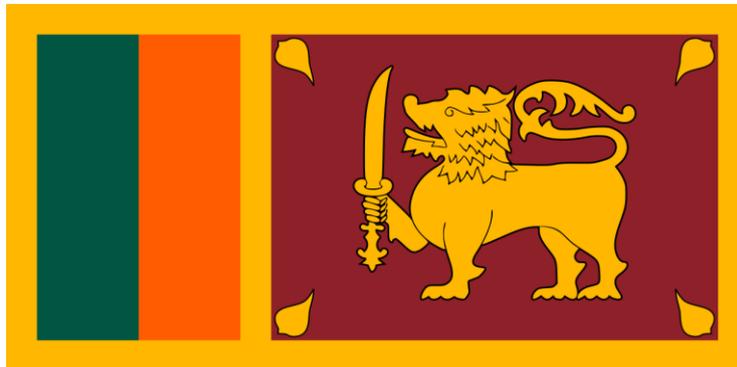


**ETHNIC COUNCIL
OF SHEPPARTON AND DISTRICT Inc.**

Reg. No. A6321

Sri Lankan Community Profile



August 2015

Country Background

Official Name

Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka

Location

Sri Lanka lies on the Indian Plate, a major tectonic plate that was formerly part of the Indo-Australian Plate. It is in the Indian Ocean southwest of the Bay of Bengal, between latitudes 5° and 10°N, and longitudes 79° and 82°E. Sri Lanka is separated from the Indian subcontinent by the Gulf of Mannar and Palk Strait. According to Hindu mythology, a land bridge existed between the Indian mainland and Sri Lanka. It now amounts to only a chain of limestone shoals remaining above sea level. It was reportedly passable on foot up to 1480 AD, until cyclones deepened the channel.

Sri Lanka has a total area of about 65,610 square kilometres (or about 25,332 square miles).¹

Population

Population in Sri Lanka is estimated at 20 million. Sri Lanka is the 57th most populated nation in the world. Density is highest in the south west where Colombo, the country's main port and industrial center, is located. The net population growth is about 0.7%. Sri Lanka is ethnically, linguistically, and religiously diverse.

According to the 2012 census the population of Sri Lanka was 20,359,439, giving a population density of 325/km². The population had grown by 5,512,689 (37.1%) since the 1981 census (the last full census), equivalent to an annual growth rate of 1.1%. 3,704,470 (18.2%) lived in urban sectors - areas governed by municipal and urban councils.

5,131,666 (25.2%) of the population were aged 14 or under whilst 2,525,573 (12.4%) were aged 60 or over, leaving a working age (15-59) population of 12,702,700. The dependency ratio was 60.2%. The mean age was 32 years and the median age was 31 years. The sex ratio was 94 males per 100 females. The fertility rate for married females aged 15 or over was 2.65 live births. There were 5,264,282 households of which 3,986,236 (75.7%) were headed by males and 1,278,046 (24.3%) were headed by females.

Of the 15,227,773 aged 15 or over, 10,322,105 (67.8%) were married, 3,927,602 (25.8%) were never married, 792,947 (5.2%) were widowed and 185,119 (1.2%) were divorced or separated.

Of those aged 15 or over, 7,857,370 (51.6%) were economically active, 4,199,558 (27.6%) did housework, 1,431,105 (9.4%) were students, 914,934 (6.0%) were unable to work and 346,084 (2.3%) were pensioners. 521,938 (6.6%) of the economically active were unemployed. 604,540 Sri Lankans were living abroad for more than six months but were intending to return to Sri Lanka.¹

A brief history

The history of Sri Lanka begins around 30,000 years ago. Chronicles, including the Mahawansa, the Dipavamsa, the Culavamsa and the Rajaveliya, record events from the beginnings of the Sinhalese monarchy in the 6th century BC, the Tamil Elara (monarch) in the 2nd century BC; through the arrival of European Colonialists in the 16th century; and to the disestablishment of the monarchy in 1815. Some mentions of the country are found in the Ramayana, the Mahabharatam and the Lankavatara Sutra Mahayana Buddhism texts of the Buddha's teachings. Buddhism was introduced in the 3rd century BC by Arhath Mahinda (son of the Indian emperor Ashoka the Great).

From the 16th century, some coastal areas of the country were ruled by the Portuguese, Dutch and British. Sri Lanka was ruled by 181 Kings and Queens from the Anuradhapura to Kandy periods. After 1815 the entire nation was under British colonial rule and armed uprisings against the British took place in the 1818 Uva Rebellion and the 1848 Matale Rebellion. Independence was finally granted in 1948 but the country remained a Dominion of the British Empire.

In 1972 Sri Lanka assumed the status of a Republic. A constitution was introduced in 1978 which made the Executive President the head of state. The Sri Lankan Civil War began in 1983, including an armed youth uprising in 1987–1989, with the 26-year-long civil war ending in 2009. Sri Lanka has emerged from its 26-year war to become one of the fastest growing economies of the world.¹

Ethnicity, language and religion

Ethnicity

Sinhalese constitute the largest ethnic group in the country, with 74.88% of the total population. Sri Lankan Tamils are the second major ethnic group in the island, with a percentage of 11.2. Sri Lankan Moors comprise 9.2%. Tamils of Indian origin were brought into the country as indentured labourers by British colonists to work on estate plantations. Nearly 50% of them were repatriated following independence in 1948. They are distinguished from the native Tamil population that has resided in Sri Lanka since ancient times. There are also small ethnic groups such as the Burghers (of mixed European descent) and Malays from Southeast Asia. Moreover, there is a small population of Vedda people who are believed to be the original indigenous group to inhabit the island.¹

Language

Sinhalese and Tamil are the two official languages of Sri Lanka. The Constitution defines English as the link language. English is widely used for education, scientific and commercial purposes. Members of the Burgher community speak variant forms of Portuguese Creole and Dutch with varying proficiency, while members of the Malay community speak a form of Creole Malay that is unique to the island.¹

Religion

Sri Lanka is also a multi-religious country. 70% are Buddhists, most of whom follow the Theravada school of Buddhism. Most of the Buddhist are from majority Sinhalese ethnic group. Buddhism was introduced to Sri Lanka in the 2nd century BC by Venerable Mahinda. A sapling of the Bodhi Tree under which the Buddha attained enlightenment was brought to Sri Lanka during the same time. The Pali Canon (*Thripitakaya*), having previously been preserved as an oral tradition, was first committed to writing in Sri Lanka around 30 BC. Sri Lanka has the longest continuous history of Buddhism of any predominately Buddhist nation, with the Sangha having existed in a largely unbroken lineage since its introduction in the 2nd century BC. During periods of decline, the Sri Lankan monastic lineage was revived through

contact with Thailand and Burma. Buddhism is given special recognition in the Constitution which requires Sri Lankans to "protect and foster the Buddha Sasana".

Hinduism is the second most prevalent religion in Sri Lanka and predates Buddhism. Today, Hinduism is dominant in Northern, Eastern and Central Sri Lanka. Hindus are mainly Tamils.

Islam is the third most dominant religion in the country, having first been brought to the island by Arab traders over the course of many centuries, starting around the 7th century AD. Most Muslims are Sunni who follow the Shafi'i school. Most followers of Islam in Sri Lanka today are believed to be descendants of these Arab traders and the local women they married.

Christianity reached the country through Western colonists in the early 16th century. Around 7.4% of the Sri Lankan population are Christians, of which 82% are Roman Catholics who trace their religious heritage directly to the Portuguese. The remaining Christians are evenly split between the Anglican Church of Ceylon and other Protestant denominations.

There is also a small population of Zoroastrian immigrants from India (Parsis) who settled in Ceylon during the period of British rule, but this community has steadily dwindled in recent years. Religion plays a prominent role in the life and culture of Sri Lankans. The Buddhist majority observe Poya Days each month according to the Lunar calendar, and Hindus and Muslims also observe their own holidays. In a 2008 Gallup poll, Sri Lanka was ranked the third most religious country in the world, with 99% of Sri Lankans saying religion was an important part of their daily life.¹

Family Values

The family is extremely important in Sri Lankan culture.

The average family is mainly a four person unit. The government encourages small families to reduce over population. The females in the family have the possibility to decide on family planning.

Family is not just the nucleus family. It is the extended family too. Parents and siblings and their families all make up part of the family.

Normally the families, old parents, will live together in one house. This is slowly changing due to many people living overseas, but it's still very common.

Family structure is patriarchal normally. The women do have a say within the family. The women in most cases is respected as the mother. ²

Education and Economy

Education

With a literacy rate of 92.5%, Sri Lanka has one of the most literate populations amongst developing nations. Its youth literacy rate stands at 98%, computer literacy rate at 35%, and primary school enrolment rate at over 99%. An education system which dictates 9 years of compulsory schooling for every child is in place. The free education system established in 1945, is a result of the initiative of C. W. W. Kannangara and A. Ratnayake. It is one of the few countries in the world that provide universal free education from primary to tertiary stage.

Kannangara led the establishment of the Madhya Maha Vidyalayas (Central Schools) in different parts of the country in order to provide education to Sri Lanka's rural children. In 1942 a special education committee proposed extensive reforms to establish an efficient and quality education system for the people. However, in the 1980s changes to this system saw the separation of administration of schools between the central government and the provincial government. Thus the elite National Schools are controlled directly by the Ministry of Education and the provincial schools by the provincial government. Sri Lanka has approximately 9675 government schools, 817 private schools and Pirivenas. The number of public universities in Sri Lanka is 15. However, lack of responsiveness of the education system to labour market requirements, disparities in access to quality education, lack of an effective linkage between secondary and tertiary education remain major challenges for the education sector. A number of private, degree awarding institutions have emerged in recent times to fill in these gaps, yet the participation at tertiary level education remains at 5.1%. The proposed private university bill has been withdrawn by the Higher Education Ministry after university students' heavy demonstrations and resistance.

The British science fiction author Arthur C. Clarke (most famous as the author of 2001 A Space Odyssey) served as Chancellor of Moratuwa University in Sri Lanka from 1979 to 2002.¹

Economy

With an economy worth \$80.591 billion (2015) (\$233.637 billion PPP estimate), and a per capita GDP of about \$11,068.996 (PPP), Sri Lanka has mostly had strong growth rates in recent years until the government toppled early in 2015 where most development projects were stopped abruptly on corruption claims. In GDP per capita terms, it is ahead of other countries in the South Asian region.

The main economic sectors of the country are tourism, tea export, apparel, textile, rice production and other agricultural products. In addition to these economic sectors, overseas employment contributes highly in foreign exchange, 90% of expatriate Sri Lankans reside in the Middle East.

Since becoming independent from Britain in February 1948, the economy of the country has been affected by natural disasters such as the 2004 Indian Ocean earthquake and a number of insurrections, such as the 1971, the 1987-89 and the 1983-2009 civil war. The parties which ruled the country after 1948 did not implement any national plan or policy on the economy, veering between left and right wing economic practices. The government during 1970-77 period applied pro-left economic policies and practices. Between 1977 and 1994 the country came under UNP rule and between 1994 and 2004 under SLFP rule. Both of these parties applied pro-right policies. In 2001, Sri Lanka faced bankruptcy, with debt reaching 101% of GDP. The impending currency crisis was averted after the country reached a hasty ceasefire agreement with the LTTE and brokered substantial foreign loans. After 2004 the UPFA government has concentrated on mass production of goods for domestic consumption such as rice, grain and other agricultural products.

Almost five years after the end of the three-decade civil conflict, Sri Lanka is now focusing on long-term strategic and structural development challenges as it strives to transition to an upper middle income country. Key challenges include ensuring that growth is inclusive, realigning public spending and policy with the needs of a middle income country, ensuring appropriate resource allocations for the various tiers of government, and enhancing the role of the private sector, including provision of appropriate incentives for increasing productivity and exports.

The Sri Lankan economy has seen robust annual growth at 6.4 percent over the course of 2003 to 2012, well above its regional peers. Following the end of the civil conflict in May 2009, growth rose initially to 8 percent, largely reflecting a “peace dividend”, and underpinned by strong private consumption and investment. While growth was mostly private sector driven, public investment contributed through large infrastructure investment, including post war reconstruction efforts in the North and Eastern provinces. Growth was around 7 percent in 2013, driven by a rebound in the service sector which accounts for approximately 60 percent of GDP. With nearly 2 million Sri Lankans living abroad, overseas employment has contributed with foreign exchange and remittances in the order of 10 percent of GDP in 2013. Overall, unemployment at 4 percent is low, although youth unemployment (ages 15–24) at around 17.3 percent and low female labour force participation at 30 percent do pose a challenge.

Sri Lanka has met the Millennium Development Goal (MDG) target of halving extreme poverty and is on track to meet most of the other MDGs, outperforming other South Asian countries. Whereas South Asia as a whole is on track or an early achiever for nine of the 22 MDG

indicators, Sri Lanka manages this for 15 indicators. Among the targets achieved early are those related to universal primary education and gender equality. Sri Lanka is expected to meet the goals of maternal health and HIV/AIDs. Progress on reaching the goals related to malnutrition and child mortality is, however, slower. Indicators are mixed on the environment: while Sri Lanka is an early achiever on indicators of protected area, ozone depleting substance consumption, safe drinking water and basic sanitation, it has stagnated or is slipping backwards on forest cover and CO2 emissions.

Sri Lanka experienced a big decline in poverty between 2002 and 2009 – from 23 percent to 9 percent of the population. Despite the very positive story of poverty reduction and shared prosperity, important development challenges remain in Sri Lanka. Pockets of poverty continue to exist, specifically in the districts of Batticaloa (in the Eastern Province), Jaffna (in the Northern Province), Moneragala (in Uva Province) and in the estate sector.

An estimated 9 percent of Sri Lankans who are no longer classified as poor live within 20 percent of the poverty line and are, thus, vulnerable to shocks which could cause them to fall back into poverty.

The Government strategic vision is laid out in the Mahinda Chintana document of 2010. The strategy describes three clear goals: doubling per capita income through sustained high investment; shifting the structure of the economy; and ensuring inclusive growth, improvement in living standards and social inclusion.

Sri Lanka is currently an IDA/IBRD blend country and the World Bank Country Partnership Strategic objectives are aligned to support the country achieve its development goals.

The country aspires to achieve the goal of doubling of per capita income to \$4,000 by 2016 from an estimated US\$3,194 in 2013, but faces three particular macroeconomic challenges. Sustaining an 8 percent-plus annual growth to meet this goal will require:

- (i) Fostering private sector development and greater private investment;
- (ii) Increasing exports to generate jobs and managing the current account deficit; and
- (iii) Further addressing fiscal imbalances and reversing the declining trend in revenue collection.

Such growth would need to be driven by a high investment rate of above 40 percent of GDP, which seems ambitious given the country's 31 percent level in 2013.

The second goal is shifting the structure of the economy to be more knowledge-based, globally integrated and competitive, environmentally friendly, internally integrated and increasingly

urban. Sri Lanka has a solid base for achieving this goal, with a well-educated population and a wealth of environmental assets. Challenges going forward include providing systems and incentives to give the labour force the types of skills needed for a knowledge economy, establishment of economic policies that encourage competitiveness, stronger efforts on environmental sustainability and adaptation to climate change, and modernizing infrastructure systems to integrate the disparate parts of the country and meet the needs of an increasingly urban population.

Ensuring improvement in living standards and social inclusion:

Thanks to a long history of attention to access to basic services, Sri Lanka excels for its income level on most social indicators. Malnutrition, however, is an exception. As Sri Lanka becomes a middle income country, new challenges are emerging (e.g. a rapidly aging population) and improving the quality of services will be a major issue going forward. While increasing the quality of services, the Mahinda Chintana aims to ensure that benefits are equitably shared across all segments of the population and that social inclusion is a priority.

In addition, the World Bank supports the country's emerging challenges and needs with a combination of technical support, knowledge products relevant to lending and the use of IDA/IBRD lending.

Strengthening Sri Lanka's resilience to natural disasters and climate change has become a priority for the country's development agenda. Climate-related hazards pose a significant threat to economic and social development in the country. The World Bank Group is well placed to assist Sri Lanka in increasing both its physical and fiscal resilience to climate and disaster risk, through adaptation enhancing investments and a Catastrophe Deferred Draw-Down Option (CAT-DDO) which is a contingent credit line that provides immediate liquidity to IBRD member countries in the aftermath of a natural disaster. A comprehensive program of support in this area is proposed in the upcoming progress report of the Country Partnership Strategy.¹

Sri Lankans in Australia

Recorded Sri Lankan immigration to Australia started in 1816, with the transportation of Drum Major William O'Dean (a Sri Lankan Malay) and his wife Eve (a Sinhalese). Early immigrants from Sri Lanka (at that time known as Ceylon) were generally (unlike the O'Deans) absorbed into the Aboriginal population. Other early references of Sri Lankan migration date back to the 1870s when authorities in South Australia sought out the possibility of importing labour from Ceylon. The first Sinhalese from Sri Lanka arrived in 1870 to work in sugarcane plantations in Queensland. A community was believed to exist on Thursday Island in 1876. In 1882, a group of 500 left Colombo for Queensland, mostly in Mackay.

Under the White Australia policy, immigration was negligible. It resumed after the Second World War primarily involving migration of Burghers, who fulfilled the then criteria that they should be of predominantly European ancestry and that their appearance should be European. By 1954 around 2000 Sri Lankans had been accepted. Sinhalese migration began in the 1960s but it was after the mid-1970s that large groups arrived, which also included Christians and Buddhists. During the 1970s intake restrictions loosened and Sri Lankan students undertook courses in Australia as part of the Colombo Plan prior to the formal dismantling of the White Australia policy, and after 1973 and from the early 1980s Sinhalese, Tamil and Moor migration resumed and increased.

In the following decade, the number of Sri Lankans entering Australia increased. Many were fleeing the conflict in Sri Lanka between Tamil separatists and Sri Lankan government forces, which ended in May 2009. Most of them arrived as Humanitarian entrants under the Special Assistance Category introduced by the Australian Government in 1995. By 2001, there were 53 610 Sri Lanka-born people in Australia

In the last five years, the majority, or more than 70 per cent, of migrants from Sri Lanka arrived under the skilled component of the Migration Program, with around 17 per cent under the Family component.

Based on the 2011 Census and settlement data of permanent arrivals since the 2011 Census to 1 July 2013, the number of people of Sri Lankan backgrounds in Australia are estimated to number around 123,000. At the time of the 2011 Census, the majority, around 90,000, were estimated to be of Sinhalese ancestry. Those of Tamil ancestry were estimated to number around 27,000. In addition to this number, there was also an estimated 14 000 to 20 000 people of Burgher ancestry (predominantly of mixed Dutch, Portuguese, German or English ancestry) who mostly claim a European rather than Burgher ancestry (in the Census). ³

The Sri Lankan Community in Shepparton

Population

According to censuses Sri Lankan community in Shepparton began to establish around 2000

In July 2015 the Sri Lankan community in Shepparton comprises 45-50 families totalling approximately 125-150 people. It is estimated that almost everyone in the Sri Lankan community has migrated to Australia as Skilled migrants or they are on the Temporary Work (Skilled) Visa (Subclass 457)

Language

It is estimated that 85% of the Sri Lankan people in Shepparton speak Sinhala and others speak Tamil, Sri Lankan Creole Malay language or Arabic.

Almost everyone in the Sri Lankan Community has a high English Language Literacy.

Education

More than 95% of the Sri Lankan community has a post- secondary education.

Employment

50% of the Sri Lankan working population in Shepparton are medical professionals, 30% other professionals such as accountants and engineers and 10% others.

Issues

There are no significant issues identified in the Sri Lankan community.

However 65% -70% of the Sri Lankan community is Buddhist and there is a need of a Buddhist Centre. Buddhism plays a vital part of the Sri Lankan culture and parents are keen to provide any opportunity for their children to learn Buddhism. The nearest place of worship is at least 180km-200km away from Shepparton.

The Sri Lankan community recently established a Sinhala language class with the assistance of the Victorian Language School at Shepparton High School.

1 http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sri_Lanka

2 <http://www.everyculture.com/Sa-Th/Sri-Lanka.html>

3 https://www.dss.gov.au/sites/default/files/documents/02_2014/srilanka.pdf