

# SRI LANKA MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT

National  
Assessment  
Report

November

**2023**



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**2023**

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# CONTENTS

ABBREVIATIONS .....	03
1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY .....	04
1.1 Background and Context .....	04-05
1.2 Humanitarian Issues and Risks .....	05-06
1.3 Recommendations .....	06-08
2 INTRODUCTION .....	09
2.1 Purpose of the Assessment .....	09
2.2 The RCRC Approach to Migration and Displacement .....	09
2.3 Overview of Sri Lanka Red Cross Society .....	10
2.4 Methodology .....	11
3 OUTBOUND MIGRATION .....	12
3.1 Labour Migration From Sri Lanka .....	12-16
3.2 Irregular Migration by Sea .....	16-17
3.3 Conflict Induced Migration .....	17-18
3.4 Student Migration .....	18
3.5 Labour Migration Trends .....	18-21
3.6 Drivers of Outbound Migration .....	21-25
4 INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT .....	26
4.1 Conflict Induced Displacements .....	26
4.2 Disaster and Climate Induced Displacements .....	27
5 INBOUND MIGRATION .....	28
5.1 Inbound Labour Migration .....	28
5.2 Refugees and Asylum Seekers .....	28-29
5.3 Migrants in Detention and Deported .....	29
6 NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS .....	30-33
7 NATIONAL SOCIETY CAPACITY .....	34-36
8 HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES .....	37
8.1 Outbound Migration- Risks and Vulnerabilities .....	37-43
8.2 Internal Displacement – Risks and Vulnerabilities .....	43-47
8.3 Inbound Migration- Risks and Vulnerabilities .....	47-48



9	KEY FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT .....	49
9.1	Stakeholders .....	49
9.2	Geographical Hotspots.....	49-50
9.3	Outbound Migration .....	50-52
9.4	Intenal Displacement .....	53
9.5	Inbound Migration.....	53-54
10	RECOMMENDATIONS.....	55
10.1	Policy, Strategy and Structure .....	55-58
10.2	Partnerships, Networking and Collaboration .....	59-60
10.3	Tools and Guidelines Development.....	61-64
10.4	Recommendations for District Branches .....	65-66
10.5	Recommendations for IFRC .....	67
11	AUTHORSHIP AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS.....	68
12	ANNEX 1- REFERENCES .....	69-73

# CONTENTS

BDRT	:	Branch Disaster Response Team
CBSL	:	Central Bank of Sri Lanka
CEA	:	Community Engagement and Accountability
CGB	:	Central Governing Board
DFAT	:	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DIE	:	Department of Immigration and Emigration
DCS	:	Department of Census and Statistics
DM	:	Disaster Management
DMC	:	Disaster Management Centre
FBR	:	Family Background Report
FCDO	:	UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
FDWs	:	Female Domestic Workers
FGD	:	Focus Group Discussions
GoSL	:	Government of Sri Lanka
ICRC	:	International Committee of the Red Cross
IDP	:	Internally Displaced People
IFRC	:	International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies
IDMC	:	Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre
IOM	:	International Organization for Migration
ILO	:	International Labour Organisation
IPS	:	Institute for Policy Studies
KII	:	Key Informant Interviews
NHQ	:	National Head Quarters
MHPSS	:	Mental health and psychosocial support
MENA	:	Middle East and North Africa
NAHTTF	:	National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force
PFA	:	Psychological First Aid
PGI	:	Protection, Gender and Inclusion
PSS	:	Psychosocial Support
RFL	:	Restoring Family Links
RCRC	:	Red Cross and Red Crescent
SDG	:	Sustainable Development Goals
SGBV	:	Sexual and Gender-Based Violence
SLBFE	:	Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment
SLRCS	:	Sri Lanka Red Cross Society
TIP	:	Trafficking in Person
UNDP	:	United Nations Development Programmes
UNHCR	:	United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees
UNOCHA	:	United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
WASH	:	Water Sanitation and Hygiene
WFP	:	World Food Programme

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## 1.1 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

Sri Lanka boasts a total estimated population of 22.156 million people, organized into nine provinces and 25 administrative districts. Notably, there are approximately 1.7 million outbound migrant workers registered with Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE). However, this number could be higher, reaching up to two million when considering unregistered workers engaged in short-term job contracts with the intention of returning to Sri Lanka. About one million migrants have established permanent residency in other parts of the world, predominantly in the Americas, Europe, and Australasia.

The outbound migrations take various forms, including regular labour migration, which encompasses the human capital flight, as well as irregular migration, such as forced labour and Trafficking in Persons (TIP). Additionally, there is migration by sea, often facilitated by traffickers and smugglers, along with conflict-induced migration, particularly spanning from 1983 to 2009. This period includes the current Sri Lankan refugee population in India.

It is noteworthy that Sri Lanka experienced a significant surge in outbound labour migration in 2022, issuing over 870,000 passports and recording 311,000 registered migrant worker departures, marking a historical high. Among various labour migration categories, Female Domestic Workers (FDWs), especially those employed in the Middle East, have faced a multitude of humanitarian issues. The implementation of the Family Background Report (FBR) regulation in 2013, primarily targeting FDWs, has resulted in an increased female irregular migration facilitated by traffickers and smugglers.

In addition to outbound migration, Sri Lanka grapples with internal displacement, primarily attributed to natural disasters and conflicts. The three-decade-long civil conflict led to the displacement of approximately 400,000 people. Furthermore, an average of about 100,000 people are displaced due to natural disasters annually.

Additionally, Sri Lanka hosts a relatively small number of refugees and asylum seekers, including 504 refugees, 221 asylum seekers, and 36 stateless individuals. There is an observed upward trend in inbound labour migration to Sri Lanka, primarily in the context of donor-funded projects.

This assessment provides a detailed account of humanitarian issues, risks, and vulnerabilities, offering an analysis of the strengths and challenges of the Sri Lanka Red Cross Society (SLRCS) in relation to various forms of migration and displacement. It also presents recommendations to help shape strategic priorities of the SLRCS in alignment with Red Cross Red Crescent (RCRC) Movement priorities.

This assessment report comprises an analysis and recommendations derived from an extensive literature review, key informant interviews (KIIs), and focus group discussions (FGDs) involving 43 respondents at the national level and across six districts, encompassing the Plantation Sector, North and East, as well as urban and rural areas of Sri Lanka.

## 1.2 HUMANITARIAN ISSUES AND RISKS

The assessment found that number of humanitarian issues and risks arising from outbound migration including impacts on families at home in Sri Lanka, internal displacements and refugees and asylum seeker crisis.

### 1.2.1 OUTBOUND MIGRATION

The assessment reported that potential migrants, especially low-skilled and semi-skilled labour workers, lack awareness of immigration and emigration procedures. Exploitative working conditions are prevalent, including long hours, low wages, and abuse, affecting both regular and trafficked or smuggled migrant workers. Isolation within workplaces and accommodations restricts interaction and mobility, exacerbating vulnerability. Legal protections are lacking and language barriers impede workers' awareness of their rights. Health and safety risks, dangerous journeys, debt bondage, social and emotional challenges, racial discrimination, inadequate grievance mechanisms, and connectivity issues further compound the risks associated with outbound migration.

In addition, female migrants, particularly those in low-skilled sectors like domestic work in the Middle East, face severe risks due to exploitative working conditions, abuse, the kafala system which ties a worker's legal status to their employer, health and safety hazards, communication barriers, and limited access to support services. Isolation from family and support networks amplifies these risks, hindering the reporting of abuse or exploitation and making them less aware of available support services. These vulnerabilities are exacerbated by their unfamiliar surroundings and challenges associated with their work.

When parents migrate for work, leaving their children, girls, and elderly family members behind, numerous risks and vulnerabilities arise. School children are typically cared for by grandparents, but these caregivers may struggle to effectively monitor and care for the children, resulting in various family challenges. Grandparentled migrant households often face inadequate meals, disorder, and academic difficulties among children, some missing schools. Teenage girls, especially, face increased vulnerability to exploitation and abuse due to insufficient supervision, raising concerns about sexual exploitation. In some instances, consensual involvement may lead to pregnancies. Guardians, especially fathers, play a crucial role, but some may neglect their parental duties, mishandling remittances and spending on non-essentials, ultimately impacting the well-being and proper upbringing of the children left in their care. This problem is compounded by a lack of proper education, affecting their financial management skills.



The human capital flight or brain drain has severe consequences, particularly in healthcare, with doctors and medical professionals leaving, leading to shortages and negatively impacting the quality and accessibility of healthcare. This places a heavier workload on remaining healthcare workers, increasing their stress and potentially causing delays in medical treatment leading to higher mortality rates.

### **1.2.2 INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT**

Conflict-induced displacement posed multifaceted challenges, including the housing shortages demanding repairs and reconstruction, livelihood setbacks, health concerns with a focus on malnutrition among children and inadequate healthcare, and the profound psychosocial impact on individuals marked by trauma, stress, and anxiety. Vulnerabilities extend to protection issues, particularly for women and children, who face risks of exploitation such as human trafficking and sexual abuse. Additional humanitarian challenges encompass family separation, return and resettlement obstacles, land and property disputes, and the complex long-term reintegration into communities altered by prolonged displacement.

Disaster-induced displacements are characterized by critical housing damage, overcrowded evacuation centers with privacy and health challenges, sanitation issues, the risk of vector-borne diseases, food security concerns, and disrupted livelihoods. The situation amplifies protection, gender, and inclusion issues, with previous experiences revealing the erosion of social norms and family support systems during emergencies, resulting in incidents of domestic violence, sexual and gender-based violence, as well as child protection concerns within evacuation camps.

### **1.2.3 REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS**

Refugees and asylum seekers face range of risks and vulnerabilities. They face protection risks such as exploitation, abuse, human trafficking, and discrimination during their journey. Upon arrival, they face limited access to basic services, including inadequate healthcare and housing, exposing them to diseases, malnutrition, and mental health challenges. Prolonged detention due to irregular migration status contributes to anxiety and stress. Refugee children particularly unaccompanied minors face significant protection risks, they often lack access to quality education, impacting their long-term development. Legal issues and resettlement challenges in Sri Lanka create uncertainty and obstacles. Tensions between refugees and host communities reported in the past resulted in xenophobia and discrimination. Cultural and language barriers, gender-based vulnerabilities, and the inability to maintain family contacts further compound the challenges.

## **1.3 RECOMMENDATIONS**

Recommendations from this assessment are provided in the form of action points directed towards the National Society, while also encompassing the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies (IFRC). RCRC Movement partners can play a significant role in implementing these actions, which are outlined below.



1. Position the Migration and Displacement portfolio within SLRCS and advocate for its integration into other policies, strategies, and plans through internal advocacy.
2. Utilize the assessment findings to integrate Migration and Displacement into SLRCS's Organizational Strategy.
3. Develop an operational strategy and robust annual operational plans for Migration and Displacement.
4. Establish a Technical Working Group (TWG) for Migration and Displacement and advocate for its upgrade as a subcommittee appointed by the President, recognized by the Central Governing Board (CGB).
5. Develop an SLRCS Migration and Displacement Policy to guide staff and volunteers, aligning with the RCRC Movement's approaches and IFRC Policy on Migration.
6. Position the Migration and Displacement units and the focal point within the approved SLRCS organizational structure to formally recognize its' position within the minimum basic structure as to give due recognition.
7. In the absence of UNHCR, foster stronger partnerships with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) and the International Labour Organization (ILO) as these two agencies are active and implement projects together with local partner organizations related to Migration across Sri Lanka.
8. Build stronger and quality relationships at the highest levels with key Government Agencies engaged in Migration and Displacement.
9. Enhance relationships with stakeholders at national level, including UN, NGOs, and donor agencies.



10. Provide technical support and guidance for effective integration of migration across thematic areas.
11. Integrate Protection Gender Inclusion (PGI) and Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA).
12. Develop and adopt knowledge products for knowledge management to raise awareness and capacity-building.
13. Offer training and capacity building in local languages to enhance the capacity of staff and volunteers.
14. Conduct scenario building and contingency planning to analyze trends and build future scenarios.
15. Strengthen collaboration with government offices, local NGOs, and Community-Based Organizations (CBOs).
16. Enhance community resilience and coping strategies for the most vulnerable groups of migrant families.
17. Create awareness about the migration process, consequences, and its impact on family members, including collaboration with school authorities and public health officers to provide sexual education to children.
18. Recommendations to IFRC for capacity building, regional cooperation, and technical support.

## 2. INTRODUCTION

The SLRCS, in collaboration with the IFRC and the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), has a history of providing humanitarian assistance during population movement crises, including those caused by conflict, natural disasters, and economic migration. To further enhance its preparedness and response to such migration crises, the SLRCS aims to establish a dedicated Migration unit with a focal point and expand the scope of its portfolio to provide services for a wide range of humanitarian issues arising from migration and displacement in Sri Lanka.

### 2.1 PURPOSE OF THE ASSESSMENT

The IFRC Asia Pacific regional office, in collaboration with SLRCS, initiated this comprehensive assessment to gain an in depth understanding of Sri Lanka's Migration and Displacement landscape. This understanding is crucial for informed decision-making by SLRCS and the IFRC, focusing on supporting migrants and host communities in the country. The assessment's findings and recommendations will underpin the development of a comprehensive work plan for Migration and Displacement activities in Sri Lanka. The primary objectives are to comprehend the consequences and humanitarian needs related to Migration and Displacement, identify key stakeholders, assess SLRCS's current capacities, explore opportunities to strengthen its role, and consider how RCRC Movement partners can enhance SLRCS's ability to assist, protect, and advocate for migrants and displaced people.

### 2.2 THE RCRC APPROACH TO MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT

The SLRCS, IFRC, and the ICRC, as components of the International RCRC Movement, are committed to protecting, assisting and advocating for individuals and communities affected by Migration and Displacement.

The RCRC Movement's approach is strictly humanitarian, focusing on the needs, vulnerabilities and potential of migrants, irrespective of their legal status<sup>1</sup>. National Societies support a diverse variety of people affected by Migration and Displacement including refugees, Internally Displaced People (IDPs), migrant workers, stateless migrants, people who have been trafficked, the families and communities of migrants and the communities who host migrants. National Societies work with people at all stages of a person's migratory or displacement experience - before migrating, during their journey and upon return. The overarching goal of the IFRC Global Strategy on Migration is that "At all stages of their journeys, and irrespective of their legal status, migrants find Red Cross and Red Crescent National Societies that help them in times of need, enhance their resilience, and advocate for their rights."

<sup>1</sup> IFRC's description of 'migrants' is deliberately broad in order to capture the full extent of humanitarian concerns related to migration. This includes all types of migrants such as labour migrants, stateless migrants, and migrants deemed irregular by public authorities as well as refugees and asylum seekers. Nonetheless, the Movement recognises the special protection of refugees and asylum seekers under international law.

## 2.3 OVERVIEW OF SRI LANKA RED CROSS SOCIETY

The SLRCS, with roots dating back to 1936, has undergone significant evolution. Originally established as a branch of the British Red Cross and later becoming the Ceylon Red Cross Society, it obtained its legal status from a Royal Charter in 1951. In 1951, the SLRCS was recognized as a charitable organization through a Finance Ministry gazette notification and was acknowledged by the ICRC and the IFRC in 1952. Sri Lankan government constitutional changes in 1972 and 1978 allowed for the continued existence of Royal Charters and Ordinances.

Led by the Director General (DG), the current SLRCS National Headquarters (NHQ) is structured with key units, including Disaster Management (DM), Health, National Society Development (NDS), Humanitarian Values (HV), and Communication. The SLRCS extends its humanitarian efforts across all 25 administrative districts, operating through 25 district branches. Each branch is under the leadership of a Branch Executive Officer (BEO) and is supplemented with additional staff as needed for district-level activities and projects.

### 2.3.1 SLRCS ENGAGEMENT ON MIGRATION AND DISPLACEMENT

SLRCS has an Assistant Programme Manager, Restoring Family Links (RFL) / Migration who collaborates effectively with the IFRC and ICRC. He is also a member of the Asia Pacific Migration Network. During the COVID-19 response from 2020 to 2022, SLRCS provided humanitarian services to affected migrant workers who were stranded in other countries as well as for returnees. SLRCS has a history of assisting IDPs in natural disaster and conflict situations, including those affected by conflict in the North and East through a large-scale humanitarian operation supported by Movement partners and the IFRC Emergency Appeal Operation in 2012<sup>2</sup>. Supported by IFRC, SLRCS conducted an emergency response operation in 2023, assisting 105 Myanmar refugees, in collaboration with various governmental and non-governmental organizations<sup>3</sup>.

SLRCS has been involved in RFL services for over 30 years, addressing humanitarian issues caused by migration, disasters, and emergencies. These services extend to various groups, including conflict-affected populations, refugees, migrant workers, and vulnerable groups. The ICRC has provided support to strengthen RFL efforts of the SLRCS and its district branches across the country.

SLRCS and its district branches maintain strong relationships with local government authorities and relevant organizations, including SLBFE, UNHCR, IOM, ILO, and others, to provide humanitarian services to migrants.

<sup>2</sup>Divisional Secretariat is the sub district level central government administrative unit. The Migration & Development Officers appointed by the Ministry of Foreign Employment and Labour attached to 331 DS offices in Sri Lanka coordinate matters related to labour migration within the sub district.

<sup>3</sup>District Secretariat is the central government administrative unit. Each office employs a Migration and Development officer who coordinates matters related to labour migration in the district.

## 2.4 METHODOLOGY

The assessment employed qualitative research tools, including an extensive desk review of over 90 diverse sources, Key Informant Interviews (KIIs), and Focus Group Discussions (FGDs). An assessment design matrix was developed with input from SLRCS and IFRC, serving as a framework for to develop key inquiry questions to help a comprehensive analysis of Migration and Displacement in Sri Lanka. The desk review included collecting quantitative data from sources like SLBFE, Department of Census and Statistics (DCS), Central Bank of Sri Lanka (CBSL), Department of Immigration and Emigration (DIE), Institute for Policy Studies (IPS), UNHCR, and Internal Displacement Monitoring Centre (IDMC), and was supplemented by additional literature as the assessment progressed. The quantitative data was used to create informative charts and maps for visual representation, supported by GeoDelta Labs. Relevant annexes, including the assessment design matrix, KII guides, and KII transcripts, are provided as separate documents accompanying this report.

The assessment included two FGDs, one at the community level and the other at SLRCS NHQ. In total, 43 participants took part, comprising 27 males and 16 females, representing the RCRC Movement and stakeholders. It is worth noting that the information from KIIs and FGDs was amalgamated to shape the assessment report, and all data collected from these sources were treated anonymously and synthesized for report development. The assessment team, consisting of a consultant, note-takers, a language editing expert, and the SLRCS Migration focal point, actively organized interviews and discussions. District level meetings were coordinated by BEOs and RFL Coordinators from six SLRCS district branches. Data collection occurred between August 3, 2023, and October 6, 2023.





## 3. OUTBOUND MIGRATION

This section discusses different types of out-migration from Sri Lanka and analyzes the trends and drivers using data and information collected through literature reviews, FGDs and KIIs. The focus is mainly on Labour Migration, Forced Labour and TIP, Migration for educational purposes, and Human Capital Flight or brain drain.

Estimates of Sri Lankan migrants residing and working abroad are not precise, though approximations place the number at around three million. Among these, two million represent temporary migrant workers mainly in the Middle East region, engaged in short-term job contracts with the intention of returning to Sri Lanka. Concurrently, one million migrants have established permanent residency elsewhere, with roughly 500,000 residing in the Americas, 400,000 in Europe, and approximately 70,000 in Australasia (Jayawardana, 2020).

### 3.1 LABOUR MIGRATION FROM SRI LANKA

A substantial portion of outbound migration consists of migrant workers bound for Middle Eastern countries. There are over 1.7 million SLBFE registered migrant workers and more than 80% of these migrants find employment in Middle Eastern nations such as Kuwait, Saudi Arabia, Oman, UAE, Qatar, Bahrain, Lebanon, and Jordan. Roughly 14% of Sri Lankan migrants seek work in the Maldives, South Korea, Romania, Japan, Singapore, Cyprus, Malaysia, Israel, and Seychelles.

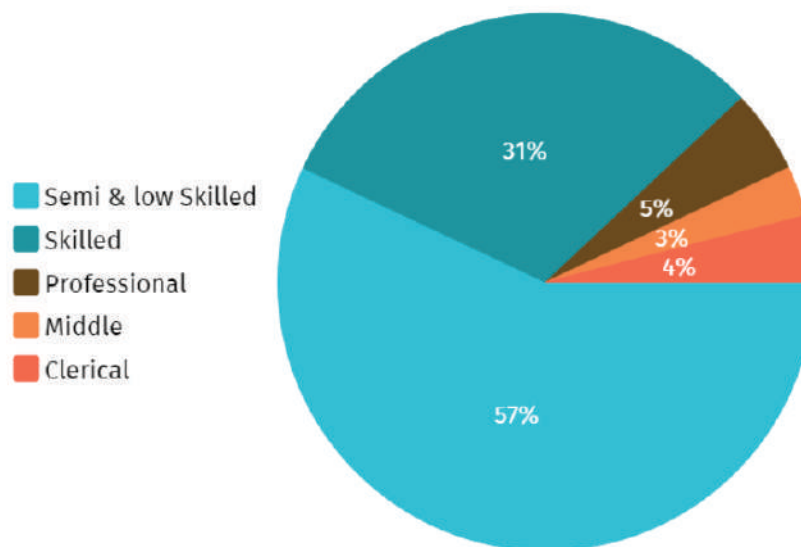


FIGURE 01. TOTAL DEPARTURES BY MANPOWER LEVEL

As illustrated in figure 02, about 57% of these migrants are engaged as semi-skilled workers, primarily in domestic housekeeping roles, and low-skilled positions. Additionally, 31% of them are employed as skilled workers, while the remainder comprises mid-level, clerical, and professional workers. A Cumulative total of 901,905 migrants departed Sri Lanka for over 48 countries from 2018 to 2022 (SLBFE 2022). The details of migrant worker categories and the destination countries can be found in the SLBFE annual statistical report 2022.

### 3.1.1 FEMALE MIGRANT WORKERS

Among the various categories of migrant workers, the majority of domestic housekeeping assistants, predominantly hailing from low-income rural, urban, and estate communities, are female workers. Some of these female workers frequently encounter protection challenges, including instances of Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV). Following the implementation of the FBR regulation by the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) in August 2013, specifically targeting female migrant workers, there was a decrease in the number of female migrant worker departures. The FBR regulation mandates that women with children under the age of five years, intending to work abroad, must obtain clearance from the respective Divisional Secretariat (DS) offices. The age limit was subsequently lowered to two years in 2022. However, the FBR regulation, despite being introduced with good intentions, has proven to be contentious, sparking debates around issues of gender discrimination (ILO, 2018).

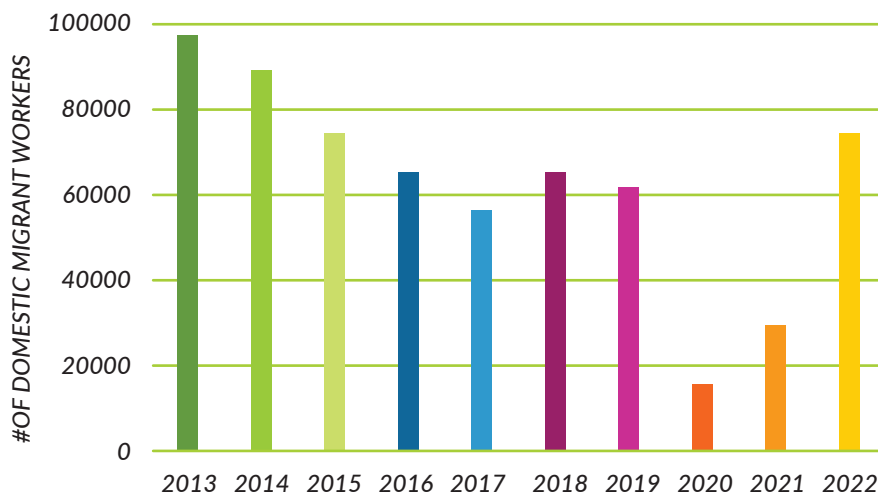


FIGURE 02. DOMESTIC MIGRANT WORKER DEPARTURES 2013-2022

According to the officials of the Nuwara Eliya District Secretariat, since the introduction of the FBR regulation, irregular female migration has surged, facilitated by unlicensed sub-agents involved in human trafficking and smuggling activities. These irregular female migrants do not enjoy the protection and guidance of SLBFE in cases of emergencies. Processing various requests such as repatriation, safe shelter, and other humanitarian needs for these irregular migrants takes an extended period as they are not registered with the SLBFE (see Ground Story 1).



### 3.1.2 FORCED LABOUR AND TRAFFICKING IN PERSONS

Sri Lanka serves as both an origin and transit/destination country for trafficking victims, mainly due to its location in the Indian Ocean. However, comprehensive statistics remain limited due to underreporting influenced by fear and social stigma. Many individuals, including women and children, fall victim to various forms of exploitation, such as commercial sexual exploitation and forced labour, in countries across the Middle East, Asia, and Europe.

The FBR regulation in 2013, resulted a decline in female migration through official channels. However, women continued to migrate irregularly, often with the assistance of unlicensed recruitment sub-agents. These intermediaries complicated the migration process with increasing risks of abuse (CEPA, 2022). Informal facilitators, who lack formal affiliations with licensed agencies, mediate between these agencies and potential migrants, playing a crucial role that agencies with limited resources cannot. While some sub-agents are trusted by migrants, they also face criticism for malpractices (IPS, 2018) .

Evidence from Nuwara Eliya district points to the involvement of various unlicensed recruitment agencies in facilitating undocumented or illegal migration. Yet, clear data on trafficking is lacking in the district and divisional secretariat offices. Most information on trafficking attempts comes from police reports.

The Deputy General Manager of Training at SLBFE reported a significant increase in complaints related to foreign employment scams. These cases rose from 552 in 2021 to 1,337 in 2022, and by May 2023, they reached 1,156.

#### Ground Story 1: Sri Lankan Female Workers Stranded in Oman

In October 2022, it came to light that approximately 90 female domestic workers had arrived in Oman on visit or tourist visas, with the intention of converting them into work visas. Disturbingly, many of these women had fallen victim to unscrupulous and unregistered agents who engaged in trafficking. As a result, these workers found themselves facing immense challenges and enduring various forms of harassment.

These female domestic workers were trapped in Oman, desperately seeking assistance for repatriation. Unfortunately, they lacked the financial means to cover the costs associated with repatriation, which include visa fees, overstay penalties, airfare, agent fees, and the recruitment expenses stipulated by their respective sponsors. To provide a safe haven for these female victims, the SLBFE has shouldered the expenses of housing them in a secure facility and also supporting repatriation.

Source: [Ada Derana News](#) and video story (Sirasa News- English): [Sex Trafficking | 90 Sri Lankan women given refuge at the embassy in Oman](#)

The Asia Foundation's report highlights that the majority of trafficking victims come from rural, impoverished areas, including the plantation sector. Rising microcredit schemes in rural Sri Lanka drive migration as a means to repay debts. Victims often face abusive relationships or financial hardships.

In the Gulf, some employers withhold identity documents from workers, restricting their freedom. Fraudulent practices by recruitment agencies include altering job conditions upon arrival (US Government, 2022). Every day, around 50 Sri Lankan women are sent to Dubai through irregular means, with many unknowingly redirected to other Middle Eastern countries. The ILO publication "Presence of human trafficking and forced labour in labour migration - Sri Lanka" delves into these issues, emphasizing key findings such as deception, document retention, wage withholding, working conditions, and physical/sexual abuse.

### 3.1.3 HUMAN CAPITAL FLIGHT

The departure of educated or professional Sri Lankans, in search of better pay or living conditions is a significant phenomenon in Sri Lanka. Often referred to as "brain drain" this form of out migration encompasses doctors, engineers, IT specialists, academics, and various other experts. Official statistics are not readily available in Sri Lanka. A notable catalyst behind the recent surge in professionals leaving the nation is the implementation of a new tax policy in 2022 by the GoSL. This policy mandates higher income earning professionals such as doctors, university professors, and similar officials to pay escalated taxes.

According to the Government Medical Officers Association of Sri Lanka, within the 12-month period culminating on May 31, 2023, a total of 842 graded medical personnel and 274 specialist doctors have departed the country. Of the 30 doctors designated for emergency services, 23 have also left, leaving a mere seven in Sri Lanka. The departure of medical personnel exerts a notable impact on the nation's healthcare service. Around 10,000 IT professionals have migrated overseas due to the ongoing economic crisis while over 600 university lecturers left their respective universities in the first half of 2023.

IOM revealed that even educated Sri Lankan professionals have become victims of human trafficking, representing a new trend in scams driven by the desperation to leave Sri Lanka, primarily due to the economic crisis. Traffickers promise these individuals jobs and transport them to countries such as Laos and Myanmar on tourist visas. Upon arrival in the destination country, victims are often confined to camps and coerced into engaging in cyber-related criminal activities.

### Ground story 2: Leaving the Paradise Island Again

“I never, ever imagined leaving Sri Lanka again. I came back to take care of my parents, but now I have to go again” said Ifthikar Mohamed, a 45-year-old software engineer who returned to Sri Lanka three years ago after living in the UAE for 11 years.

“Once I had saved up and bought myself a house, this was the best place to live. Truly a paradise. But not anymore. Now I have to struggle to even feed my children and my parents.” [Ada Derana News](#)

## 3.2 IRREGULAR MIGRATION BY SEA

Sri Lanka has witnessed multiple instances of irregular migration, particularly by sea, as individuals strive to reach more developed nations such as Australia and Canada in pursuit of improved living conditions, employment prospects, and safety. However, these journeys across the sea are perilous, often involving reliance on smugglers and unsafe vessels. Tragic accidents during these risky voyages have resulted in migrants being susceptible to exploitation and abuse along the way (IPS, 2013).

### Ground story 3: Australian dream shattered

"I believed that going to Australia would allow me to earn a better income and secure a brighter future," reflects Jayan, as he speaks from his modest home, in a coastal village in the north of Sri Lanka.

A fisherman by trade and a member of Sri Lanka's Tamil ethnic minority, Jayan is familiar with boats and was asked to fix the ageing vessel that was to take him to Australia, alongside a desperate handful of men, women and children. Jayan embarked on this risky journey with hopes of a better life.

The boat made it to Australia, but swiftly returned to Sri Lanka. A handful of questions and he found himself put on to a plane, and flown back to where he started, now facing charges.

As a Tamil, Jayan says the challenges he faced in Sri Lanka remain, heightened by the country's worsening economic and political crises. There is, he says, a "mafia" in operation, exploiting the crisis, promising safe passage overseas, and demanding up to 900,000 rupees (A\$3,500) for a place on a boat. - [The Guardian, June 2022](#) -

Within Sri Lanka, human trafficking networks organize perilous boat journeys to countries like Australia. KII in the Vauniya district of the Northern Province, home to a significant Tamil population, unveiled that local sub-agents exploit vulnerable individuals, charging hefty fees while promising escape via boats. Many sell their assets to fund these sub-agents, and Sri Lanka's ongoing economic crisis compounds the issue, with sub-agents coercing desperate people onto boats. A Guardian report highlights a troubling trend, with 38 boats carrying 873 asylum seekers, including 124 children, arriving on Australian shores between late 2013 and the end of 2021 but being subsequently returned. On November 7th, 2022, a Vietnamese-flagged fishing vessel, carrying 303 Sri Lankan nationals bound for Canada, encountered distress in Vietnamese waters, leading to their rescue. The IOM has been actively facilitating the repatriation of these individuals to Sri Lanka, some of whom refused to return, having paid smugglers between 700,000 and 1,000,000 Sri Lankan Rupees in the hopes of reaching Canada.

### 3.3 CONFLICT INDUCED MIGRATION

The Sri Lankan civil war, lasting from 1983 to 2009, resulted in significant loss of life and displacement, with the Northern and Eastern Provinces at the heart of the conflict. Various regions of the country witnessed related incidents like explosions, suicide bombings, abductions, and disappearances. This conflict led to the displacement of Tamil-speaking communities from the North, East, and other regions, forming a significant part of the Sri Lankan migrant community. Besides the conflicts in the North and East, two uprisings took place in southern Sri Lanka in 1971 and 1988/89, resulting in several forced migrants, mainly from the Sinhala-speaking population (Jayawardana P, 2020). While the precise number of Sri Lankan Tamil diaspora members remains challenging to pin down, estimates suggest hundreds of thousands to over a million Sri Lankan Tamils migrated worldwide during and after the civil war.

UNHCR data indicates that over 84,000 Tamils sought refuge in neighboring India during the conflict, with hundreds of thousands more finding sanctuary in Europe, North America, and Australia, creating one of the Western world's largest groups of asylum seekers. Canada alone hosted around 200,000 Tamil refugees, the most substantial concentration in a single country. The conflict also internally displaced approximately 800,000 Sri Lankan Tamils within the country.

#### 3.3.1 SRI LANKAN REFUGEES IN INDIA

The Sri Lankan Tamil community shares deep historical, social, cultural, and linguistic ties with Tamil Nadu, India. The ongoing economic crisis and political instability have triggered a renewed movement of Sri Lankan Tamils to Tamil Nadu, India. In May 2022, 28 Sri Lankan families, comprising 85 individuals, arrived in southern Tamil Nadu state by boat. This trend may continue if inflation persists and livelihood opportunities remain limited.

During Sri Lanka's 30-year civil conflict, more than 75,000 Tamils from the North and East Provinces sought refuge in India. Presently, around 60,000 Sri Lankan Tamils reside in refugee

camps in India, and since 2014, UNHCR, at the refugees' request, has been facilitating their voluntary repatriation from Tamil Nadu to Sri Lanka, with approximately 1,634 individuals resettled. However, this repatriation is not actively advocated due to various challenges, including the transportation of refugees' belongings, unclear information and policies regarding their return status, access to land amid concerns about occupation, uncertainties about children's education, and concerns for personal safety.

Despite these obstacles, around 200 individuals return to Sri Lanka annually, and this number could rise if the proposed ferry service between Sri Lanka and Southern India is initiated. These returnees require humanitarian assistance such as Water Sanitation and Hygiene (WASH), shelter, health, and support in preparing legal documents like national identity cards and land titles. Given UNHCR's phase-out of operations in Sri Lanka by 2024, IOM has been providing humanitarian services to these returnees until a more permanent solution is established in the future.

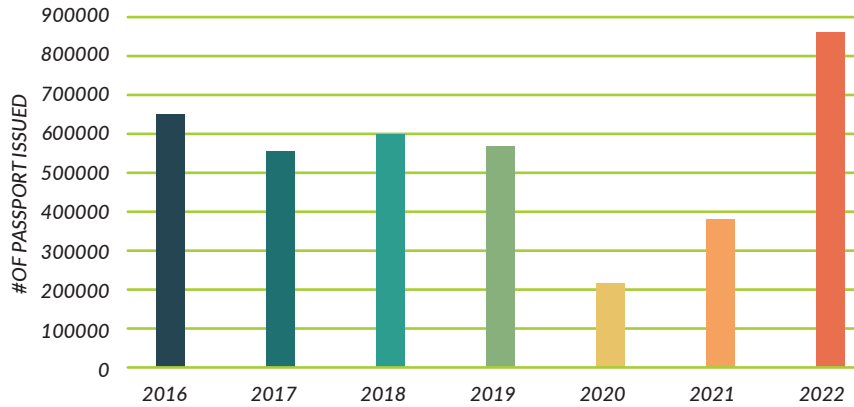
### 3.4 STUDENT MIGRATION

Student migration from Sri Lanka for education abroad has surged recently, driven by the competitive nature of local higher education and the economic crisis. The youth unemployment rate, particularly among 20-24-year-olds, hitting 24.2% in 2022 too has contributed to this trend. An estimated 12,000 students leave Sri Lanka annually for foreign universities, resulting in a significant annual outflow of around US\$400 million. Popular destinations include Australia, New Zealand, the United States, Canada, and the European Union, as well as countries like India, China, Russia, Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, and Bangladesh. The mismanagement of the economy has intensified feelings of hopelessness and frustration among the nation's youth, motivating them to seek educational opportunities and potentially residency abroad. Though student migration offers potential benefits such as easing pressure on the domestic education system and contributing expertise, it also carries the risk of “brain drain” and foreign exchange outflow (IPS, 2022).

### 3.5 LABOUR MIGRATION TRENDS

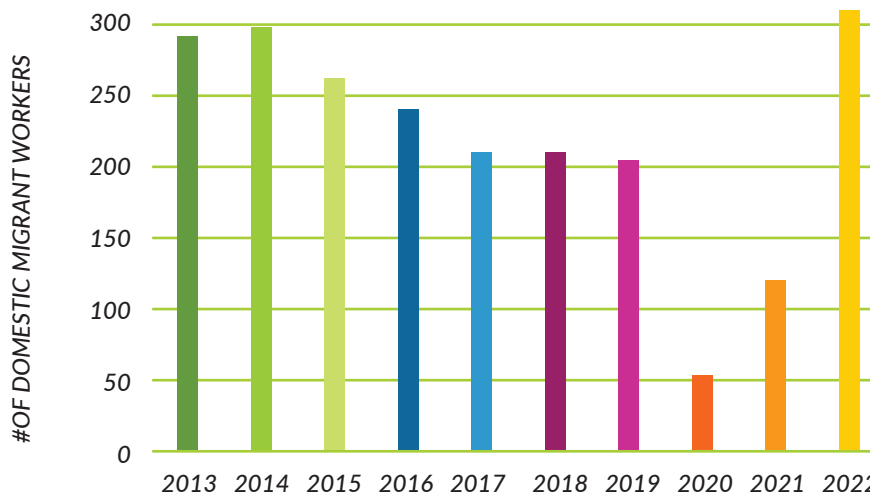
Sri Lanka has a history of out-migration dating back to the 1980s, with over 1.7 million Sri Lankans working abroad. The demand for foreign employment has surged since mid-2022 due to intensifying economic hardships, resulting in a record number of passport issuances in 2022, reflecting a growing trend of outbound migration across diverse demographics.

The IFRC Complex Emergency Needs Assessment for 2022 reveals a persistent and growing trend of outbound migration in Sri Lanka. In the second half of 2022, three times more households expressed intentions for overseas migration compared to the first half of the year, with 18 percent aiming to migrate for employment reasons. This increase aligns with a significant rise in passport applications or renewals during 2022. The UN Humanitarian Needs and Priorities Plan for 2022 further supports these findings, reporting an unprecedented 286 percent year-on-year increase



SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND EMIGRATION

FIGURE 03. NUMBER OF PASSPORT ISSUED FROM 2016-2022



SOURCE: SLBFE STATISTICS

FIGURE 04. TOTAL DEPARTURES FOR FOREIGN EMPLOYMENT 2013-2022 ('000)

There is a rising demand for foreign employment opportunities due to increasing job redundancies, the depreciation of the LKR, and soaring living costs. Moreover, there is an emergence of new categories of migrant workers, particularly in higher skilled and professional fields. This includes public sector professionals who face the risk of redundancy due to Sri Lanka's economic crisis, political instability, and higher income tax rates for high-earning professionals (ILO,2022).



### 3.5.1 GEOGRAPHICAL DISTRIBUTION

According to SLBFE statistics spanning from 2017 to 2022, the highest number of most migrant workers left the country from Colombo district, averaging approximately 23,000 departures per year followed by Gampaha, Kandy and Kurunegala as illustrated in Figure 05. This distribution can be attributed to factors such as high population density and increased urbanization. As per figure 06, Batticaloa, Ampara and Trincomalee districts in the Eastern Province reported the highest density of migrant worker departures per 100,000 people. This trend could be attributed to their significant Muslim population and the presence of recruitment agencies connected to Middle Eastern countries.

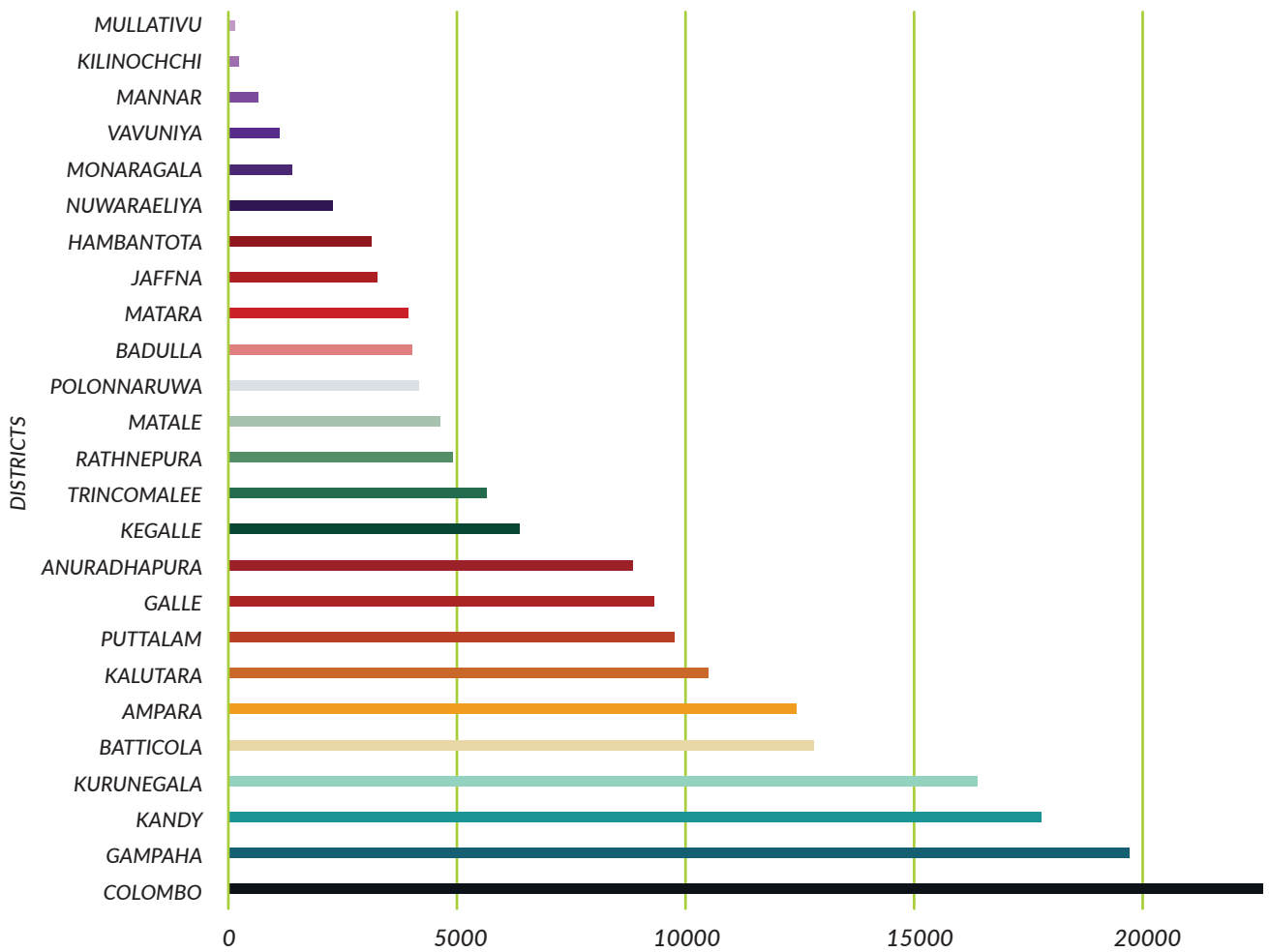


FIGURE 05. AVERAGE NUMBER OF LABOUR MIGRANT DEPARTURES 2017 TO 2022



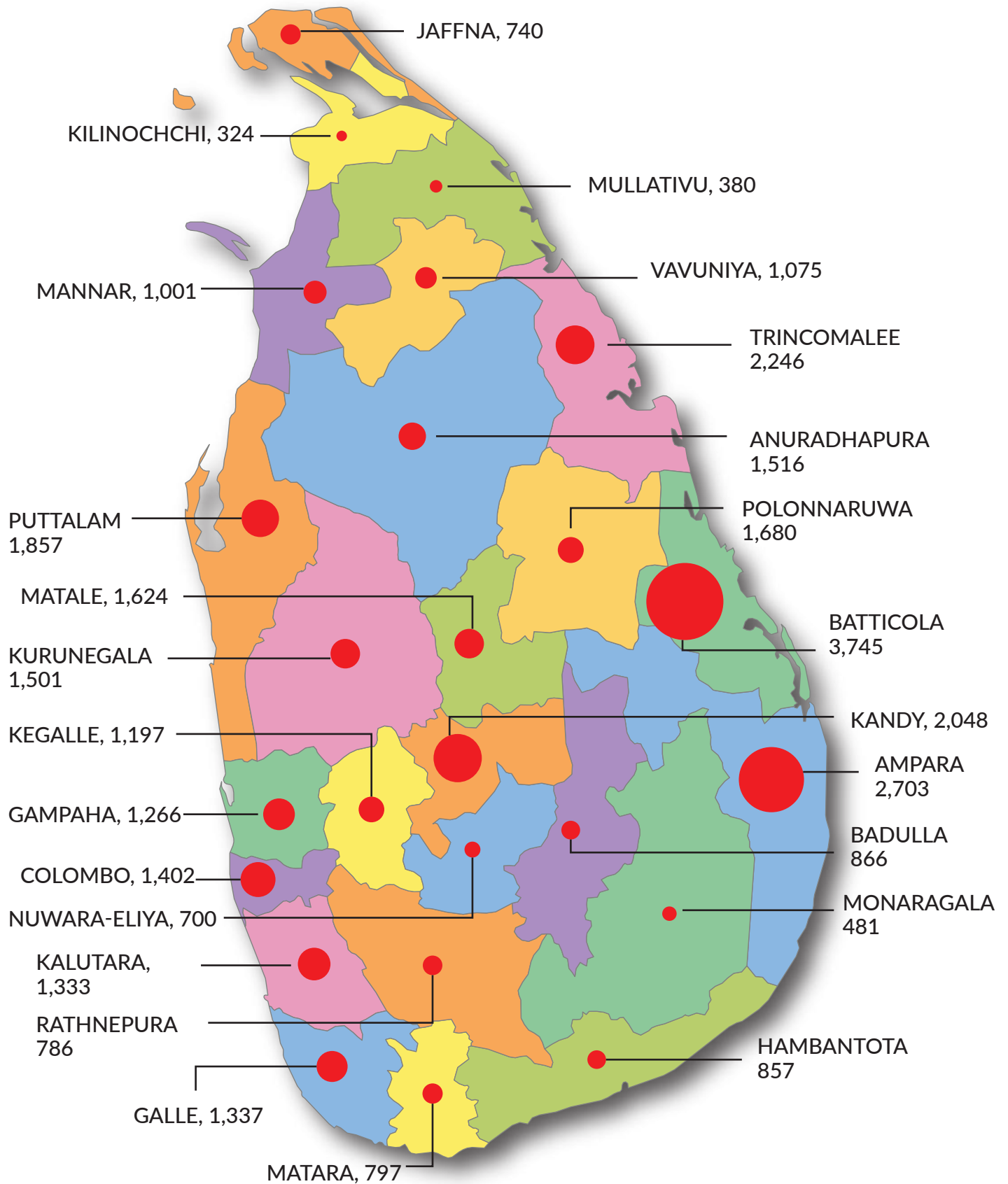


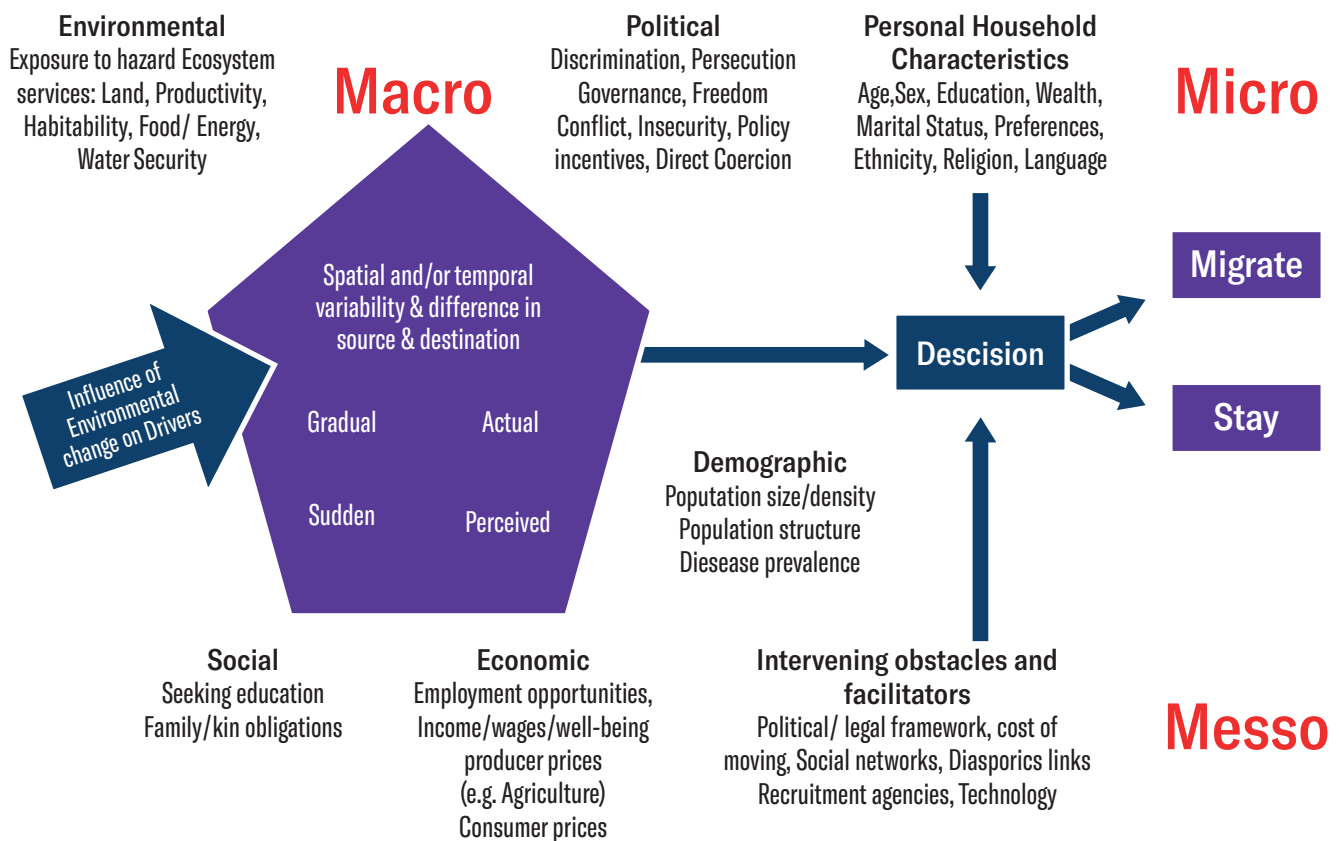
FIGURE 06. DENSITY OF MIGRANT WORKER DEPARTURES PER 100,000 PEOPLE



### 3.6 DRIVERS OF OUTBOUND MIGRATION

Migration decisions are shaped by various drivers including environmental, demographic, economic, and social and political factors, as seen in Figure 10 of Foresight's conceptual framework . However, the mere presence of these drivers doesn't ensure migration; it hinges on intervening factors and individual or household traits (Foresight, 2011).

IFRC's Policy on Migration (2009) emphasizes that migration, whether voluntary or involuntary, often results from a mix of choices and constraints .



SOURCE: FORESIGHT, 2011

FIGURE 17. FORESIGHT'S CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK FOR DRIVERS OF MIGRATION

### 3.6.1 MAIN DRIVERS

Based on information gathered through KIIs and FGDs, which involve district and divisional-level government officials, as well as staff and volunteers from SLBFE and SLRCS, the drivers of outbound migration in Sri Lanka exhibit a multifaceted nature. Different and unique stories emerge depending on migrants' socio-economic backgrounds. The main driving factors are analysed and highlighted below:

**1. Economic Factors:** Economic challenges push many Sri Lankan low-income communities, including women, to seek employment abroad, especially in the Middle East, where there's a demand for domestic and low-skilled workers. The income inequality and low wages within Sri Lanka lead individuals, particularly those from low-income backgrounds, to migrate for better-paying jobs. For example, discussions in the Nuwara Eliya district indicate that plantation workers can earn as little as LKR 800 (US\$2.5) per day, which is inadequate given the high inflation and rising food costs during the ongoing economic crisis.

**2. Household indebtedness:** Debt pressure has emerged as a significant driver of migration, particularly in rural, low-income urban, and plantation areas, intensifying as a result of the ongoing economic crisis. The IFRC's 2022 assessment highlights its prevalence, with 64 percent of rural, 51 percent of urban, and 84 percent of estate households reporting increased debt levels due to the crisis. This escalating household debt situation significantly contributes to rising vulnerabilities, with about 33.4 percent of the population grappling with debt-induced hardships, including taking on debt for basic necessities like food, healthcare, and education, and resorting to measures like selling personal items or jewelry, which may have further worsened with the ongoing economic challenges (UNDP 2023).

**3. Gender and Social Dynamics:** Sri Lankan women, particularly in low-income rural, urban, and estate communities, often find themselves in the role of primary breadwinners. Societal expectations, rooted in cultural norms, place women in caregiving roles. Like all migrant workers, Sri Lankan women are motivated to seek low-skilled jobs overseas for various reasons. These include family poverty, limited employment opportunities, a desire to secure better healthcare and education for their families, and the necessity to repay debts (Jayasuriya R & Opeskin P, 2015). FDWs embarking on migration to Middle Eastern countries possess limited education and skills, and are often married with children. Their migration aims at improving their family's financial circumstances. However, others migrate for non-financial motivations, such as escaping an abusive spouse or violence (IPS, 2018). Migration can also offer women a sense of autonomy and independence, enabling them to take charge of financial decisions and contribute to their family's well-being.

**4. Middle East as a Preferred Destination:** The main countries of destination for Sri Lankan migrant workers are in the Middle East as these countries have a demand for migrant workers of all types due to their growing economies and increasing dual-income households. Middle Eastern countries attract over 80% of all types of Sri Lankan migrant workers, particularly semi-skilled and low-skilled workers. Driven by economic and social factors, Sri Lankan women also take up jobs as domestic workers in these countries.

**5. Presence of Licensed Recruitment Agencies:** Licensed recruitment agencies play a pivotal role in facilitating labour migration. The presence of a large number of agencies in Sri Lanka, along with informal sub-agents operating at the local level, provides easy access for potential migrants to apply for jobs abroad. These agents connect potential migrants with employers overseas, particularly in the Middle East. However, the recruitment process can lack transparency and proper regulation, which may lead to exploitation.

**6. Filial Responsibilities:** Many Sri Lankan families expect their children to financially support the household and contribute to family well-being. Migration is seen as a means to fulfill these responsibilities. Moreover, the pressure to match the lifestyles of migrated neighbors and relatives (social comparison) can motivate individuals to seek employment abroad.

**7. Lack of Job Security and Social Protection:** Job Security and Social Protection are major issues in Sri Lanka due to a large informal economy, resulting in insecure employment, low wages, and insufficient worker protection. Migrants often seek more stable and regulated work environments abroad, even if it involves domestic work. For instance, the Nuwara Eliya district, with its low daily wages of just US\$2.5 per person, significantly affected estate sector communities. Many women migrate as domestic workers due to this economic crisis and a lack of financial support from adult males. The government's social protection scheme, 'Samurdhi'<sup>4</sup>, faces overwhelming demand from families falling below the poverty line, which has nearly doubled from LKR 7,395 in 2020 to LKR 13,777 in December 2022 (DCS, 2022). This increase is driving more families to migrate overseas in search of decent incomes to meet their basic needs.

**8. Changes in Government Policies:** In early 2022, the government encouraged public sector employees to take no-pay leave for up to five years without affecting seniority and pension, for employment abroad or in the private sector. Furthermore, the new tax policy introduced in 2022 is propelling people to migrate. Notably, high-income professionals like Doctors, Academics, Engineers, and IT experts are among the most affected.

<sup>4</sup>Samurdhi is a poverty alleviation programme implemented since 1995 and still continues. Number of new applications to enroll as a Samurdhi recipient have increased in the recent past mainly due to economic crisis.

**9. Family Reunification:** Many migrants are motivated by a desire to reunite with family members who have already migrated. Family reunification is often a key driver of migration for many Sri Lankans, especially in countries that have established pathways for family-sponsored visas. The current economic situation in the country also leads many Sri Lankans in this direction.

**10. Asylum and Refuge:** There are instances where Sri Lankans fleeing persecution, conflict, or human rights abuses may seek asylum or refugee status in North America, Europe, or Australia to find safety and protection. However, some people sometimes misuse these opportunities and provide false information to seek asylum and refugee status.

**11. Quality of Life:** The overall quality of life, including factors like access to reliable healthcare, better education, social services, and personal safety, can motivate even wealthy individuals to seek a better life for themselves and their families and children in North America, Europe and Australia.

**12. Household and Individual Factors:** In addition to the primary migration drivers mentioned, KIIs in all districts highlighted a few other specific factors. These include hopelessness and frustration due to a lack of opportunities in Sri Lanka, discrimination in accessing resources and services based on social class, aspirations of building homes, acquiring cars, starting new businesses, accessing better healthcare and education for families and children, purchasing luxury items like washing machines, fridges, smart TVs, expensive furniture, and pressure from teenage children to own mobile phones, motorbikes, laptops, etc.



## 4. INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT

### 4.1 CONFLICT INDUCED DISPLACEMENTS

Since the onset of Sri Lanka's conflict in 1983, internal displacement has been a recurring issue, affecting an estimated 800,000 people, primarily Tamils but also some Muslims and a smaller number of Sinhalese. In the aftermath of the 2009 civil war, about 300,000 IDPs sought refuge in sites like the Menik Farm IDP camp in Vavuniya, Jaffna, and Trincomalee as per UNHCR. Data from the IDMC suggests there were around 400,000 IDPs across the country in 2009. Additionally, research from the Refugee Studies Centre in 2010 indicates that about 75,000 Muslims left the Northern Province in the 1990s under pressure from the militants, with roughly 65,000 IDPs resettling in the Puttalam district.

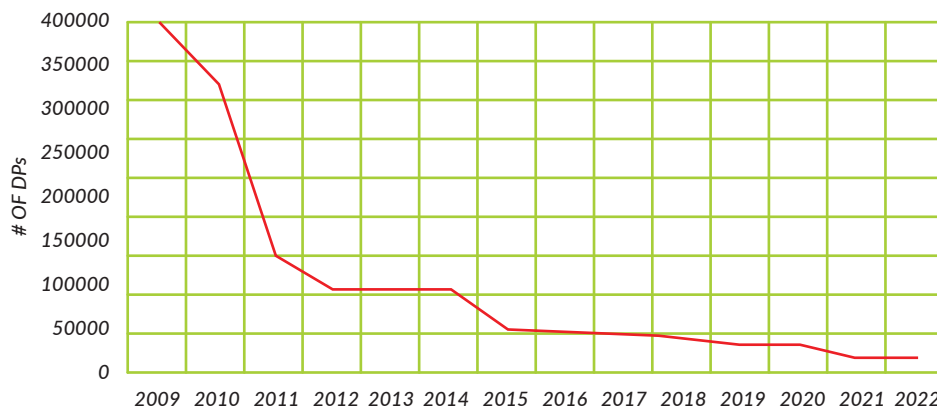


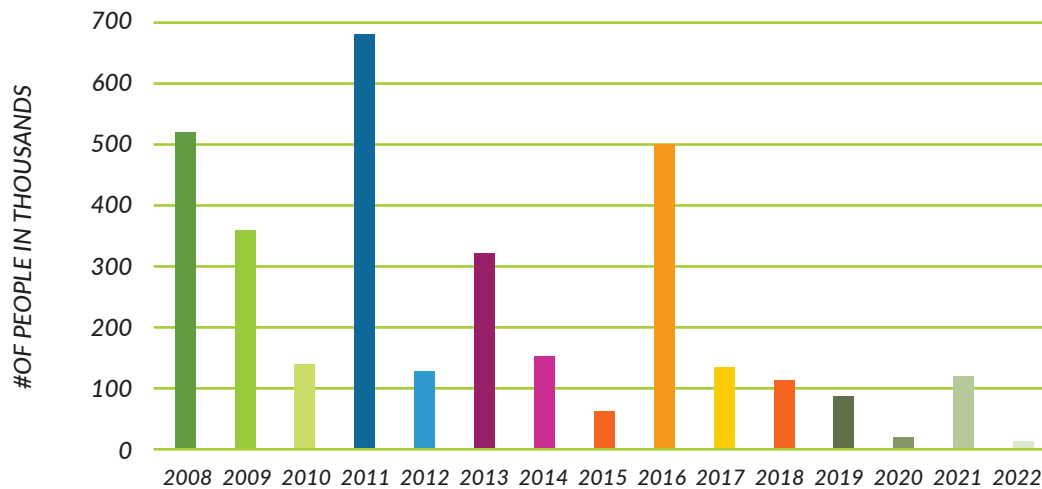
FIGURE 08. CONFLICT INDUCED INTERNALLY DISPLACED PEOPLE IN SRI LANKA

Since 2009, concerted efforts by humanitarian agencies, including the GoSL, have led to a notable decrease in conflict-induced IDPs. Collaborative initiatives, such as house construction by IFRC and SLRCS, and livelihood support from ICRC, have contributed to this trend. UNHCR notes 8,540 IDPs of concern, primarily scattered in the Northern Province currently. Details of these families are not available, as the UNHCR's Northern Province office has already been closed, and the responsibility has been handed over to the Ministry of Resettlement and Reconstruction. While there have been sporadic incidents of intercommunal violence, the only significant displacement occurred after the Easter Sunday bombings in 2019, which left at least 253 dead and over 500 injured, as detailed in the SLRCS final report on the Easter Sunday attack response and recovery programme that concluded in 2020.



## 4.2 DISASTER AND CLIMATE INDUCED DISPLACEMENTS

Located in the Asia Pacific region, Sri Lanka, as a tropical island, is highly vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, experiencing sudden weather-related disasters like floods, landslides, cyclones, and heatwaves which result in internal displacements. Long-term effects like sea-level rise and droughts also play a role in shaping migration patterns. Climate events lead to temporary and permanent displacements, with over 100,000 internal displacements recorded in 2021, primarily due to heavy monsoon rains causing floods and landslides. These events affected the majority of the country's provinces. Local authorities, alongside the Disaster Management Centre (DMC), have established safety centers and secure locations across various districts to provide shelter to those displaced during such disasters.



SOURCE: IDMC

FIGURE 09. NATURAL DISASTER DISPLACEMENT IN THOUSANDS







# 5. INBOUND MIGRATION

## 5.1 INBOUND LABOUR MIGRATION

Sri Lanka has recently become a destination for labour migration, attracting workers from countries like India, Bangladesh, and China, primarily to address labour shortages in low-skilled sectors and foreign-investment-backed projects. This influx includes both low-skilled labourers and high-skilled professionals, students, and returning citizens. The government is actively working on establishing frameworks to manage this influx (IOM, 2021) .

However, this inbound labour migration trend is contributing to labour shortages and comes with economic and social challenges, including fewer job opportunities for locals, strain on healthcare systems, and social cohesion and national security concerns. Demographic shifts, evolving social attitudes, and an expanding economy play a role in this phenomenon (UN Migration Network in Sri Lanka) .

## 5.2 REFUGEES AND ASYLUM SEEKERS

The presence of refugees and asylum seekers in Sri Lanka is relatively limited. According to the UNHCR Refugee Data Finder for Sri Lanka in 2022 , the country is host to 504 refugees, 221 asylum seekers, and 36 stateless individuals. The majority arrived in Sri Lanka through irregular means or were intercepted by Sri Lankan authorities while attempting to travel to other countries. The countries of origin include Myanmar (Rohingya refugees), Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, and various African nations (UNHCR/Muslim Aid, 2023).

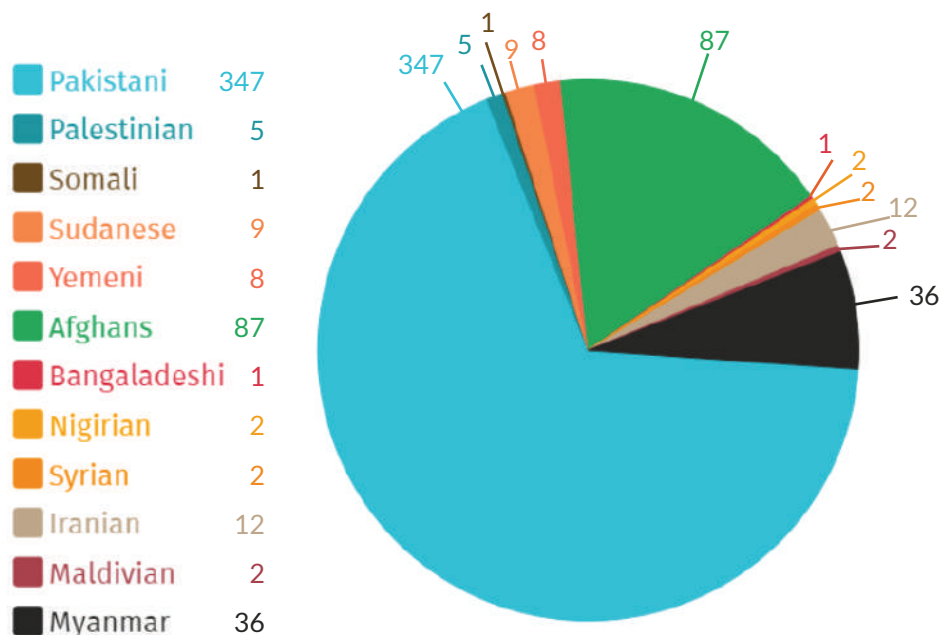


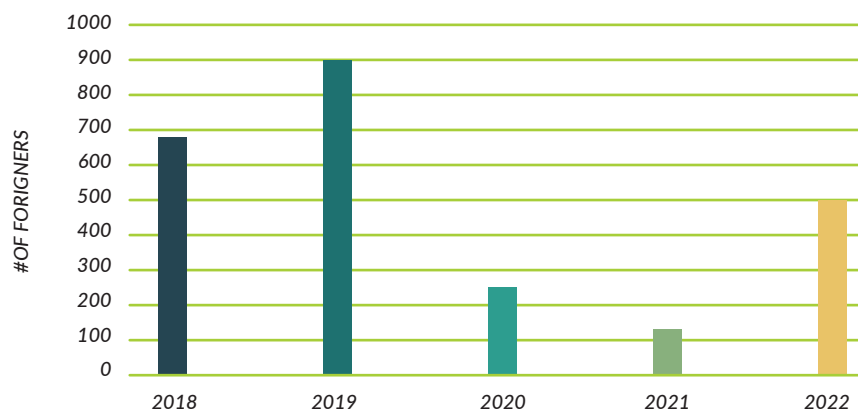
FIGURE 11. NUMBER OF ASYLUM SEEKERS AS OF 2022

The 2022 performance report of the DIE indicates that the total number of asylum seekers as of December 31, 2022, stands at 512, as depicted in Figure 11. When comparing this information with the UNHCR data, there is a discrepancy as UNHCR has not updated the data base with latest information due to phasing out of its' operation in Sri Lanka.

In December 2022, a series of events involved vessels carrying displaced people from Rakhine State in Myanmar who had departed from refugee camps in Bangladesh. Among these a vessel containing 105 Rohingya refugees was rescued by the Sri Lankan Navy. In response to this situation, SLRCS was actively involved in providing humanitarian assistance to the refugees in close coordination with the DIE, Ministry of Health and other government authorities as well as other humanitarian agencies such as UNHCR and Muslim Aid (IFRC 2023).

### 5.3 MIGRANTS IN DETENTION AND DEPORTED

Immigration detention is commonly used for individuals entering or staying in a country without proper authorization, including asylum seekers, refugees, or economic migrants. In 2022, a total of 180 individuals were detained due to immigration regulation violations. The largest group detained consisted of Indian fishermen (SLRCS & ICRC, 2022). In the same year, the DIE conducted 1,641 investigations involving foreigners, leading to the deportation of 501 individuals for violating immigration laws, reflecting the government's efforts to enforce regulations.



SOURCE: DEPARTMENT OF IMMIGRATION AND EMIGRATION-2022

FIGURE 32. NUMBER OF FOREIGNERS DEPORTED 2018-2022

## 6. NATIONAL AND INTERNATIONAL LEGAL AND POLICY FRAMEWORKS

During the literature review and various stages of data collection, the assessment came across a number of national and international policies, strategies, and legal frameworks pertaining to Migration and Displacement in Sri Lanka. A list of these frameworks is highlighted below.

<i>National Level</i>	
FRAMEWORKS	BRIEF DESCRIPTION
1. National Labour Migration Policy for Sri Lanka, 2008	Sri Lanka's National Labour Migration Policy outlines the government's approach to promoting safe, orderly, and beneficial migration for Sri Lankan migrant workers. This policy has been revised recently and scheduled to be launched in October 2023.
2. National Action plan of Migration for Employment (updated NLMP) 2023-2027	This is an action plan for the implementation of the National Labour Migration Policy.
3. National Action Plan on Return and Re integration of Sri Lankan Migrant workers	This considers reintegration of returnee migrant workers as a priority area.
4. Migrant Health Policy for Sri Lanka -2012	The policy focus on the health needs of migrants
5. National Policy on Technical Education and Vocational Training 2018	This policy is important as it linked with migrant workers' technical skills development.
6. Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Act and subsequent Amendments	This Act established SLBFE, the regulatory body responsible for the welfare and protection of Sri Lankan migrant workers. It provides provisions for the registration and regulation of foreign employment agencies, monitoring and protection of migrant workers, and welfare services for returnees.
7. Regulatory background pertaining to the Family Background Report	This was a circular issued by the Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment in July 2013. It introduced measures such as mandatory pre-departure training, requiring a Family Background Report for female migrant workers, and setting up welfare funds for migrant workers.

8. Immigration and Emigration Act No. 20 of 1948	This Act governs the entry and exit of individuals to and from Sri Lanka. It outlines the rules and regulations related to visas, residence permits, and the immigration process.
9. Sri Lanka-Saudi Arabia Agreement on Domestic Workers	This addresses the rights and working conditions of Sri Lankan domestic workers in Saudi Arabia, providing a legal framework for their protection.
10. National Child Protection Policy	This policy ensures the protection of children, including those affected by migration. It emphasizes preventing child trafficking, ensuring proper care and rehabilitation for returning child migrants, and providing education and health services.
11. Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC)	Sri Lanka signed the UN Convention on the Rights (UNCRC) of the Child on 26th January 1990 and ratified on 12th July 1991. As a follow-up to the UNCRC, the government of Sri Lanka formulated the Children's Charter in 1992. The government's policies and programmes are designed to uphold the rights of migrant children.
12. Sri Lanka Disaster Management Act, No. 13 of 2005	This is linked to the addressing humanitarian issues of internal displacements due to disasters.
13. National Adaptation Plan for Climate Change Impacts in Sri Lanka 2016 – 2025	This document provides details of various climate adaptation strategies including strategies for climate induced displacements in Sri Lanka
<b>International Level</b>	
14. 1951 Refugee Convention and 1967 Protocol	While Sri Lanka is not a party to these international treaties, Sri Lanka does offer temporary asylum to refugees under the purview of UNHCR.

<p>15. 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development</p>	<p>Migration and Displacement are relevant to several Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), such as Goal 10 (Reduced Inequalities) and Goal 16 (Peace, Justice, and Strong Institutions). The 2030 Agenda provides a broader framework for addressing these issues.</p>
<p>16. Global Compact for Safe, Orderly, and Regular Migration (GCM) : principles, and commitments related to migration.</p>	<p>Adopted in December 2018, the GCM is a landmark agreement that provides a comprehensive framework for international cooperation on migration. It aims to enhance the benefits of migration while addressing its challenges. The GCM is not legally binding but sets out a common understanding,</p>
<p>17. Global Compact on Refugees</p>	<p>This is a UN-led effort to address refugee issues, adopted in December 2018. It seeks to improve the global response to refugee situations. Like the GCM, it is not legally binding but outlines principles for international cooperation</p>
<p>18. UNHCR's Global Strategy</p>	<p>The UNHCR developed a Global Strategy, which is its principal policy document. It sets out the organization's priorities and approaches for responding to forced displacement globally.</p>
<p>19. Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction</p>	<p>While not exclusively focused on Migration and Displacement, the Sendai Framework, adopted in 2015, includes considerations for reducing displacement due to disasters and strengthening the resilience of affected communities.</p>
<p>20. Paris Climate Agreement</p>	<p>Articles 7,8 and 10 within the Paris Climate Agreement, focusing on Adaptation, Resilience Building and Loss and Damage, have a direct relationship with Migration and Displacement. Climate-induced migration across borders and internal displacements will undoubtedly present escalating humanitarian challenges in the years ahead.</p>

21. The Bali Process	The Regional Support Office was established in 2012 to provide technical support to Bali Process Members and to strengthen cooperation on refugee protection and international migration, including human trafficking, people smuggling and transnational crime.
<b>RCRC Movement Policies and Strategies</b>	
22. IFRC Policy on Migration	This policy emphasizes the humanitarian principles of neutrality, impartiality, and independence in assisting migrants and displaced populations. It highlights the importance of addressing the vulnerabilities and needs of migrants, including their protection, health, and well-being.
23. IFRC Global Strategy on Migration 2018 - 2022	This IFRC Global Migration Strategy sets a direction for National Societies and the IFRC Secretariat until the end of 2022. The title – Reducing Vulnerability, Enhancing Resilience – reflects that this is not just about meeting humanitarian needs and mitigating risk, but also supporting the resilience of migrants by integrating assistance, protection and advocacy.
24. Restoring Family Links	Strategy for the International Red Cross and Red Crescent Movement 2020–2025

## 7. NATIONAL SOCIETY CAPACITY

As highlighted in section 2.3.1 - SLRCS Engagement on Migration and Displacement, there has been a considerable effort by the SLRCS in the past to address the humanitarian issues related to migration and displacement, particularly focusing on RFL and providing humanitarian assistance to refugees. Following strengths and challenges were identified during the assessment, and various actions are proposed to address the challenges in the section 10 – Recommendations.

**Policy and Strategy:** The SLRCS strategic plan 2018-2021 and other policies lack analysis, guidance, and key activities related to Migration and Displacement. Given SLRCS's substantial efforts to fortify RFL services in Sri Lanka, the strategic plan should have incorporated RFL as a current and forthcoming key activity. There appears to be limited knowledge or understanding among some staff and governing board members about wider Migration and Displacement issues. However, the DG has a good grasp of these issues and the skills required to build this portfolio. Furthermore, there are gaps in having a protection policy for the safety and well-being of migrants, refugees, and displaced individuals.

**Organizational Structure:** The current approved minimum SLRCS organizational structure lacks a dedicated Migration and Displacement unit, but discussions are ongoing to propose an interim arrangement. This interim structure will align with the organizational strategy, ultimately achieving a more permanent alignment between strategy and structure. Strategic discussions within senior management are crucial to effectively position the Migration and Displacement unit within both interim and permanent structures.

**Recognition and Positioning within SLRCS:** The Assistant Programme Manager, RFL/Migration is recognized for the work done and collaboration with the ICRC. However, there is a crucial need to expand and establish a fully functional Migration and Displacement Unit within SLRCS. Beyond RFL, the broader Migration and Displacement portfolio is relatively under development. Positioning the Migration and Displacement unit within SLRCS is vital for recognition by the CGB and SLRCS leadership. It is a work in progress, aiming to become a fully-fledged department. Key informants also recommend creating a separate Migration and Displacement technical working group led by the Migration focal point. This group would involve other thematic focal points to address relevant issues, develop strategies, and build technical capacity.

There is hope for inclusion of Migration and Displacement as a separate thematic area in the new strategy which is being developed currently. If a dedicated migration unit is established, RFL can become an integral part of it. Currently, the Migration focal point juggles various responsibilities due to limited staff, sometimes affecting the focus on RFL as well.

**Partnerships and Collaboration:** The Migration focal point maintains a positive rapport with key stakeholders. However, formal partnership tools like Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) and agreements, are currently lacking. The participants of the assessment report validation workshop stressed the need to develop quality relationships at the highest levels involving senior



officials of the government.

**Guidelines and Manuals:** There are no existing guidelines or manuals related to Migration and Displacement in local languages to serve as references or handbooks for staff and volunteers at all levels. There is a need for step-by-step guidelines on executing various activities. Furthermore, instructions on safeguarding the rights and protection of migrants and displaced individuals, including measures against human trafficking and exploitation, are absent.

**Action Plan:** While RFL work is well recognized, the Migration Unit lacks a comprehensive preparedness, response and risk reduction plan. Expanding activities to cover all Migration and Displacement aspects is missing. The upcoming Migration and Displacement Needs Assessment 2023 will aid in developing a comprehensive plan and expanding current activities.

**Integration and Mainstreaming:** Discussions with staff and volunteers highlight the need to integrate Migration and Displacement into SLRCS's other thematic areas. Beyond RFL, most board members, National HQ staff, and district branch personnel are unaware of other migration dimensions. To achieve this integration, it is essential to ensure that board members, staff, and volunteers are well-informed about the humanitarian consequences of all Migration and Displacement aspects.

**Protection, Gender, and Inclusion:** Literature review and KIIs at all organizational levels identified various protection and gender issues, including safety, human trafficking, legal protection, access to asylum, child protection, gender-based violence, family separation, workplace exploitation, cultural barriers, and psychological well-being. The KII with the IFRC/Canadian Red Cross PGI expert emphasized the importance of strengthening PGI capacity within SLRCS, especially to enhance its Migration and Displacement portfolio and reduce vulnerabilities faced by migrants and displaced individuals. While SLRCS has integrated PGI into its programmes, current capacity is somewhat limited. PGI plays a significant role in Migration and Displacement interventions and should be integral. It is closely linked with Community Engagement and Accountability (CEA), where obtaining community feedback is vital. A FGD conducted as a part of IFRC assessment in 2022 revealed that over 65% of participants are unsure how to make complaints or provide feedback when encountering issues.

**Assessment Tools:** Current assessment and evaluation tools do not account for migration factors. They typically omit data on migrant families, family composition, and conflict-displaced individuals. Natural disaster assessments do collect data on displaced people. Assessment templates, tools, forms, and guidelines lack content on broader migration aspects.

**Cross-Cutting Themes:** While most staff and volunteers are trained in cross-cutting areas like PGI, SGBV, Psychological Support Services (PSS), and Psychological First Aid (PFA), applying these concepts effectively at the ground level during emergency responses varies based on skill

levels and capacity across branches.

**Training and Capacity Building:** SLRCS conducts response team trainings such as National Disaster Response Teams (NDRT), Branch Disaster Response Team (BDRT), and Community Disaster Response Team (CDRT), along with other trainings. While a training session on RFL is part of the BDRT curriculum, broader Migration and Displacement issues, including cultural sensitivity, psychological first aid, community engagement, and migrants needs understanding, are not included in these training modules.

**Information Dissemination:** Information materials like brochures, pamphlets, and videos that provide information on migration processes, risks, and legal rights are available in some areas. However, these materials could be further improved. Strategies for effectively reaching and engaging with affected communities to disseminate information and raise awareness could also be enhanced.

**Access to Migrant Data:** SLRCS maintains a reasonably good relationship with Migration and Development officers at divisional and district levels. These officers collect data related to migrants and their families and maintain a database at their respective offices. While SLRCS branches can access this information, no efforts have been made by branches to formally request Divisional or District Secretariats to share this information with SLRCS.

**Contingency Planning:** Recent events, such as the Sri Lankan navy rescuing the Displaced Population from Rakhine (DPR) and the conflict in Gaza and Israel, highlight the need for contingency planning. Possible future scenarios, including pandemics or conflicts in the Middle East, could lead to an influx of returning migrants to Sri Lanka. Currently, SLRCS lacks a contingency plan for these scenarios, but the ICRC has its own contingency plan regarding RFL. In the absence of SLRCS plan, the ICRC shared its own plan with SLRCS for inspiration.



## 8. HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES

Migration and Displacement, whether forced or voluntary, can give rise to a range of humanitarian challenges affecting migrants, displaced individuals, their families, and the host communities. Those who find themselves in irregular situations or lack proper documentation face even greater obstacles in accessing vital services, protection, and assistance. Formal and informal barriers often impede their ability to receive the support they need, and authorities in some instances may be unable or unwilling to extend help to undocumented migrants (IFRC, 2021).

Many Sri Lankan migrants work in the Middle East and North Africa (MENA) in various jobs such as housekeepers, caregivers, and drivers. These roles are crucial to the host country's economy but are often undervalued. Foreign workers also work in construction, manufacturing, agriculture, and retail but often face poor working conditions and even exploitation resembling human trafficking and forced labour, underscoring the need for enhanced efforts to protect their rights and well-being, particularly in a humanitarian context.

### 8.1 OUTBOUND MIGRATION- RISKS AND VULNERABILITIES

Based on insights gathered from various sources, including SLBFE officials, Migration and Development officers at Divisional and District Secretariats, community members, as well as SLRCS branch staff and volunteers active at the community level, it is evident that Sri Lankan migrant workers face a myriad of risks and vulnerabilities. These challenges are outlined below:

- + Lack of Awareness:** Potential migrants, especially low-skilled and semi-skilled labourers, lack awareness about proper immigration procedures and struggle to access family connection services.
- + Exploitative Working Conditions:** Migrant workers face long work hours, low wages, abuse, and substandard living conditions, causing financial instability and compromising their well-being.
- + Abuse and Exploitation:** Migrant workers, particularly females, face physical, verbal, and sexual abuse. Deceptive recruitment practices and human trafficking are significant concerns.
- + Isolation and Limited Mobility:** Migrant workers experience isolation within workplaces, restricted mobility due to confiscated passports, and limited support networks.
- + Lack of Legal Protections:** The kafala (sponsorship)<sup>5</sup> system in the Middle East ties a worker's legal status to their employer, restricting mobility and making it hard to change jobs or leave the country.
- + Health and Safety Risks:** Workers in certain sectors, like construction and domestic work,

face health and safety risks due to limited access to proper healthcare and occupational hazards.

- + Dangerous Journeys:** Irregular migrants face perilous journeys with threats of violence, extortion, and health risks, often lacking legal documentation and fearing deportation.
- + Debt Bondage and Recruitment Fees:** High recruitment fees lead to debt bondage, trapping labourers in financial dependence and making escape difficult.
- + Social and Emotional Challenges:** Being away from families for extended periods causes emotional stress, feelings of isolation, and loneliness.
- + Limited Access to Social Services:** Migrant workers often have limited access to legal aid, counseling, and support services.
- + Loss of Identity and Freedom:** Trafficked individuals lose their identification documents and freedom of movement, making escape from exploitative situations challenging.
- + Racial and Ethnic Discrimination:** Migrant workers, especially from countries like Sri Lanka, face racial and ethnic discrimination.
- + Inadequate Grievance Mechanisms:** Workers lack effective mechanisms to lodge complaints and seek redress for violations of their rights.
- + Connectivity Issues:** Poor signal coverage, limited internet access, and unfamiliarity with technology hinder communication, particularly for detained workers or those facing employer restrictions.
- + Sri Lankan female migrant workers in particular, notably in low-skilled roles like Middle Eastern domestic work, confront grave risks from exploitative conditions, abuse, isolation, the kafala system, health hazards, debt, communication barriers, and limited support access. These vulnerabilities intensify due to isolation from family and the absence of support networks. They also struggle with unfamiliarity regarding available support services, compounding the challenge of reporting abuse and exploitation.**

<sup>5</sup>The kafala system is a legal framework that has for decades defined the relationship between migrant workers and their employers. It gives private citizens and companies in number of Middle Eastern countries almost total control over migrant workers' employment and immigration status.

#### Ground Story 4: Register with the Bureau to Avoid Risks

"There are several benefits that migrants and their families can enjoy by registering with the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment before departing for employment," says Ms. Silva, Officer in Charge of the SLBFE district office in Batticaloa. She adds, "For first-time migrants, the registration fee is 21,400 rupees, and for those who have worked in the Middle East before, the fee is 4,450 rupees."

She elaborates further, stating, "Through the Migration and Development officers attached to the Divisional Secretariat offices, we collect all necessary information about the migrant families, as required by the Family Background Report regulation. We also oversee the welfare of these families." Enthusiastically, Ms. Silva continues, "We provide scholarship grants to students in grade five, O-Level, and A-Level of these families. Additionally, we supply school stationery, bags, and other essential items worth up to 10,000 rupees."

"However, if migrants do not register, the consequences can be severe, and at times, catastrophic," she adds somberly. "Take the case of Rizana, for example. The Saudi government executed her because the court deemed her responsible for the death of the infant she was caring for." Ms. Silva further explains, "Rizana was a minor of 17 years when she migrated, using a false identity claiming to be 25. Sub-agents orchestrated fraudulent paperwork, even with the knowledge of her parents. The outcome was catastrophic; Rizana wasn't trained for the role of a nanny and was a minor when she left Sri Lanka, and she was executed a few years later. Unfortunately, the bureau was unable to intervene."

She expresses gratitude to the RFL Coordinator for providing pre-departure training to migrants in the district and remarks, "The Red Cross can extend assistance to individuals who have suffered accidents while employed and are disabled or seriously injured. Some may require wheelchairs, while others might need prosthetic limbs due to amputations following accidents. The Red Cross can also offer First Aid training to potential migrants before their departure," Ms. Silva concludes optimistically.

### 8.1.1 FAMILIES AT HOME- RISKS AND VULNERABILITIES

When parents migrate to work, particularly in the Middle East, and leave their children, girls, and elderly family members behind, several risks and vulnerabilities can emerge. These issues were extensively discussed during Key Informant Interviews (KIIs) conducted with SLRCS branches and government officials.

**Impact on Families at Home:** Female domestic workers' remittances are vital for their families' survival, addressing needs like food and education. However, lack of financial knowledge among some family members can cause complications. Emotional stress affects families when a loved one migrates, particularly when mothers leave children behind. This impacts older children's caregiving roles and education. Children are often left with grandparents, who may struggle to provide adequate care. Migrant women experience a "double burden," working abroad while maintaining caregiving responsibilities at home, leading to mental and physical exhaustion.

**School Children:** When mothers work abroad, they often leave their children in the care of grandparents. However, grandparents may struggle to closely supervise the children, leading to family problems. In plantation sector schools, around 5-6 children in a class of 30 have both parents working abroad, staying with their grandparents. This affects their well-being, with irregular meals, disordered lives, and academic challenges. Many spend evenings watching TV late, neglecting homework, and missing school the next day.

**Teenage girls:** Teenage girls are highly vulnerable to abuse and exploitation due to inadequate supervision. They lack control over their lives, exposing them to various forms of sexual exploitation. The proximity of affordable hotels in Nuwara Eliya makes it easy for them to engage in risky sexual activities. After O/L exams, they are often left unsupervised, increasing their risk of exploitation, which, in some cases, may be consensual. In the predominantly Tamil-speaking tea plantation area, about 1 in 5 births at the District Hospital Nuwara Eliya involves unknown fathers. Younger generations are avoiding tea estate jobs, perceiving them as substandard, and girls migrating to Colombo are also at risk of pregnancies and risky sexual behavior.

**Role of Guardians:** When mothers leave children with fathers, it sometimes leads to parental neglect. This is due to the assumption that certain responsibilities are traditionally a mother's role. Working mothers send money home, including to fathers or grandparents, but ensuring it is used properly is challenging. Fathers may fail in budgeting, spending money on non-essentials, like alcohol and drugs. Some may even neglect their jobs and rely solely on received funds for unproductive activities. Money earned abroad might be spent on children's smartphones or tablets without proper supervision, risking misuse. According to Key Informants, the root of this problem lies in education, as fathers with proper education are more likely to utilize funds wisely.



### Ground Story 5: Three School-Age Children Living Alone

This heart-wrenching story unfolds in the remote village of Pothanegama, situated within the Giribava Divisional Secretariat in Kurunegala district. It revolves around a mother of three school-going children: a five-year-old boy, a seven-year-old girl, and a fourteen-year-old boy.

She was forced to leave her children in the care of their grandmother and seek employment in Kuwait due to her husband's life sentence in prison. Consequently, these three innocent souls find themselves living alone in a modest mud house, abandoned by their grandmother, who was their only source of support and protection. Without a guardian to guide them, their education has been interrupted, leaving them without the nurturing environment of school.

The mother, bound by contractual obligations and unable to return to Sri Lanka, tries to maintain a connection with her children through video calls. Tearfully, she implores them to take care of themselves, promising to return soon. Her voice quivers with emotion as she says, "Please hold on until I come; don't cry."

The weight of responsibility now rests on the shoulders of the fourteen-year-old boy, who must care for his younger siblings, even though he himself needs protection and guidance. "I find work at a nearby coir fiber mill to provide for my siblings," he explains, adding, "But when it rains, the mill closes, and I can't earn anything." His seven-year-old sister joins in, her voice trembling with longing, "We can't bear to stay alone in this house; we yearn for our mother. If she were with us, we could return to school."

Desperate, the mother appeals to the authorities, pleading, "Please, sir, help me. I want to return to Sri Lanka to care for my children. They're struggling to find enough food and can only manage one meal a day." Her plea carries the weight of a mother's love and concern for her vulnerable children.

(Source: Derana News 08 September 2023)





### 8.1.2 IMPACT OF COVID19 ON THE MIGRANTS

COVID-19 in general significantly affected migrant population around the world, with around 21,000 Sri Lankans in the Middle East seeking repatriation . Labour camps in the Gulf initially became COVID-19 hotspots, leading to lockdowns and economic challenges in the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries, impacting migrants of all skill levels . The return of Sri Lankan workers due to COVID-19 strained social protection systems, care networks, and support services. It also revealed social cohesion issues, with reported stigma, discrimination, and hate speech towards returnees, foreigners, and minorities (IOM 2021). The IFRC report "Least Protected, Most Affected: Migrants and refugees facing extraordinary risks during the COVID-19 pandemic" (2020) underscores compounding risks faced by migrants during the pandemic.

The risks include undocumented status leading to barriers and reluctance to access help due to fears of arrest, exclusion from healthcare and essential services, communication barriers, stigma and discrimination, loss of social support due to quarantine or border closures, heightened risk of gender-based violence, financial barriers to healthcare, poor living and working conditions, labour exploitation and human trafficking, social, religious, and cultural obstacles, restricted protection and safety, job loss, income disruption, and significant psychological and emotional impact. These challenges are exacerbated during health crises, potentially affecting the physical and mental well-being of migrant populations.

### 8.1.3 IMPACTS OF HUMAN CAPITAL FLIGHT

The departure of skilled professionals like doctors can have severe humanitarian consequences, particularly for the poor and vulnerable populations. It can result in reduced access to healthcare, higher costs, lower quality of care, and various health and social inequalities. the following humanitarian consequences have been identified from media sources, KIIs, and stakeholder interviews:

**Healthcare Services Decline:** When doctors leave in large numbers, it can lead to a shortage of healthcare professionals. This impacts the entire population but disproportionately affects the poor who may already have limited access to medical care. A shortage of healthcare professionals can lead to higher mortality rates due to delays in diagnosis and treatment, especially for complex medical conditions. Longer wait times, reduced availability of specialized care, and inadequate coverage of medical facilities in underserved areas become more common.

**Education and Research:** Brain drain reduces the availability of experienced educators, affecting the quality of education in universities and research institutions.

**Economic and Development Impact:** A lack of skilled professionals can hinder economic growth and development, as innovation and technological advancement are limited.

**Social Services:** Professionals like engineers and architects contribute to the development of infrastructure and public services. Their absence can delay critical projects. Brain drain can lead to shortages of skilled teachers, affecting the quality of education in schools. Limited access to quality healthcare and education can disproportionately affect marginalized and vulnerable populations.

## 8.2 INTERNAL DISPLACEMENT – RISKS AND VULNERABILITIES

### 8.2.1 CONFLICT INDUCED DISPLACEMENTS

While Sri Lanka is currently free from active armed conflict, the memories of past conflicts and the subsequent humanitarian situation still linger in the minds of stakeholders and Key Informants, particularly in areas like Vauniya District in the Northern Province and Baticaloa District in the Eastern Province. The Menik Farm in Vauniya District, once a massive IDP camp hosting around 300,000 individuals, remains a poignant symbol. Collaboratively, SLRCS, IFRC, ICRC, and Movement partners actively provided humanitarian assistance to these IDPs.

IFRC launched Emergency Appeal in 2012, insights from branch discussions and stakeholder inputs highlight the following humanitarian challenges triggered by conflict-induced displacement particularly related to IDPs:

- + Landmine Risks:** Despite post-war mine clearance efforts, certain regions in northern Sri Lanka still bear the threat of explosive remnants of war, endangering returnees and residents.
- + Shelter Requirements:** Housing emerged as a foremost priority among the returning population. A significant portion of houses designated for IDP resettlement are damaged, necessitating repairs or rebuilding.
- + Livelihood Challenges:** Vulnerable families suffered substantial economic losses due to disrupted food reserves, farmland destruction, loss of crops and fishing equipment, business interruption, and livestock loss.
- + Health and Sanitation Concerns:** The health and nutrition of IDPs raised concerns, particularly for children facing high malnutrition levels. While some hospitals operated in affected areas, primary healthcare services remained inadequate. There were apprehensions about water and vector-borne diseases.
- + Psychosocial Impact:** Conflict, displacement, and the loss of family or property led to widespread trauma and psychological stress among displaced individuals. The ICRC report, "Living with Uncertainty: Needs of the Families of Missing Persons in Sri Lanka," highlights the unique suffering endured by those with missing loved ones. This ambiguous loss brought about anxiety, depression, and somatic symptoms.

- + Protection Vulnerabilities:** Displaced populations, especially women and children, were at risk of exploitation, including human trafficking and sexual abuse.
- + Education Disruption:** Many children had their education interrupted due to displacement, resulting in a generation with missed learning opportunities.
- + Family Separation:** Displacement frequently led to the separation of families, scattering members across different locations.
- + Return and Resettlement Challenges:** The presence of landmines and unexploded ordnance in conflict-affected areas posed threats to safe return and resettlement efforts.
- + Land and Property Disputes:** The conflict generated disputes over land and property ownership, complicating the return and resettlement process.
- + Long-Term Reintegration:** Reintegrating into communities after prolonged displacement posed challenges due to changing dynamics and social structures.

While the immediate conflict has subsided, the enduring humanitarian consequences of displacement continue to influence the lives of those affected.



### Ground Story 6: Better Awareness for Improved Migrant Lives

"Currently, around 250 families reside here," states Mr. Nadaraja, President of the Rural Development Society of Menik Farm village. He elaborates, "Back in 2009, when the IDP camp was established by the government, stringent security measures were in place. The authorities restricted our movement outside the village."

**Menik Farm**, situated in the Vauniya district of the Tamil-speaking Northern Province, was among the world's largest IDP camps, sheltering nearly 300,000 people displaced by conflict in Sri Lanka. The camp ceased operation in 2012 as people were gradually resettled.

Ms. Jecinta, a pre-school teacher at the Menik Farm village pre-school, shares her husband's story: "About a year ago, my husband left Sri Lanka for work on a tourist visa, aiming to secure a work permit in Malaysia through an agent. However, even after a year, he lacks a work visa and is now evading arrest in Malaysia." She continues, "He had taken a loan to pay the sub-agent, who assured him a job in Malaysia. The agent managed all necessary documents—passport, visa, and ticket—but provided no receipts or proof of payment." Jecinta, a mother of two, expresses her predicament.

"He can't send money as he's not in a stable job, and we're still grappling with the loan. He's barely getting by with odd jobs," Jecinta adds. "I'm juggling my earnings as a pre-school teacher and private tuition to feed my children. I hope my husband secures a job soon to support us," she says with a blend of emotion and optimism.

Joining the discussion, Mr. Sathyaseelan, a youth community member, shares his perspective: "I also aspire to migrate, but lack the funds to pay agents." He adds, "Many are trying to leave Sri Lanka due to the challenging circumstances here. Some even sell all they own to take the risky journey to Canada. Agents promise to facilitate everything for 11 million rupees, but instances of people returning empty-handed due to fraud are common."

Mr. Nadaraja as leader in the community urges, "If the Red Cross could raise awareness about immigration and emigration processes, people can make informed decisions before embarking on their migration journey, thereby avoiding unnecessary risks." His gaze turns hopefully to Mr. Ronald Sri Kanth, Branch Executive Officer of SLRCS Vauniya branch.

17 August 2023

## 8.2.2 DISASTER AND CLIMATE INDUCED DISPLACEMENTS

Figure 09 illustrates the consequences of environmental disasters, particularly climate-related extreme weather events, which annually displace thousands of individuals. Discussions with SLRCS staff and volunteers confirm the critical humanitarian impacts outlined by IOM, particularly for people affected by floods and landslides, as observed in May 2017. Furthermore, the IFRC DREF final report on the May 2021 floods in Sri Lanka emphasized additional humanitarian needs resulting from the flooding. A summary of the humanitarian needs arising from displacements due to natural disasters is provided below:

- + Housing Damage:** Emergency shelter emerge as a paramount need for those with completely destroyed homes or those unable to return due to unsafe conditions. Evacuation centers became essential as temporary housing. Families with partially damaged houses required emergency shelter kits, including tarpaulin sheets, to facilitate repairs. Families at risk of landslides needed relocation to avert future disasters.
- + Evacuation Center/Camp Management:** Evacuation centers often suffered from overcrowding, lacking privacy and posing particular challenges for women and breastfeeding mothers. Inadequate bedding led to occupants sleeping on floors and tables. Inadequate toilet facilities necessitated portable solutions. Electricity supply disruptions added to the challenges.
- + Health, Water, Sanitation, and Hygiene:** The risk of vector-borne and communicable diseases was substantial. Contaminated and inaccessible water sources posed waterborne disease threats. Flooded and unusable wells compounded water-related issues.
- + Food Security:** Agricultural sectors endured losses due to damage to paddy fields and livestock deaths.
- + Livelihoods and Basic Necessities:** Market and service disruptions, coupled with COVID-19 restrictions, hindered families from securing essentials for daily life. Severe losses impacted long-term food security, while limited work opportunities diminished the purchasing power of vulnerable families. Many affected individuals, particularly daily wage labourers, lost their income due to lockdown measures and flood-induced disruptions.
- + Protection, Gender, and Inclusion:** Past experiences from SLRCS disaster and crisis responses have shown that protective social norms and family support systems often erode during volatile situations. Evacuation camps tend to witness incidents of domestic violence, sexual and gender-based violence, and child protection concerns like exploitation, assaults, and neglect.

It is evident that disaster and climate-induced displacements bear a multitude of humanitarian challenges, impacting not only physical well-being but also psychosocial and protection dimensions, emphasizing the need for comprehensive response and support measures.

### 8.3 INBOUND MIGRATION- RISKS AND VULNERABILITIES

Refugees and asylum seekers in Sri Lanka face significant humanitarian challenges. These challenges are complex and multifaceted, influenced by factors such as conflict, persecution, environmental issues, and lack of resources. The Stakeholder Dialogue and the Lessons Learned Workshop on Population Movement DREF operation organized by SLRCS in April 2023 extensively discussed the humanitarian issues faced by the refugees and asylum seekers in Sri Lanka.

- +** **Protection Risks:** Refugees and asylum seekers are vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, human trafficking, and discrimination, both during their journey and upon arrival in host countries. In the case of Rohingya refugees arrived in December 2022, there were unaccompanied girls (age below 18) who needed special accommodation facilities as they cannot be kept in a normal house setting. There were challenges as there is a language barrier and some children did not have guardians in the country of origin and it was extremely difficult to connect these children with their parents or guardians.
- +** **Access to Basic services:** Health services are often inadequate, and refugees are susceptible to diseases due to poor living conditions. Many refugees and asylum seekers lack adequate housing and live in overcrowded camps or informal settlements, increasing the risk of health issues and vulnerabilities. Access to sufficient and nutritious food and clean water can be limited, leading to malnutrition and related health problems. Refugees often carry the trauma of conflict, persecution, and displacement, leading to mental health challenges. The loss of homes, communities, and loved ones can have lasting emotional effects. For example, the recent experience revealed that the refugees were depressed for various reasons - their relatives are in Bangladesh and Malaysia. Sense of hopelessness, safety and security issues and lack of community support.
- +** **Prolonged Detention:** Asylum seekers and refugees may be detained for prolonged periods due to their irregular migration status in Sri Lanka. cases are often subject to complex legal processes, administrative backlogs, and resource constraints. Lengthy detention periods can lead to feelings of hopelessness, anxiety, and stress among detainees. The uncertainty of their situation, coupled with the conditions of detention, can take a toll on the mental health of asylum seekers. Depression, anxiety, post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), and other mental health issues are common among detained individuals, especially those who have already experienced trauma in their home countries.



- +** **Education and Future Prospects:** Refugee children often lack access to quality education, impacting their long-term development and future prospects. Gaining access to education in the host country- in the case of Sri Lanka is extremely difficult as revealed during the stakeholder dialogue. Displacement can disrupt the educational and career paths of adults, hindering their potential contributions. Education and earning a living in Sri Lanka is difficult for refugees as refugees are not receiving proper legal status in Sri Lanka.
- +** **Legal Issues and Resettlement Challenges:** Sri Lanka is not a party to the 1951 Refugee Convention , nor does it have a national law and mechanism to offer permanent resettlement to refugees. Therefore, Sri Lanka is only a temporary transit point for few years for many people awaiting resettlement in a third country. Navigating the complex legal procedures for seeking asylum can be challenging, and delays in processing can cause uncertainty. The authorities may arrest the asylum seekers and produce them in the court of law before they are handed over to UNHCR and DIE. Only a fraction of refugees is granted resettlement in third countries, leaving many in protracted situations.
- +** **Xenophobia and Discrimination:** Tensions can arise between refugees and host communities due to competition for resources, leading to xenophobia and discrimination. There were incidents in Sri Lanka that refugees were attacked by the locals after Easter Sunday attack in 2019 in Sri Lanka.
- +** **Cultural and Language Barriers:** It is evident that asylum seekers and refugees face cultural and language barriers that affect their ability to integrate. Lack of pre-crisis coordination mechanisms between humanitarian agencies, inadequate information, lack of trained staff and volunteers who have prior experience and language skills can further exacerbate the humanitarian situation.
- +** **Gender-Based Vulnerabilities:** Women and girls are at heightened risk of gender-based violence, exploitation, and trafficking. Lack of access to education and economic opportunities can limit women's empowerment. There could be challenges related to treating women for diseases even with female health workers due to cultural barriers.
- +** **Maintaining family contacts:** The migrants do not have access to communication equipment such as mobile phones or do not even have the contact details of their relatives and loved ones in the home country or any other country that they currently live. This could lead to loneliness, distress, anxiety and psychological impacts in general.



## 9. KEY FINDINGS OF THE ASSESSMENT

The key findings are derived from the literature review, KIIs with stakeholders, SLRCS staff and volunteers, and with selected community groups.

### 9.1 STAKEHOLDERS

The assessment finds following key stakeholders that are engaged in Migration and Displacement in Sri Lanka. A detailed list is available as a separate document to this report, including their affiliation, mandate, contact details, expertise, resources, relevance, geographic coverage, and past involvement with SLRCS/IFRC.

- + SL Bureau for Foreign Employment
- + Department of Immigration & Emigration
- + National anti-human trafficking task force
- + Sri Lanka Navy
- + Department of Probation and Child Care Services
- + International Organisation for Migration
- + International Labour Organisation
- + UNHCR- Sri Lanka
- + Muslim Aid
- + Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment
- + Swiss and Australian Embassies
- + Disaster Management Centre
- + Centre for Migration Research and development
- + Institute of Policy Studies
- + HELVITAS
- + District and Divisional Secretariats

### 9.2 GEOGRAPHICAL HOTSPOTS

The assessment identified several geographical locations highlighted during consultations that may be valuable for SLRCS to target its interventions.

- + **Human Trafficking and Smuggling:** The regions of Chilaw in the Puttalam district and Negambo in the Gampaha district have gained notoriety as hubs for organized irregular migration by boat to countries like Australia. Instances of trafficking related to migrant workers are scattered across the country, but Baticaloa, Ampara, and Trincomalee districts have been singled out as hotspots.
- + **Return and Resettlement of Sri Lankan Refugees:** The Sri Lankan Tamil refugees in Tamil Nadu have started returning in small numbers and resettlement takes place in the North and East provinces.

- + Labour Migration:** Notably, the Kurunegala and Colombo districts house a significant number of labor migrant recruitment agencies. The highest percentage of labor migration was reported in Batticaloa, Ampara, and Trincomalee, while Colombo, Gampaha, Kandy, Puttalam, Anuradhapura, Polonnaruwa, Matale, and Kurunegala are other districts with a high density of migration.
- + Detention Camps:** There are two detention facilities, one located in Welisara within the Gampaha district, and the other in Mirihana within the Colombo district. These facilities cater to asylum seekers seeking refuge.
- + Internal Displacement:** In recent times, instances of internal displacement predominantly arise from natural disasters, specifically floods and landslides. These occurrences tend to concentrate their impact on districts such as Rathnapura, Colombo, Gampaha, Kalutara, Galle, Matara, Kilinochchi, and Jaffna, as supported by statistics provided by the SLRCS.

### 9.3 OUTBOUND MIGRATION

Key highlights of the outbound migration including humanitarian issues are summarized below.

- + Human Trafficking and Smuggling Concerns:** Unlicensed sub-agents operating at the local level, exploit potential migrants, compelling them to migrate for better opportunities. Debt-related pressure, especially on women, drives them to take risks. Despite a reported decline in female labour migration after the 2013 FBR regulation, many females are still migrating irregularly to Middle Eastern countries, often exploited by local sub-agents. Irregular sea migration attempts, facilitated by smugglers and unsafe vessels, have led to tragic accidents and increased vulnerability to exploitation.
- + Rising Outbound Migration and Concentration:** Since 2022, there has been a noticeable increase in outbound migration from Sri Lanka, mainly attributed to the economic crisis. There is an increasing trend of brain drain which is attributed to high taxes imposed by the government on high-income professionals. Over 80% of migrant workers are concentrated in Middle Eastern and Gulf countries while Malaysia, South Korea, Japan, Romania too attract Sri Lankan migrant workers.
- + Migration Drivers:** Economic challenges, specifically low wages, increasing household debt, and income inequality, including gender dynamics, propel low-income individuals, notably women, to seek employment abroad. Family reunification serves as a motivating factor, and governmental policy changes drive migration, particularly for high-income professionals. The pursuit of asylum and refuge in response to persecution, conflict, or human rights abuses is another driver, albeit sometimes misused. A desire for an improved quality of life, encompassing healthcare, education, social services, and safety, motivates migration, even among the affluent. Limited opportunities, discrimination, aspirations, and familial pressure

also contribute to migration.

- + **Education and Skill Development:** Key informants stress the need for systematic vocational training and skills development programmes to produce skilled, less vulnerable migrants. Public awareness about available training opportunities and institutes should be enhanced, including technical colleges and organizations like VTA and NAITA. The ILO offers career guidance and Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) opportunities to returning migrants, enhancing their employability and self-esteem.
- + **Student Migration:** Economic crisis, political instability, and high unemployment rates along with feelings of hopelessness, frustration, and anxiety among the youth have propelled student migration to developed countries with the hope of getting permanent residency in the future.

### 9.3.1 HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES

- + Migrants encounter several challenges, including a lack of awareness about immigration procedures, leading to exploitation; abuse, poor working conditions, low wages, and coercion; safety and health risks during perilous journeys with limited access to healthcare and government assistance; emotional stress and connectivity issues due to prolonged separation from families; and limited legal protections due to language barriers and a lack of awareness about their rights, hindering their access to legal avenues for addressing grievances.
- + Gender-specific vulnerabilities affect female migrant workers, particularly those working as domestic helpers in Middle Eastern households, exposing them to isolation, sexual harassment, and abuse. Compounded by maternity rights and family challenges, their difficulties are exacerbated. The kafala system in Middle Eastern countries further restricts workers' mobility, leaving them susceptible to exploitation. The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated migrants' challenges, creating legal, health, and social barriers.
- + Legal and protection gaps affecting migrant workers include weak labour laws and limited enforcement in Middle Eastern countries, coupled with the restrictive kafala system, which hinders workers from changing employers or leaving the country, rendering them vulnerable. Additionally, barriers to justice emerge as migrant workers struggle to access legal remedies and justice due to their limited awareness of their rights and fears of reprisals.

### Ground Story 7: Estate Female Migrant Loses All Earnings After Returning

"This woman, originally from Ragala, spent 15 years working as a domestic worker in the Middle East," explains Kasun Menaka, RFL Coordinator at the SLRCS Nuwara Eliya branch, who possesses extensive experience in migration-related issues in the district.

Ragala, situated in the tea plantation region of Nuwara Eliya district, is home to a population primarily consisting of Indian Tamils who are engaged in the tea estates.

Continuing the narrative, Kasun elaborates, "She resides in a 'line room house,' provided by the estate management for her family. This line house, measuring approximately 120 square feet, is divided into two main sections: a sleeping and living area, as well as a kitchen with poor ventilation."

"After returning from the Middle East, she invested a substantial portion of her earnings in purchasing jewelry, a refrigerator, television, oven, furniture, and other household items. The limited space in her line room house posed challenges in accommodating all these newly acquired belongings. Lacking a bank account, she chose to keep her money as cash at home," Kasun explains.

"Tragically, a fire engulfed the line houses one day, resulting in the complete destruction of her line room along with all her possessions. In just a matter of hours, fifteen years' worth of earnings vanished. This devastating event profoundly impacted her mental well-being, and she has since been living with the effects of trauma," Kasun shares somberly. "As the Red Cross, we recognize the urgency to extend assistance to these individuals and provide them with training in effective fiscal management."

(Photo: SLRCS)



## 9.4 INTENAL DISPLACEMENT

- +** **Conflict-Induced Displacements:** Between 1983 and 2009, around 400,000 people were internally displaced due to conflict, mainly in districts like Vavuniya, Jaffna, Trincomalee, Batticaloa, and Puttalam. As UNHCR phases out operation, monitoring the residual IDP cases is now the responsibility of the Ministry of Resettlement and Reconstruction. Although there's no major humanitarian crisis related to these IDPs, ongoing political instability poses a risk of civil unrest and religious tensions.
- +** **Disasters and Climate-Induced Displacements:** Sri Lanka faces ongoing humanitarian challenges due to displacements caused by disasters and climate-related factors. Seasonal shifts have led to recurring extreme weather events like floods and landslides, necessitating evacuations.

### 9.4.1 HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES

- +** **Conflict-Induced Displacement:** Historical conflicts in Sri Lanka have inflicted significant suffering, especially on marginalized and impoverished segments. Conflict-induced displacement results in numerous challenges, including landmine risks, limited access to essential services, trauma, and protection concerns, particularly for women and children. Additional issues involve disrupted education, family separation, return difficulties, land disputes, and long-term reintegration.
- +** **Natural Disaster-Induced Displacement:** Infrequent natural disasters like tsunamis can lead to extensive property damage and significant displacements, straining government and humanitarian capacities. Challenges arising from natural disaster-induced displacements encompass overcrowded evacuation centers, food insecurity, transportation disruptions, limited access to livelihoods, protection concerns, and coordination challenges among humanitarian entities.

## 9.5 INBOUND MIGRATION

**Economic Migrants:** In Sri Lanka, inbound economic migrants work in various sectors, including construction, hospitality, manufacturing, education, and services. This diverse group includes high-skilled professionals, students, and returning Sri Lankan citizens.

**Asylum Seekers and Detainees:** Sri Lanka hosts 502 asylum seekers, approximately 500 refugees, and about 450 detainees. They come from nations like Myanmar, Afghanistan, Pakistan, Palestine, and various African countries, including Myanmar, India, Nigeria, Pakistan, and China. It is important to note that there may be an overlap between asylum seekers and detainees when comparing numbers.

### 9.5.1 HUMANITARIAN CONSEQUENCES

- +** **Protection and Basic Needs:** Forced displacement exposes refugees and asylum seekers to risks like exploitation, abuse, and health issues from long, unhygienic sea voyages. Limited access to education, healthcare, and proper nutrition worsens vulnerabilities. Special attention is needed for unaccompanied girls under 18, facing accommodation and guardianship challenges. Tensions between refugees and host communities can breed xenophobia and discrimination, leading to local attacks.
  
- +** **Legal Challenges and Mental Health:** Sri Lanka lacks comprehensive mechanisms for permanent refugee resettlement, resulting in delayed asylum processes and prolonged detention. Only a fraction are resettled in third countries, leaving many in legal limbo. This uncertainty, coupled with detention conditions, impacts mental well-being, leading to conditions like depression, anxiety, and post-traumatic stress disorder. Isolation from loved ones can cause loneliness, distress, anxiety, and psychological strain.
  
- +** **Integration and Gender Vulnerabilities:** Limited access to education affects refugee children's development and the uncertain career paths of adults. Integration obstacles, like cultural and language barriers, hinder refugees' adaptation to host societies. Women and girls face increased risks of gender-based violence and exploitation. Limited communication options affect their mental health and overall well-being.

## 10. RECOMMENDATIONS

The recommendations of this assessment are developed based on the findings with an intention of enhancing the Sri Lanka Red Cross's approach to addressing humanitarian challenges posed by Migration and Displacement issues in Sri Lanka looking at its policies, structures, technical capacities, partnerships, community level programming and overall response mechanisms.

### 10.1 POLICY, STRATEGY AND STRUCTURE

#### *Action 1- Positioning within SLRCS and Internal Advocacy*

**Action description:** The placement of the Migration unit within SLRCS is critical for its recognition. The Migration focal point should initiate discussions with other thematic units on how to integrate Migration and Displacement issues into various thematic areas. As an initial step, in collaboration with thematic focal points and the IFRC, the Migration focal point should review SLRCS's existing policies and strategies related to DM, Health, Humanitarian Values, and Organizational Development. This review should lead to recommendations for integrating Migration and Displacement considerations into these policies where relevant.

The focal point, in coordination with the IFRC, should advocate for these recommendations in the respective policies by actively participating in the DM, Health, Youth, and National Society Development sub-committees. Findings from the Migration and Displacement needs assessment must be presented to these sub-committees, CGB members, and branches to secure support for developing a dedicated Migration and Displacement policy and strategy for SLRCS in the future.

Looking ahead, internal advocacy within SLRCS is essential to foster awareness and engagement among governing board members, senior management, staff, and volunteers at all levels. This advocacy seeks to promote the Migration and Displacement portfolio within the SLRCS and the RCRC Movement.

**Timeline:** To be implemented urgently on short term

**Responsibility:** Migration focal point with the support of DG and relevant thematic focal points. The DG should make a formal request to the President to include Migration focal point in sub committees. IFRC may be invited to the sub committees where relevant as and when needed.



### **Action 2- SLRCS Organizational Strategy**

**Action description:** SLRCS is developing a 5-6-year organizational strategy, with a focus on aligning it with IFRC Strategy 2030, which recognizes Migration and Displacement as a global challenge. Given that Migration and Displacement are core humanitarian concerns for Sri Lanka, collaboration with Movement partners is vital to integrate these issues into SLRCS's strategy possibly as a separate strategic objective. Key strategic areas may include addressing risks and vulnerabilities in outbound labour migration, monitoring humanitarian concerns related to human capital flight, prevention of trafficking, refugee/asylum seeker support, and collaborating with other SLRCS units such as DM and Health on internal displacement.

**Timeline:** To be implemented urgently on short term and priority basis

**Responsibility:** Migration focal point together with IFRC should advocate for the inclusion of Migration and Displacement in the upcoming strategy with the support of DG.

### **Action 3- Operational Strategy and Annual Operational Plans**

**Action description:** An operational strategy for Migration and Displacement is necessary for SLRCS to effectively and efficiently address the humanitarian needs of migrants and displaced persons, ensuring alignment with the SLRCS organizational strategy. This strategy enables SLRCS to adopt a focused and systematic approach to tackle the complex challenges of migration and displacement. This involves identifying priority areas, target populations, and specific interventions. A clearly defined operational strategy provides a results framework and establishes a basis for accountability. SLRCS can measure its progress, as well as that of the Migration and Displacement unit, against established goals, objectives, and indicators. The current annual operational plans should be further strengthened and harmonize with IFRC country plans, contributing to the implementation of the Operational Strategy

**Timeline:** To be implemented on short term

**Responsibility:** Migration focal point supported by IFRC with the consent of DG.

#### **Action 4- Technical Working Group for Migration and Displacement**

**Action description:** The TWG is a think tank to develop the portfolio and a platform to promote the unit's work within SLRCS, Movement partners, and external stakeholders. The TWG would include Movement partners, thematic focal points, and selected branches and external stakeholders may be invited as needed. The TWG may not initially have the same recognition by the CGB as other subcommittees. However, working closely with partners and colleagues can build a case for recognition and position the unit to be a fully-fledged sub-committee like DM and Health which is established by the President of the SLRCS.

**Timeline:** To be implemented on short term

**Responsibility:** Migration focal point supported by IFRC and with the consent of DG.

#### **Action 5- Migration and Displacement Policy**

**Action description:** The Migration focal point, with input from senior management and the CGB, should develop Migration and Displacement Policy for SLRCS. IFRC can offer valuable support. A dedicated policy offers clear guidance and a framework for staff, volunteers, and stakeholders to align with the RCRC Movement's approach to Migration and Displacement. It clarifies roles and responsibilities, ensuring consistent actions and responses across contexts. This consistency reduces ad-hoc decision-making and confusion. Additionally, it aids SLRCS in complying with national and international laws related to migration, displacement, and humanitarian work, ensuring it operates within defined boundaries.

**Timeline:** To be implemented on medium term with 12-18 months' time frame

**Responsibility:** Primary responsibility of initiating this lies with the CGB. DG together with Migration focal point, IFRC and should advocate to get the initial approval to start developing the policy. Sub committees, Branch Governing boards and BEOs should be involved

### **Action 6- Position within the Organizational Structure**

**Action description:** Migration and Displacement are cross-cutting issues linked to various thematic areas. The existing organizational structure lacks a dedicated Migration and Displacement Unit and does not integrate these aspects into other thematic units. Recognition is needed for the Migration and Displacement portfolio, including RFL. A senior position is required to represent SLRCS effectively in both internal and external meetings and forums. Migration and Displacement should be placed as a separate unit like DM and Health in the revised interim structure which is being proposed currently. This interim structure's approval is subject to the CGB in accordance with SLRCS policy.

At the branch level, the RFL volunteer coordinator, present in each of the 25 districts, plays a pivotal role. Their role can be expanded and strengthened to address a broader range of Migration and Displacement-related tasks, including outbound labour migration risks, human trafficking, and collaboration with other thematic units on internal displacement matters.

**Timeline:** To be implemented on long term with two year time frame

**Responsibility:** DG is responsible to propose this change to CGB and get the approval. Consultation with CGB, Sub committees, Branch governing boards and BEOs should take place

## 10.2 PARTNERSHIPS, NETWORKING AND COLLABORATION

Establishing a range of partnerships and collaboration is crucial for effectively addressing Migration and Displacement issues by SLRCS. These partnerships can leverage resources, expertise, and networks to provide comprehensive support to migrants, refugees, and displaced individuals. A comprehensive list of potential stakeholders is provided separately with whom SLRCS should engage. While SLRCS already maintains positive relationships with some organizations and has collaborated in responding to recent population movement crises, there is room to build on these strengths, expand relationships, and formalize partnerships.

### **Action 7- Closer working relationship with IOM and ILO**

**Action description:** Currently, IOM and ILO collaborates with Sarvodaya , HELVETAS, Save the Children, the Family Rehabilitation Centre , AMCOR , and OECRP along with government authorities, to create awareness, establish watch groups, and assist trafficking victims through district-level anti-trafficking committees. SLRCS can collaborate with IOM and ILO specifically on the following areas:

- In the absence of UNHCR, partner with IOM to assist Sri Lankan Tamil refugees returning from South India. Returnees face challenges including shelter, basic needs, healthcare, land, and legal issues.
- Partner with ILO and HELVETAS on CSO capacity-building programme on Safe Labour Migration.
- SLRCS can work together with ILO and SLBFE offering psychosocial assistance, first aid, and other necessary aid through platforms like WhatsApp or other suitable communication channels to migrants.

**Timeline:** On going, and should be further strengthened with joint projects

**Responsibility:** Migration focal point, supported by Head of Operation or DG

### **Action 8- Strengthen Relationship with National Level Government Agencies**

**Action description:** SLRCS should strive to strengthen and foster partnerships with key government agencies that deal with Migration and Displacement, such as the Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment, SLBFE, DIE, National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force, Department of Probation and Child Care Services, Security Forces, and Police, as well as the Vocational Training Authority.

**Timeline:** Medium to long term. SLRCS maintains relationship some government agencies currently. However, there is a need to develop quality relationships at the highest levels

**Responsibility:** Migration focal point supported by Head of Operation or DG

### **Action 9- Strengthen Relationship with stakeholders at National Level**

**Action description:** Apart from IOM, ILO and UNHCR, there are number of agencies working on migration and displacement. These include: Helvitas, Sarvodaya, World Vision, Muslim Aid, Save the Children, Legal aid organizations, academic research institutions such as IPS, CEPA and CMRD, and media organizations. Furthermore, there are donor agencies such as Australian High Commission and DFAT, British High Commission and FCDO, European Union and European Commission - Directorate-General for European Civil Protection and Humanitarian Aid Operations (ECHO), Government of Japan, and Swiss Embassy on issues that are interested in Migration related work.

SLRCS should advocate with these organizations to set up a platform or a forum with periodical meetings to share information and discuss common issues. This platform would function as a think tank, fostering the collaboration of experts and practitioners to address shared concerns, share knowledge, and exchange information. Stakeholders also highlighted the necessity for a network involving district migration and development officers from the Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment.

**Timeline:** Long term. First, initiate discussions with other stakeholders

**Responsibility:** Migration focal point supported by Head of Operation

## 10.3 TOOLS AND GUIDELINES DEVELOPMENT

### **Action 10 -Technical support and guidance for integration**

**Action description:** The assessment recommends that integration of migration consideration in to other technical areas is essential. Effective integration of migration across thematic areas requires collaboration, awareness, and commitment. Through the proposed technical working group, technical guidelines encompassing checklists, data collection forms, and templates should be developed to coach staff and volunteers. Moreover, this working group should offer the necessary support for skills development to both staff and volunteers. The focal technical aspects that require attention are as follows:

- Emergency needs assessment and disaster risk assessment tools including looking at Health and WASH
- Modify livelihood assessment tools to recognize the skills and qualifications of migrants and displaced individuals - refer RPL Learning Package .
- Guidelines and technical standards for designing shelters that cater to the cultural and privacy needs of displaced populations.
- Develop education materials that are culturally sensitive and pertinent to the experiences of migrants.
- Data Collection and Monitoring: Design templates and data collection forms to gather disaggregated data on migrants and displaced populations, serving as a foundation for evidence-based programming.

**Timeline:** Long term. Once the proposed TWG is established, these actions should be part of the agenda

**Responsibility:** Migration focal point supported by Head of Operation and thematic focal points

### **Action 11 - Integration of PGI and CEA**

**Action Description:** PGI and CEA are vital cross cutting areas that need special attention, as these are closely linked with Migration and Displacement. All SLRCS members, including volunteers and board members, need a solid understanding of these concepts. Fast-tracking Child Safeguarding and Preventing Sexual Exploitation and Abuse policies development is crucial for integrating PGI and CEA into all programmes, especially Migration and Displacement efforts.

The migration unit should identify specific PGI issues related to each migration types and develop targeted interventions. Translating IFRC PGI in Emergencies and CEA Kits into Sinhala and Tamil and training district RFL coordinators on PGI are essential. Documenting PGI best practices, including integrating PGI, CEA, and Migration modules in disaster response training, is necessary and feasible since the BDRT curriculum is under review.

**Timeline:** Ongoing and medium term. Currently PGI and CEA are an integral part of Emergency Operations.

**Responsibility:** Migration focal point supported by Head of Operation and PGI/CEA focal points

### **Action 12 - Knowledge Management**

**Action Description:** SLRCS together with Movement partners and stakeholders could develop and adopt various knowledge products to raise awareness and capacity-building for Migration and Displacement. Examples include case studies and success stories to document real-life stories of migrants and displaced individuals, highlighting their challenges and achievements.

**Timeline:** Medium and long term. With the support of Movement partners and stakeholders

**Responsibility:** Focal point supported by Head of Operation, Communications Officer and PGI/CEA focal points



### **Action 13 - Training and Capacity Building**

**Action Description:** SLRCS should disseminate the available training opportunities and materials within and outside the Movement. Furthermore, develop training modules for Migration and Displacement in local languages to enhance staff capacity of staff and volunteers. Collaborate with IFRC and other Movement partners to create tailored training materials and use existing training modules available and adopt to local context. Topics for training sessions should include:

- Introduction to Migration and Displacement
- National and International Legal Framework
- Protection and Safeguarding
- Cultural Sensitivity and Communication
- Data Collection and Reporting

These sessions should use practical exercises, case studies, role-playing, and interactive discussions to enhance participants' understanding and skills. Consider offering training for government officials, particularly at the district and divisional levels. A list of e-learning courses and resource materials is provided as a separate document accompanying this report.

**Timeline:** Long term. With the support of Movement partners and stakeholders

**Responsibility:** Migration focal point supported by the Movement Partners

### **Action 14 - Scenario Building and Contingency Planning**

**Action Description:** SLRCS should use its contingency planning experience to analyze Migration and Displacement trends and build future scenarios. Collaborate with stakeholders and RCRC Movement partners to develop potential scenarios in the Sri Lankan context, including:

- Religious tensions, ethnic violence, and anti-government protests, election violence leading to civil unrest and displacement.
- Refugees and asylum seekers arriving in Sri Lanka from countries like Bangladesh, Myanmar, Afghanistan, and Pakistan.
- Large-scale return and reintegration of migrant workers from the Middle East.
- Irregular Sri Lankan migrant workers stranded abroad and needing assistance.
- Irregular migrants on dangerous sea voyages.

Prioritize these scenarios, analyze their risks, and collaboratively develop contingency plans with other thematic units to prepare for potential events.

**Timeline:** Medium and Long term.

**Responsibility:** Migration focal point supported by other thematic focal points

## 10.4 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR DISTRICT BRANCHES

### **Action 15 - Strengthen collaboration with government offices, local NGOs and CBOs**

**Action Description:** The branches can improve their current collaborations to broaden the sharing of data and information related to migrants and their families, which includes the welfare programmes managed by the SLBFE for the families of migrants. Numerous local NGOs and CBOs are active at the district or divisional level. The branches should establish strong partnerships with these organizations to ensure grassroots participation, culturally sensitive interventions, and community-driven solutions.

Building on current strength on good relationship with government stakeholders, the branches should advocate to establish a district-level “Migration Network” led by District Secretary or advocate for an agenda item to discuss the migrants’ issues at the district development committee.

**Timeline:** Long term.

**Responsibility:** BEO supported by RFL Coordinators and Migration focal point at NHQ

### **Action 16 - Strengthen Community Resilience and Coping Strategies**

**Action Description:** Collaborate with SLBFE and local authorities to understand and address challenges faced by migrant workers’ families. The economic downturn is increasing destitution risk, impacting migrant families. Branches should work with authorities to identify vulnerable individuals left behind, especially those with disabilities, the elderly, children and the marginalized. Focus on school-going children and adolescent girls from migrant families, addressing protection issues and facilitating RFL services. Empower affected migrant families, equip potential migrants with basic IT skills, and guide volunteers in conducting vulnerability assessments. Assess healthcare, mental health, and sanitation challenges, identify resilience-enhancing activities, and use evidence for policy influencing and advocacy. Furthermore, branches could establish an information desk and a hotline.

**Timeline:** Long term.

**Responsibility:** BEO supported by RFL Coordinators, Migration focal point and other thematic focal points at NHQ

### **Action 17 - Awareness Creation and Sexual Education for School Children**

**Action Description:** Raise awareness among potential migrants and families about the migration process, consequences, and impact on family members. Use SLBFE's Safe Labour Migration Information Guide for this. Trained staff should deliver informative presentations, and resource persons should lead awareness campaigns.

Using existing government structure, initiate grassroots-level awareness campaigns and establish a communication chain from Grama Niladhari<sup>6</sup> officers to Divisional Secretaries, endorsed by the District Secretary, for efficient incident reporting and assistance, especially for migrants.

Inform the younger generation about the value of acquiring relevant technological knowledge and skills before migrating. Promote vocational training through technical colleges, the VTA, and other centers.

Furthermore, collaborate with school authorities and public health officers to provide sexual education, PSS to children left behind by migrating parents. This proactive measure safeguards their well-being, empowers them to make informed choices, and fosters healthier communities. Sexual education imparts knowledge about safe practices and informed decision-making, reducing risks of early pregnancies and diseases. It equips children to manage their sexual health and relationships and to identify and resist exploitation, mitigating the added vulnerabilities they may face due to parental migration.

**Timeline:** Long term

**Responsibility:** BEO supported by RFL Coordinators, Migration focal point and other thematic focal points at NHQ

<sup>6</sup>Grama Niradhari is the village level government administrative officer responsible for dealing with village level administrative issues of the people.

## 10.5 RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IFRC

IFRC can boost SLRCS's engagement in Migration and Displacement issues specifically focusing on the following areas:

- **Connect SLRCS with other regions:** Over 80% of Sri Lankan migrant workers are in the MENA. IFRC can facilitate discussions with counterparts in MENA offices and connect SLRCS.
- **Joint Initiatives:** Explore the possibility of collaborative planning for Preparedness for Effective and Response (PER) actions, including contingency planning, training, and capacity building during peacetime. Moment Partners can share lessons learned and additional technical advises needed.
- Strengthen dialogue between SLRCS and RCRC National Societies in migrant worker destination countries, promoting knowledge sharing, experience exchange, and preparedness and response
- **Technical support to SLRCS:** Provide expert input for policy and strategy development, advocacy, partnership development, knowledge management, communication, and capacity building.
- **Strengthen SLRCS's Migration unit:** Offer guidance to the Migration focal point including financial support, develop teaching materials for existing trainings, and provide staff training to integrate Migration and Displacement into SLRCS's programmes and operations.

## 11. AUTHORSHIP AND ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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