



Youth Employment Policy Summary

SRI LANKA



International
Labour
Organization

Background Figures:

Total population:
20.8 million (2016)¹

Youth population (% total):
3.2 million (2014);
15.0%²

GDP (USD\$): 82.3 billion (2015)³

GDP growth: 4.8 per cent (2015)³

Urban-rural breakdown:
18.4/81.6 per cent (2015)⁴

Net migration rate (per 1000):
-3.0 (2010-2015)⁴

Employment by sector:
39.4 agriculture; 17.7 industry; 41.5 services (2012)⁵

% earning less than \$2/day:
23.9 (2010)⁵

Source:
1. Worldometers
2. ILOSTAT;
3. World Bank
4. UNESCAP
5. KILM



Source: Infoplease.com

Labour Market Situation of Young People

Following the end of Sri Lanka's 25 year civil war in 2009, the country has witnessed steady economic growth, registering at 4.8 per cent in 2015. In its attempt to rebuild, Sri Lanka has emphasised social inclusion and employment promotion and has focused on the education and training of young people. Compared to other countries in the region, the secondary school enrolment rate is high (85.4 per cent), although its tertiary enrolment is low at 17.0 per cent in 2012.

A significant challenge facing youth is their high unemployment rate, which was 20.1 per cent in 2013, compared to the 2.1 per cent adult unemployment rate. Moreover, young women were almost twice as likely to be unemployed than young men, at 24.0 and 14.1 per cent, respectively. To respond, the Government has adopted different policies to ensure a better match between supply and demand, enhance social protection and anti-discrimination measures, improve labour market information and strengthen public employment services.

In 2014 Sri Lanka hosted the World Conference on youth to explore mechanisms to mainstream youth concerns into the Post-2015 Development Agenda, culminating the [Colombo Declaration](#) which outlines recommendations concerning inclusive youth-led development, poverty eradication for youth, gender equality and a range of other issues critical for youth empowerment. The Government of Sri Lanka also used the opportunity to pledge for the creation of one million jobs for youth, indicating its strong commitment to developing strong labour market policies supporting youth. This was further reinforced in 2016 with ratification of The Employment Policy Convention, 1964 (No.122).

Table 1: Youth Employment Indicators

Indicator	%
Labour Force Participation Rate, ages 25+ (2013) ¹	58.8
Youth Labour Force Participation Rate, ages 15-24 (2013) ¹	35.2
Youth Unemployment Rate (2013) ²	20.1
Youth Unemployment Rate in South Asia Subregion (2016) ³	10.9
Enrolment in secondary education (2011) ⁴	85.4
Enrolment in tertiary education (2012) ⁴	17.0

Source: 1. ILOSTAT; 2. KILM; 3. ILO 2016, WESO; 4. UNESCAP

Youth Employment Policy Approach

Sri Lanka's youth policies fit within the country's broader spectrum of employment and development strategies which seek to address inequalities, social inclusion and promote decent work. Sri Lanka's approach to youth employment covers interventions ranging across sectoral policy, enterprise development, education and training and labour market policy. Through its [2007 National Action Plan on Youth Employment](#) and the [2014 National Youth Policy](#), the Government promotes the four "e"s of equal opportunity, employment creation, employability and entrepreneurship. It seeks to support social cohesion among its diverse society, challenge discrimination and have youth become independent and responsible members of their community. Both the Action Plan and Youth Policy have been updated and aligned with 2014 World Youth Conference Colombo Declaration. Through different interventions, youth are targeted as a vulnerable group, along with different sub-groups of the youth population. These include the unemployed, those from war-affected communities, young widows, ex-combatants and those from the Tamil minority. Youth are defined as those between 15 and 29 years of age.

Policy and Legal Measures

Macroeconomic and Sectoral Policy: Sri Lanka's [Human Resources and Employment Policy \(HREP\)](#) and its [National Development Strategy](#) focus on attracting youth to particular sectors, namely the **fish industry, agriculture, information and communication technologies and tourism**. The agricultural sector will also combine vocational training with entrepreneurship skills to attract young people, particularly rural women. Educated young women are targeted in tourism, health services and ICT.

Enterprise Development: Young people are encouraged to start their own business through various incentives. The [National Action Plan on Youth Employment \(NAPYE\)](#) will lobby for **exemptions from labour and tax regulations** during the start-up phase and aims to introduce a special social safety net for young entrepreneurs. In addition, a special start-up fund will be created to support those in their first-time cooperative ventures and they will receive special mentoring. **Mentoring** is also mentioned in the [National Youth Policy](#) which will be established through the regional Chambers of Commerce to help promote entrepreneurship. The [NAPYE](#) also mentions creating a nation-wide entrepreneurship network for young people to provide them with a strong social capital base.

The school system is targeted to promote an **entrepreneurial culture** and to provide training in entrepreneurship skills. The [NAPYE](#) will pilot-test entrepreneurship modules in the school curricula and will streamline entrepreneurship training courses for different youth groups, such as young women, the disabled, young offenders, etc. It will also implement a national **media campaign** to show that entrepreneurship is a realistic career path and instil the values of socially responsible forms of entrepreneurship.

Documents containing youth employment policy provisions:

- National Youth Policy Sri Lanka 2014
- National Human Resources and Employment Policy 2012 (HREP)
- National Enterprise Policy, 2009
- Sri Lanka Qualifications Framework 2012
- Sri Lanka: The Emerging Wonder of Asia, Mahinda Chintana Vision for the Future (National Development Strategy)
- Employment of Trainees Act 1978
- Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Act 1956
- National Action Plan for Youth Employment 2007 (NAPYE)

For more information on the policy documents and their provisions, please visit the [YouthPOL webpage](#).

Education and Training: The emphasis of the country's TVET provisions revolve around decreasing the skills mismatch and meeting the skills needs of the labour market. **Public-private partnerships** are encouraged in curriculum development to ensure a better match between supply and demand ([HREP](#)). Each province will operate a College of Technology to provide the necessary demand-driven diplomas ([National Development Strategy](#)). The [National Youth Policy](#) also calls for the improvement of non-formal education for out-of-school youth through alternative training options and the inclusion of soft skills training at all levels of training and education. Youth in conflict areas will receive **scholarships** for education and training ([NAPYE](#)).

Did you know?

Sri Lanka has ratified 41 ILO Conventions, including 8 Fundamental and 2 Priority Conventions:

Fundamental Conventions:

- Forced Labour Convention (No. 29)
- Freedom of Association and Right to Protection of the Right to Organise Convention (No. 87)
- Right to Organise and Collective Bargaining Convention (No. 98)
- Equal Remuneration Convention (No. 100)
- Abolition of Forced Labour Convention (No. 105)
- Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) (No.111)
- Minimum Age Convention (No. 138)
- Worst Forms of Child Labour Convention (No. 182)

Priority Conventions:

- Labour Inspection Convention (No. 81)
- Tripartite Consultation Convention (No. 144).

Sri Lanka has put great emphasis on **career education and career guidance**, including through linking to potential employers. Career guidance programmes are designed to take into account different backgrounds and characteristics of youth, i.e. those from conflict areas, women, etc. ([NAPYE](#)). Career guidance is mandatory in schools at the O and A levels and for all school leavers. At the university level and at vocational training institutes, the capacity of career guidance units will be increased and special focus will be placed on female graduates ([HREP](#)). The [National Development Strategy](#) mentions the establishment of **Market Intelligence Units** in universities which collaborate with the private sector and collect information about their labour needs ensure a match between demand and supply.

Youth affected by the conflict, as well as early school leavers and drop-outs, will be prioritised in the provision of **apprenticeships** ([NAPYE](#)). In addition, the [HREP](#) aims to improve the apprenticeship schemes and introduce new schemes in an effort to meet the needs of the labour market. In terms of work experience, the [NAPYE](#) will pilot test **internships and trainee programmes** during “gap” periods after exams, and also will support internships in rural areas to decrease rural/urban disparities. Part-time work in the vocational training sector as well as in public sector offices and private companies during secondary school is mentioned in the [HREP](#) and [NAPYE](#).

Sri Lanka has a **National Qualification Framework** for recognising and accrediting qualifications and will develop vocational qualification standards that will be at the same level with international standards. It aims to enter into bilateral agreements through Mutual Recognition of Qualification Agreements to facilitate access to the international labour market ([Sri Lanka Qualifications](#)

[Framework](#)). In terms of **recognition of prior learning**, the [HREP](#) aims to develop formal recognition of skills gained abroad by migrants.

Labour Law and Legislation: Regarding conditions of work and working arrangements as set out in the [Employment of Women, Young People and Children Act](#), a young person under 18 cannot be **employed at night**. The exception is for young men between 16 and 18, for the purpose of vocational training or apprenticeship and with the approval of the Minister. He must then receive a rest period of 13 hours between two working periods. No worker under 18 can be

employed in **hazardous conditions**. There are particular contractual arrangements for the **employment of trainees** in the private sector, for purposes of vocational training. Their contracts may not exceed one year in duration, the normal workweek will be 45 hours/9 hours per day and any overtime is paid 1.5 times the normal rate ([Employment of Trainees Act](#)). The [NAPYE](#) mentions reviewing circulars and codes in the public sector which can contribute to gender **discriminatory practices** and lobbying for equal career opportunities for young women.

Labour Market Policies: Regarding labour market policies, the collection of **labour market information** will be improved and disseminated in Sinhala and Tamil and distributed to universities and vocational training institutions. **JobsNet** information centres will provide improved counselling and job placement programmes. The [HREP](#) targets early school leavers and drop-outs who are in the informal sector by providing them with subsidized vocational training. In addition, the *Policy* establishes **once-stop career centres** to give employment-related services such as information on training, career counselling and planning. Career guidance services will be strengthened, partly through the increased involvement of industry and private and public sector employers. In terms of **positive action**, a quota will be introduced in the public sector to guarantee the recruitment of a certain percentage of young people. There will also be a pilot project for the inclusion of disabled youth in private sector companies and government agencies ([NAPYE](#)).

The [Human Resource and Employment Policy](#) calls for the establishment of a “social protection floor” which will provide access to health care, income security and income support to vulnerable populations. It also calls for the negotiation, through collective bargaining, of a sectoral **minimum wage**, taking into account the skills level of the workers. The [NAPYE](#) supports reforming labour laws to enhance social protection of youth, including through unemployment benefits and a better social safety net for young entrepreneurs.

Structure of Governance and Main Actors

Several actors are involved in the formulation and delivery of youth-related policies, including youth themselves. The **Ministry of Youth Affairs and Skills Development** has responsibilities covering social inclusion, entrepreneurship promotion, vocational education and training and implementing the *National Youth Policy*. The *National Youth Policy* also established an inter-ministerial “**Presidential Youth Development Commission**” in charge of implementation and monitoring of the *NYP*, and also promotes research and development. Sri Lanka’s **Ministry of Labour and Labour Relations**, and in particular the Department of Labour, monitors conditions of work and provides labour market information and statistics. Other relevant actors include the **Entrepreneurship Task Force, the Ministry of Social Services and the Ministry of Education**.

References:

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- ILO YouthPOL eAnalysis 2015, contains information with analysis of policy documents.
- ILO, 2016. *World Employment Social Outlook: Trends for Youth 2016*.
- UNESCAP, 2014. Statistical Yearbook for Asia and the Pacific.
- World Bank, 2015. World Development Indicators.

Source: www.ou.ac.lk

