

Pre-departure Preparation of Migrant Workers in Sri Lanka

BACKGROUND

The Middle East has been the main destination for Sri Lankan migrant workers since the late 1970s. Approximately 1.7 million Sri Lankans are now reported to be working abroad.

Remittances have become the key foreign exchange earning source in the country, and a source of economic sustenance for nearly a third of the population.

The largest number of women who migrate to the Arab States for domestic work come from the Philippines, Indonesia and Sri Lanka.

Income from the foreign employment industry accounts for 65% of Sri Lanka's export earnings as per statistics of the Central Bank of Sri Lanka in 2014, underpinning the significance of migrant workers' contribution to the island's economy.

A large private recruitment industry has grown around labour migration, with both positive and negative effects.

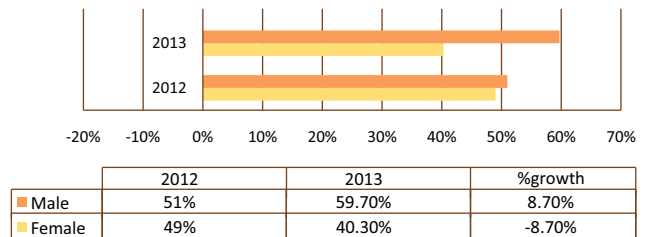
NUMBERS AT A GLANCE

The reduction in the number of female domestic workers could be attributed to the new regulation preventing women who have children under 5 years of

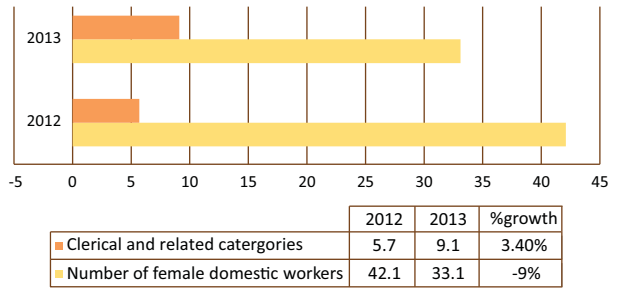
age migrating for employment as domestic workers. While the government sees the measure as beneficial from the child and family point of view, it impinges on the freedom of movement of women.

The numbers of skilled migrant workers have increased in 2013 showing signs of the Governments push to discourage domestic workers and increase migration of skilled workers.

Total Number of Persons Migrating for Employment



Skill Category of Migrant Workers



SLBFE REGISTRATION

Under the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Act No. 21 of 1985, it is required by law that all workers leaving Sri Lanka for overseas employment get registered with the SLBFE, prior to departure. For registration the following documents are required:

- Family background report certified by the Development Officer and the head of the village verifying that children are above 5 years and have a guardian- if female is seeking domestic work and Middle East-bound
- Valid passport and visa
- Pre-departure training certificate acquired at a SLBFE training centre (NVQ3 certification)
- Signed employment agreement/ contract

SLBFE SERVICES PRIOR TO PRE - DEPARTURE

Granting of Recruitment Licenses

In accordance with strict guidelines, issue of annually renewable licenses to foreign employment agents and agencies. Migrant workers are required to seek employment through these licensed foreign employment agents.

Training of prospective migrant workers

Apart from training those who are low skilled and semi-skilled, SLBFE also has programmes to promote skilled workers of different sectors by facilitating training through national institutions that are certified by the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission of Sri Lanka.

Insurance Coverage

The Videsha Rakiya Insurance Scheme is available to every Sri Lankan SLBFE-registered migrant worker.

Special Informative Programmes

Through the Divisional Secretariats, awareness and educational programmes for prospective migrant workers, their family members and the public are conducted.

Foreign Employment Approval Services

Scrutinization and endorsing employers by the SLBFE staff in Sri Lankan Embassies / High Commissions prior to granting approval for job orders by foreign recruitment agents.

Signing of Employment Agreements/Contracts

Approval and translation of employment contracts to Middle East only.

Banking Facilities within the Migrant Resource Centres

All workers are required to open savings accounts prior to departure to facilitate the safe remittance of money earned overseas. The SLBFE has provided office space to state banks to provide more convenient banking facilities for the migrant workers.

Special Investigative Services

Through its in-house special police unit, the SLBFE's legal division investigates and files action against errant recruitment agents, agencies or migrant workers.

Information Technology Services

Specific information of the migrant worker is stored on a computerized central network for efficient service delivery. This includes registration details, details on pre-departure training and details regarding a complaint lodged by the worker or their family members. The centralized system is also accessible to SLBFE officers in the Sri Lankan Diplomatic missions so they are able to verify details and take any action required.

Sahana Piyasa Relief Centre

Sahana Piyasa provides vital services to migrant workers. Most importantly, migrant workers can request compensation at SLBFE's Welfare Division if they return prior to completing the period of contract owing to illness, accident, disability or due to harassment or physical abuse.

Located in the vicinity of the Bandaranaike International Airport and the Mahinda Rajapaksa International Airport in Mattala, migrant returnees





can seek emergency assistance from the SLBFE officers at the Sahana Piyasa relief centers. Emergency money to travel home or a stay at the transit home can also be provided. Sahana Piyasa also offers a host of services to migrant workers prior to departure.

Sahana Piyasa

101 5/3, Negombo Road,
Katunayake.

Tel : +94 11 225 9341

Fax : +94 11 225 9953

Email: sahanapiyasa@slbfe.lk

SLBFE website: (www.slbfe.lk)

SLBFE information hotlines (24 Hour Service:
+94 11 287 9900 - 902)

Government Information Hotlines (1919) and
Government Website (<http://www.gic.gov.lk/>)

ENSURING WORKER'S SAFETY

SLBFE provides welfare services to those who are in need of support.

- Within Sri Lanka -Family members of migrant workers.
- Outside of Sri Lanka -Migrant workers.
- Returnees.

EVOLUTION OF PRE-DEPARTURE TRAINING

In 1994, by circular (No C/No 94/3) dated 30 June 1994, training was made compulsory for prospective migrant workers.

The initial 7-day training programme, targeting the Middle East-bound Domestic Sector workers, was not systematic and lacked a curricula. SLBFE training gradually evolved into a 12-day and 15-day training schedule. The current training for female domestic workers is conducted over a period of 21 days.

The current training also includes basic preparation for migration, an introduction to the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) and registration, making necessary arrangements for successful migration including the preparation of travel documents and social arrangements such as discussions with family members, school teachers, religious leaders and concludes with a pre-flight briefing.

TRAINING WITH A PURPOSE

Key milestones in the recent years include:

- Launch of a National Labour Migration Policy (2008),
- decentralization of SLBFE resource centres and training facilities,
- the facilitation of private recruitment agents to conduct standardized training and orientation,
- introduction of the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level III standardization system,
- introduction of an Operational Manual for Labour Sections of Sri Lankan Diplomatic Missions in Destination Countries (2013) to support migrant worker grievance handling,
- creation of a new cadre of Development Officers at the Divisional Secretariat level to complement SLBFE functions locally, and
- development of a Safe Labour Migration Information Guide (2013) to strengthen pre-departure advisory services provided by locally based Government officers.

These efforts and tools have been introduced for the protection of the island's migrant workers and to ensure they have the necessary skills and better understanding to deliver on their employment contracts.

The National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level III Trainer and Trainee Guides was developed to standardize the SLBFE's 21-day Pre-Departure Training programme aimed at the prospective migrant workers going to the Middle East (Domestic Sector). Further, 28 Functional Guides and 11 Language Guides covering English, Arabic, Hebrew, Greek, Mandarin, Cantonese and Hindi have been developed, and are available in Sinhala, Tamil and in English at the training centers.

SLBFE TRAINING PROGRAMMES FOR LOW SKILLED WORKERS

The SLBFE-initiated training programmes contain training modules on both job competencies and safe migration awareness.

COMPETENCY LEVEL

Middle East-bound domestic sector migrant workers are required to possess the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Level III.

The NVQ testing process covers six units of skills training concerning domestic accommodation units:

1. Cleaning of walls, ceilings and floors
2. Cleaning of furniture and furnishings
3. Cleaning of bathrooms and toilets
4. Household Laundry
5. Preparing of meals
6. Serving of food and beverages



PRE-REQUISITES FOR THE TRAINING

1. Candidates must possess a valid passport and National Identity Card (NIC)
2. Be physically fit and mentally prepared-attested by a medical examination certificate
3. Be able to read and write in either Sinhala or Tamil so they are able to easily follow the instructions of the training

Age restrictions:

- Domestic workers to Saudi Arabia (female) 25 years and above
- Domestic workers to other Middle Eastern Countries (female) 23 years and above
- Domestic workers to Middle East Countries (male) 21 years and above
- Workers to all other countries-21 years and above
- Those above 45 years of age require a special physical fitness test



Course Name	Country	Duration
Basic Literacy (for those who cannot read & write in their own mother tongue)	Middle East	18 days
Domestic Sector housekeeping	Middle East	21 days
Domestic sector care giving	Israel	30 days
Domestic sector housekeeping and care giving	Cypress	30 days
Orientation course (non-domestic sector)	Middle East	05 days

(SLBFE conducts training programmes at 25 locations island-wide, Private recruitment agencies deliver trainings at 13 training centres, targeting Middle Eastern countries only.)

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PRE-DEPARTURE PREPARATIONS BASED ON FEEDBACK FROM TRAINERS AND TRAINEES¹

Area	Key Findings	Key Recommendations
Use of Functional Guides	<p>Trainings were based on the Functional Guides, Language Guides and Training Modules</p> <p>Functional Guides were extensively used for training purposes. Trainers found them easy to use</p>	Instructors preferred to have detailed training modules for delivery
Instructors	Experienced and confident, however lacked formal training as instructors	Instructors should undergo regular Training of Trainers (ToT) sessions to enhance skills level and competencies
Use of Functional Guides	<p>Language Guides were popular with the Language Lab officers and trainees</p> <p>Inadequacy of time for language practice</p> <p>Allocated time inadequate to learn new languages (primarily Arabic, Hebrew and Greek)</p> <p>Trainers were guided by the Language Guides</p>	<p>Terms linked to the skills training programmes should be introduced more frequently, for example more words linked to care giving</p> <p>More time needs to be allocated to develop basic language skills</p> <p>More time is needed to develop new language skills</p> <p>Specific terms useful in the skills training should be included in the English language course</p>
Training methods	<p>Innovative methods to get the message across were not used</p> <p>Trainings are lecture-based with limited hours for practical training</p>	<p>Increase use of audio-visuals</p> <p>Introduce relevant handouts and other training material</p> <p>Increase hands-on sessions such as group work, practical sessions, role plays etc</p>
Training material	<p>The use of audio-visuals in training was minimal, however a video was used to educate trainees on sexual harassment</p> <p>No uniformity in the quality of delivery especially in the teaching of functional aspects. While most used the guides, some used their own tools, and they had their own method of delivery. Instructors used training material prepared by themselves</p>	<p>Introduce audio-visuals to enhance the quality of training</p> <p>Increase the trainees' capacity to absorb new information</p> <p>Introduce uniform training material, including handouts etc and a standardized training delivery method</p>
Course Duration	Intense training schedules	<p>Review allocated time and redesign to ensure some time for recreation</p> <p>Review course duration</p>
Migrant worker safety	<p>Trainees unaware of emergency assistance forms to be used in case of an emergency</p> <p>Specific ways in which Sri Lankan embassies/high commission can assist migrant workers unclear to trainees</p> <p>Unaware of the functions of safe houses or location/s</p> <p>Migrant worker safety has remained a key concern for Sri Lanka and should form a core area of SLBFE training programmes. This area is covered through Training Module (No 8), however, is not handled sufficiently and no practical session/role play is included in the module</p>	<p>Use specimen of the form during training</p> <p>Clarify role of Sri Lankan missions in host countries</p> <p>Explain concept, services and how to access services</p> <p>Include a module on migrant worker safety that deals with aspects of physical safety (with sufficient local examples from the past)</p> <p>Make a health and safety training module compulsory in the 21-day Housekeeping for Middle East-bound Domestic Sector workers and 5-day Orientation Course for Middle East-bound non-domestic sector workers</p> <p>Include role plays and/or show safety videos on how to seek assistance, reach safe houses</p> <p>provide contact information of embassy /high commission welfare units as a handout</p>

¹ Interviews were conducted with the Deputy General Manager – Training, Manager Training of the SLBFE. A total of 4 trainees from Ratmalana (south of Colombo) consisting of 2 care giving trainees bound for Singapore and 2 males bound for the Middle East as well as 2 female instructors. A total of 4 trainees in Tangalle (south of the country) consisting of 2 care giving trainees bound for Israel and 1 woman and 1 man migrant worker bound for the Middle East as well as 2 female instructors. All interviews were conducted in the month of December 2014.

KEY FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PRE-DEPARTURE PREPARATIONS BASED ON FEEDBACK FROM TRAINERS AND TRAINEES¹

Area	Key Findings	Key Recommendations
Family Background Report (FBR)	<p>Female trainees considered the FBR discriminatory, aimed at denying or discouraging female migration for work</p> <p>Caused practical delays in joining training programmes</p> <p>Lack of awareness among public officials regarding documents necessary for FBR issuance</p>	<p>Educate public officials about the requirement of documents</p> <p>Issuing of clearance letters by the Grama Seva Niladharis (for FBRs) should not be restricted to two days of the week</p>
Awareness Creation of Legal Systems	<p>Lecture on legal systems applicable in Middle Eastern countries is too general for the 5-day Middle East orientation course (non-domestic sector)</p> <p>Creating awareness is done through trainers sharing their personal experiences as opposed to an explanation of applicable laws</p>	<p>Create a core group of guest lecturers/SLBFE officials who previously worked at Missions etc to educate trainees on legal systems prevailing in receiving countries, mostly in the Middle East</p> <p>Work in collaboration with the Legal Aid Commission</p> <p>Explain protection mechanisms available to migrant workers, with reference to specific International Labour Organization (ILO) Conventions and other laws and regulations</p>
Explanations of safe recruitment	<p>Trainees unaware of the rating system or the importance of working with SLBFE-registered agencies</p>	<p>Educate trainees about the importance of seeking out a credible recruitment agency</p>
Understanding terms and conditions of employment	<p>Middle East-bound domestic sector trainees were unaware of weak legal protection for this specific category</p> <p>Trainees unaware of international laws and standards applicable to migrant workers</p>	<p>Discuss in detail applicable labour laws under various types of employment contracts</p> <p>Educate trainees about this aspect</p>
Training Selection - Interview process for 21-day orientation (Trainees Perspective) - Interview Process for 30-days Israel-bound care giving (Domestic Sector Course) (Trainers Perspective)	<p>Creates a bottle neck for prospective trainees. Many who face the oral interview fail the final examination</p> <p>Language proficiency (written test) includes words that are not used by prospective migrants</p> <p>The required level of English knowledge at the time of enrollment is too low</p>	<p>Consider introduction of a basic English course prior to training for those lacking higher proficiency level in English</p> <p>Simplify the language used in the written test (form-filling exercise)</p> <p>Provide additional Language support focusing more on the Foreign Agents interview process</p> <p>Set higher standards for enrollment</p>
Role and Responsibilities of SLBFE	<p>Lack of clarity among trainees about the processing of documents, selection of a reliable recruitment agency and specific services, including welfare, offered by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE)</p> <p>Trainees unaware of the agency rating system and the benefit of seeking employment through SLBFE-registered agency</p>	<p>Discuss SLBFE-offered services during training sessions, including welfare measures</p> <p>Use of videos, including short videos of successful migrant returnees who have received benefits through SLBFE services. Provide testimonials from recently returned migrants</p> <p>Explain agency rating system that the SLBFE is currently using for the Star awards system</p>

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