



International
Labour
Organization

The ILO in Sri Lanka



Key Facts and Figures

Population (2012): 20.3 million
GDP per capita (2013): US\$ 3,280

Labour force (2013): 8.9 million

- 5.8 million male
- 3.1 million female

Labour force participation rate (2013): 53.8%

- 75.5% male
- 35.6% female

Employment to population ratio (2012): 52.3%

- 73.5% male
- 32.2% female

Unemployment rate (2013): 4.4%

- 3.1% male
- 6.9% female

Youth unemployment rate (2013): 20.1% (Age group 15-24)

- 15.0% male
- 27.8% female

Following the end of a 30-year-long conflict, in May 2009, the Government of Sri Lanka embarked upon a programme of economic development. As a result Sri Lanka's economy has grown at a healthy rate, reaching more than 8 per cent in both 2010 and 2011 and 7.8 per cent in the last quarter of 2013.

Ratified Conventions

Sri Lanka has ratified 40 ILO Conventions including all eight Fundamental Conventions:

- C.29 - Forced Labour Convention, 1930
- C.87 - Freedom of Association and Protection of the Right to Organise Convention, 1948
- C.98 - Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention, 1949
- C.100 - Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951
- C.105 - Abolition of Forced Labour Convention, 1957 (Not in force)
- C.111 - Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958
- C.138 - Minimum Age Convention, 1973
- C.182 - Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention, 1999



There has been a notable decline in the percentage of the total population living in poverty, from 31 per cent in 1996 to 6.5 per cent in 2012. The Central Bank of Sri Lanka has predicted that by 2016 GDP growth will reach 8.3 per cent, poverty will decline to 2 per cent and unemployment to 3 per cent. Overseas employment remains the most important contributor to the national economy, providing revenues of approximately US\$7 billion at the end of 2013.

Unemployment among young women and men continues to be very high, reaching more than 20 per cent in 2013. Gender inequality in the labour market appears to be common, and male labour force participation was almost twice as that of females in 2013.

Social security coverage in Sri Lanka is more extensive than in most other South Asian countries. Workers in the formal economy and public sectors are well covered; however, some voluntary schemes operate for workers in the informal sector.

The country's 10-year development policy framework is titled "Mahinda Chintana" or "the emerging wonder of Asia". This development strategy relies on promoting investment in infrastructure that will bring commercial and economic returns, alongside equitable access to such infrastructure that will allow people to take part in gainful economic activities. The ultimate goal is to turn Sri Lanka into a strategically important economic hub in the areas of maritime, aviation, commerce, energy and knowledge, which will enable the country to serve as a key link between East and West.

Sources: Central Bank of Sri Lanka, Annual Report 2013; Central Bank, Economic and Social Statistics of Sri Lanka, 2013; Dept. of Census, Labour Force Survey, 2013, 2nd Quarter Report; Household Income and Expenditure Survey – Preliminary Report 2013

The ILO - Who We Are

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the UN specialized agency dealing with work and workplace issues, and related rights and standards. Its overarching goal is to achieve decent work for all so everyone benefits from working conditions that offer freedom, equity, security and human dignity. In working towards this goal the ILO has four principal strategic objectives:

- To promote and realize standards, and fundamental principles and rights at work.
- To create greater opportunities for women and men to secure decent employment.
- To enhance the coverage and effectiveness of social protection for all.
- To strengthen the relationship between workers, employers and governments, and encourage social dialogue.

Founded in 1919, the ILO is the only surviving major creation of the Treaty of Versailles, which established the League of Nations. It became the first specialized agency of the United Nations in 1946.

The ILO in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka became a member of the ILO in 1948. In 1984 the ILO Country Office in Colombo was established, covering both Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

Since 2008 Sri Lanka has had two Decent Work Country Programmes (DWCPs). The 2008-12 DWCP supported the amendment of labour laws and the formulation of national policies to protect workers' rights and promote the concept of Decent Work for All. It also supported the sustainable development of economically disadvantaged and conflict-affected areas, better labour administration, equitable employment practices, social dialogue and labour market governance.

Building on the achievements of the first DWCP, the second DWCP (2013-17) aims to improve social protection further and create decent work for more people, with a particular focus on young women and men.

Current areas of work

Under the overarching guidelines of the DWCP, the ILO has contributed to Sri Lanka's social, economic and labour market development in a number of important ways.



- Assisting with the formulation of the National Human Resources and Employment Policy (NHREP) of Sri Lanka, supporting implementation of selected priority areas and currently providing support to the Government on ratifying Convention 122 on employment.
- Supporting the Government in eliminating the worst forms of child labour by 2016, by conducting a Child Activity Survey, organizing training, helping strengthen policies and legal frameworks, developing a roadmap, operating strategically-planned pilot activities, and assisting with the creation of a pilot "child labour free zone".
- Ensuring the implementation of labour policies, assisting with the revision of labour laws, strengthening of labour inspection systems, and supporting the training of labour tribunal judges.
- Supporting the Government's implementation of the National Labour Migration Policy by developing the capacity of officials, regulating the recruitment industry, developing reintegration strategies for returnee migrant workers and centralising the grievance referral system.
- Improving the constituents' capacity to prevent workplace HIV infections and protect the employment rights of people living with HIV, helping to develop a Gender Equality Policy Development Guide and a Code of Conduct to Prevent Sexual Harassment in the Workplace.
- Facilitating vocational training and market oriented skills for vulnerable groups, supporting policy frameworks to improve income and livelihoods for workers.
- Assisting the Government with rebuilding the conflict-affected areas, supporting the rejuvenation of the local economy, the rehabilitation and development of economic infrastructure, the introduction of new technology and improved business development services, to encourage a more equitable distribution of economic benefits.
- Promoting and development of partnerships between North and South while facilitating to establish B2B market. Supporting the provincial council to re-vitalise the cooperative sector in order to improve existing services and introduce demand driven new services for the betterment of the vulnerable communities in the North.
- Providing technical assistance on public employment services, particularly for vulnerable groups. Strengthening the employability of young people through non-formal education, skills development, entrepreneurship training and referral to micro-credit facilities. Developing a knowledge base on youth employment challenges and supporting for wage increases and self-employment in selected districts.

Social partners

The ILO's social partners in Sri Lanka include the Ministry of Labour and Labour Relations, the Employers' Federation of Ceylon, and Trade Unions. The ILO works with them to support the strengthening of tripartite social dialogue, which in turn fosters sustainable and equitable social progress.

The International Labour Organization

The International Labour Organization (ILO) is the UN agency for the world of work. It was founded in 1919 as part of the Treaty of Versailles that ended World War I, to reflect the principle that universal and lasting peace can only be achieved if it is built on social justice. The ILO is the only 'tripartite' United Nations agency that brings together representatives of governments, employers and workers to shape policies and programmes for social justice and decent working and living conditions for all women and men. For this it was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1969. The ILO is also responsible for drawing up and overseeing international labour standards (Conventions and Recommendations). This unique arrangement gives the organization an edge in incorporating 'real world' knowledge about employment and work into its activities.



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