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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 convictions of labor traffickers and identifying and providing services to more trafficking victims. The government made policy changes to strengthen victim care and reported more victims participated in criminal justice proceedings. The government canceled licenses and blacklisted more recruitment agencies allegedly responsible for facilitating trafficking; officials also reported providing assistance to a greater number of migrant workers at Sri Lankan diplomatic missions abroad. However, the government did not meet the minimum standards in several key areas. The government investigated and prosecuted fewer trafficking cases, and sentences for convicted traffickers remained lenient, which undercut efforts to hold traffickers accountable, weakened deterrence, created potential security and safety concerns for victims, and was not equal to the seriousness of the crime. The government appeared unwilling or unable to hold allegedly complicit officials accountable for trafficking, even suspected cases of child sex trafficking. The government did not cooperate with foreign law enforcement on trafficking cases despite many such cases involving migrant workers abroad. The government also referred fewer trafficking victims to services, and officials did not report ordering restitution for or providing compensation to trafficking victims. The government did not eliminate all recruitment fees charged by labor recruiters to workers nor increase monitoring of licensed recruitment agencies and subagents, and the government maintained gender-based labor migration policies that pushed Sri Lankan women to travel via unlicensed agents, which increased their vulnerability to trafficking.

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. * Increase efforts to proactively identify trafficking victims, including among undocumented migrant workers abroad and women in commercial sex, and ensure victims are not inappropriately penalized solely for unlawful acts committed as a direct result of being trafficked. * 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 monitoring of licensed recruitment agencies and regulation of subagents, referring allegations of criminal violations to law enforcement. * Promote safe and legal migration, ensure migration regulations do not discriminate based on gender, and increase awareness among prospective migrants of the steps necessary for safe migration and resources available abroad. * Eliminate all recruitment fees charged by labor recruiters to workers. * Increase efforts to address extraterritorial child sexual exploitation and abuse within the tourism sector, including proactive identification of victims and investigation of complicit establishments. * Formalize the domestic work sector and increase oversight of working conditions. * Provide sufficient resources for labor inspectors and increase identification of labor trafficking and exploitation. * Increase training for police, prosecutors, judges, immigration officials, and service providers on human trafficking and victim-centered and trauma-informed approaches.

PROSECUTION

The government decreased 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 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 (HTSIMCID) and police initiated at least 22 investigations involving 24 suspected traffickers (21 sex trafficking suspects and three forced labor suspects) and continued 54 investigations involving an unspecified number of suspects from previous years. This compared with 34 investigations of 60 suspected traffickers during the previous reporting period. The government initiated prosecution in three cases against an unspecified number of suspects using non-trafficking charges, including two under procurement, 360A, and one under the sexual exploitation of children statute, 360B; the government continued prosecution of at least 64 cases from previous reporting periods. This compared with prosecution against 23 suspects, including 15 for sex trafficking (10 under 360A; three under 360B; and six under 360C) and eight for labor trafficking (all under Section 360C) during the previous reporting period. The government convicted 13 traffickers, including six labor traffickers under 360C and seven traffickers under 360A for unspecified forms of trafficking, and acquitted two suspects. This compared to convicting two sex traffickers under Section 360A and two labor traffickers under 360C during the previous reporting period. Nine of 13 convicted traffickers had their sentences fully suspended with no time served; three traffickers received six months' imprisonment; and one trafficker received a sentence of seven years' imprisonment – the one sentence adequate to address the seriousness of trafficking crimes and issues in line with the sentencing guidelines. The courts also ordered the payment of fines and repayment of expenses to the victims. By sentencing multiple convicted traffickers to terms of imprisonment below the mandatory minimum penalties prescribed under the trafficking law, courts created potential safety concerns for trafficking victims and weakened deterrence. The government maintained a telephone hotline and online platform for reporting complaints directly to the Inspector General of Police. The National Child Protection Agency (NCPA) reported 36 trafficking-related calls received through its hotline, compared to 128 cases of possible child sexual exploitation referred to police during the previous period. Police did not always notify the NCPA about cases of commercial sexual exploitation of children because of a lack of referral procedures. Unlike previous years, Sri Lankan officials did not report cooperating with law enforcement in other countries on human trafficking investigations involving Sri Lankan nationals. However, the government participated in a multi-country working group – including Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma, India, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand – to counter human trafficking in the Bay of Bengal. The government also worked with INTERPOL, the private sector, and civil society partners to enhance investigations of crimes involving sexual exploitation of children, including online crimes involving social media. 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 law enforcement efforts; the government maintained a separate extradition treaty with the UAE to improve coordination on extradition cases, including trafficking. Although government agencies such as the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) and Department of Immigration Emigration (DIE) had anti-trafficking units, and several agencies had anti-trafficking focal points, resource constraints continued to hinder investigations and anti-trafficking efforts. Nonetheless, SBLFE issued penalties, and initiated some prosecutions, involving 355 recruitment agents for non-trafficking related offenses.

Prosecutors' reliance on victim testimony, difficulty securing evidence from victims, and judges' issuance of suspended sentences contributed to the government's general reliance on procurement charges and the lenient sentences applied under Section 360A. 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 (MOLFE), 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. The NCPA maintained three sets of 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. The case recalled past allegations involving Sri Lankan consular officers sending trafficking victims back to abusive employers and exploitative employment agencies for financial gain when victims fled to embassies for help. However, the attorney general, claiming a lack of sufficient evidence, dropped the government's case against a local divisional council member, two police officers, and a Naval officer arrested for sex trafficking of a 15-year-old girl in July 2021. The government did not report any action against past abuses in state-run childcare institutions, nor any outcomes in cases against state-run orphanage employees charged with sexual abuse of children. Some officials reportedly coerced women involved in commercial sex to perform sexual favors. Some officials reportedly accepted bribes to facilitate undocumented migration, which left workers vulnerable to exploitation abroad.

PROTECTION

The government slightly increased protection efforts. The government identified 95 victims – including 53 men, 34 women, five girls, and three boys – compared with 59 victims identified during the previous reporting period. Of the 95 victims, nine were sex trafficking survivors, 78 were labor trafficking survivors, and eight were survivors of unspecified forms of trafficking; seven victims were Pakistani nationals. The government continued to support the repatriation of potential trafficking victims, including at least nine Sri Lankans from Burma, a decrease from 72 potential trafficking victims repatriated in the previous reporting period.

The government had SOPs for the identification of potential victims and their 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. The Department of Immigration and Emigration (DIE), which issued two circulars instructing immigration officers to screen potential victims, intercepted 12 potential human trafficking cases using its SOP at designated ports. 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. The government did not implement its SOPs uniformly and the capacity of local officials to identify trafficking victims remained low. In previous reporting periods, officials did not consistently identify forced labor and sex trafficking that did not involve transnational movement, especially of children, and sometimes categorized such cases as other crimes. Officials also misidentified some migrant smuggling cases as human trafficking and vice versa. Officials charged victims of sex trafficking with commercial sex offenses committed as a direct result of being trafficked. Social stigma and fears of police discouraged potential victims – particularly victims identified as engaging in commercial sex – from reporting 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 police made some efforts to improve interactions with potentially vulnerable groups. Some officials

may force victims to participate in the investigation and prosecution of trafficking cases or face penalties.

The government adopted some changes to its procedures for victim care, including gender-sensitive medical examinations and interviews, enrollment in the victim information register, and a special advisory board to allocate compensation to victims of crime. The government could provide medical assistance, psychosocial care, shelter, and other services to victims of crime, including trafficking. The government referred at least 20 identified victims to government agencies and an international organization for services, including shelter, psycho-social care, and educational services. This compared to 54 identified victims referred to care in the previous reporting period. The government and partners reported providing services to at least 57 trafficking victims, including seven Pakistani citizens. The government provided legal assistance to trafficking victims through the Legal Aid Commission of Sri Lanka. The government also collaborated with civil society to provide support for foreign trafficking victims, including Pakistan.

The government operated two shelters for trafficking victims that provided for basic needs, medical care, and education services. A magistrate's 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 did not report funding for victim protection and assistance, but previously provided 1.33 million LKR (\$4,107) in assistance to operate the shelters. No government shelter could accommodate adult male victims, although the government stated it could provide shelter for male victims, if needed. The government partnered with international organizations to provide medical, psycho-social, 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 NCPA conducted routine monitoring of childcare institutions using a digital platform; officials identified instances of potential exploitation and trafficking and referred these incidents to police.

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 allowed victims to transfer court houses, provided transportation for court cases, and offered relocation services during pending trials to encourage victims to participate 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 16 victims used remote options. In total, 102 trafficking victims reportedly participated in criminal justice proceedings, an increase from 65 victims in the previous reporting period. Nonetheless, many victims were reluctant to pursue cases against traffickers because of the social stigma attached with trafficking.

When authorities officially identified foreign trafficking victims, the victims had the same access to services as Sri Lankan citizens. The 2015 SOP on the identification, protection, and referral of victims 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 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 could order restitution from traffickers although Sri Lankan courts did not report the number of restitution orders, compared to 55 cases during the previous period.

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 288 trafficking victims, compared to 134 migrant workers during the previous reporting period. The SLBFE previously allocated 100 million LKR (\$308,830) for such facilities in 2022, but did not report its funding for the current 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. Embassy shelters could only accommodate women, so it was unclear where exploited male migrant workers stayed before repatriation. Observers reported embassy officials required more training to adequately support potential trafficking victims abroad. 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. Although the SLBFE maintained district-level offices, it sometimes required repatriated migrant workers to travel to the main office in Colombo to launch an investigation into recruitment and labor violations, including trafficking.

PREVENTION

The government increased 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 to combat human trafficking or implement its NAP and relied on previously allocated ministries' general funding to support anti-trafficking activities. 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; billboards; and radio, television, 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 53 calls were trafficking-related and shared with police for investigation. 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. In 2023, the DOL conducted 76,916 routine inspections, the government received 87 complaints of child labor, and identified 12 child labor violations involving 15 children; this compared with 70,089 labor inspections, 145 child labor complaints, and 11 child labor violations in 2022. 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 Ministry of Labor and Foreign Employment (MoLFE) launched an updated national migration policy and action plan through 2027 to protect migrant workers in Sri Lanka. The government did not allow migrant workers to change employers without obtaining special permissions.

The government did not robustly enforce its migrant worker policies in an effort to increase remittances and boost the Sri Lankan economy. However, the government established a committee to review migration policies to prevent trafficking. The government attempted to regulate online activity, but struggled to monitor unregistered employment agencies operating online. Officials began digitalizing the foreign service center in an attempt to improve licensing and provide greater security to migrant workers. The SLBFE held 28 day pre-departure training programs for prospective migrant workers. The government maintained some labor migration policies that negatively affected Sri Lankan women pursuing employment abroad. The government restricted women younger than 21 years from pursuing domestic employment abroad while requiring female migrant workers younger than 45 years old to submit a "family background report" to ensure they did not have children younger than 2 years old. The government also required either a spousal or guardian's consent for women to work abroad; authorities did not require spousal or guardian

consent for male migrant workers. Observers reported the restrictions 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 piloted a new employer-paid insurance program for female domestic workers in Jordan and planned to expand the program to other countries. The government also required licensed foreign employment agencies to submit a semi-annual report confirming the whereabouts of female domestic migrant workers in an effort to mitigate the risk of exploitation while abroad. The government established a safe migration unit at the international airport in Colombo to intercept Sri Lankan migrant workers traveling abroad using tourist visas as part of its efforts to prevent trafficking; as a result, the SLBFE's unit there detected migrant workers attempting to go abroad for employment using tourist visas. The government worked with Burma, Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Vietnam to prevent migrant smuggling and crimes associated with human trafficking. In July 2023, the government and Malaysia established a working group to prevent migrant smuggling and human trafficking. The government and several countries, including India and Thailand, drafted MOU agreements to cooperate on preventing trafficking in persons, which remained pending at the end of the reporting period.

The government maintained agreements and MOUs with other countries 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 SLBFE reported no recruitment fees were required for the domestic work sector in the Middle East and most professional categories, but the government continued to allow many other migrant workers to bear recruitment costs. However, 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 (\$3,090) 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. Migrant workers continued to report cases of exploitative labor to the SLBFE, including non-payment of wages, contract fraud, and document retention. 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, compared to providing 38 million LKR (\$117,360) in 2022. SLBFE officers in the conciliation division attempted to identify trafficking cases to refer to police, although officers sometimes handled cases administratively based on evaluation guidelines. The SLBFE reportedly took action against recruitment agencies, including suspending or canceling the licenses of 149 agencies; this compared to the SLBFE canceling the licenses of 57 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 previously issued guidelines to prevent subagents and brokers from engaging in corrupt recruitment practices. The SLBFE mandated some rules for the licensing process for recruitment agencies and sub-brokers, including minimum recruitment numbers to renew licenses. The government also required police clearance certificates from recruitment agency employees and minimum education requirements for recruiters. Although the government reported a legislative framework to address subagents existed, the SLBFE did not have the legal authority to regulate subagents, which officials recognized contributed to trafficking. 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. Similarly, the board of the SLBFE was comprised mostly of employment agencies and lacked adequate representation of migrant workers.

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 observed the use of social media to solicit children for child sex trafficking and anticipated increasing reports of child abuse, including extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse, in Sri Lanka's Coastal Belt and tourist areas. The government researched ways to reduce the demand for child sex trafficking, and conducted information sessions with some hotels to increase awareness of extraterritorial commercial child sexual exploitation and abuse. The Bureau for the Prevention of Abuse of Children and Women (BPACW) partnered with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children (NCMEC) to prevent child victimization and sexual exploitation. 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:

As reported 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 since 2019 has driven record numbers of Sri Lankan women and men abroad in search of employment where many faced risks of exploitation; children and family members remaining in Sri Lanka experienced heightened vulnerability. Approximately 1.5 million Sri Lankans work in the Middle East, Japan, and South Korea, predominately in construction and domestic work. Sri Lankan migrants have increasingly traveled to Southeast Asian countries for higher-skilled employment sometimes leading to trafficking. Sri Lanka's formal migration system requires paying 17,500 LKR (\$54) to the SLBFE, but various fees and lengthy applications result in migrants seeking alternative routes for employment through irregular channels. Many migrants travel abroad on tourist visas in search of employment, resulting in increased vulnerability to trafficking, and unregistered migrants may not be able to access government services. 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 have increasingly used social media to fraudulently recruit victims. Traffickers 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 nationals in online scam operations in Sri Lanka. In addition, the socio-economic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic followed by the country's economic crisis have contributed to an increase in cybersex crimes and increased the risk of low-income individuals and other vulnerable groups to sex trafficking.

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 recruitment agencies lure workers with promises of work abroad but send them with fraudulent or incorrect documents, including tourist visas instead of work visas, so victims are subject to penalization, including jail and deportation, if they seek assistance abroad. 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. Some Sri Lankan migrants reported indicators of fraudulent recruitment while traveling to Russia to enlist as foreign fighters in Russia's war in Ukraine.

Observers reported women and girls are disproportionately impacted by human trafficking. The majority of Sri Lankan female migrant workers seek employment in the Middle East, Japan, and South Korea, and thousands of Sri Lankan female migrant workers report employers exploit them

in forced labor and sometimes 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; in addition, in-house domestic workers experience greater risks of exploitation and abuse. Sri Lankan women resorted to commercial sex because of financial hardships caused by the pandemic and the country's economic crisis, increasing their vulnerability to trafficking. Some microfinance companies target women with predatory loans and contracts written in English, resulting in debts that forced women to resort to commercial sex or subject their children to sex trafficking to pay off the debt. Some observers have alleged local government and security sector 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 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. Some child domestic workers are subjected to physical, sexual, and psychological abuse, non-payment of wages, and restrictions of movement – all indicators of labor trafficking. Labor traffickers exploit children in small boutiques 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. In addition to foreign tourists, researchers report local demand drives child sex trafficking in Sri Lanka. Some workers and residents in government and private shelters caring for trafficking victims sexually abuse and exploit some of the children.

Observers note marginalized communities in Sri Lanka continue to face discrimination and consequently greater vulnerability to human trafficking. Marginalized communities such as the Malayaha Tamils, whose ancestors migrated from India to work on plantations, continue to experience marginalization and discrimination; Malayaha Tamils sometimes experience bonded labor, particularly on small, private plantations. Members of some marginalized communities were unable to report abuses to authorities because of language barriers among officials who only spoke Sinhala.