

**Flygtningenævnets baggrundsmateriale**

<b>Bilagsnr.:</b>	<b>773</b>
Land:	Sri Lanka
Kilde:	US Department of State
Titel:	2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Sri Lanka
Udgivet:	29. september 2025
Optaget på baggrundsmaterialet:	8. oktober 2025

# 2025 Trafficking in Persons Report: Sri Lanka

## SRI LANKA (Tier 2)

The Government of Sri Lanka does not fully meet the minimum standards for the elimination of trafficking but is making significant efforts to do so. The government demonstrated overall increasing efforts compared with the previous reporting period; therefore, Sri Lanka remained on Tier 2. These efforts included increasing investigations and prosecutions of alleged traffickers, identifying more victims, and allocating more funding for victim assistance than in past years. The government canceled more licenses of recruitment agencies allegedly responsible for facilitating trafficking; officials also reported providing assistance to a greater number of migrant workers, including trafficking victims, at Sri Lankan diplomatic missions abroad. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government convicted fewer traffickers and concerns of official complicity in trafficking crimes remained. Labor inspectors lacked adequate training and resources to identify trafficking victims, and the government referred only a small proportion of trafficking victims to protection services. The government did not eliminate all recruitment fees charged by labor recruiters.

## PRIORITIZED RECOMMENDATIONS:

- Increase efforts to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, including labor traffickers and officials allegedly complicit in trafficking, and seek adequate penalties for convicted traffickers, which should involve significant prison terms.
- Improve the quality and accessibility of victim services, ensure shelter and specialized services are available for all identified victims, and provide support to victims who participate in trials against traffickers.
- Increase efforts to proactively identify trafficking victims, including among migrant workers and women in commercial sex, and ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked.
- Expand prevention measures, including through raising awareness of fraudulent recruitment for employment abroad and resources available abroad.
- Increase monitoring of licensed recruitment agencies and regulation of subagents, referring allegations of criminal violations to law enforcement and ensure migration regulations do not discriminate based on sex.
- Provide sufficient resources for labor inspectors and increase training to identify potential trafficking victims during inspections.
- Eliminate all recruitment fees charged by labor recruiters to workers.
- Increase efforts to address extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse by foreign tourists in Sri Lanka, including proactive identification of victims and investigation of complicit establishments.
- Formalize the domestic work sector and increase oversight of working conditions.
- Increase training for police, prosecutors, judges, immigration officials, and service providers on human trafficking and victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches.

## PROSECUTION

The government maintained anti-trafficking law enforcement efforts.

Section 360C of the penal code criminalized sex trafficking and labor trafficking and prescribed penalties of two to 20 years' imprisonment and a fine, which were sufficiently stringent and, with respect to sex trafficking, commensurate with those prescribed for other grave crimes, such as rape.

The government also used other sections of the penal code to investigate and prosecute sex trafficking crimes. Section 360B criminalized offenses relating to the sexual exploitation of children and prescribed penalties of five to 20 years' imprisonment and a fine. In addition, Section 360A criminalized offenses relating to procurement for commercial sex acts and prescribed penalties of two to 10 years' imprisonment and fines, significantly lower than those available under the trafficking provision.

The Criminal Investigation Department's (CID) anti-trafficking unit and police initiated at least 24 investigations involving 61 suspects – 19 for sex trafficking, three for forced labor, and one for an unspecified form of trafficking – and continued 69 investigations from previous years. This compared with 22 investigations involving 24 suspects during the previous reporting period. The government initiated prosecution in seven cases against an unspecified number of suspects under Section 360C; the government continued prosecution of at least 68 cases from previous reporting periods. This compared with initiating three prosecutions against an unspecified number of suspects during the previous reporting period. The government convicted six traffickers, including five under Section 360C and one under Section 360A. This compared with convicting seven traffickers under Section 360A and one trafficker under Section 360C during the previous reporting period. One trafficker received a sentence of five years imprisonment; two traffickers received sentences of seven years' imprisonment; and one trafficker received a sentence of 12 years' imprisonment. The government did not report the sentencing information for two convicted traffickers. The courts could order the payment of fines and repayment of expenses to the victims, but did not report doing so. Sri Lankan officials reported cooperating with law enforcement in other countries, including Malaysia, Indonesia, Cambodia, and Canada, on human trafficking investigations involving Sri Lankan nationals. The governments of Sri Lanka and Maldives maintained a mutual legal assistance treaty to increase coordination on criminal matters, including trafficking investigations, although officials did not report cooperation on any trafficking investigations or prosecutions during the rating period. Although government agencies such as the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) and Department of Immigration Emigration had anti-trafficking units, and several agencies had anti-trafficking focal points, resource constraints continued to hinder investigations and anti-trafficking efforts.

Prosecutors' reliance on victim testimony, difficulty securing evidence from victims, and judges' issuance of suspended sentences contributed to the government's case backlog and low number of convictions. Many victims were deterred from participating in criminal justice proceedings because of lengthy trials, a problem endemic throughout the criminal justice system, and social stigma. Most Sri Lankan diplomatic missions did not refer witness and victim affidavits from abroad to the CID for investigation, although the Ministry of Foreign Affairs instructed embassies to refer cases to the appropriate institutions. Most police and government officials outside Colombo remained unfamiliar with human trafficking. Members of the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force (NAHTTF), including the Department of Labor, Ministry of Labor and Foreign Employment, SLBFE, the Sri Lankan police, and other ministries, conducted numerous anti-trafficking trainings for officials and civil society members, and police conducted anti-trafficking training for new recruits. However, law enforcement, prosecutors, and judges lacked the capacity to investigate and prosecute trafficking crimes, especially crimes involving online scam operations. The Sri Lankan Police established a Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse of Children and Women (BPACW) unit dedicated to investigating crimes against women and children, including trafficking. The government maintained guidelines providing child-friendly procedures for police, judicial officers, and probation officers.

Concerns about official complicity persisted; the government investigated some allegations of official corruption and initiated disciplinary action in some cases, but did not report any prosecutions or convictions of allegedly complicit officials, inhibiting law enforcement action. Sri Lankan authorities continued a disciplinary hearing against an SLBFE officer – previously posted at the Sri Lankan Embassy in Oman – on charges of trafficking and sexual harassment of migrants and initiated preliminary criminal proceedings. Media reported the arrest of former military officials for their alleged connection with the fraudulent recruitment of Sri Lankans to enlist as foreign fighters to fight in the Russia-Ukraine war. The government did not report taking any action against prior complicity concerns involving employees in state-run childcare institutions.

# PROTECTION

The government increased protection efforts.

The government identified 168 victims – including 102 men, 59 women, and seven children – compared with 95 victims identified during the previous reporting period. Of the 168 victims, 19 were exploited in sex trafficking, 59 in labor trafficking, and 90 were exploited in unspecified forms of trafficking. The government also reportedly identified 463 potential victims fraudulently recruited to enlist as foreign fighters in Russia to fight in the Russia-Ukraine war. The government supported the repatriation of 109 Sri Lankans in Russia; some reports indicate more than 1,000 Sri Lankans remain in Russia awaiting repatriation. The government also coordinated with the Government of Pakistan to repatriate seven Pakistani trafficking victims.

The government had SOPs for the identification of trafficking victims and referral to services; separate SOPs for the identification, protection, and referral of child trafficking victims; and step-by-step guidelines for providing short-term assistance available to all victims of trafficking. However, observers reported the government did not implement its SOPs uniformly and a lack of awareness and training on the SOPs hindered overall victim identification efforts. The SLBFE continued to screen prospective migrant workers and reportedly identified a small number of potential victims. As in previous years, government identification of trafficking victims remained relatively low despite the significant number of complaints received from workers abroad. Officials charged victims of sex trafficking with commercial sex offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked. Social stigma and lengthy court proceedings discouraged potential victims – particularly victims identified as engaging in commercial sex – from reporting trafficking crimes, which created difficulty accessing government benefits and programs. The government reported efforts to screen for trafficking indicators during law enforcement operations, although officials did not identify any trafficking victims among detained individuals. Observers reported a lack of victim-centered approaches, capacity, and sensitization among police, immigration officials, and judges, particularly at the local level, remained an impediment to proper screening for trafficking victims, although the government made some efforts to include victim-centered approaches in training for frontline officials. Some officials reportedly forced victims to participate in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases or face penalties.

The government could provide medical assistance, psychosocial care, shelter, and other services to victims of crime, including trafficking. The government referred at least six identified victims to government agencies and an international organization for services. This compared to 20 identified victims referred to care in the previous reporting period. The government provided legal assistance to trafficking victims through the Legal Aid Commission of Sri Lanka. The government could collaborate with civil society to provide support for foreign trafficking victims; however, it did not report doing so.

The government operated two shelters for trafficking victims that provided for basic needs, medical care, and education services. A magistrate's court order was required for victims to receive services at the two shelters. The National Authority for the Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses operated an additional shelter to support victims of crime, including trafficking victims. The government reported allocating 25 million LKR (\$85,324) for victim protection and assistance compared to no funding reported in the previous reporting period. The government did not have shelter services for adult male victims, although the government stated it could provide shelter, if needed. The government cooperated with international organizations to provide medical, psychosocial, legal, and reintegration support to victims with court orders, regardless of their decision to cooperate with law enforcement. The government operated safe homes and approximately 331 childcare institutions that provided services to vulnerable children, including trafficking victims.

The Assistance to and Protection of Victims of Crime and Witnesses Act of 2015 entitled victims to financial support, including accommodations, food and lodging, and transportation to testify or appear in court. The government provided transportation for court cases, legal support, and relocation services during trials to support victims' participation in law enforcement proceedings.

The government provided interim payment of 8,000 LKR (\$25) to trafficking victims participating in criminal justice proceedings. The government also allowed testimony through remote audio and video links in certain cases to prevent re-traumatization of victims, particularly child victims, and at least 19 victims used remote options. The government did not report the number of victims who participated in criminal justice proceedings, compared to 102 victims in the previous reporting period.

When authorities officially identified foreign trafficking victims, the victims had the same access to services as Sri Lankan citizens. The SOPs authorized foreign trafficking victims with a court order to receive repatriation assistance and support services regardless of cooperation with a criminal complaint. Foreign victims who cooperated in prosecutions could receive a visa extension until the end of the trial, although the government did not report issuing any visa extensions. Sri Lankan law did not provide foreign victims with legal alternatives to deportation to countries where they might face hardship or retribution after trial completion. The government maintained a victim and witness compensation fund; however, the government did not report providing any funding to trafficking victims. Courts ordered restitution from traffickers in at least three cases.

The government operated shelters and safe houses at Sri Lankan diplomatic missions in some countries, and provided food, lodging, and other support to a reported 871 migrant workers, including potential trafficking victims, compared with 288 individuals assisted in the previous reporting period. The SLBFE allocated 2.4 million LKR (\$8,327.75) for such facilities and medical services compared to no funding reported in the previous reporting period. However, observers reported these facilities were insufficient to meet victims' needs and migrant workers previously reported poor conditions, including inadequate food, unsanitary living conditions, and insufficient legal assistance. Observers reported embassy officials required more training to adequately support potential trafficking victims abroad; additionally, some repatriated victims were not referred to any protection services upon return to Sri Lanka. The government trained labor attachés after reports some attachés did not know how to collect evidence of trafficking or refer potential cases to other agencies. The government reportedly provided access to legal assistance at Sri Lankan embassies to migrant workers regardless of their registration status. The SLBFE continued to operate a transit shelter near the Colombo airport, primarily for returned migrant workers who experienced abuse abroad.

## **PREVENTION**

The government maintained its prevention efforts.

The NAHTTF continued to meet regularly under the leadership of the Ministry of Defense and worked to increase coordination among government and civil society organizations to implement the 2021-2025 NAP. The government did not have a dedicated budget for anti-trafficking activities and relied on previously allocated ministries' general funding to support its efforts. The government continued to train ministry officials on victim identification, victim assistance, and anti-trafficking laws. The government, sometimes in coordination with an international organization, conducted awareness campaigns through workshops, community events, and social media programs. The campaigns targeted students, prospective migrant workers, and the general public; awareness-raising materials were available in Sinhala, Tamil, and English. The government participated in several international policy dialogues to raise awareness or train government officials on trafficking. Several government ministries continued to operate hotlines that could receive trafficking calls; the government reported at least 80 calls were trafficking-related and shared with police for investigation compared to 89 during the previous reporting period. The government also maintained a telephone hotline and online platform for reporting complaints directly to the Inspector General of Police. The National Child Protection Agency (NCPA) continued to receive trafficking-related calls received through its hotline. Police did not always notify the NCPA about cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children because of a lack of referral procedures. The BPACW also ran a 109 hotline for women and child victims of crime, including trafficking. The

NCPA maintained a database on child abuse cases, including child trafficking cases, to coordinate agency services during court procedures.

The DOL conducted routine labor inspections and trained inspectors on trafficking indicators. In 2024, the government received 78 complaints of child labor and identified two child labor violations involving two children; this compared with 87 child labor complaints and 10 child labor violations in 2023. Labor inspectors did not report identifying any cases of human trafficking. Observers noted the number of labor inspectors was insufficient, resulting in many workers remaining vulnerable to abuse. Labor inspectors could carry out unannounced inspections, but only had the authority to inspect residences for child domestic worker violations if a complaint was received and observers reported the process to formally file a complaint was lengthy and difficult. The DOL launched an online campaign for the private sector to pledge their businesses were free of child labor; it also signed an MOU with the Industrial Development Board to prevent child labor. The government did not allow migrant workers to change employers without obtaining special permissions.

The government did not robustly enforce its migrant worker policies. This was a result of the government's efforts to increase remittances and boost the Sri Lankan economy. The government attempted to regulate online activity but struggled to monitor unregistered employment agencies operating online. The SLBFE held pre-departure training programs for prospective migrant workers. Nonetheless, SLBFE issued penalties and initiated some prosecutions involving 561 recruitment agents for non-trafficking related offenses, such as fraudulent documentation and withholding wages, compared to 355 in the previous reporting period. Observers reported restrictions on women younger than 21 years old from pursuing domestic employment abroad and additional requirements for women under 45 years old left some Sri Lankan women with no legal means to travel abroad and, therefore, without access to protection mechanisms available through authorized travel and more vulnerable to trafficking. However, SLBFE maintained a government-funded insurance program for female domestic workers in Jordan and planned to expand the program to other countries. The government continued to work with Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, and Vietnam to prevent migrant smuggling and crimes associated with human trafficking. Previously drafted MOUs with countries, such as India and Thailand, to cooperate on anti-trafficking activities remained pending.

The government maintained agreements and MOUs with several countries, including Japan, Malaysia, Oman, and Qatar, to increase safe labor recruitment and prevent trafficking vulnerabilities of migrant workers. The government required translating into Sinhala and Tamil the contracts for migrant workers bound to Saudi Arabia and planned to expand its language requirements for other destination countries. The SLBFE required migrant workers to pay a registration fee equivalent to more than one month's salary with renewal necessary every two years. The government did not make efforts to eliminate the legal fees recruitment agencies are allowed to charge migrant workers. The SLBFE reported monitoring the costs charged to migrant workers, although fees varied by destination country, employer, and job category. Despite the SLBFE's efforts to monitor foreign employment agencies, some companies reportedly charged fees in excess of the legal amounts; some workers paid as much as 1 million LKR (\$3,412) for the entire recruitment process, including fees charged by illegal subagents.

The SLBFE maintained an online system for registering and responding to migrant worker complaints. The SLBFE received 53 complaints related to trafficking and referred these complaints to law enforcement. The SLBFE did not report how much it provided in compensation to migrant workers who received no employment after paying recruitment agents more than the permitted amount. The SLBFE reportedly took action against recruitment agencies, including suspending or canceling the licenses of 210 agencies; this compared to the SLBFE canceling the licenses of 149 recruitment agencies in the previous year. The SLBFE continued to evaluate and categorize foreign employment agencies as part of its labor recruitment oversight efforts. The government required police clearance certificates from recruitment agency employees and minimum education requirements for recruiters. However, some officials had business interests in foreign employment companies, including officials responsible for migrant labor regulatory functions and oversight of

grievance resolution mechanisms; officials also had conflicting mandates to facilitate increased remittances while providing oversight for worker protections.

The government did not report efforts to reduce the demand for commercial sex. The government operated a center to screen foreigners in commercial sex for trafficking indicators; the government denied visa extensions and deported people it regarded as vulnerable to trafficking. Officials launched a social media and billboard campaign to raise awareness of child trafficking. The government continued to conduct information sessions with participants from the tourism industry to increase awareness of extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse. The NAHTTF researched and publicized its findings on using digital technology to improve law enforcement investigations and raise awareness of child sex trafficking. The Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse of Children and Women (BPACW) cooperated with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) to investigate child sexual abuse material on social media platforms. The government conducted anti-trafficking trainings for personnel at some Sri Lankan diplomatic missions. The government continued to provide anti-trafficking training to its troops prior to their deployments as peacekeepers.

## **TRAFFICKING PROFILE:**

Trafficking affects all communities. This section summarizes government and civil society reporting on the nature and scope of trafficking over the past five years. Human traffickers exploit domestic and foreign victims in Sri Lanka, and traffickers exploit victims from Sri Lanka abroad. The majority of reported Sri Lankan trafficking cases involve traffickers exploiting Sri Lankan migrant workers overseas. Economic hardship drives Sri Lankan women and men abroad in search of employment where many face risks of exploitation; children and family members remaining in Sri Lanka are vulnerable to trafficking. The government reports undocumented migrant workers remain particularly vulnerable to forced labor and sex trafficking. Within Sri Lanka, traffickers exploit men, women, and children in forced labor and sex trafficking, although women, children, ethnic minorities, and older individuals are often most at risk. Traffickers use social media to fraudulently recruit Sri Lankan victims with job offers and force them to engage in online scam operations, particularly in Southeast Asia. Traffickers reportedly also exploited foreign workers, particularly from India and Southeast Asia, in online scam operations in Sri Lanka.

Traffickers exploit Sri Lankan men, women, and children in forced labor in the Middle East, Asia, Europe, and the United States in the construction, garment, and domestic service sectors. Before leaving Sri Lanka, many migrant workers accumulate debt to pay recruitment fees imposed by unscrupulous labor recruitment agencies, most of them members of Sri Lanka's association of licensed foreign employment agencies, and their unlicensed subagents. Some microfinance companies and traffickers target Sri Lankan women with existing debts and use promises of a large advance to defraud them into accepting positions abroad. Some recruitment agencies commit fraud by changing the agreed upon job, employer, conditions, or salary after the worker's arrival. Some Sri Lankan migrant workers in the Gulf countries report employers retained their identification documents, including passports and work permits, which restricts freedom of movement and is a common means of coercion for trafficking. Sri Lankan migrants reported indicators of fraudulent recruitment while traveling to Russia to enlist as foreign fighters in the Russia-Ukraine war. Additionally, media and NGOs report unscrupulous actors, including Russian officials and illicit recruiters, fraudulently recruited women ages 18-22 from Africa, South Asia – including Sri Lanka – and South America for vocational training programs and subsequently placed them in military drone production sites. Media report workers at these sites are subjected to hazardous conditions, surveillance, hour and wage violations, contract switching, and worker-paid recruitment fees, all of which are indicators of human trafficking.

Observers reported women and girls are disproportionately impacted by human trafficking, with thousands of female migrant workers reporting employers exploiting them in forced labor and sex trafficking. Traffickers recruit women from rural areas with promises of urban jobs in the hospitality sector, salons, spas, and domestic work but exploit some in forced labor or commercial

sex. Women working in the garment sector experience conditions of forced labor and the threat of sexual harassment. The domestic work sector, mostly employing women and girls, is largely unregulated with working conditions indicative of forced labor and domestic servitude. Some Sri Lankan women engage in commercial sex because of financial hardships caused by the country's economic crisis, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. Observers have alleged officials forced women to perform commercial sex acts for access to government benefits owed to widows for their deceased husbands' military service. Traffickers also exploit foreign women in commercial sex in Sri Lanka, including Southeast Asian migrant workers brought to Sri Lanka on tourist visas.

Sri Lankan children work in the domestic sector, service industry, agriculture, and more hazardous occupations, such as the industrial sector. Labor traffickers exploit children in retail and informal markets, and traffickers have reportedly exploited children in the drug trade in previous years. Child labor is also significant among ethnic minority Tamils on tea and rubber plantations. Additionally, traffickers reportedly exploit boys and girls in child sex trafficking, including in coastal areas, for extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse.

Observers note ethnic minority communities in Sri Lanka continue to face greater vulnerability to human trafficking. Communities such as the Malaiyaha Tamils, whose ancestors migrated from India to work on plantations, sometimes experience bonded labor, particularly on small, private plantations. Language barriers among officials who only spoke Sinhala prohibited some communities from reporting abuses to authorities.