

Sri Lanka

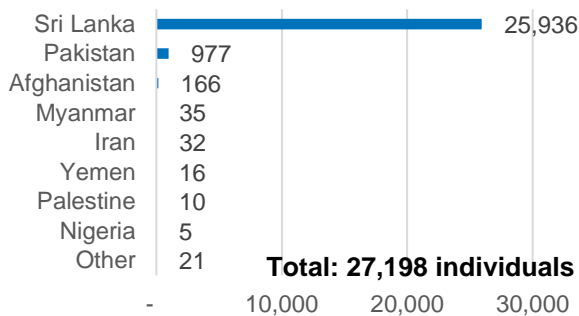
30 November 2020

UNHCR Sri Lanka is supporting **1,253 refugees and asylum-seekers** as well as **Sri Lankan Refugee Returnees** voluntarily returning from India.

Refugees and asylum-seekers cannot **access education and employment**. Refugee Returnees face issues with **livelihood/LHP and basic facilities**.

UNHCR provides **protection and assistance** while advocating for more sustainable solutions and strengthening protection space.

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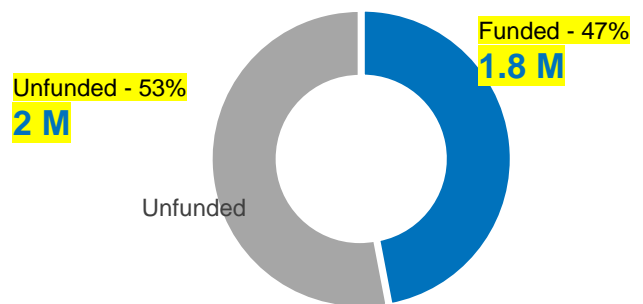
*Sri Lanka : Includes Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs), IDP returnees and Refugee returnees in 2020.

**Other: Includes refugees and asylum seekers from Syria, Bangladesh, Sudan, Maldives, India, Eritrea, Iraq, Somalia

FUNDING (AS OF 30 NOVEMBER 2020)

USD 3.8 M

requested for UNHCR Sri Lanka



UNHCR PRESENCE

Staff:

21 National Staff

Offices: 02

Representation Office in
Colombo

Field Office in Jaffna



Working with Partners

- UNHCR collaborates with the Ministry of Foreign Affairs(MFA), State Ministry of Internal Security, Home Affairs and Disaster Management, Department of Immigration and Emigration (DIE), Ministry of Health (MoH), State Ministry of Estate Housing and Community Infrastructure Facilities; State Ministry of Women & Child Development, Pre-school and Primary Education, School Infrastructure and School Services; Authorities at the provincial, district and local levels in the Northern and Eastern Provinces.
- In 2020 UNHCR partnered with ZOA Refugee Care, Muslim Aid Sri Lanka, the Bar Association of Sri Lanka-Legal Aid Commission, Jaffna Social Action Centre, Human Rights Commission, Sarvodaya Women's Movement and the Bank of Ceylon to implement its activities.

Main Activities

Protection

- In the absence of a state asylum process, UNHCR conducts registration, refugee status determination, documentation and counselling for asylum-seekers and pursues durable solutions for refugees while enabling protection and advocating for services for all persons of concern.
- However, in 2020 advocacy opportunities were limited due to the scrutiny of the new government on all refugee related issues, persistent concerns regarding the possibility of shrinking asylum space and large scale refoulement of PoCs and the COVID-19 crisis.
- In Sri Lanka, UNHCR monitors and assists 27,198 persons of concern, that includes; 1,018 refugees, 235 asylum-seekers, 207 refugee returnees (including spontaneously returned refugees); 619 internally displaced persons (IDPs) who have returned and 25,110 IDPs.
- Although UNHCR operations were restricted due to COVID-19, registration and Refugee Status Determination and Resettlement interviews took place remotely to ensure continued access to asylum and solutions.
- In order to advocate for safe asylum space for UNHCR's persons of concerns, the operation maintains regular contact with government stakeholders which includes the Department of Immigration and Emigration (DIE), Ministry of Foreign Relations (MFR) and Ministry of Defence (MoD).
- Due to the pandemic no capacity building or sensitization trainings were held in 2020. However, capacity building support was provided to the Department of Immigration and Emigration, Land Branches of the District Secretariats, District Social Service Offices, Additional District Registrar Offices and Women Development Officers (GBV prevention) in the Northern Province.
- Whilst carrying out regular protection monitoring visits, UNHCR staff also carries out protection against sexual exploitation and abuse (PSEA) awareness sessions for persons of concern.

Education

- Government funded free public education is not available to refugee and asylum seeker children in Sri Lanka. However, upon being recognised as a refugee, UNHCR provides every child with the opportunity to pursue primary education at a private educational institution. Secondary education in contrast is not funded by UNHCR.
- Currently, 140 refugee children are benefitting from primary education, while 36 adolescents are provided with English Language classes.

- In addition, ZOA and Muslim Aid provides 204 adult refugees with English classes and 49 with basic ICT training. During the COVID-19 lockdown period, virtual approaches were initiated and continue to be utilized to conduct educational programmes for PoCs.

Health

The government of Sri Lanka provides free public health to all its citizens. Asylum-seekers and refugees have the same access to government health care as citizens as a result of UNHCR's advocacy.

- Psychosocial activities including therapy were provided for 434 asylum-seekers and refugees including children and adolescents. Family counselling and health education is provided for PoCs throughout the year.
- As part of its regular programme, UNHCR provided administrative and medical equipment to 8 government hospitals which treat UNHCR PoCs, in order to further strengthen its relationship with the health sector.
- In addition, in response to COVID-19, PPEs were given to the Department of Immigration and Emigration, 6 District Health Offices, and 7 primary schools attended by refugee and asylum seeker children.
- During the COVID-19 lockdown in March, IOM in close coordination with UNHCR established a 24/7 hotline dedicated to support refugees and asylum seekers in Sri Lanka. In addition to providing health advice, necessary referrals were made to government hospitals for outpatient or inward care. Further, Interpreter assistance was provided for health consultations as necessary.
- This hotline resumed in November due to the 2nd wave of COVID-19, which resulted in a lock down in many high-risk areas across the country. The hotline continues to provide medical assistance to UNHCR persons of concerns in need.
- Medication was also provided to 37 PoCs with chronic health issues and partner staff continue to channel donations from individuals and/ groups to provide dry rations to vulnerable asylum-seekers and refugees during the lockdown as they did previously.

Community Empowerment and Self-Reliance

- UNHCR works together with two partner organisations; ZOA and Muslim Aid; in providing assistance, skills development and psychosocial services to asylum seekers and refugees in Sri Lanka.
- The two refugee centres in Dehiwala and Negombo continue to provide a neutral ground for asylum-seekers and refugees to congregate regardless of their religion, nationality or ethnicity and develop their skills and access certain facilities.
- As part of its operation, 60 asylum-seeker and refugee families were assessed for vulnerability of which 54 were given voucher assistance to buy essential goods.
- In addition to periodic voucher assistance to EVIs, UNHCR distributed vouchers to all PoCs to mark World Refugee Day-2020 to the value of LKR 1,216,000.00.
- 1,017 refugees benefitted from UNHCR's monthly cash assistance as they have no right to work and are liable to face penalties and even deportation if found to be working illegally.
- Life-skills/leadership training activities for refugees were carried out through the refugee centres managed by the said partner organisations.
- UNHCR provides assistance to vulnerable refugee returnees in the North while also facilitating access to land rights and supporting activities preventing and mitigating the risk of SGBV.

- Under the 'Safe from the Start SGBV risk mitigation' project, 85 vulnerable female headed returnees were assessed of which, 30 females at risk of SGBV were empowered through Sustainable Livelihoods.
- Supporting improved reintegration of refugee returnees, 17 capacity building projects aimed at Government Departments and Authorities such as the office of the Provincial Land Commissioner, land branches, civil documentation offices & the Social Service Department were undertaken in the North. 145 Government Officials were trained on land law.
- 60 Extremely vulnerable returnees were assisted with targeted material support.
- 15 District and Divisional Level land coordination meetings and, 11 training programmes for public officers were held. 34 village level awareness programmes on land rights for 1,196 community members and 125 monitoring visits were conducted. 33 refugee returnees were counselled on their land issues.
- The returnee stakeholder coordination meetings in the North continued under the joint leadership of UNHCR and Organisation for Elangai Refugees Rehabilitation. -
- All of these initiatives were taken to ensure that the re-integration of the refugee returnees in the North takes place in a sustainable manner.
- Individuals at risk of statelessness were referred for documentation support. A residential leadership training was held for 98 women from formerly stateless populations living in under-served areas.

Durable Solutions

- In the absence of any prospects of local integration in Sri Lanka and lack of prospects of voluntary repatriation only resettlement to a third country is available as a durable solution to refugees in Sri Lanka. In addition, as a complementary pathway refugees may access the Private Sponsorship Programme facilitated by the Government of Canada.
- 133 refugees (69 cases) were submitted for resettlement and 193 refugees departed on resettlement during 2020 (3 refugees under the Private Sponsorship Programme – PSR -Canada). During the COVID lockdown, UNHCR initiated and established remote interviewing to enable the continued submission of cases for resettlement.
- UNHCR continues to advocate for the operationalization of the National Policy on Durable Solutions for Conflict-Affected Displacement.
- Protection assistance and legal advice on civil documentation was provided to all refugee returnees and to a number of IDP returnees.
- 196 refugee returnees (90 families) voluntarily repatriated from India and UNHCR assisted them with cash grants as well as access to legal advice on housing, land and property issues, to enable their smooth reintegration and assimilation into society. Owing to COVID-19, repatriation was suspended from March 2020.
- The planned roundtable to discuss the UNHCR commissioned analysis of the nationality laws of Sri Lanka to identify gaps between national legislation and the provisions of the Statelessness Conventions was not held due to COVID-19 but will be held in 2021.
- Advocacy for Sri Lanka's accession to the statelessness conventions will continue as it is one of UNHCR's global institutional priorities and commitments.

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External / Donors Relations

UNHCR is very grateful to donors who have provided contributions directly to the Sri Lanka operation and to donors who have provided softly earmarked and unearmarked contributions to the organisation: Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America.

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LINKS

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