentage of PWSNs (11%) among 2023 returnees compared to 19% among 2022 returnees. The incidence of women at risk and those with serious illnesses were also substantially less among 2023 returnees (8 family members) than among those who returned in 2022 (24 family members).
2. Despite 2023 returnees being impacted more negatively than those who returned in 2022 in terms of livelihoods and receiving cash grants and allowances, 2023 returnees were more satisfied than 2022 returnees with returning to Sri Lanka (92% vs. 82%) and were less likely to return to India than 2022 returnees (3% vs. 10%).
 - a. 2023 returnees were impacted more negatively than 2022 returnees in terms of the following:
 - i. A substantially higher proportion of households did not have a livelihood (30% vs. 17%)
 - ii. More households with no one having livelihood skills (22% vs. 17%)
 - iii. None or of the 2023 returnee households received the NFI cash grant (versus 100% having received it among 2022 returnees) since UNHCR had stopped NFI assistance in 2023 in view of the winding down of their operations to assist refugee returnees to Sri Lanka, and in keeping with this winding down process, much lower numbers of 2023 returnees received shelter assistance (14% versus 19%) and livelihood assistance (5% vs. 32%)
 - b. On the other hand, more 2023 returnees (45%) returned to their own land which they had left behind than did 2022 returnees (38%). Also, more 2023 returnee households had income support from relatives in Sri Lanka / overseas compared to 2022 returnees (34% vs. 29%).

The positive aspects of having more family members in the home (as opposed to being in single member households), being reassured that they had got their land back, as well as there being more households receiving income support from their families in Sri Lanka / overseas, were probable contributory factors for 2023 returnees to be more satisfied with returning to Sri Lanka than those who returned in 2022.

3. Almost all 2023 returnee households (98%) were registered with the DS / GN, similar to the universal registrations among 2022 and 2020 returnees. However, only 24% of 2023 returnees were registered with other organisations, compared with 34% and 75% being registered among 2022 and 2020 returnees.
4. The incidence of family members not having a BC was only 1% among 2023 returnees, similar to the 0.5% among 2022 returnees. However, 11% of adults did not have a NIC (and even among 2022 and 2020 returnees this percentage was similar at the time of being surveyed). The three main reasons for not having a NIC were that the applications were being processed by the authorities, not having supportive documents, and not knowing how to go about the application process.
5. Only 22% of adults among 2023 returnees were registered to vote, compared to 55% and 60% respectively among 2022 and 2020 returnees. The two predominant reasons for not being registered were (as with like NICs) that the applications were being processed and not knowing how to apply.
6. Out of the 51% of 2023 returnees who owned land, 89% were able to return to it or get back the land that they owned. i.e. 45% of all 2023 returnees returned to or got back their land, a higher proportion than the equivalent 38% among 2022 returnees. Among the balance 49% of 2023 returnees who did not have land, only a third (38%) had applied for land (to the DS / GN) and no one had yet received a positive response. This was also the case with the 2022 returnees at the time of being surveyed. The main reason stated for not receiving a positive response was that the applications were being processed.
7. 30% of 2023 returnees said there was a military presence in the area they were living in, higher than the 12% who responded similarly among 2022 returnees. The vast majority (100% among 2023 and 86% among 2022 returnees) stated that there was no problem with the military being present or that it was good to have a military presence. When asked what the opinion of their communities were in terms of the relationship with the military, about two thirds (69% and 65% among 2023 and 2022 returnees) mentioned that they thought the relationship was good.
8. When asked if movements were restricted, almost all 2023 and 2022 returnees (99%) said no. All 2023 returnees also said that they or their family members had not experienced any safety concerns, and 99% said they felt generally or completely safe. Only one respondent said they sometimes felt they were in danger - due to crime and violence.
9. A quarter of 2023 returnees (23%) had received the services of the police in the last one year, half as much as the 46% of 2022 returnee households who had done so. Of those who sought police assistance, all 2023 returnees and 92% of 2022 returnees were highly or somewhat satisfied with this assistance.
10. The main livelihood skills differed between females and males. Among 2023 returnees, the main livelihood skills among females were sewing / tailoring (37%), computing / software (13%) and beauty culture (9%), while the most mentioned livelihood skills for males were painting (18%), farming (13%), computing / software (8%), fishing (8%) and driving (8%).

As with previous returnees, the mostly mentioned impediment to restoring livelihoods (or increasing earnings) was a lack of tools and / or means (material / finance) to undertake an activity, which was mentioned by 57% of 2023 returnees.

11. Among 2023 and 2022 returnees, three quarters of 18 to 35 year olds (74% and 72% respectively) who were able to work were without livelihoods compared to a little over half (54%) among 2020 returnees. Over half of the 18 to 35s without livelihoods among 2023 returnees (57%) and two thirds (65%) among 2022 returnees were females. In terms of education, 41% of the 18 to 35 year olds without livelihoods among 2023 returnees were degree holders and another 10% had a diploma or higher diploma.
12. Among all three groups of returnees, the metrics continued to be high for sanitation measures in their homes and access to drinking water. The percentage of households having a toilet in their land was 98% among 2023 returnees and 96% among 2022 returnees, and the proportion with access to water that could be drunk without boiling or purifying was 92% among 2023 returnees, up from 87% among 2022 returnees.
13. Finally, the adverse impact of the 2022 economic crisis was considerable for both 2023 and 2022 returnees. The main concern expressed by almost all 2023 returnees (99%) and 81% of the 2022 returnees was that essential foods were unaffordable. Furthermore, 13% of 2023 returnee households and 17% of 2022 returnees did not have three meals a day, compared to 0% among 2020 returnees at the time they were interviewed.

DASHBOARD OF SELECTED RESEARCH FINDINGS

		Year of return		
		2023	2022	2020
Respondent and household information				
	Facilitated air return	100%	83%	88%
	Average household size	2.1	1.9	2.5
	Households with PWSNs	11%	19%	11%
	Average proportion of female family members in household	53%	57%	55%
	All adults in household had received COVID-19 vaccine	94%	99%	94%
	Grade 11 and below children in school	100%	100%	89%
Registrations and civil documentation				
	Not having any BC	1%	0.5%	3%
	Adults not having SL NIC	11%	8%	10%
	Adults registered to vote	22%	55%	60%
Land, shelter, and sanitation				
	Household has own toilet	98%	96%	91%
	Water can be drunk without boiling or purifying	92%	87%	74%
	Received shelter assistance	14%	19%	43%
	Households owning land	51%	49%	67%
Livelihoods				
	Households with no livelihoods	30%	17%	7%
	Households with no one having a livelihood skill	22%	17%	32%
	Having 3 meals a day	87%	83%	100%
	Received livelihood assistance	5%	32%	67%
	Unemployed 18-35 year olds as a percentage of all 18-35s	73%	75%	60%

Year of return		2023	2022	2020
Security and justice				
	Feel generally or completely safe	99%	96%	98%
	No landmines in area	100%	100%	100%
Returnee sentiments on return				
	Satisfied with return to Sri Lanka	92%	82%	87%
	Returnees would advise others to return to Sri Lanka	86%	74%	96%
	Thinking of going back to India due to SL economic crisis	3%	10%	-
Reintegration assistance				
	Facilitated returnees receiving NFI cash grant from UNHCR	0% ¹	100%	92%
	Returnees who were health screened on arrival in Sri Lanka	67%	58%	100%

¹ UNHCR had discontinued NFI cash assistance in 2023 in view of winding down Sri Lankan operations

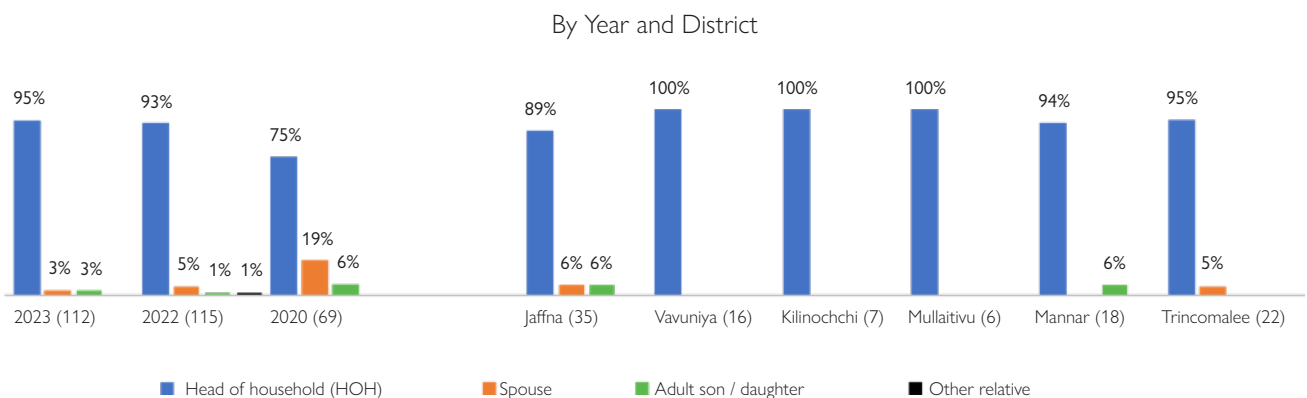
BASIC RESPONDENT INFORMATION

Intent of analysis: To illustrate the profiles of the households and surveyed respondents, which provides a context with which to read into the Tool 2 survey results.

1.1 | Sample profile

- Among 2023 returnees most respondents (95%) were the heads of household (Figure 1), which was similar to the response among 2022 returnees. In districts other than Jaffna, 95% or more of respondents were HoHs.

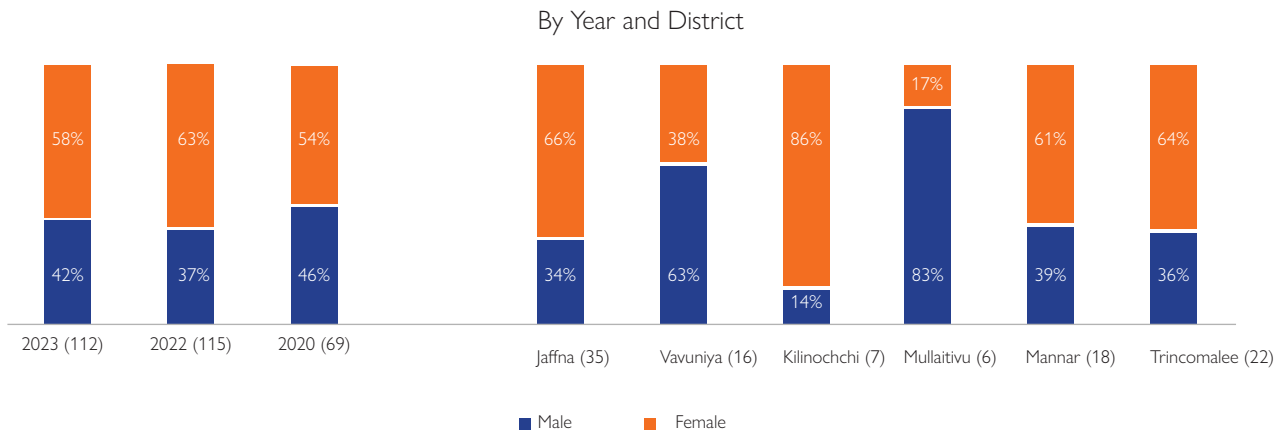
Figure 1: Main survey respondent



Base: All respondents

- Most respondents were female (58%) as shown in figure 2, similar to the proportions among 2022 and 2020 returnees (63% and 54% respectively). Since as many as 95% of the respondents in the 2023 returnee sample were HoHs, as illustrated in figure 1 above, it is evident that a substantial majority of households among 2023 returnees were headed by females as in the returnees in the previous year (2022).

Figure 2: Respondent's sex

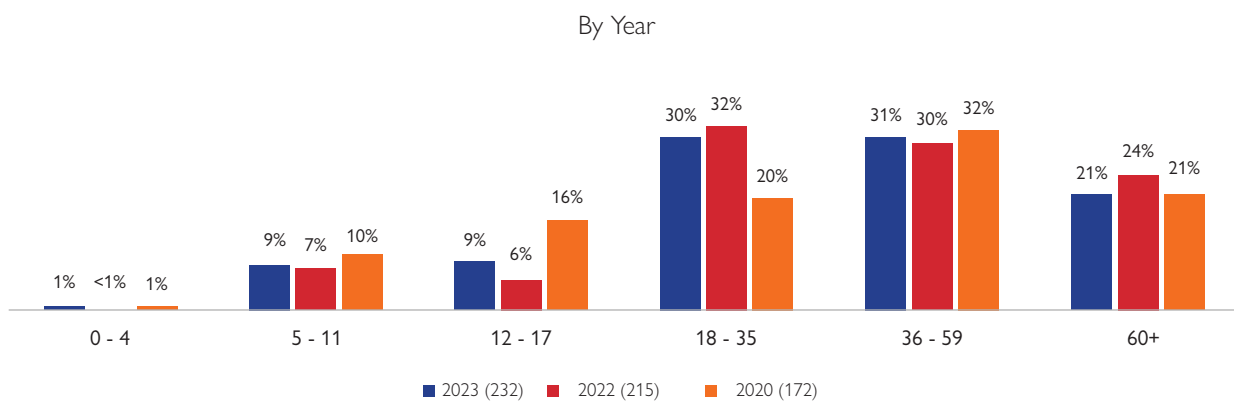


Base: All respondents

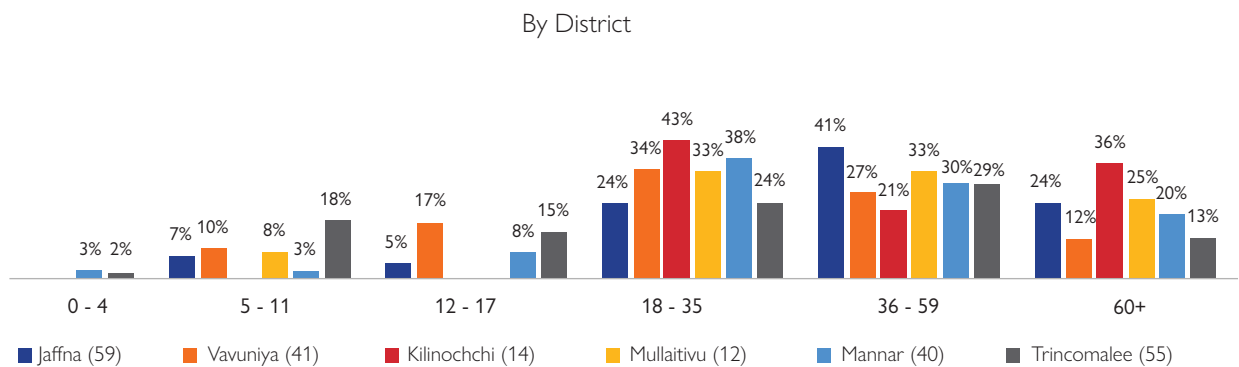
- In the 2023 returnees sample of 112 households there were 232 family members. 61% were in the working age group of 19 to 59 years while 19% were aged 0 to 17 years, and 21% were 60 years or older (Figure 3).

The age distribution among 2023 returnees was similar to that of the 2022 returnees. In all the last three returnee batches, the proportion of young children (aged upto 11 years) was low, at about 10%.

Figure 3: Age distribution of all household family members



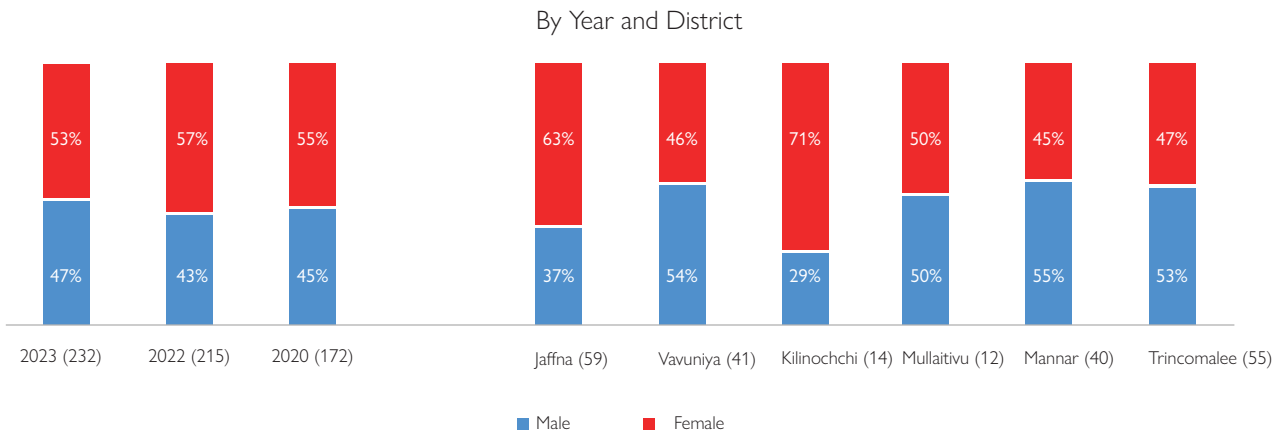
Base: All family members



Base: All family members

- Among 2023 returnees, as shown in figure 4, the family members distribution by males and females were slightly skewed towards females with 47% being males and 53% females. In the Jaffna district the proportion of females was as high as 63%. Among 2022 and 2020 returnees, the proportion of females were higher as well.

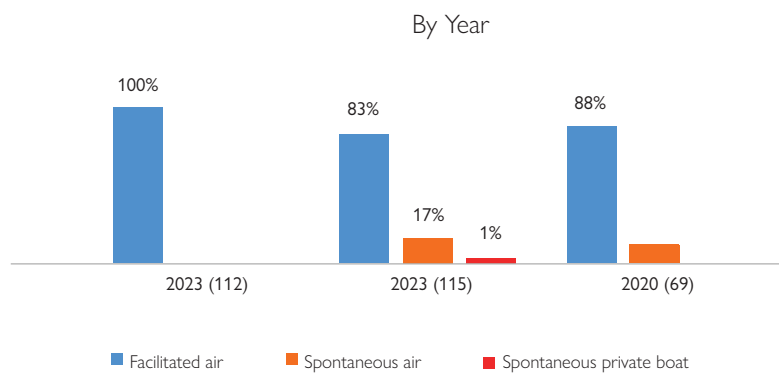
Figure 4: Distribution of family members by sex



Base: All family members

- All 2023 refugee returnees arrived in Sri Lanka by facilitated air transport (Figure 5). None arrived spontaneously by air, as unlike in previous years when UNHCR were processing spontaneous returnees, UNHCR did not have the field presence to do so in 2023.

Figure 5: Type of return to Sri Lanka

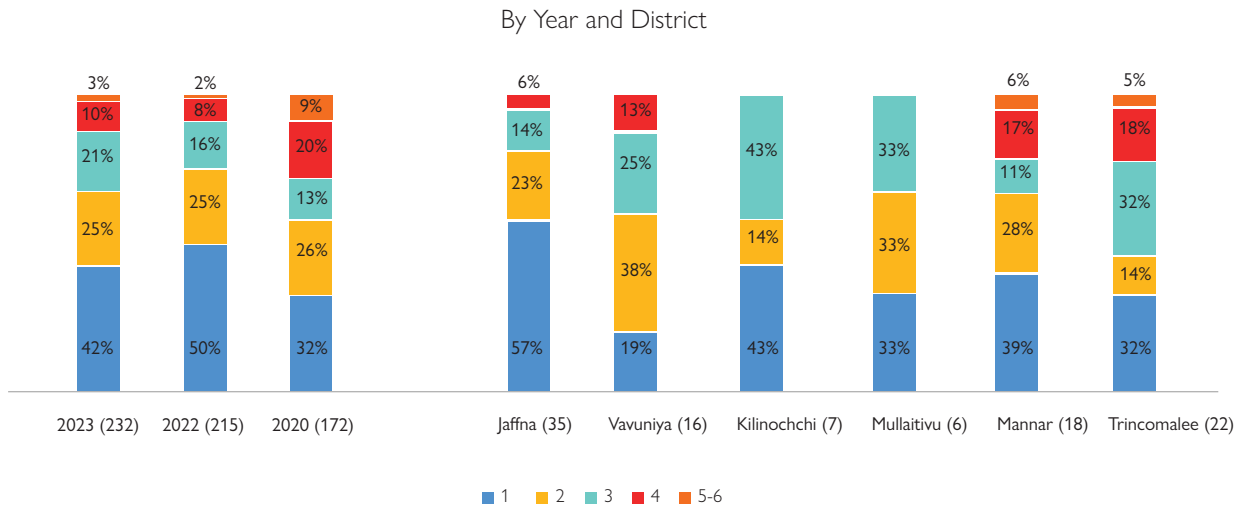


Base: All respondents

1.2 | Vulnerability risk

- Two fifths of the 2023 returnee households (42%) had just one family member (Figure 6), slightly less than the 50% of households with one family member among the returnees in 2022². Therefore 58% of 2023 returnee households had two or more family members.

Figure 6: Number of family members in each household



Base: All respondents

- The 232 family members from 112 households among the 2023 returnees results in an average household size of 2.1, higher than the average household size of 1.9 among 2022 returnees, but still less than the average of 2.5 family members among 2020 returnees. Nevertheless, it should be kept in mind that the average household size of 2.1 is much lower than the Sri Lankan national average of 3.8 (Table 3).

The average number of working age adults (aged 18-59) in a typical 2023 returnee household was 1.4, which was slightly higher than the equivalent numbers of 1.2 and 1.3 among 2022 and 2020 returnees respectively, as shown in table 3. However, again these averages were all well below the national Sri Lankan average of 2.2.

Table 3: Age profile of family members in an average household: Sri Lanka vs Returnees

Age Group	Sri Lanka national average	2022	2020	2019
0-4	0.3	<0.1	<0.1	<0.1
5-17	0.8	0.3	0.2	0.7
18-59	2.2	1.4	1.2	1.3
60+	0.5	0.3	0.5	0.5
Average household size	3.8	2.1	1.9	2.5
No. of respondents	(5.4 m households)	112	115	69

² Respondents were asked about the number of family members living in the home, including the respondent. In many instances there were households with just one family member i.e., the respondent, which, in some instances, could be due to the respondent being the first in the family to return to Sri Lanka with the rest of the family returning later; instead of the whole family returning at once.

- Among 2023 returnees about one in ten (11%) of all family members were PWSNs, notably less than the equivalent percentage among 2022 returnees (19%) as illustrated below in table 4. Among 2023 returnees, the proportions of PWSNs among all family members were highest in the districts of Jaffna (17%), Mullaitivu (17%), Mannar (15%) and Kilinochchi (14%).

Table 4: Incidence of persons with specific needs (PWSNs) in family

District	2023			2022			2020		
	No. of house-holds	Total no. of family members	% PWSN family members	No. of house-holds	Total no. of family members	% PWSN family members	No. of house-holds	Total no. of family members	% PWSN family members
Jaffna	35	59	17%	36	67	31%	20	58	7%
Vavuniya	16	41	2%	15	23	26%	14	28	11%
Kilinochchi	7	14	14%	11	25	4%	8	17	24%
Mullaitivu	6	12	17%	8	17	6%	3	5	0%
Mannar	18	40	15%	18	35	14%	11	26	19%
Trincomalee	22	55	7%	21	36	11%	13	38	8%
Other	8	11	9%	6	12	17%	-	-	-
All districts	112	232	11%	115	215	19%	69	172	11%

- Among 2023 returnees, three fourths of PWSNs (73%) were females, much higher than the 53% overall share for all female family members. Among 2022 returnees, the share of female PWSNs was lower at 63% with females contributing to 57% of all family members.

In terms of age, among the 2023 returnees 58% of PWSNs were aged 60 years or above, 38% were aged 36 to 59 years and 4% (one family member) were aged 18 to 35 years. Among 2022 returnees, the equivalent proportions were somewhat similar: 70% aged 60+, 25% aged 36 to 59 and 5% aged 18 to 35.

- Among 2023 returnees the main categories of PWSNs were single older person, physical disability and being a woman at risk. These categories were among the most mentioned among 2022 and 2020 returnees as well.

Table 5: No. of PWSNs by category

No. of mentions	2023	2022	2020
Single older person	8	7	3
Physical disability	4	4	4
Woman at risk	3	13	1
Single parent	2	7	2
Diabetes	2		
Heart ailment	2	5	1
Mental illness	1	2	
Cancer	1	4	
Stroke	1		
Hearing issue	1		
Blindness	1		
Recovering from surgery		5	
Single female Head of Household			3
Kidney disease			3
Widowed / divorced			1
Old age			2
Base: No. of PWSNs	26	40	19

Note: Some PWSNs had more than one special need

REGISTRATION AND OTHER VISITS BY AUTHORITIES

Intent of queries: To identify if returnees were able to register as residents in the areas of return, if they in fact do so, and to ascertain if returnees are visited by military or police, for registration or any other purposes, and the frequency of such visits.

There are numerous and persistent anecdotes regarding the close surveillance of civilians in the North and East by security or intelligence personnel, including repeated visits to homes. This is one attempt to gather factual data on the existence and scope of any such activity.

2.1 | Registration feedback

- As with 2022 returnees, 98% of the 2023 returnee households too had been registered with the DS or GN offices, marginally lower than the 100% registrations with the DS / GN among the 2020 returnees. Among the 2023 returnees only two of the 112 households had not been registered.
- When asked if anyone else, other than the DS or GN had visited to register them, as shown in table 6, a quarter of the 2023 returnee respondents (24%) said their household was registered by other organisations, lower than the third (34%) of 2022 returnee households registered with other organisations. When asked who registered them, most mentioned NGOs (81%), and to a lesser extent the Police (stated by 11%).

The involvement of other organisations (mainly NGOs) in registering returnee families has declined sharply over the last few years: from 75% among 2020 returnees and 34% among 2022 returnees, to 24% among 2023 returnees.

Table 6: Extent to which households were registered by other organisations, and by whom

Whether registered by others	2023	2022	2020
Yes	24%	34%	75%
No	76%	66%	25%
Base: All respondents	112	115	69
If registered, by whom	2023	2022	2020
NGOs	81%	85%	100%
CID / TID	-	5%	2%
Police	11%	5%	2%
Military	-	-	2%
Others (not specified)	7%	5%	-
Base: Households registered by others	27	39	52

- Among 2023 returnees these registrations by other organisations were only in the Trincomalee and Jaffna districts, with a substantially higher proportion registered in the Trincomalee district (Figure 7).

Figure 7: Extent to which households were registered by other organisations, by district



Base: All respondents

2.2 | Other visits

- Respondents were also asked if they were interviewed by anyone else other than for registration purposes. 55% of 2023 returnees said they were, slightly more than the 44% saying yes among 2022 returnees (Table 7).

Among 2023 returnees, almost all who were visited for non registration purposes, almost all (97%) said these visits were by NGOs (Table 7). The balance 3% (two respondents) said they were visited by the military.

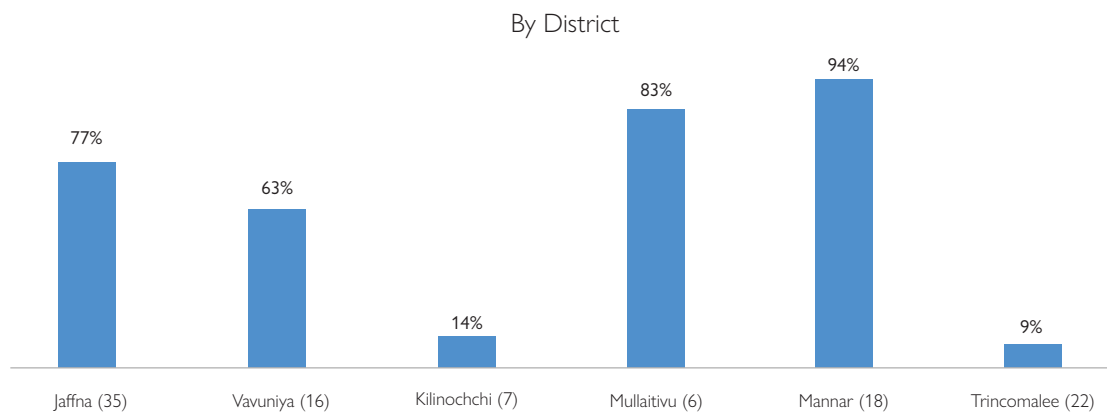
Among those who were visited by NGOs, 52% said they were visited once by them, 43% said they were visited twice, and the balance 5% said they were visited three or more times by these NGOs. Both respondents who said they were visited by the military, said they were visited once.

Table 7: Extent to which households were interviewed by anyone else, and by whom

If interviewed by anyone else other than for registration and by whom.	2023	2022	2020
Yes	55%	44%	48%
No	44%	54%	52%
Base: All respondents	112	115	69
If registered, by whom	2023	2022	2020
NGOs	97%	98%	81%
Government officer	-	-	17%
Military / TID / CID	3%	-	3%
Police	-	2%	-
Other	-	2%	-
Base: Households registered by others	62	51	52

As shown in figure 8, the extent of 2023 returnees being visited other than for registration purposes, was high in the Jaffna, Vavuniya, Mullaitivu and Mannar districts. These districts were mostly those which had the lowest incidence of registrations by NGOs as illustrated in figure 7 above.

Figure 8: Extent to which households were interviewed by other organisations, by district



Base: All respondents

CIVIL DOCUMENTATION

Intent of queries: To determine if returnees have essential civil documentation (such as birth certificates and national identity cards) and to determine if there are any constraints to access them. In this section, the enumerators ensured that data was collected for each family member in the household, not merely for the respondent or head of household. For birth certificates, the data reflects Sri Lankan vs. non Sri Lankan issued birth certificates. These queries also helped determine the percentage of returnees without essential documents and who may be at risk of statelessness.

3.1 | Birth certificate (BC)

- Only two family members (1%) did not have a BC among 2023 returnees, similar to the very low percentages among 2022 and 2020 returnees (Table 8). These family members were born in Sri Lanka (Table 9).

Table 8: Incidence of individuals not having any Birth Certificate

Whether having any BC	2023	2022	2020
Having any BC	99%	99%	97%
Not having any BC	1%	0.5%	3%
Number without any BC	2	1	6
Base: All family members	232	215	172

Table 9: Country of birth of individuals not having any Birth Certificate

Country of birth	2023	2020	2019
Number born in Sri Lanka	2	1	2
Number born in India	-	-	3
Number where country was not mentioned	-	-	1
Total number of family members without any BC	2	1	6

- Among 2023 returnees, there were three family members without a Sri Lankan BC: in addition to the two family members born in Sri Lanka without a BC as mentioned above, another family member had an Indian BC.

3.2 | National Identity Card (NIC)

- As shown in table 10 below, 11% of adults (20 adult family members) among the 2023 returnees did not have a Sri Lankan NIC: 9% (16 adult family members) never had one and 2% (4 adult family members) did have a NIC earlier but no longer.

Table 10: Adult family members' NIC status

NIC category	Year of return			District					
	2023	2022	2020	Jaffna	Vavuniya	Kilinochchi	Mullaitivu	Mannar	Trincomalee
(a) Total no. of all adult family members (18+)	189	185	126	52	30	14	11	35	36
(b) No. of adult family members (18+) not having NIC	20	14	12	6	-	-	-	3	8
(b) % of adults not having NIC	11%	8%	10%	12%	-	-	-	9%	22%
(b1) % of adults had NIC but not now	2%	1%	5%	4%	-	-	-	3%	-
(b2) % of adults never had NIC	9%	7%	5%	8%	-	-	-	6%	22%

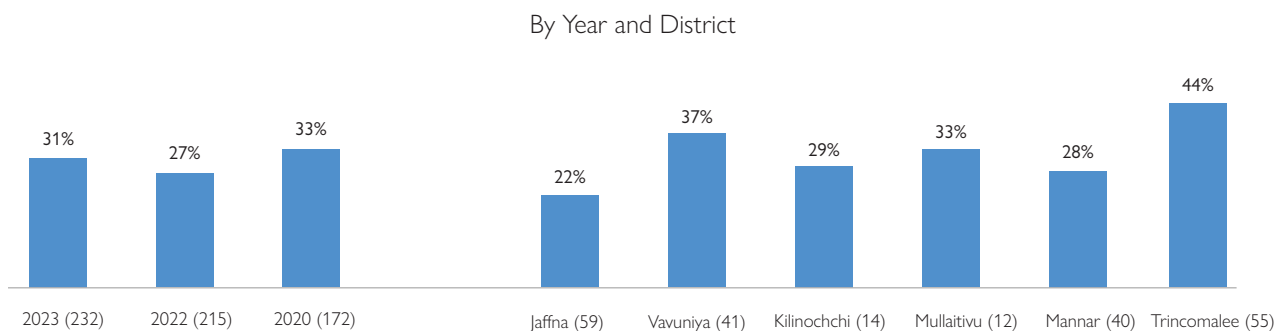
These 20 adults without a NIC were from 19 households. Reasons for the family member(s) not having a NIC were that (1) they had applied and are awaiting the NICs, stated by nine respondents (2) lack of supportive documents, stated by four respondents (3) not knowing the process of applying, stated by three respondents and (4) respondent was in India / overseas, stated by one respondent. The remaining two respondents did not give any reasons for not having a NIC.

Table 10 shows that 22% of adult family members in the Trincomalee district were without a NIC and never had one. Table 10 also states that 12% of adult family members in the district of Jaffna and 9% in the Mannar district were currently without a NIC.

3.3 | Absence of essential Sri Lankan identity documents

- Among the 2023 returnees, one of the 232 family members (<1%) did not have any Sri Lankan identity documents: a Sri Lankan birth certificate, a Sri Lankan national identity card or a Sri Lankan passport. The percentages not having any identity documents among 2022 and 2020 returnees were 1% and 3% respectively.
- Among 2023 returnees as well among 2022 and 2020 returnees, about 30% of family members were born in India: 31% among 2023 returnees and 27% and 33% respectively among 2020 and 2019 returnees (Figure 9). In Trincomalee district the percentage of Indian born family members was as high as 44%.

Figure 9: Percentage of family members born in India



Base: All family members

- Among 2023 returnees, 71 family members were born in India to 45 families / households. As shown in table 11, in all three years of return the number of individuals born in India exceed the current number of children indicating that many of those born in India were now adults.

Table 11: No. born in India versus current number of children

Indian born children	2023	2022	2020
No. born in India	71	57	57
Current no. of children (upto 18 years)	43	30	46

- All 2023 returnee respondents in whose households children were born in India (45 households), were asked if the children’s births were registered in India. All (100%) said that these births were registered in India. Among 2022 and 2020 returnees too, the births of all children born in India were registered in India (Table 12).

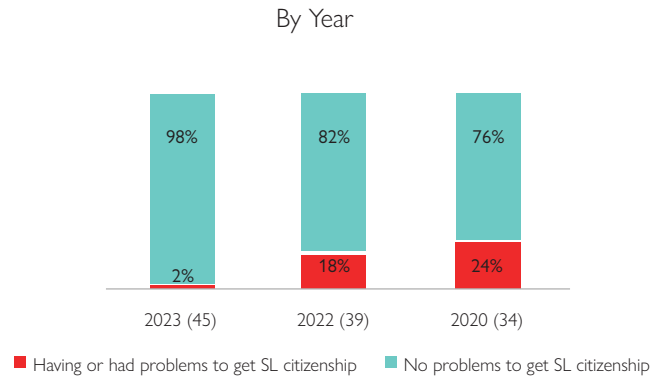
As many as 98% of 2023 returnees had registered the births at the hospital where the child was born and 2% said the children were born in a refugee camp. All these respondents said that they had with them the birth registration documents of these children.

Table 12: No. of households with children born in India and registration

Registration details	2023	2022	2020
Those who registered births in India	100%	100%	100%
Births were registered at:			
Hospital	98%	92%	94%
Refugee camp	2%	8%	6%
Those having the birth documents registered in India	100%	92%	97%
Base: No. of households with children born in India	45	39	34

- Only one respondent (2%) said they had or were having problems in getting Sri Lankan citizenship for these children (Figure 10). The problem was the delay in obtaining the child's birth certificate, which had still not been resolved (Table 13).

Figure 10: If there were problems to get SL citizenship for children born in India



Base: No. of households with children born in India

Table 13: Types of problems

Types of problems	No. stating
Delay in obtaining BC	1
This respondent said this problem (the delay) had still not been resolved at the time the survey was being administered	
Base: HH having / had problems	1

3.4 | Families from plantation areas (Hill Country)

- Just one household (1% of returnee households) was originally from the plantation areas / hill country before they sought refuge in India, slightly less than the 2% and 4% mentioned by 2022 and 2020 returnees respectively. This household had the relevant document(s) to prove their Sri Lankan nationality.

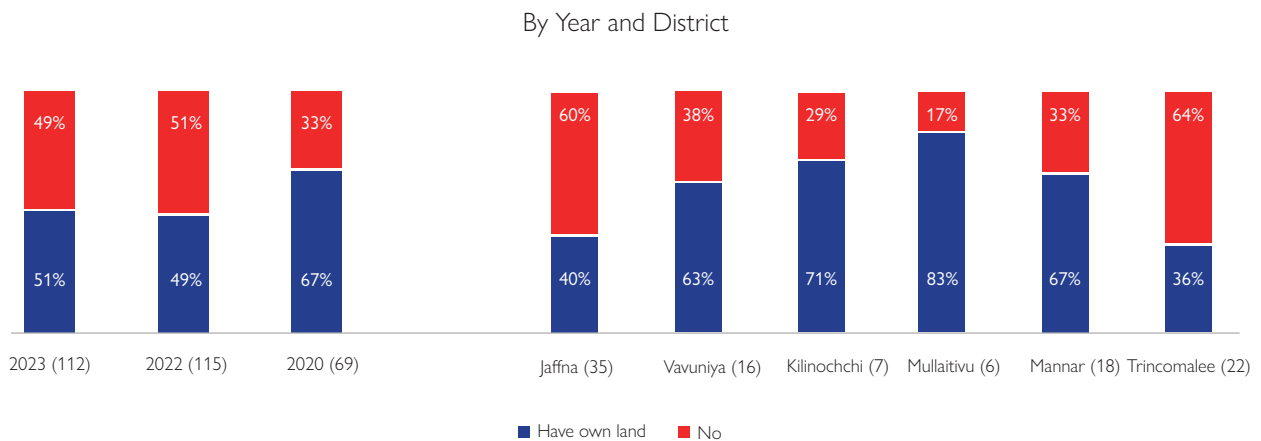
LAND AND SHELTER

Intent of queries: To identify shelter needs (repair or construction of a new shelter) of refugee returnees, the extent of landlessness, property document procurement and replacement needs, and what mechanisms are used or trusted by returnees to resolve disputes.

4.1 | Land ownership and access to land

- Half the 2023 returnees (51%) owned land (Figure 11), as was the case with 2022 returnees. Land ownership was lowest in the Jaffna (40%) and Trincomalee (36%) districts.

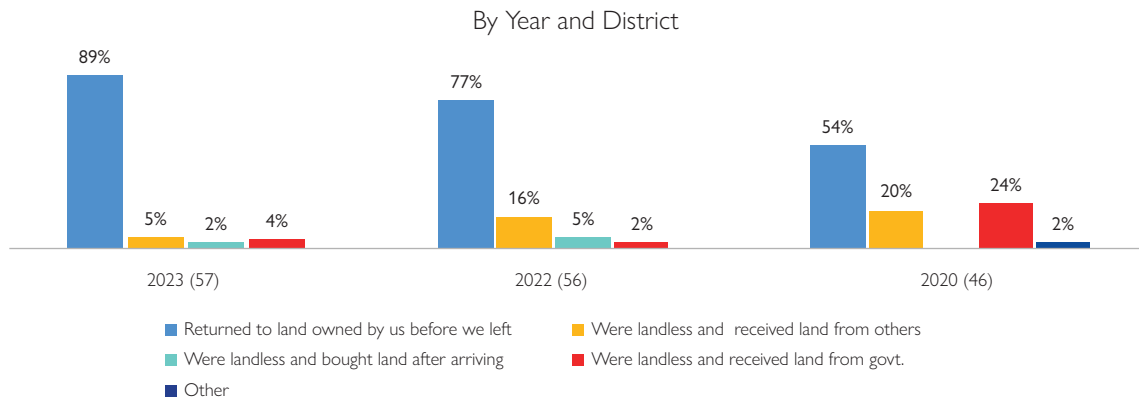
Figure 11: Ownership of land



Base: All respondents

- As illustrated in figure 12, among the 2023 returnees who owned land, a very high proportion (89%) returned to the land that was owned by them: higher than among returnees in 2022 (77%) and 2020 (54%).

Figure 12: Source of owned land

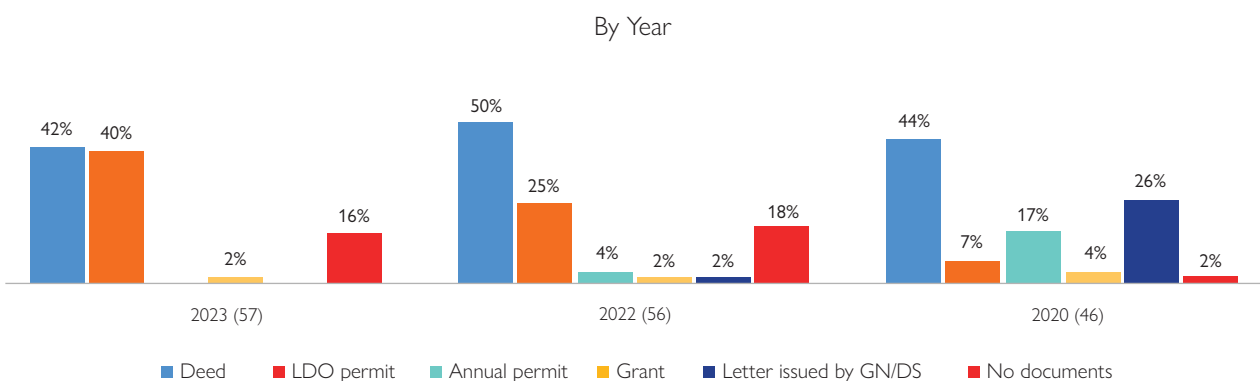


Base: Respondents owning land

- About two fifths each of 2023 returnees had a deed (42%) or a LDO permit (40%) while almost a fifth (16%) did not have any land ownership documents (Figure 13). A similar proportion of 2022 returnees too (18%) did not have any land ownership documents.

Among the 2023 returnees who did not have ownership documents (nine respondents), four had applied for them and were waiting for a response from the authorities and one did not know how to go about the application process. The remaining four respondents did not provide a reason for not having the document(s).

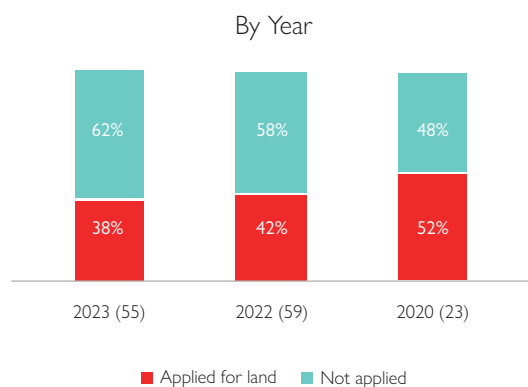
Figure 13: Land ownership documents in possession



Base: Respondents owning land

- Respondents who owned land were asked if they had access to their land. All 2023 returnees having land said they had access, similar to the near universal confirmation among equivalent 2022 returnees.
- When asked if there was a dispute currently regarding ownership of the land, just three of the 57 respondents (5%) who owned land answered in the affirmative: two said the household was trying to resolve the dispute internally / bilaterally with the other party while the third respondent had asked the local authority to assist in the resolution of the dispute.
- The 49% of 2023 returnees who did not own land (55 respondents) were asked if they had applied to the authorities for land. As shown in figure 14, only 38% of them (21 respondents) had done so, and all of them had applied to the GN / DS / Provincial Council. So far, none of them had been successful in getting land.

Figure 14: Extent to which landless returnees had applied for land



Base: Those not owning land

- Table 14 lists out the reasons why these applicants were so far unsuccessful with their application. Among the 2023 returnees who applied, 62% informed that the process was ongoing while 33% said they do not know the reason for not getting a response. One respondent (5%) said their applications were rejected.

Table 14: Responses from authorities to applications for land

Responses from authorities for land problems	% stating 2023	% stating 2022
The process is ongoing	62%	44%
Do not know the reasons for not getting a response	33%	40%
Authorities refused to grant us land / said we were not entitled to land	5%	16%
Base: Landless respondents who applied for land	21	25

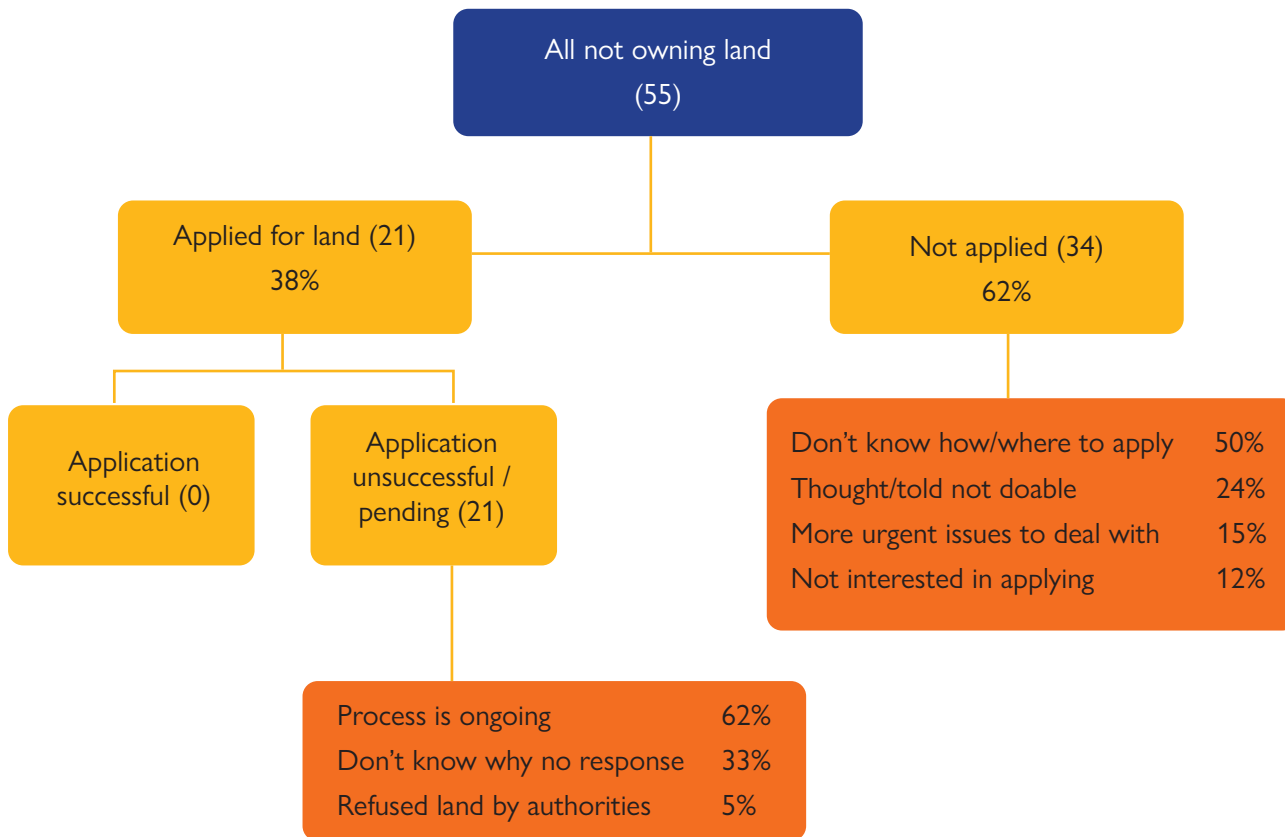
- Table 15 lists out the reasons given by those landless returnees for not applying for land. Among 2023 as well as 2022 returnees, most did not know the process of applying or thought / were told that it was not possible to get land. Some said that they had more urgent issues to deal with.

Table 15: Why landless returnees had not applied for land

Reasons for not applying for land	% stating 2023	% stating 2022
Do not know how to / where to apply	50%	32%
We think / we were told it is not possible	24%	35%
There are more urgent issues to deal with right now	15%	18%
We are not interested in applying	12%	15%
Base: Landless respondents who had not applied for land	34	34

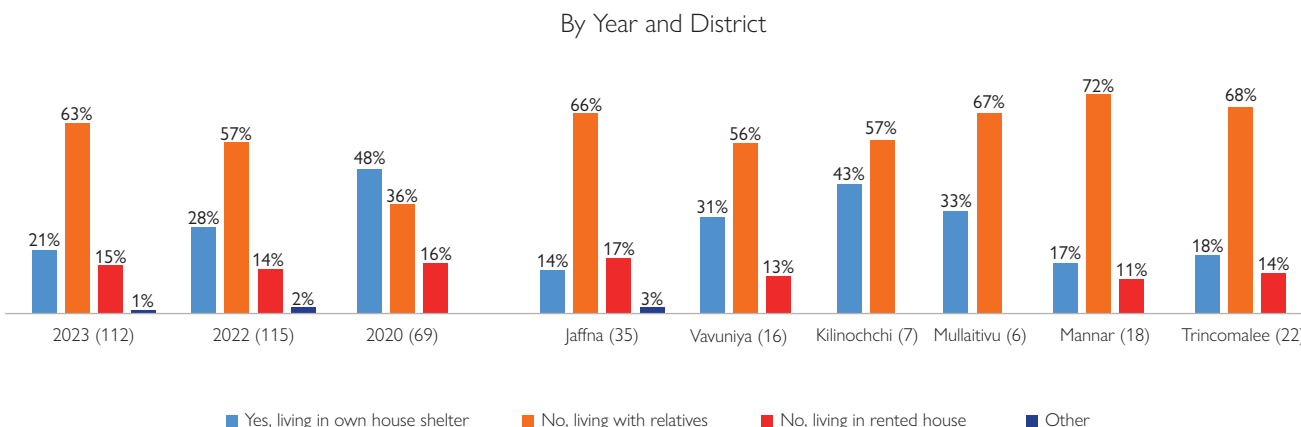
- An overall summary of the non land owners among 2023 returnees is shown in figure 15 below. Many mentioned the lack of information on applying, and there being no information on the status of the applications.

Figure 15: Summary of status of non land owners applications for land among 2023 returnees



- As illustrated in figure 16, among 2023 returnees, most respondents (63%) were living with relatives, and a fifth (21%) living in their own house / land, and 15% living in rented accommodation or in other places (workplace, convent). The situation was fairly similar in each district as well. Among 2022 returnees too, the distribution of responses were similar.

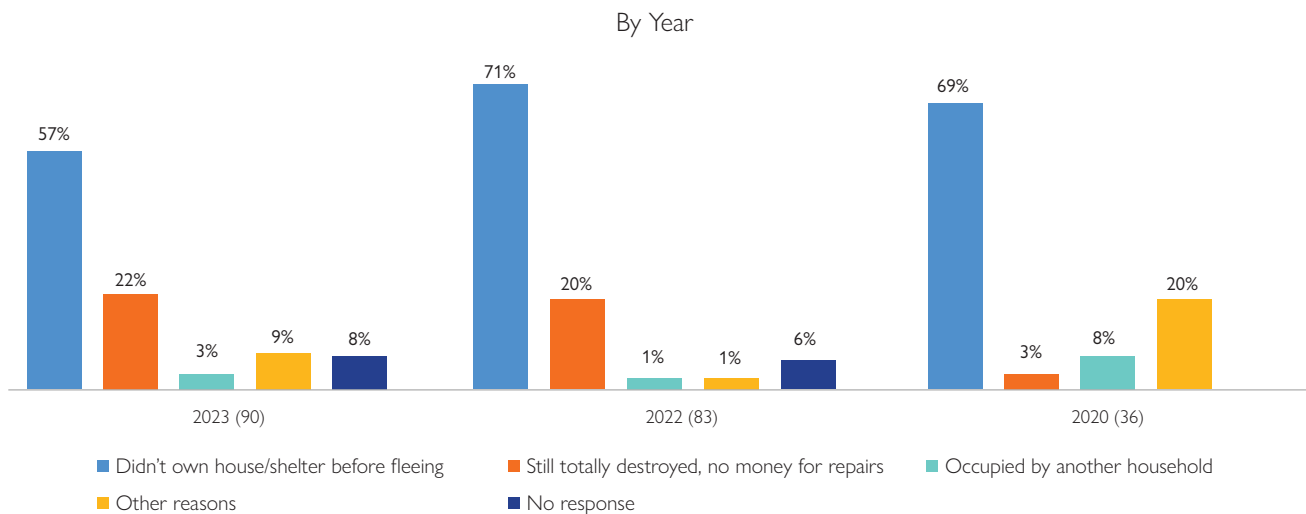
Figure 16: Whether residing in own house or shelter



Base: All respondents

- Among 2023 returnees too, most of those not living in their own house or shelter (57%) said this was because they did not have their own house or shelter before having to flee (Figure 17). A fifth (22%) mentioned that their own home was destroyed totally and that they could not afford to rebuild it.

Figure 17: Reasons for not living in own house / shelter

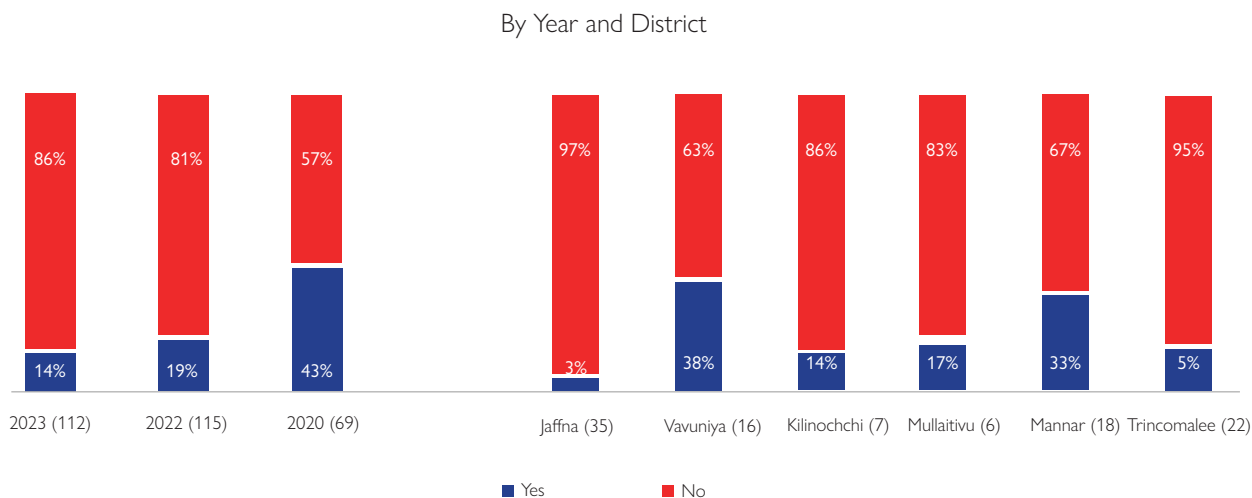


Base: Respondents not living in their own house / shelter

4.2 | Shelter assistance

- Just 14% of 2023 returnees said they received shelter assistance, less than the 19% and 43% among 2022 and 2020 returnees (Figure 18). The percentage of recipients was lowest in Jaffna and Trincomalee.

Figure 18: Extent of receiving shelter assistance



Base: All respondents

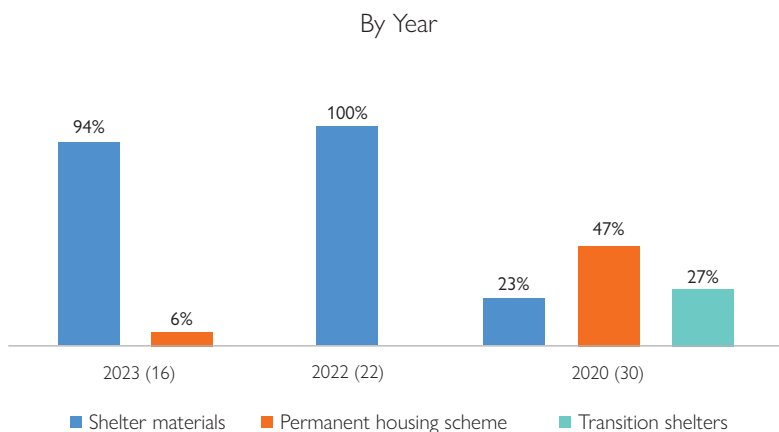
- Among 2023 returnees, all 14% who received shelter assistance obtained this only through OfERR, much like among the previous batch of returnees in 2022 (Table 16).

Table 16: Who provided shelter assistance (by year)

Providers of shelter assistance	2023	2022	2020
Government	-	-	50%
DS office	-	-	47%
DS office Indian housing scheme	-	-	3%
Local NGO	100%	100%	53%
OfERR Ceylon	100%	100%	53%
Valvodayam- Mannar	-	5%	-
Base: those who recd. shelter assistance	16	22	30

- Almost all 2023 returnees receiving shelter assistance (15 out of the 16 households that received this support) were provided with shelter materials, much like among 2022 returnees (Figure 19).

Figure 19: Type of shelter assistance received



Base: Respondents who received shelter assistance

SECURITY AND JUSTICE

Intent of queries: To identify refugee returnees' personal perceptions of post-return security and military presence in areas of return, to ascertain how returnees reintegrate within their neighbourhoods and home communities, to identify impact of landmines and unexploded ordinance (UXOs) on reintegration, and to know where returnees go if they encounter security concerns.

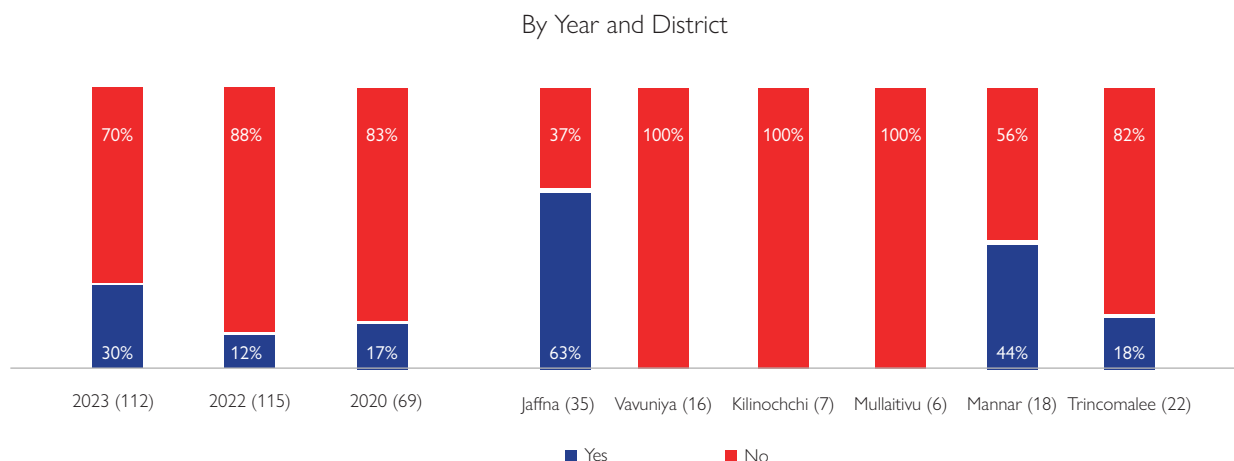
5.1 | Impact of landmines

- When questioned about the presence of landmines in the area, all 2023 returnee respondents (100%) said there were no landmines in their area, similar to the responses among 2023 and 2020 returnees.
- And no respondents or their other family members had received Mine Risk Education (MRE) among 2023 returnees, as was the case with 2022 and 2020 returnees.

5.2 | Relations with the military

- 30% of 2023 returnees said there was a military presence in their area or nearby, substantially more than the 12% mentioned by 2022 returnees (Figure 20).
- The high mention of military presence was largely due to 63% of 2023 returnees in the Jaffna district and 44% in the Mannar district saying there was a military presence in their area, several fold more than the 11% and 0% mentions respectively, among 2022 returnees in these two districts.

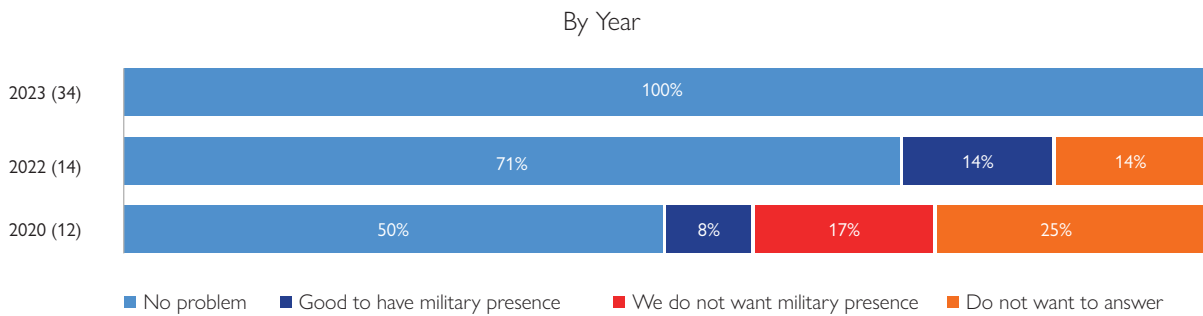
Figure 20: Whether there is military presence in the area or nearby



Base: All respondents

- As shown in figure 21, the acceptance / tolerance of the nearby military presence was universal among 2023 returnees who had a military presence nearby: even higher than the equivalent mentions among 2022 returnees.

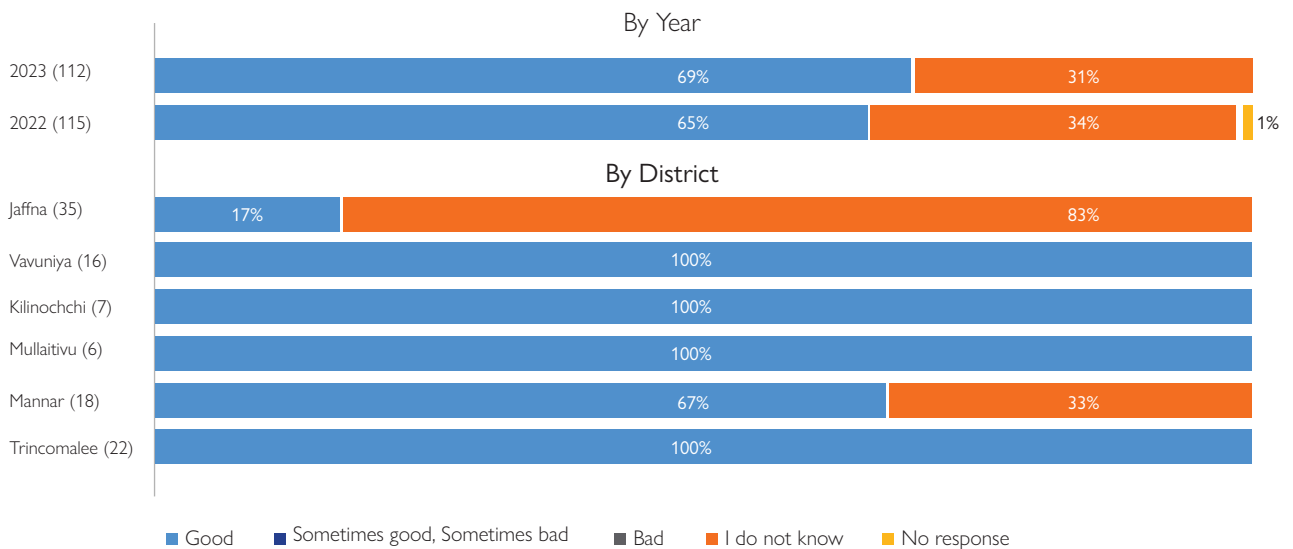
Figure 21: Opinion about military presence in the village / local area



Base: Respondents who had a military presence in their village / area

- All respondents were asked for their opinion of the relationship between the community and the military. Among both 2023 and 2022 returnees, overall opinions were similar with about two thirds (69% and 65% respectively among 2023 and 2022 returnees) saying they thought the relationship was good (Figure 22).
- The vast majority of the 2023 returnees in the Jaffna district responded that they did not know and just 17% thought the relationship was good. In the other five districts taken together, the percentage perceiving the relationship between the military and community being good was consequently 91%, higher than the above mentioned total percentage of 69%. (Among 2022 returnees in these same five districts, the equivalent percentage was also higher, at 82%, compared to the above mentioned total sample percentage of 65%.)

Figure 22: Opinion on relationship between the military and the community

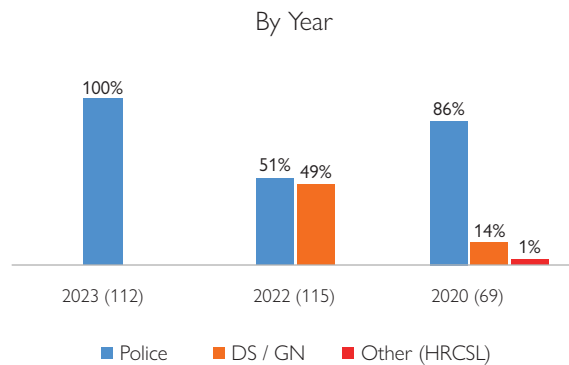


Base: All respondents

5.3 | Physical security

- Respondents were asked to whom they would first report a serious crime against their own family. All 2023 returnee respondents said they would report such a crime to the police.
- Among 2022 returnees, mentions were split down the middle between the police (51%) and the DS / GN (49%) due to polarised responses by district (Jaffna and Trincomalee respondents preferring to report such crimes to the Police and the other four districts preferring to do to the DS / GN).

Figure 23: For a serious crime against own family, to whom would it be first reported

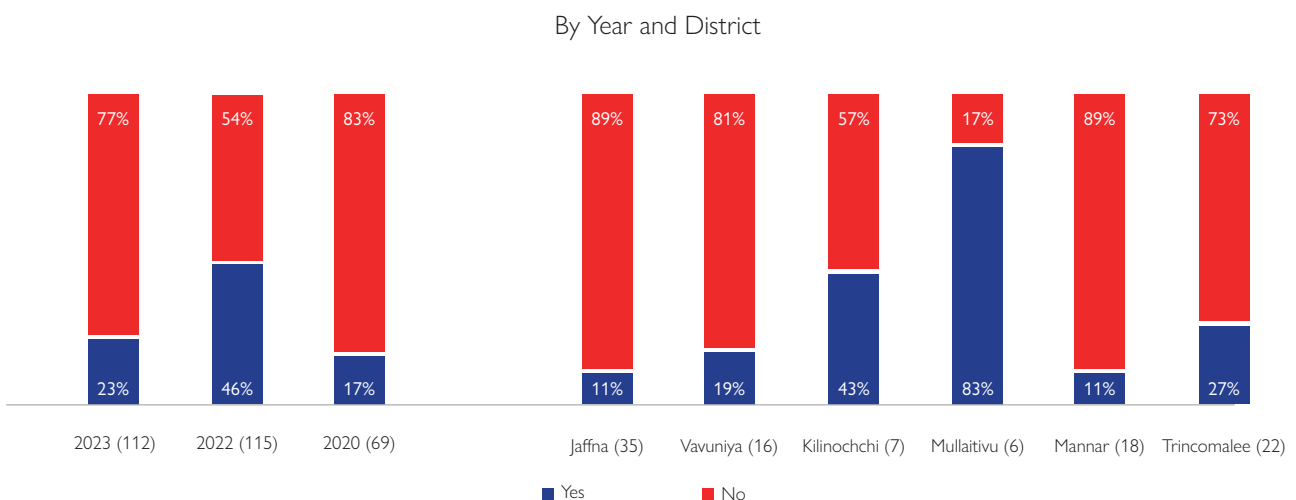


Base: All respondents

5.4 | Access to justice

- About a quarter of 2023 returnees (23%) had obtained the services of the police in the past one year, half the percentage among the previous batch of 2022 returnees (Figure 24).

Figure 24: Extent of having received the services of the police in past one year

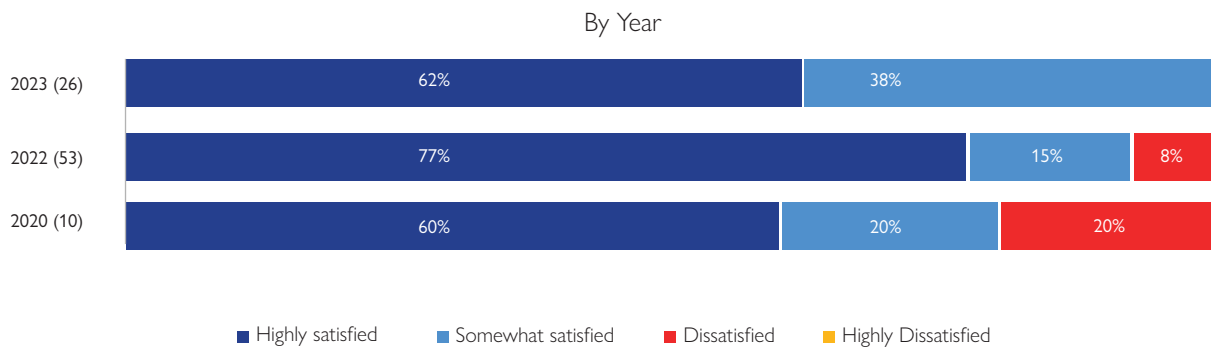


Base: All respondents

The types of services received from the police was not asked in the survey instrument. However, feedback from field enumerators were that the main reasons to go to the police were to (a) report a lost NIC and get a copy of their police report to apply for a new NIC (b) report fraudulent money transfer transactions, such as incorrect foreign currency exchange rates and (c) make complaints about land matters.

- The level of satisfaction with the services of the police was high among the 2023 returnees who had sought their services, with all these returnees being highly or somewhat satisfied, with none saying they were dissatisfied (Figure 25). Among the batch of 2022 returnees too, satisfaction with the service from the police was high.

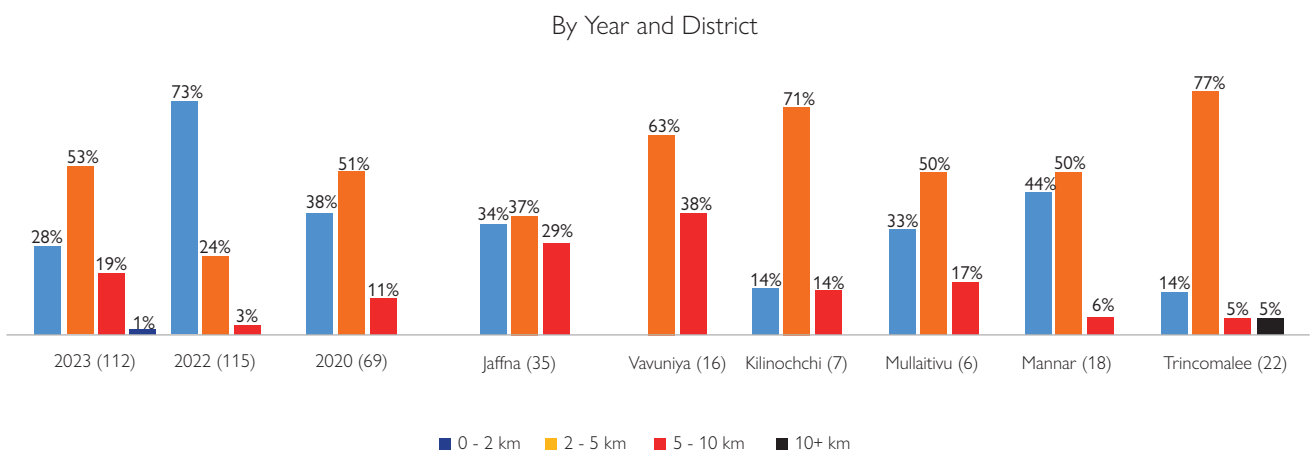
Figure 25: Extent of satisfaction with the services of the police



Base: Those who sought the services of the police

- As illustrated in figure 26, while a quarter of 2023 returnees (28%) lived less than two kilometres away from the nearest police station, most (53%) lived two to five kilometres away and the rest were largely five to ten kilometres away (19%). Among 2022 returnees, most (73%) lived less than two kilometres from the nearest police station.

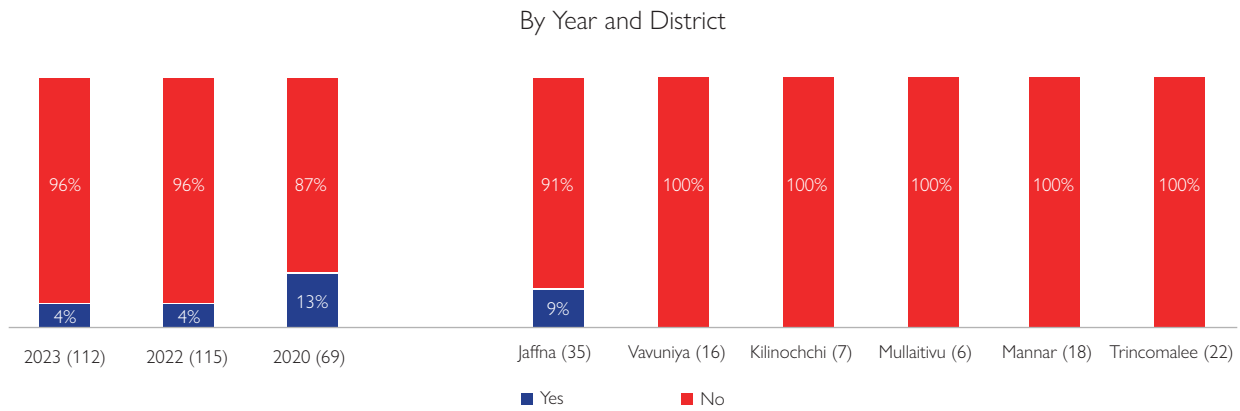
Figure 26: Distance from house to nearest police station



Base: All respondents

- When asked if they had gone or would go to the courts in case of any disputes (Figure 27), only 4% of 2023 returnees (four respondents) said yes, similar to the 4% who said so among 2022 returnees. Three of the 2023 returnees had gone to courts regarding land disputes while the fourth said it was because of a family dispute.

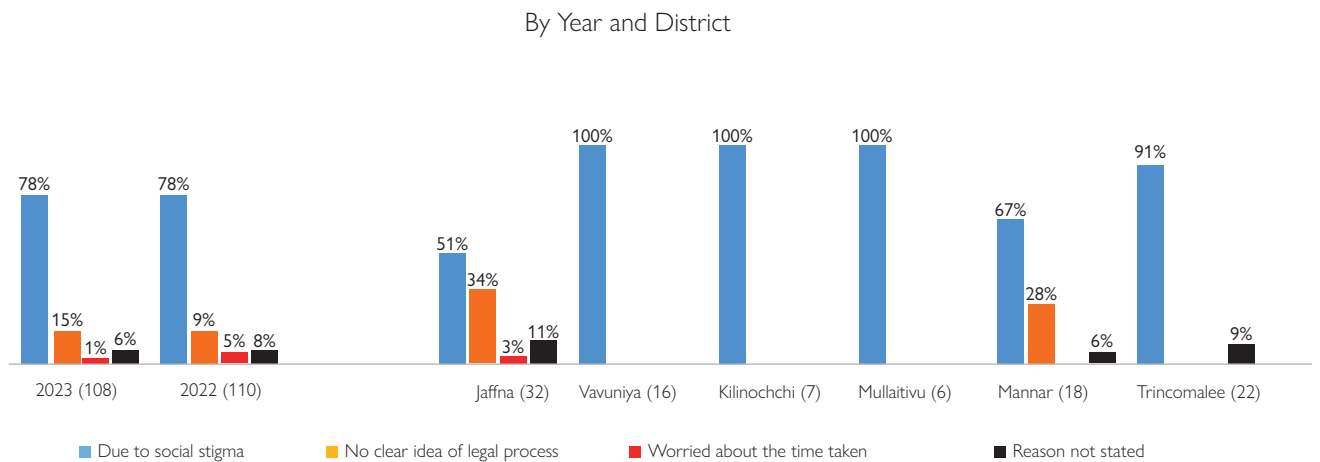
Figure 27: Was or would assistance be sought from the courts in case of a dispute



Base: All respondents

As shown in figure 28, the main reason stated for not wanting to go to courts was that there was a risk of being socially stigmatised in doing so. Some 2023 returnees (15%) said they had no idea of the legal process.

Figure 28: Reasons for not wanting to seek assistance from the courts

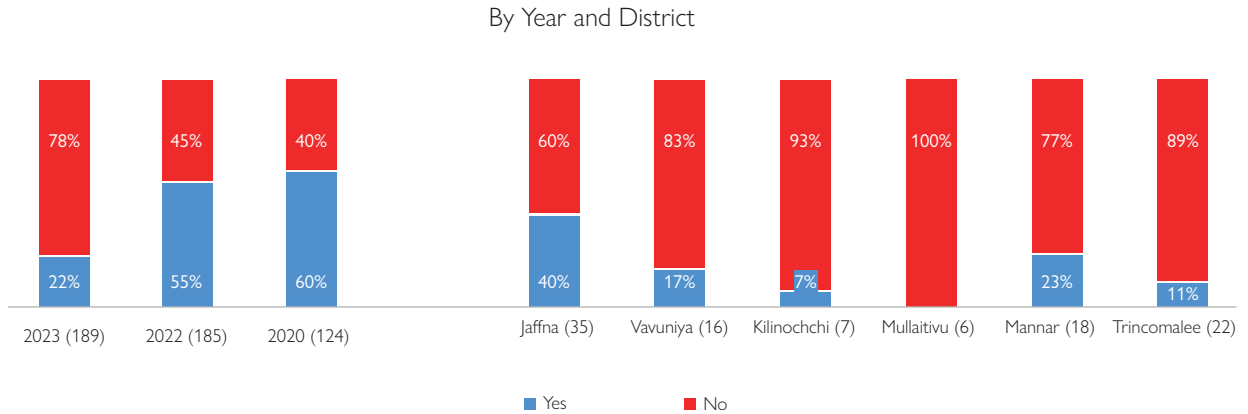


Base: Respondents not wanting to seek assistance from the courts

5.5 | Participation in public affairs without being discriminated

- Among 2023 returnees, 22% of adult family members (aged 18 or above) were registered to vote, substantially less than the 55% registered to vote among 2022 returnees (Figure 29). The lower incidence of being registered to vote among 2023 returnees appears to be due to a shorter lag between dates of returning to Sri Lanka and dates of conducting fieldwork than in previous years.

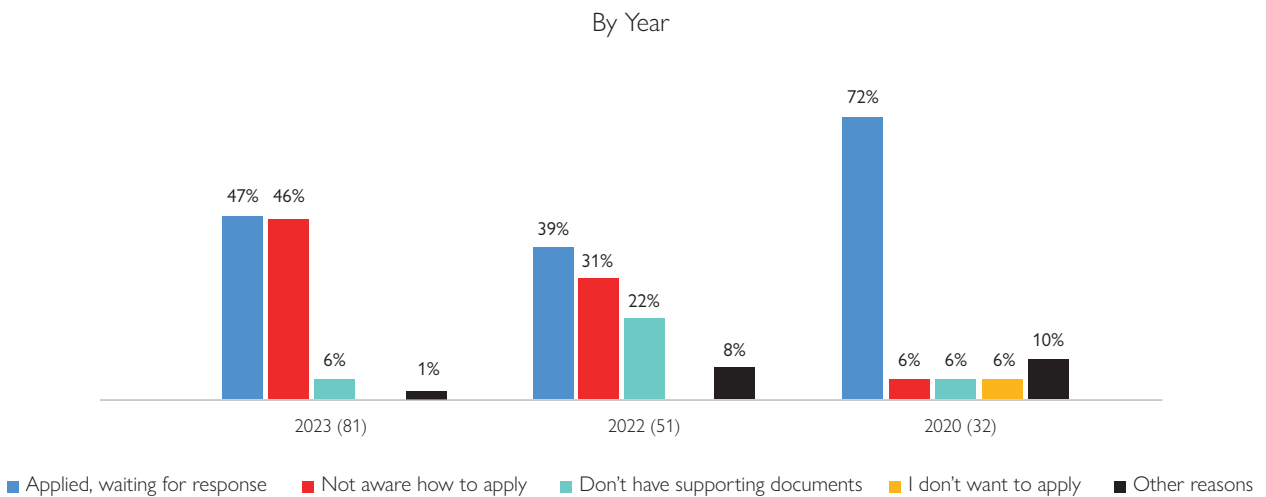
Figure 29: Adults registered to vote



Base: All adults (18+)

- When asked for the reason for not being registered to vote, as shown in figure 30, the most mentioned reasons were that their applications are pending approval from the authorities (47%) and being uncertain how to apply for registration (46%).

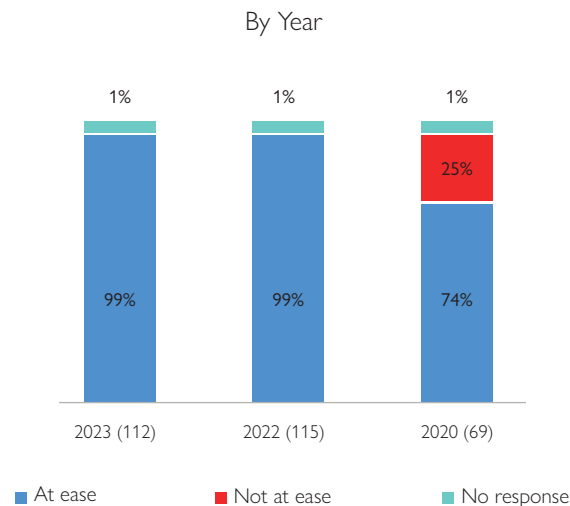
Figure 30: Reasons for adults not being registered to vote



Base: Respondents in whose homes adults not registered to vote

- When asked if they were at ease to discuss their own political views in public, almost all 2023 returnees (99%) said that they were at ease to do so (Figure 31). Even among 2022 returnees, 99% were at ease to do so. Among 2020 returnees however, the percentage at ease to do so was lower at 75%.

Figure 31: Whether at ease to discuss own political views in public



Base: All respondents

5.6 | Restrictions in movement

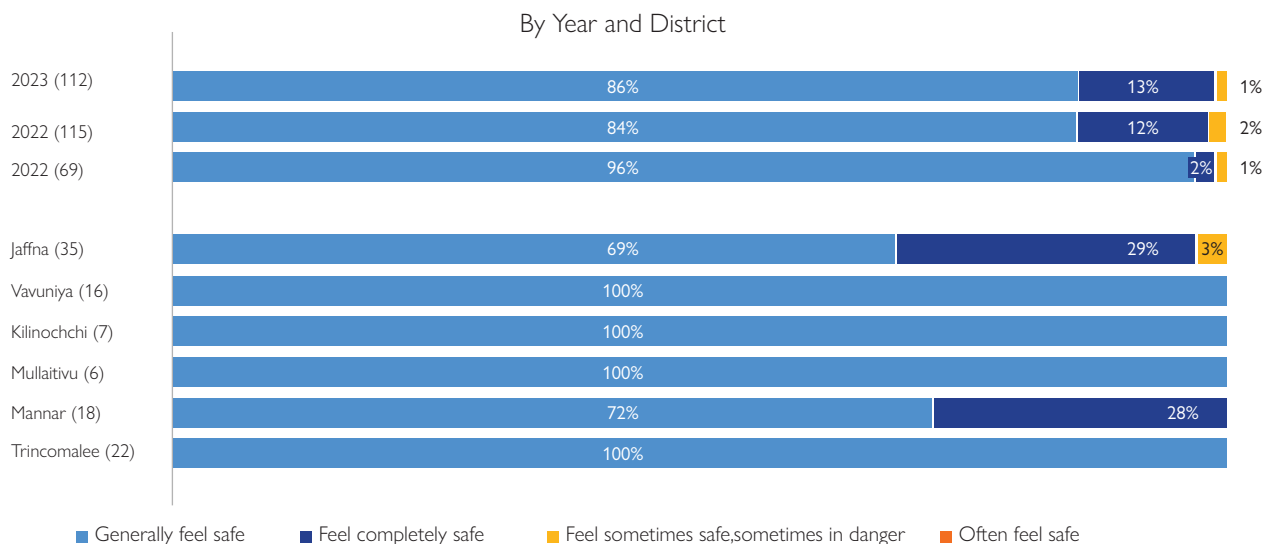
- When respondents were asked whether anyone restricted their movements in and out of the village, only 1% of 2023 returnees (one respondent) said yes their movements were restricted, similar to the percentage saying so among 2022 returnees as well. Among 2020 returnees, no one said that their movements were restricted.
- The above mentioned 2023 returnee respondent who said their movements were / had been restricted was from the Trincomalee district. However, details of who restricted them was not mentioned.

5.7 | Issues and perceptions impacting peace of mind

- All respondents were asked whether after returning to Sri Lanka, if they or other members of their families faced any of these safety concerns: killed, went missing / disappeared, harassed, or repeatedly interrogated by security forces or the police, arrested, sexually harassed, or abused. Among 2023 returnees all responded that that they had not faced these issues / concerns. (In the group of 2022 returnees, responses were largely similar too, except for one respondent from the Kilinochchi district who said that they faced harassment / repeated interrogation from the security forces.)
- Respondents were also asked how safe they and their families felt where they lived today (the day of the interview). As shown in figure 32, across all three years of return (2023, 2022 and 2020), over 95% said they felt either generally or completely safe. However, 1% to 2% said they sometimes felt safe and sometimes they felt that they were in danger.

Among 2023 returnees, the one respondent (in Jaffna district) who said they sometimes felt that they were in danger, said so because of crime and violence.

Figure 32: Extent of feeling safe today



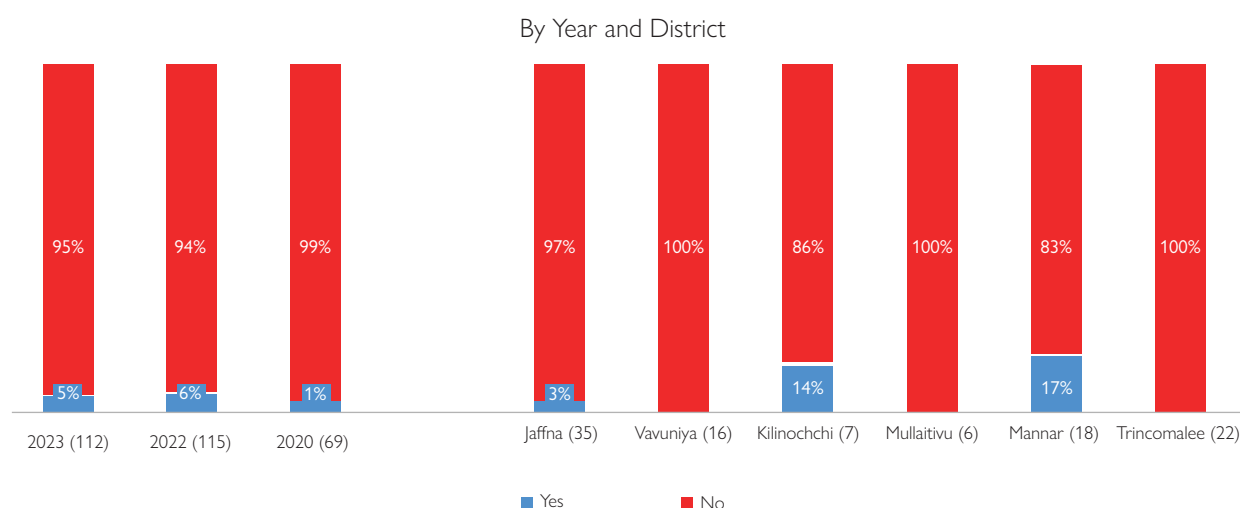
Base: All respondents

5.8 | Relations with the community

- When asked if they were treated differently by the local community as they were refugees, 5% of 2023 returnees said 'yes', similar to the 6% who said so among 2022 returnees (Figure 33).

Of the six 2023 returnees who said they were treated differently, four did not provide any reasons for saying so, while two said that there were differences in the (Tamil) language dialect from that used locally.

Figure 33: Whether treated differently by the community for being refugee returnees



Base: All respondents

- When asked where would they go to in case of a family dispute (non criminal) with the community, the vast majority of 2023 returnees (87%) said they would go to the GN / DS, and 12% said they would solve disputes among themselves. No one mentioned that they would go to the police. Even among previous groups of returnees, the most mentioned response was to discuss with the GN / DS (stated by 97% each of 2022 and 2020 returnees and the rest said they would go to the police).

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