

# Promoting decent work for women and men migrant workers from Sri Lanka



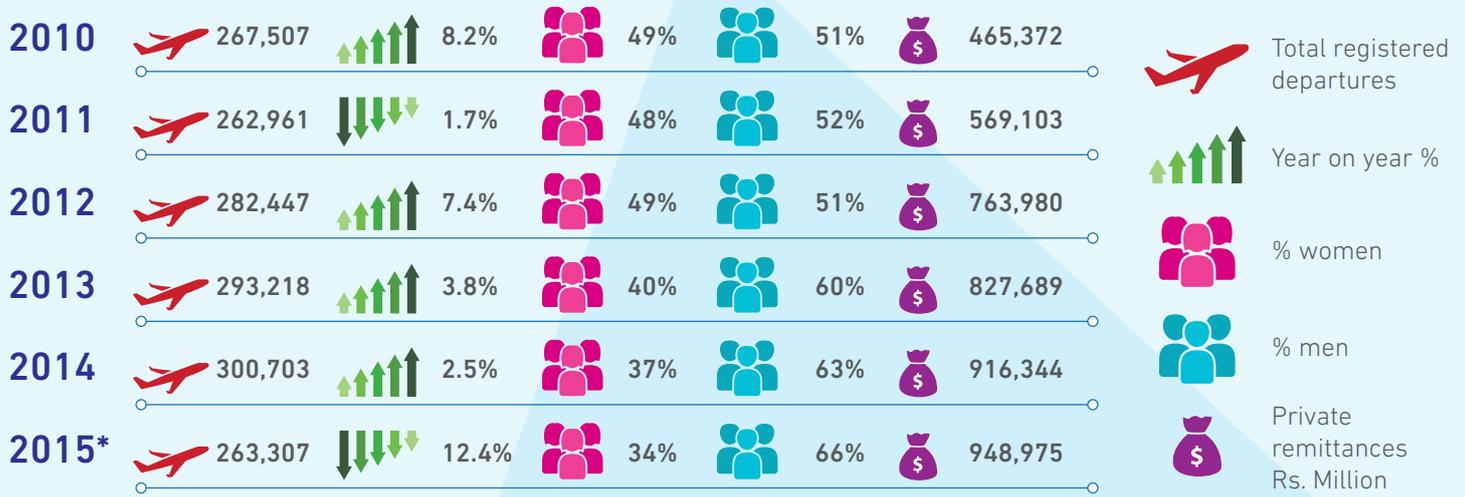
International  
Labour  
Organization



## Profile of Labour Migration in Sri Lanka

Labour migration makes a considerable contribution to the growth and development of Sri Lanka. It continues to be an important and essential means to reduce domestic employment pressures, and has been a major source of foreign exchange for the Sri Lankan economy for nearly four decades. Over the past five years there has been a steady increase in the annual number of migrant workers deployed and the remittances received from abroad. Several factors contribute to the growing numbers including the search for better paying jobs, poverty, climate change, natural disasters, conflict and social factors.

However, more recently the economic downturn and labour market reforms in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries has led to a deceleration in the aggregate demand across major oil and other commodity exporting countries. At the same time, Sri Lankan regulations have stemmed the outflow of females migrating for domestic work. These trends are changing the nature of migration and its contribution to growth and development in Sri Lanka.



\*SLBFE Statistics 2015

The departure numbers have been on the increase since 2011, however a considerable drop is shown in 2015, which shows a reduction by 12.4 per cent from the previous years' departures. There is a downward trend of departures to the four GCC countries that receive the highest numbers of Sri Lankan workers. This reflects the reduction of female domestic workers departing to the Middle East, as well as a diversification of countries of destination.

The Central Bank Annual Report also indicates a decrease in total departures to Middle Eastern countries by **13.5% to 242,431 in 2015.**



\*SLBFE Statistics 2015

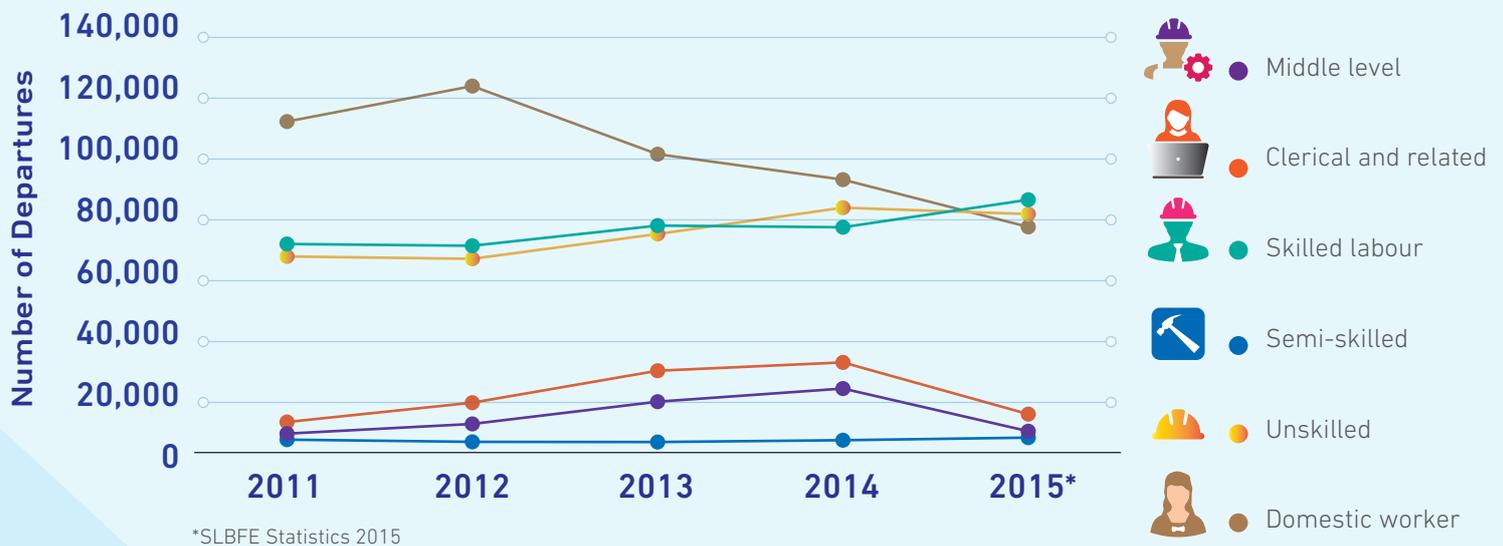
The policy of the Government has been to shift the profile of Sri Lanka's migrant workers from low-skilled to semi-skilled and skilled workforce to improve incomes and working conditions. In 2015, there was an increase in the number of professional, skilled and semi-skilled workers, but a drop in clerical and middle-level workers – reversing a growth trend seen since 2011.

The introduction of the Family Background Report (FBR) in 2013 sought to restrict foreign employment for female domestic workers who had children under 5 years of age, and ensure the welfare of children over 5 years of age for females seeking to work in the domestic labour market. The FBR contributed to a

drastic drop in the numbers of registered migrant female domestic workers departing Sri Lanka.

There have been several Government efforts to upgrade the skills of migrant workers. The curricula at pre-departure orientation centres for female domestic workers (40 days) and low and semi-skilled male workers (5 days) is now standardized and is being conducted at National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) level 3, certified by the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) of the Ministry of Skills Development and Vocational Training. Prospective workers receive a certificate confirming their skills levels to be a minimum of NVQ3 and also have the facility for Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) before departure as well as skills upgrading upon return.

The 2015 annual report of the Central Bank indicates an increase in the departures among the following skills categories: 'Professional', 'Skilled labour' and 'Semi-skilled labour', and a decline in all other skill categories.



Sri Lanka's National Labour Migration Policy (NLMP) has been a model for other countries in the region. The NLMP was approved by the Cabinet in 2009, and implementation is overseen by a National Labour Migration Advisory Committee, chaired by the Minister of Foreign Employment, with support from the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) and other line ministries and agencies. The rights-based policy was developed through broad consultation among government, social partners, civil society organizations, recruitment agencies and others. It draws on the ILO Multilateral Framework on Labour Migration.

In 2012, the Cabinet also approved a Migrant Health Policy which addresses health aspects of internal, in-bound and out-bound migrants and their families left behind in Sri Lanka. Then in 2015, the Ministry of Foreign Employment launched a sub-policy and National Plan of Action on Return and Reintegration of Sri Lankan Migrant Workers.

Sri Lanka plays a key role in the region especially in Regional Consultative Processes (RCPs) as Chair of the Colombo Process since 2013 and with its recent appointment as Chair of the Abu Dhabi Dialogues in 2016.

The International Labour Organization (ILO) has been providing technical cooperation to the Government, social partners, civil society, the recruitment agency association and other stakeholders to implement the NLMP since December 2010, with support from the Government of Switzerland.

Phases I and II of the Project on "Promoting decent work through good governance, protection and empowerment of migrant workers: Ensuring the effective implementation of the Sri Lanka National Labour Migration Policy" were implemented from December 2010 to December 2015.

The current third phase of the project (2016- 2020) builds on the work carried out in the previous phases and seeks to develop new guidelines, mechanisms and tools under the three overarching NLMP themes of governance, protection and empowerment of migrant workers and harnessing the development impact of migration. The project aims to further improve the policy, legislative and regulatory frameworks and processes that govern labour migration in Sri Lanka to reflect and respond to the changing context.

The ILO is also working to enhance recognition of skills to reduce vulnerabilities of Sri Lankan construction workers in selected GCC Countries as part of the International Organization of Migration's (IOM) regional project on "Strengthening governance on labour migration among Colombo Process Countries" supported by Government of Switzerland. The project is assisting Sri Lanka's participation in the United Arab Emirates (UAE) Skills Pilot under the Abu Dhabi Dialogue (ADD) framework, and enhancing the skills of migrant construction workers in Sri Lanka.

These projects contribute to the Decent Work Country Programme in Sri Lanka, and the specific outcome on "Policies and programmes in place to better govern labour migration, particularly for reintegration and prevention of trafficking of persons in place".



The ILO also aims to link these efforts in Sri Lanka to regional and global processes. The documentation and sharing of Sri Lanka's experience is important to strengthen the dialogue on, and governance of, labour migration in the region and beyond. On a number of issues, Sri Lanka has been innovative, progressive and also put itself forward as a regional leader.

**The ILO will facilitate Sri Lanka's contribution towards regional and global discourse on migrant workers through:**

- Showcasing the Sri Lankan experience in regional and global dialogues
- Supporting the Government to monitor and report on progress towards realising the Sustainable Development Goal targets, specifically targets 8.7, 8.8 and 10.7
- Supporting the Government on periodic reporting required by international and ILO Conventions
- Policy briefs that incorporate Sri Lanka's experience and thematic areas of interest for Sri Lankan constituents and partners

**There is interest from other countries in the Asia-Pacific region to draw on Sri Lanka's experience on:**

- The adoption and implementation of the National Labour Migration Policy
- Government operated pre-departure orientation and training
- Insurance and welfare programmes, including a pension scheme for migrant workers
- Return and reintegration services and programmes
- Ratification and reporting on international instruments on labour migration
- Complaints handling mechanisms, including grievance referral systems and mediation boards

Supporting Sri Lanka's contribution and engagement in national, regional and global discourse on migrant workers, including:



Contact Information:  
**Swairee Rupasinghe**  
 National Project Coordinator - Labour Migration  
**ILO Country office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives**  
 202-204, Baudhaloka Mawatha, Colombo 07.  
 Tel: 0112592525 ext. 2213  
 Fax: 0112500865  
 Email: [rupasinghe@ilo.org](mailto:rupasinghe@ilo.org)  
 Website: <http://www.ilo.org/colombo>

Supported by  
 Schweizerische Eidgenossenschaft  
 Confédération suisse  
 Confederazione Svizzera  
 Confederaziun svizra  
**Embassy of Switzerland**

Help make Decent Work for All a reality! Follow the ILO on social media

