



International
Labour
Organization

Sri Lanka DWCP Review

2018-2024

Final Report

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Assignment	Sri Lanka Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) Review (2018-2024)
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Consultant	Ana Diogo
Coordination and Management	Monitoring and evaluation focal point person in Sri Lanka and ILO ROAP Regional M&E Officer
Country Programme Review Task Force	Representatives from the ILO Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives, tripartite constituents, and RO-Bangkok

Disclaimer

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and are not necessarily the views of the International Labour Office (ILO). The Consultant is solely responsible for any errors or omissions in the text of the report.

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Acronyms

CFTU	Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions
CO	Country Office (ILO Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives)
CP	Country Priority
CPR	Country Programme Review
CWC	Ceylon Workers Congress
DC	Development Cooperation
DWCP	Decent Work Country Programmes
DWT	Decent Work Team
EFC	Employers' Federation of Ceylon
EQM	Evaluation Question Matrix
FTZGSEU	Free Trade Zone & General Services Employees Union
ILO	International Labour Organization
ILS	International Labour Standards
IMF	International Monetary Fund
LFP	Labour force participation
LMRTS	Labour Market Recovery and Transformation Strategy
MOLFE	Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment
MSME	Micro, small, medium enterprises
NLAC	National Labour Advisory Council
NTUF	National Trade Union Federation
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OSH	OSH Occupational Safety and Health
PAC	Project Advisory Committee
P&B	P&B Programme and Budget
RBSA	Regular Budget Supplementary Account
RBTC	RBTC Regular Budget Technical Cooperation
REO	Regional Evaluation Officer
ROAP	Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific
SD	Social Dialogue
SLBFE	Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment
SDG	Sustainable Development Goals
SLNSS	Sri Lanka Nidahas Sevaka Sangamaya
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNEG	United Nations Evaluation Group
UNSDCF	United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework
XBTC	Extra-Budgetary Technical Cooperation

Executive summary

The Review of the Decent Work Country Programme of Sri Lanka (2018-2024) aimed at gathering information that could support the formulation of the next DWCP. While taking stock of what has worked and has not worked, what could be improved or maintained, there was also an interest on the type of changes that might have occurred during the implementation period, which was marked by multiple crisis affecting the country.

With this purpose, the Review consisted of a home-based desk-review phase, for document analysis and exploratory interviews with ILO's staff, followed by a field mission, which included: interviews with key informants, site visits for interaction with ultimate beneficiaries, a participatory consultation workshop, with different stakeholders, to promote the joint analysis and discussion of stories of change, collected through different sources, and debriefing sessions with the constituents and ILO's staff.

The DWCP was grounded in three country priorities and one enabling outcome, operationalized through nine outcomes:

Country priority 1 – Creation of sustainable, inclusive and decent employment

1.1: Sri Lankan workforce have more and better employment opportunities

1.2: National strategy to respond to technological advancements and other productive market demands for population at large is in place

Country priority 2 – Better governance of the Labour Market

2.1: Effective systems for social dialogue and tripartism in place, institutionalised and operationalised

2.2: More effective labour administration system with more efficient workplace inspection in place

2.3: Laws and policies are modernised to respond to diverse and evolving forms of work

Country priority 3 – Rights at work for all

3.1: Child labour and its worst forms eliminated

3.2: Labour market outcomes for (low-skilled) migrants are improved and their vulnerability to exploitation (forced labour) reduced

3.3: Improved social protection for all workers with special focus on informal workers

Enabling outcome – Greater data and knowledge generation

4.1: Reliable user-friendly labour market information are regularly made available and accessible to policy makers, constituents, and public

Additionally, the DWCP is materialized through Country Programme Outcomes (CPOs), which, in turn, are anchored in technical and development cooperation projects. In total, 34 development cooperation projects were implemented between 2018 and 2024, funded by different sources: ILO core voluntary funds (RBSA), multi-bilateral donors, Inter-Governmental organizations, private/non-state actors and the United Nations.

The contextual environment faced by Sri Lanka during the implementation period imposed a change of course, not at the level of the Programme overarching principles but on the stronger focus that was given to some areas or emergent topics, such as the SME's, the in-bound and out-bound flows of migrants; or, operationally, by the introduction of OSH concerns during the pandemic, or a stronger emphasis on skills development, or the revision of the selected value-chains during the fuel crisis, the fertilizer or import bans occurred.

In 2021, the constituents led an exercise to assess the DWCP's performance. The Review Team concluded that, at the time, only two out of nine outcomes had been achieved. Therefore, the Government's proposal to extend the DWCP for two more years, from 2022 to 2024, was accepted, as constituents agreed that the DWCP outcomes remained relevant for the country.

In 2024, the data collection reveals that all outcomes have registered a certain degree of accomplishment, when assessed in the form of milestones related with the expected outputs. However, progress remains uneven between the different outcomes and topics seen as critical for different constituents have not progressed as expected, i.e. the strengthening of the National Labour Advisory Council, the revision of certain social protection benefits, or the business environment. Hence, constituents' perceptions about the **results** achieved are not consensual.

In terms of **relevance**, ILO's work is recognized by constituents and development partners and, although targeting the right beneficiaries was, in some instances, challenging, the implemented projects have reached a plethora of beneficiaries – intermediate and ultimate, typically within the range of the most vulnerable ones.

One of the traits of the 2018-2024 DWCP was its alignment with the policies and priorities of the Government of Sri Lanka and the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF), 2018-2022. Its **coherence** can also be attributed to past experience of collaboration between constituents and from ILO's work in the country. However, the growing number of development partners interacting in the economic and social landscape of the country may represent a challenge to synergies and interlinkages, which demands for reinforced attention from constituents and the ILO.

On what concerns to **impact, sustainability and transformation**, ILO's twofold strategy – operating as an implementation agency whilst positioning itself as a normative and technical guidance facilitator, has created a positive feeding loop: experience gained in the field shapes and translates into policy decision-making, and policies implementation guide new interventions for operationalization.

This bundle approach was appreciated by certain donors facing a balancing act: on the one hand, the acknowledgment of the difficulties of obtaining solely normative milestones, due to Sri Lanka's political environment; on the other, the push to

demonstrate and raise visibility on the results of development cooperation efforts building on success stories.

Although ILO's work had repercussions at multiple levels (individuals, constituents, community, district, provincial, nation-wide, sectoral) the existing reporting and communication mechanisms are not capturing and following systematically the level and intensity of the results and changes achieved. To mitigate this limitation, the consultation workshop, delivered in Colombo during the review, intended to obtain participants' perceptions regarding the type of changes the DWCP originated. The exercise demonstrated that participants considered that all types of changes (incremental, reform and transformative) were occurring across different levels of intervention, country priorities and outcomes. However, the majority of changes discussed were categorized as incremental, and there was an overall sense that the country's context was less conducive to transformative changes. This conclusion led to participants' suggestions around the need to design for change, but also to nurture incremental and reform changes with a view to sustain effects and wider results.

Considering the country's context (existing gender roles and women participation in labour force, past civil-war conflict and a legacy of social and physical scars, setbacks in national tripartite mechanisms, climate change risks), cross-cutting issues, such as gender equality, international labour standards, disability inclusion, non-discrimination, environmental sustainability, tripartite processes, peace and reconciliation, are of utmost importance. Nevertheless, looking at the **normative** dimension, the findings indicated an uneven result on how cross-cutting issues are being embedded and implemented in projects. Moreover, there is insufficient data to follow-up and assess the existence of unintended or negative effects (do no harm), or spillovers or positive unexpected results on the population or social groups within or outside the programme's scope.

In face of the findings, and bearing in mind that the country's situation remains uncertain, the following ways forward are suggested for thorough consideration by the constituents, prior and during the next DWCP's formulation:

Content

Consistent follow-up and consolidation as the core drivers for the new DWCP

Effective policy implementation in Sri Lanka tends to be challenging. In order to ensure sustainability of the interventions developed under the DWCP 2018-2024, the new DWCP should bet on consolidation and support to effective implementation of the policies already approved, such as the National Labour Migration Policy, National Social Protection Policy, Labour Market Recovery and Transformation Strategy, the conventions ratified or under approximation via the new Employment Act, and the national ambitions towards targets like child labour eradication or the 3% employment quota in public sector entities.

Address unfulfilled expectations

The expectations around effective tripartite social dialogue have not been fully achieved, and continue to carry on from DWCP to DWCP, having led to a recent paralysis of the National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC), even though its role during the COVID-19 pandemic was recognized by all constituents as fundamental to ensure job retention and income security to Sri Lankans. Likewise, a current topic in the previous DWCP's formulation and reviews relates to wage setting and implementation mechanisms based on evidence, full consultation and unified approaches that are adequate, effective and inclusive, rather than politically-led or sectoral definitions.

The next DWCP formulation should take stock of the recurring topics that have not been successfully address, as the two mentioned above, and define a strategy to deal with pending issues.

Support Trade Unions overcoming the movement's challenges

The key strategic initiatives proposed in the report "*Opportunities and Challenges in Formation and Functioning of Trade Unions in Sri Lanka*" should continue to be pursued, hand by hand with the implementation of a development capacity working plan, aiming at a less fragmented, more representative and empowered trade union movement.

Labour market information and adjacent data gaps

The new Labour Market Information System can represent an opportunity for constituents, the ILO and other relevant stakeholders (Central Bank) forge the basis to overcome the recurring issues around data gaps: fragmentation of data collection, lack of interoperability between public sector entities, delayed adoption of statistical standards, difficulties in terms of accessibility by third parties, need to include specific modules in the census or labour market surveys.

Design

Scenario planning and risk analysis

The country's future remains uncertain, due to the national macro-economic situation, and to be seen impacts in the labour market, but also due to the current global instability, which can affect the country's development. In this context, instead of a linear approach to programming, a foresight exercise with the constituents, to envisage which priorities and lines of action could be feasible and desired if different scenarios happen, could be advisable.

Instead of realignment as a reaction, like the course shift due to COVID-19, constituents could discuss and strategize on how Decent Work and Social Justice would look like if different scenarios unfold, and what contribution each constituent and the ILO could bring to the table. Accordingly, a risk analysis should be introduced into the programming and monitoring practices, to confer agility and decision-making guidance during implementation.

Timeframe

Considering the uncertainty and volatility of the country's context, and assuming policy implementation as a core element for the new DWCP, a shorter timeframe could be defined. This option would allow the DWCP alignment with the UNSDCF 2023-2027, which will be revised in 2025, as well as to any national development policies that may arise from the recent and upcoming elections.

Improve cross-cutting issues inclusion

The cross-cutting issues (gender equality, disability inclusion, non-discrimination, environmental sustainability, tripartite processes, international labour standards, peace and reconciliation) should be present in the DWCP strategy and guide future projects in an explicit manner, ensuring real targeting and measurement.

Governance

Revise the Tripartite Task Force monitoring practices'

Constituents should report back their contributions, concerns and recommendations having the DWCP framework (priorities, outcomes, outputs, activities) as a roadmap. The DWCP Tripartite Task Force meetings should be designed to promote the DWCP's ownership and progress tracking by constituents, positioning ILO as a mere secretariat.

Adding to the occasional field study visits, other participatory monitoring practices around topics of interest, such as missing stories, success cases, innovative interventions, could be experimented to capture unintended effects or implementation gaps. For effective monitoring, constituents should comply with the defined frequency of the meetings.

For the effect, the ILO capacity needs to be assessed, in line with the recommendation, below, regarding the organizational arrangements.

Revamp the DWCP brand

The DWCP, as an overarching strategy defined by Sri Lanka's tripartite constituents and supported by the ILO did not echo or resonate with the majority of interviewees during the review exercise. To improve understanding of the larger framework in which development cooperation projects and technical assistance is being provided, the constituents and the ILO should enhance visibility and communication around the DWCP.

Leverage ILO's technical capacity

The ILO's specialized technical capacity is a distinctive competitive advantage but the role and intervention of the ILO's DWT experts still needs to be fully explored during the whole DWCP cycle: design, monitoring, review and evaluation. Specialists should be actively engaged in the new DWCP formulation and follow-up.

ILO's Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives organizational arrangements

The existing organizational arrangements and dynamics regarding the structure (vacant positions, shortage of certain capabilities), working methods (operational procedures) and communication (internal communication, knowledge management, institutional memory) between operations, programming and project units at the Country Office needs to be reviewed and shaped to fit the purpose.

Support and resource mobilization

Forge stronger government relations and linkages

The nature and interconnectedness of the social problems trying to be addressed by the DWCP does not comply with well-established ministerial boundaries of any government's architecture. Although the Ministry of Labour remains as the main focal point within the Government, for efficiency and policy drive, the ILO should forge stronger relations with other relevant ministries and public sector organizations which have power or influence in policy and project's design or implementation, or in donor networking, namely the Ministry of Finance, Economic Stabilization and National Policies and the Department of National Planning, which are leading the National Social Protection Policy.

Build leadership within the UN

Similar to what happened during COVID-19, the ILO, while chairing *Outcome Results Group II - Sustainable and inclusive, green-led growth, people-centred economic recovery, livelihoods and productivity*, should engage and coordinate the multiple efforts from UN agencies happening in matters under the DWCP realm (UNDP has become a part of the country's social protection policy dialogue and, together with UNICEF, has engaged in high level policy dialogue with the Sri Lankan government and other key stakeholders on social safety nets), reinforcing the *One UN principle*.

Map development partners' priorities

Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows have been falling in regions outside the mediatic sphere of humanitarian crisis and war in Ukraine (OECD, 2024). The reduced fiscal space and existing debt imbalances in Sri Lanka demand for a sound resource mobilization strategy. A thorough mapping of current development partners' priorities, and an analysis of potential new partners is imperative to sustain the changes and policies needed for the country's growth and inclusion ambitions.

Pitch the DWCP business case

The DWCP should invest in building a business case that can be pitched and modulated accordingly to potential development partners' priorities and interests, without losing sight of ILO's generic competitive and distinctive features (tripartism, social dialogue), but also the one's specific to the country (ground level knowledge that feeds into policy cycle, well-established networks in particular geographical areas, proven successful approaches, like LEED+ value chains, the MSME's understanding). Additionally, with a

growing movement towards regional level interventions, opportunities to booster synergies, even between regions (safe migration corridors, skills recognition) should be followed-up.

Introduction

Decent Work Country Programmes are the ILO's programming instrument at the country level. They provide a framework that identifies the priorities of ILO's constituents in a country and specify the planned support of the Office to the achievement of results under those priorities.

Sri Lanka's fourth DWCP (2018-2024) was launched on 16 May 2018, following signature of a memorandum of understanding between the Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment (MOLFE)¹; the Employers' Federation of Ceylon (EFC); the Sri Lanka Nidahas Sevaka Sangamaya (SLNSS); the National Trade Union Federation (NTUF); the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC); the Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions (CFTU); the Free Trade Zone & General Services Employees Union (FTZGSEU), for and on behalf of the Government of Sri Lanka, employers' organisations, and workers' organisations; and the International Labour Organization Country Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives.

The Programme's design occurred in 2017, aligned with policies and priorities of the two previous Governments of Sri Lanka. The DWCP was originally drafted for 2018-2022 but got extended, in 2021, upon a recommendation from the internal mid-term, by two more years, until 2024.

This report provides the findings and recommendations of the learning exercise of Sri Lanka's DWCP (2018-2024) Review, taking stock of the progress made and reflecting on any significant changes, new challenges, opportunities, and lessons learnt. The review was anchored in a synthesis review of selected documents, followed by a field mission that culminated in a collaborative analysis of significant changes through a participatory consultation with tripartite stakeholders and key partners and a debriefing session with the Tripartite Task Force, in Colombo.

The first part of the report describes the nature and requirements of the assignment; the second part provides background information regarding the period of implementation of DWCP, the main actors and the international commitments at the time. After setting the stage, an overview of the DWCP's priorities, partners and resources is provided, to frame the results achieved and the findings. Lastly, building on the information gathered, a set of suggestions to guide the new DWCP formulation is suggested.

¹ The designation of the Ministry, at the time this Review was conducted, was Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment

The Review

Purpose

The Sri Lanka Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) 2018-2024 is coming to an end. Before the new DWCP formulation starts, it is convenient to take stock of the progress made and reflect on any significant changes, new challenges, opportunities, and lessons learnt from previous experience.

The purpose of this Review is to take stock of what has worked and has not worked and what could be improved or maintained with the next DWCP. To maximize existing knowledge, Review encompassed two main tasks:

- A synthesis review based on Development Cooperation (DC) and Regular Budget Supplementary Account (RBSA) evaluations from projects implemented between 2018-2024, and
- A consultation workshop for collaborative analysis of significant changes, through a participatory exercise with tripartite stakeholders and key partners

Clients

The Review should provide Sri Lanka DWCP with a performance story, trends, lessons learnt, and useful insights to help ILO Constituents, ILO Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives (Colombo), and ROAP (Bangkok) to make informed decisions for future DWCP.

The DWCP signatories in 2018 were: the Government (Ministry of Labour & Trade Union Relations); on behalf of the Employers' organizations: the Employers Federation of Ceylon; on behalf of Workers' organizations: Sri Lanka Nidahas Sevaka Sangamaya, National Trade Union Federation, Ceylon Workers Congress, Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions, Free Trade Zones & General Services Employees Union.

Objectives

As per the Terms of Reference, the specific objectives are to:

1. Identify progress and achievements made by ILO programme and budget and DC projects in Sri Lanka in the framework of Sri Lanka DWCP
2. Analyse what has worked and what has not worked during the DWCP implementation and to see what needs improving or continuing. Identify what have been the incremental and transformative changes that lead to structural reforms, as a result of ILO's contribution?
3. Analyse the effectiveness of the promotion of all ILO's cross-cutting issues
4. Assess the extent of DWCP's contribution to the UN framework
5. Provide ILO Constituents, ROAP, and CO-Colombo with useful insights to make informed decisions to: a) position ILO in relation to UNSDCF and UN System work

and to assist CO Colombo in resource mobilization and profiling/ communication vis-à-vis Government of Sri Lanka and other partners

Scope of the review

The scope of the DWCP review spans the period from 2018-2024 and covers the national and local level of geography, structure, or sequence under which the DWCP operates. In detail, the synthesis review will cover all DC and RBSA evaluations under the management responsibility of ILO Colombo from 2018 up to June 2024, regardless of funding sources. In addition, the scope will include the DWCP's implementation reports of 2018-19, 2020-21, and 2022-23.

Methodology

The DWCP Review was conducted according to ILO's Evaluation Office Policy and guidelines, particularly on what concerns the ILO's evaluation specificities and the cross-cutting issues, namely representativeness of ILO's constituents.

In a nutshell, the Review followed the methodology described in the visual aid:



Figure 1 - Methodology overview

Phase I: synthesis review (desk-based)

As per the ToR, the synthesis review's findings should provide the ILO and its tripartite constituents and other stakeholders with **information on the success story of ILO's interventions and ILO's approaches that work well, those that could be improved, and for whom and why.**

Sampling

The sample of documents to screen, predetermined by the ToR, had as driving criteria the maximization of existing evaluative findings and knowledge produced during the DWCP implementation period (2018 to 2024) and existing relevant documents. In total, a list of 17 documents was selected for the synthesis review.

#	Reference	Title	Year
1	LKA/15/02/CHE	Promoting decent work through good governance, protection and empowerment of migrant workers: Ensuring the effective implementation of the Sri Lanka National Labour Migration Policy - Final evaluation	2020
2	GLO/15/41/EUR	Global action to improve the recruitment framework of labour migration - Final Evaluation	2021
3	LKA/16/02/NOR	Employment generation and livelihoods through reconciliation in Sri Lanka - Final independent evaluation	2018
4	LKA/17/01/USA	EQUIP: Equipping Sri Lanka to Counter Trafficking in Persons - Final evaluation	2021
5	LKA/17/03/UND	Empower: Building peace through the economic empowerment of women in northern Sri Lanka - Final evaluation	2020
6	LKA/16/02/RBS	Jobs for Peace and Resilience (RBSA) - Independent evaluation	2019
7	LKA/19/03/USA	Support to Resettlement and Reconciliation through the United Nations Joint Programme for Peace - Final evaluation	2021
8	LKA/20/50/UND	MPTF COVID: Healthy Socio-Economic Recovery of the Micro and Small Enterprise Sector of Sri Lanka (COVID-19) - Final joint evaluation	2021
9	LKA/18/01/MUL	Local Empowerment through Economic Development and Reconciliation Project (LEED+) - Final evaluation	2023
10	BGD/20/01/RBS	ILO's cluster of interventions funded under RBSA round 2020-21 (improved employment opportunities COVID response focused) - Final evaluation	2023
11	LKA/20/04/IOM	Strengthening Socio-Economic Resilience of Returnee Migrants - Final evaluation	2023
12	RAS/17/06/JPN	Towards fair and sustainable global supply chains: Promoting formalization and decent work for invisible workers in South Asia – final evaluation	2022
13	RAS/21/01/USA	South Asia Leadership in Entrepreneurship (SALE)	2024
14	LKA/20/01/RBS	Cluster evaluation RBSA - social dialogue	2024
15		DWCP Implementation report 2018-19	
16		DWCP Implementation report 2020-21	
17		DWCP Implementation report 2022-23	

Table 1 - List of documents for the synthesis review

Strategy and Protocol

The synthesis review strategy and protocol, was tested during the inception phase, and can be visually represented as follows:

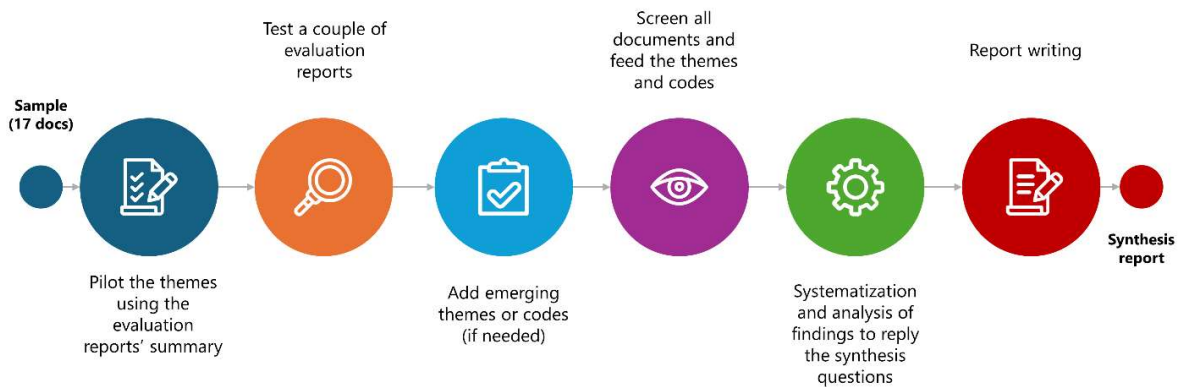


Figure 2 - Synthesis review strategy and protocol

The listed documents were screened to assess their fit for purpose. This meant contrasting the documents with the synthesis' research purpose and run some of the evaluations' summaries through the qualitative software, which also enabled a first approach to the coding task.

During the first iteration, it was detected that:

- Some of the evaluation reports pertained to clustered evaluations, which means that scattered information about interventions in Sri Lanka was provided or that the conclusions, lessons learnt, and recommendations were be placed at a higher level (e.g. GLO/15/41/EUR, BGD/20/01/RBS)
- Evaluation reports that were commissioned by other organizations rather than the ILO were less sensitive to ILO's specificities (e.g. LKA/20/04/IOM)

Coding and analysis

In the current case, the ToR suggested the DWCP priorities² as guiding themes/codes for the synthesis exercise. Hence, the coding was developed based on the synthesis purpose ("provide the ILO and its tripartite constituents and other stakeholders with **information on the success story of ILO's interventions and ILO's approaches that work well, those that could be improved, and for whom and why**") and the conceptual framework: the DWCP country priorities and enabling outcome, supplemented by the ILO cross-cutting issues (gender equality, disability inclusion, and non-discrimination, promotion of international labour standards, tripartite processes and environmental sustainability) and a DWCP cross-cutting issue (peace and reconciliation). However, the synthesis was flexible enough to allow the construction of thematic categories, into which data could be coded, if relevant for the purpose of the review.

The sample of documents was uploaded into the qualitative analysis software MAXQDA, to explore the pre-determined codes. A tentative structure of the coding book was prepared.

² The DWCP priorities are: 1) Creation of sustainable inclusive and decent employment; 2) Better Governance of the Labour Market; 3) Right at Work for all; 4) Enabling outcome - greater data and knowledge generation)

Data systematization, analysis and reporting

After running the list of documents against the themes and codes, excerpts from the documents will be extracted and systematized, exploring MAXQDA's reporting and visual features, with a view of establishing patterns of relationships between codes and quotes, and highlighting where gaps of information exist. A summary report was produced and an online presentation was delivered to the DWCP task force focal points, prior to the field mission.

Phase II: analysis and consultation with tripartite stakeholders (field mission to Sri Lanka)

The synthesis review findings informed and shaped the following steps of the DWCP review, notably the choice of key informant stakeholders to interview during the field mission. The main objectives for this phase were to:

1. Gather additional information from the participants
2. Answer the review questions by reviewing and discussing the information on the DWCP
3. Make evidence-based recommendations (both content and process) for the formulation of the new DWCP

The field mission took place from August 30th to September 14th and was organized as follows:



Figure 3 - Field mission outline

The data collection instruments, such as templates for collection of change stories and workshop's materials, were developed to support the data collection effort. To achieve the purposed objectives, the following techniques were used:

Interviews with key informants

In total, forty-two (42) interviews were conducted, involving fifty-four (54) interviewees, from which fifteen (15) were women. The purposive sample³ respected the ILO's tripartite matrix and aimed at stakeholders with contrasting levels of participation and decision-making power.

Category	Male	Female	Total
Government	1	0	1
Workers	5	0	5
Employers	1	0	1
ILO Office for Sri Lanka & the Maldives staff	8	4	12
ILO Specialists	7	4	11
ILO - other relevant staff	1	3	4
Academia	1	1	2
Development Partners	7	2	9
National Implementation Partners	7	2	9
Total	38	16	54

Table 2 - Interviewees profile

The interviews were conducted on site, except for the interviews with ILO's staff, which were conducted online, before and during the field mission, in a view of providing a better understanding of the DWCP context and challenges.

Observation (site visits)

To contrast and complement the interviews, the evaluator requested an opportunity to interact with beneficiaries from the interventions that were not institutional organizations rather individuals. Therefore, selected field visits, based on availability and proximity to Colombo, were arranged.

Site visit	Location	Date
SPARK Grand Finale	Taj Samudra Hotel (Grand Marquee), Colombo	September 5
Motive Power workers forum	Maligawatta, Colombo	September 6
Sri Lanka Port – NUSS	Sri Lanka Port, Colombo	September 6
Rubber Plantation Workplace committee on OSH in	Avissawella, Colombo	September 6

Table 3 - List of site visits

The visits provided a better understanding of the grassroot problems, the work being done by the different parties and the ultimate beneficiaries reactions, in their own setting.

³ The list of contacts and arrangements were organized mainly by the ILO Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives focal point.

Besides, they were relevant to collect, in first hand, stories of change to add to those collected through document's review.

Stakeholder consultation workshop

The DWCP consultation workshop was designed inspired by the Most Significant Change technique, which is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation⁴.



Figure 4 - Consultation workshop approach

The joint analysis and discussion of the stories took place in Colombo, September 10. During a 3-hour workshop, twenty-three (23) participants⁵, from which eight women (8), representing constituents, Academia, development partners, national implementation partners and ILO officials, from CO and ROAP, discussed a set of stories and its significance within the current DWCP.

Due to time constraints and the ultimate purpose of the workshop, the Most Significant Change technique was partially deployed⁶ and the workshop was customized, by adding a presentation on types of change⁷ (incremental, reform and transformative) that was followed by a guided inquiry to envision the changes desired by the different stakeholders in the room.

The stories were collected both from projects' implementation and evaluation reports; existing communication materials; and by eliciting key informants' stories during interviews and site visits. The collection was free from any attempt of statistical

⁴ Davies, R. & Dart, J. (2005). The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique - A Guide to Its Use

⁵ See [Annex 1 of the Consultation Workshop Report](#)

⁶ From the 10-step process of the Most Significant Technique, the following steps are core: collection of SC stories (Step 4), selection of the most significant of these stories by at least one group of stakeholders (Step 5), feedback to relevant stakeholders concerning which SC stories were selected and why they were selected (Step 6).

⁷ Inspired in the following work: *ICAT Transformational Change Methodology, Chapter 3 – What is transformational change. Available in: Policy assessment of transformational change (climateactiontransparency.org)*

representativeness. It was guided by a convenience sample: the key informants (storytellers) had a vested interest in the DWCP and were available to grant an interview during the data collection period of the review.

DWCP task force debriefing

Towards the end of the field mission, a debriefing session with the DWCP Task Force, representing the tripartite constituents, and ILO's staff took place in Colombo, September 13. The objective was to provide insights on the data collected during the field mission, as well as an overview regarding the next steps of the Review, i.e. the final report. The constituents were able to provide feedback and pose questions during the session.

Phase III: conclusion and finalization of DWCP review report (desk-based)

The DWCP Review final report builds on the sub-products delivered during the assignment (synthesis review, debriefings' presentations, and the consultation workshop report).

Limitations

As foreseen during the inception phase, some of the hurdles faced during the conduction of the assignment related to the timing (close to the Presidential election's) and the duration of the assignment, accuracy and systematization of the existing data, availability of the interviewees and access to final beneficiaries.

During the Review it was ascertained the lack of a reporting mechanism based on the DWCP's framework and the non-existence of a mechanism to reconstruct the overall performance of the Programme, including disaggregated data on constituents' and ILO's contribution. Although we realize that the ILO does not have a mandatory monitoring and reporting system strictly designed for this purpose and we are aware of the Country Office early efforts to establish such a practice, the reality is that this fact conditioned the lines of inquiry that could have been followed by the consultant during the different stages of the Review, and, ultimately, hindered the possibility of stating causal claims or narratives around the DWCP's implementation and results. Considering the complexity of the multiple inputs that feed the DWCP and the interlinkages with internal and external frameworks, to which adds the dynamics between constituents at national level, it becomes intrinsically hard to navigate the system without specific aids and guidance.

In terms of mitigation strategy, before the field mission, a series of online interviews were conducted, particularly to capture the views and insights of the ILO Specialists. These were crucial to inform the interview guides for the interviews conducted in the field. Also, the availability of the Country's Office staff to reply to doubts and questions was invaluable as a way to overcome the complexities of the programming and reporting reality.

There were difficulties or delays in obtaining, beforehand, compiled and consolidated internal information, access to documents and sources, the consolidation of the complete field mission agenda, the late identification of potential key informants, both for interviews and participation in the consultation workshop, as well as the selection of sites to visit. The assignment could have benefited from greater coordination and timely planning from the CO side. This reality took its toll in the preparation and execution of the field mission.

As mentioned, the duration of the field visit, which comprised a phase of data collection, but also a collaborative consultation workshop, field visits and debriefings, was not compatible with field visits to the Northern Provinces, where the ILO has been implementing relevant projects in terms of duration and budget.

In terms of mitigation strategy, the inclusion of site visits and interaction with final beneficiaries, although limited, attempted to disrupt the inner cycle of constituents and implementation partners, allowing other voices to be heard. The sites' selection was contingent to proximity to Colombo, as travelling would have been extremely time-consuming and peril the remaining activities (consultation workshop).

As a result of the combined effect of the limitations described, it is acknowledged that the voices of those most vulnerable were not heard or were insufficiently represented during the Review's process. The same applies to those who might have been negatively affected by the interventions. The absence is extended to those many Trade Unions that are not currently signatories of the DWCP. As reported above, there were gender imbalances in terms of women's participation in interviews, the debriefings and in the workshop, which may be read as a proxy for women participation in decision-making structures and society.

Background

Country Context

The implementation of the DWCP cannot be disentangled from the country's context from 2018 to 2024. In fact, during the DWCP timeframe, Sri Lanka faced multiple crises: a political crisis in 2018; the Easter bombings, in 2019; the COVID-19 pandemic, which led to a 3.5 per cent economic contraction, in 2020; the loss of access to international financial markets due to the significant external debt services, following credit rating downgrades.

In April 2021, a short-term ban on chemical fertiliser imports severely hampered domestic agricultural production and resulted in increased food prices and limitations in the availability of staple foods. The dollar shortage and increases in global commodity prices have resulted in an inability to purchase essential goods such as fuel, gas, medicines and food, or manage rising inflationary pressures⁸.

Sri Lanka announced an external debt service suspension in April 2022, pending debt restructuring, and sought support from the International Monetary Fund (IMF)⁹. The economy contracted by 2.3% in 2023, but began to show signs of stabilization, with inflation easing to 4% in December 2023 from 51.7% in January 2023. In March 2023, the IMF approved an Extended Fund Facility arrangement for Sri Lanka and completed its first review in December 2023¹⁰.

Additionally, Sri Lanka has been facing the impacts of climate change, being consistently placed among the top ten countries at risk of extreme weather events by the Global Climate Risk Index¹¹. The country faces environmental challenges (heatwaves, drought, floods, cyclones, deforestation of its lowland rainforests and degradation of its urban and coastal wetlands) and consequences on natural resources (water, coastal zone), economic sectors (agriculture and fisheries, urban and energy, tourism), and at the community level (poverty and inequality, gender, human health)¹².

The economic conditions observed during 2018 to 2024 have resulted in increased poverty and vulnerability. According to the World Bank update (April 2024) on Sri Lanka Development¹³:

- "Poverty has increased for four consecutive years. It reached 25.9% in 2023, compared to pre-COVID levels of 11.3%, in 2019

⁸ UN (2022). United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for 2023–2027

⁹ Ministry of Finance Economic Stabilization & National Policies (MoF) and Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment (MoWCASE), April 2023, *Stakeholder engagement plan for social protection project* - draft document

¹⁰ Asian Development Bank, 2023, Member fact sheet

¹¹ UN (2023). Fact Sheet: Climate Impact in Sri Lanka

¹² Climate Risk Country Profile: Sri Lanka (2021): The World Bank Group and the Asian Development Bank

¹³ Sri Lanka Development update - Bridge to recovery, April 2024, available: [content \(worldbank.org\)](https://content.worldbank.org)

- Households have been impoverished by a fall in their purchasing power due to high inflation, losses in wages, income and employment, and a drop in remittances
- Worsening labour market trends continue to pose further risks to household welfare. The closure of businesses, especially micro, small and medium enterprises, contributed to a contraction in labour force participation (LFP) to 49.8%, in 2022, from 52.3%, in 2019
- Labour force participation was even lower in urban areas (47.2%) and among women (32.1%)¹⁴. While there was a slight improvement in Quarter 3 of 2023 relative to Quarter 2, driven by higher LFP in rural areas, the LFP rate in urban areas continues to worsen (45.2%, in Q3 2023), and total LFP remains below pre-pandemic levels
- Youth unemployment also increased from 16.4% to 17.7% between the second and third quarters of 2023, with a larger increase among young adults aged 25–29. Furthermore, 45.8% of employed individuals experienced a pay/allowance cut or income loss, 48% experienced a reduction in working hours, and 47.3% experienced a work break or temporary absence since March 2022
- Approximately 60% of all households also reported a reduction in income. Faced with falling incomes, many households have turned to negative coping mechanisms, which have increased food insecurity, malnutrition, and stunting. Almost three-fourths of households have limited their expenditure or changed their diets in response to higher living costs
- After improving during the 2023 harvest season, food security deteriorated again in the second half of 2023, with 24% of the households being classified as food insecure, which is almost as high as in 2022.
- The share of children under 5 who are underweight increased (y-o-y) in January 2024, with higher increases in stunting and underweighted children in rural and estate areas, which poses concerns for longer-term disparities in human capital.
- To respond to financial constraints and meet household food requirements, households also took on more debt. A significant share of households (22.3%) indicated that the reason for indebtedness is to meet daily food requirements
- Households have also reduced their investments in human capital. For example, 17.5% of households indicated that they limited their education expenses (including on stationery and uniforms) to deal with rising costs, and most households have changed their health treatment procedures since March 2022 due to a lack of funds”.

According to the SDG Transformation Centre¹⁵, in 2023, Sri Lanka scored 67.43 out of 100 in the SDG Index Score, ranking 93 out of 167 countries (in 2016, ranked 81st out of 157 countries, and scored 65.9). On what regards SDG 8 – Decent Work and Economic Growth, the trend points to stagnation and significant challenges remain in terms of

¹⁴ Women’s LFPR is only half that of men and it is due to the interplay of many intersecting factors, including the disproportionate burden of care and the large gender pay gap.

¹⁵ SDG Transformation Center's Data Hub

indicators like: adjusted Gross Domestic Product (GDP) growth, fundamental labour rights guaranteed, unemployment rate, and victims of modern slavery.

SDG Dashboards and Trends

Click on a goal to view more information.



Figure 5 - SDG Index and Dashboards Report 2024 - Sri Lanka overview

Particularly relevant for the DWCP implementation, as it deals with normative work and relays in its implementation, is the decreasing trend concerning SDG 16 - Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions¹⁶, which gathers information on the timeliness of administrative proceedings or corruption¹⁷, both showing decreasing scores.

Although the last States of Fragility Report (OECD, 2022) did not flag Sri Lanka as a fragile context, it recognized that various indicators were showing warning signs, such as the country’s high ratio of debt to gross domestic product, exchange rate volatility and low tax revenue¹⁸.

As described, the country’s situation during the period of 2018 to 2024 was marked by multiple, national and international, crises. The scenario of complexity and uncertainty shaped and influenced the DWCP implementation, namely the response to the emergency and remedial actions needed during and after the COVID-19 pandemic.

Tripartite Social Partners in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka became a member of the ILO in 1948, and, in 1984, the ILO Country Office in Colombo was established. Since 2006, Sri Lanka has designed and executed four Decent Work Country Programmes.

¹⁶ Additional information on Governance indicators can be found in [Interactive Data Access | Worldwide Governance Indicators \(worldbank.org\)](#)

¹⁷ In the 2023 Corruption Perceptions Index, from Transparency International, Sri Lanka has a score of 34 out of 100, representing a change of -2 since 2022, and ranking 115 out of 180 countries. [Sri Lanka - Transparency.org](#)

¹⁸ OECD (2022). States of Fragility 2022, OECD Publishing, Paris, <https://doi.org/10.1787/c7fedf5e-en>

Government of Sri Lanka

The prime mission of the Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment is to formulate and implement policies to enhance the contribution of the local and foreign labour force to economic development by protecting the occupational rights & ensuring social security of the private and semi-government sector employees, promoting industrial peace, providing employment opportunities, enhancing productivity of the country and directing skilled workers to the foreign job market.

During the period of 2018-2024, the Ministry of Labour, now denominated as Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment, was held by 7 different Ministers¹⁹ and 6 Secretaries²⁰.

Institutions under the purview of the Ministry include: the Department of Labour, Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, Department of Manpower and Employment, National Institute of Labour Studies (NILS), National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), Office of the Commissioner for Workmen's Compensation, National Productivity Secretariat, Shrama Vasana Fund (established to promote welfare of employees by Act No. 12 of 1998), Sri Lanka Foreign Employment Agency (Pvt.) Limited.

Sri Lanka has ratified 43 Conventions, as follows, and 1 Protocol²¹, this last, P029 - Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930, was the only ratification occurred under the current DWCP, on 10 April 2019.

- Fundamental Conventions: 8 of 10
- Governance Conventions (Priority): 3 of 4
- Technical Conventions: 32 of 177

On the other side, the 51 Conventions not ratified include two Fundamental Conventions: C155 - Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No. 155) and C187 - Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 2006 (No. 187); and the Governance Convention (Priority): C129 - Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention, 1969 (No. 129).

Trade unions

The first Trade Union in Sri Lanka was formed in 1893 and the Trade Union Ordinance was enacted in 1935 (ILO, 2020). Data from 1996 to 2016 on trade unions' membership and number of registered trade unions, reveals that "overall membership in trade unions has been declining steadily over time, and it is estimated that at present only about 9.5

¹⁹ Hon. Minister in 2018: Hon. Gamini Lokuge, Hon. W. D. John Seneviratne, Hon. Ravindra Samaraweera; In 2019: Hon. Daya Gamage, Hon. Dinesh Gunawardena; In 2020: Hon. Dinesh Gunawardena, Hon. Nimall Siripala De Silva; In 2021: Hon. Nimall Siripala De Silva; In 2022: Hon. Nimall Siripala De Silva, Hon. Vidura Vikaramanayake, Hon. Manusha Nanayakkara; In 2023 and 2024: Hon. Manusha Nanayakkara.

²⁰ Secretary in 2018: Mr. H. M. Gamini Senevirathne, Mr. R. P. R. Rajapaksha; In 2019: Mr. Sarath Abeygunawardana; In 2020 and 2021: Mr. M. P. D. U. K. Mapa Pathirana; In 2022: Mr. M. P. D. U. K. Mapa Pathirana, Ms. Vasantha Perera, Mr. R. P. A. Wimalaweera; In 2023 and 2023: Mr. R. P. A. Wimalaweera

²¹ Out of 43 Conventions and 1 Protocol ratified by Sri Lanka, of which 30 are in force, 6 Conventions and 0 Protocol have been denounced; 7 instruments abrogated; none have been ratified in the past 12 months.

per cent of the labour force is covered by a trade union; the ratio is likely to be even less if the percentage of wage earners that are members of a trade union are considered”, according to an ILO study commissioned at the request of trade unions, in 2020. The same study highlights the relatively low women membership in trade unions and in leadership positions²².

The aforementioned study identified several challenges in terms of freedom of association and collective bargaining, and the shortcomings in the assurance of the rights guaranteed under the relevant ILO Conventions that have been ratified by Sri Lanka. Under that study, a SWOT²³ analysis was conducted and a series of strategies/recommendations were proposed. At present date, the discussion appears to continue as relevant as before.

In terms of signatories, the current DWCP counts with the following Trade Unions: Sri Lanka Nidahas Sevaka Sangamaya, National Trade Union Federation, Ceylon Workers Congress, Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions, Free Trade Zones & General Services Employees Union.

Employers

The Employers’ Federation of Ceylon (EFC)²⁴ is the national employers’ organisation in Sri Lanka, established in 1929. Originally involved in the settlement of industrial disputes, it has evolved over the years towards lobbying for labour reforms and changes in policy in the interest of employers.

Its mission is to encourage workers, their organisations and the Government to co-operate with business for the attainment of the following objectives:

- To make employees more efficient and quality conscious
- To achieve better terms and conditions of employment
- To prevent industrial strife and, where disputes have arisen, to resolve them in a fair and expeditious manner
- To generate employment opportunities
- To provide members with services to achieve objectives of growth and stability

Its members (689) represent sectors like: manufacturing; Accommodation and Food Service Activities; Financial and Insurance Activities; Wholesale and Retail Trade; Repair of Motor Vehicles and Motorcycles; Agriculture, Forestry and Fishing.

Services provided by the EFC to its members include: advisory services on Employment Law, Industrial Relations and Human Resource Management, industrial relations, HR and

²² This reality seems to be similar to the other constituents, as the Trade Unions pinpointed during the interviews, and we were able to testimony through the lack of presence of women in the interviews, debriefings and workshops.

²³ SWOT - Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats

²⁴ [About Us_efcHistory – The Employers’ Federation of Ceylon](#)

legal solutions, training and certifications – including specialized training for persons with diverse disabilities, plantation services.

Nevertheless, it must be noted that the EFC does not represent the majority of the business community in Sri Lanka, being particularly in the MSME's space, as the crises exposed. Moreover different business and commerce Chambers, at different geographical levels, operate in Sri Lanka.

Tripartite Consultation Mechanisms

The National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC)²⁵ is the national tripartite consultative mechanism. It was established in 1994 to provide for consultations and cooperation between the government and the employers' and workers' organizations, at the national level, on matters relating to social and labour policies and international labour standards, following the ratification of Convention 144 - Tripartite Consultation Convention.

The NLAC Chairman of the Council is the Minister assigned to the labour portfolio, who appoints an officer as the Secretary and selects the organizations and institutions, among the most representative²⁶, to be part of the NLAC. The reconstitution procedure, in 2023, led to the loss of membership of four unions²⁷, while another four joined the NLAC. Consequently, a complaint was filed at the ILO under article 24 of the ILO Constitution alleging non-observance by the Government of Sri Lanka of the Tripartite Consultation (International Labour Standards) Convention, 1976 (No. 144). The ILO Governing Body decided that the representation was receivable and to set up a tripartite committee to examine it²⁸. The NLAC meetings should convene regularly as frequently as determined by the minister, at least once a month. The last meeting convened on December 13, 2022, as the Government sustains that until the resolution of the legal procedure the NLAC should not convene.

The UN Sustainable Development Framework

The UN Sustainable Development Framework guides the work of the UN in the country and follows the "delivering as one" principle, by aiming at enhanced coordination transparency, efficiency and impact of the United Nations development activities.

²⁵ [National Labour Advisory Council - Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment \(labourmin.gov.lk\)](http://labourmin.gov.lk)

²⁶ Employers: Free Trade Zone Manufacturer's Association, Federation of Chambers of Commerce & Industry of Sri Lanka, Employers' Federation of Ceylon, Sri Lanka Apparel Exporters Association, Joint Apparel Association Forum, Industrial Association of Sri Lanka. Workers: United Federation of Labour, National Union of Seafarers Sri Lanka, The Ceylon Mercantile, Industrial and General Workers Union, Sri Lanka Nidahas Sewaka Sangamaya, Ceylon Estates Staffs' Union, Free Trade Zone & General Services Employees Union, Joint Plantation Trade Union Center, Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions, Jathika Sevaka Sangamaya, Ceylon Federation of Labour, Lanka Jathika Estate Workers Union, Inter Company Employees Union, Ceylon Workers Congress, Ceylon Bank Employees' Union

²⁷ Free Trade Zone Workers and General Services Union; the Ceylon Mercantile and General Workers Union, the United Federation of Labour, and the Ceylon Estate Staff Union

²⁸ [Article 24/26 cases \(ilo.org\)](http://ilo.org)

The DWCP 2018-2024 coexisted with two UNSDFs. The first one, covering the period between 2018 to 2022, had the following four strategic areas of focus:

- Towards improved data, knowledge management and evidence-based policy
- Strengthened, innovative public institutions and engagement towards a lasting peace
- Human security and socio-economic resilience
- Enhancing resilience to climate change and disasters and strengthening environmental management

The DWCP clearly embedded, in its Enabling Outcome, the shared need to improve data, knowledge and policy evidence-based.

In 2020, amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, a UN Advisory Paper was developed, advocating for five strategic priorities for immediate socio-economic response, in line with the UN (Global) Framework (launched on 27 April 2020):

1. Health First: Protecting Health Systems and Services during the Crisis
2. People First: Social Protection and Basic Services
3. Economic Recovery: Protecting Jobs, Micro, Small and Medium Sized Enterprises (MSMEs) and Informal Economy Workers
4. Social Cohesion and Community Resilience
5. Macroeconomic Response and Multilateral Cooperation.

The ILO's supported priorities 1, 2 and 3. During the pandemic, the ILO added value and technical understanding of the implications in the labour market, led to a coordinated response with other UN agencies (IOM, WHO, UNOPS). Social dialogue was also seen as a useful instrument for peacebuilding, understood as social cohesion, when public sector disruptions arose, which fostered continued support of ILO's initiatives on this matter.

While the DWCP was extended until 2024, a new UNSDCF was designed, covering the period between 2023-2027. This new document set four strategic priorities for the country:

- Inclusive and Equitable Human Development and Well-being
- Resilient and Green Recovery and Growth for Shared Prosperity and Environmental Sustainability
- Social Cohesion and Inclusive Governance & Justice
- Gender Equality

The ILO is implementing programmatic interventions, both in specific locations and at country level, that contribute to the UNSDCF²⁹ results. Moreover, the ILO chairs Outcome Group II - Sustainable and inclusive, green-led growth, people-centred economic recovery, livelihoods and productivity, besides being a member in other outcome groups.

²⁹ UN's programmatic interventions map, [United Nations in Sri Lanka](#)

Sri Lanka Decent Work Country Programme

This section summarizes the DWCP 2018-2022 logic of intervention, its operationalization and funding strategy. However, due to the country's conditions, adjustments took place and an internal mid-review conducted by Constituents led to the DWCP extension until 2024³⁰.

Logic of intervention

The DWCP areas of work, prioritised by the constituents, represented a continuum of past DWCP priorities which were considered as still valid. The DWCP, originally programmed for the period of 2018 to 2022, consists of three (3) Country Priorities (CP) and one (1) Enabling Outcome (EO), each of them disaggregated into outcomes (9) and outputs (17).

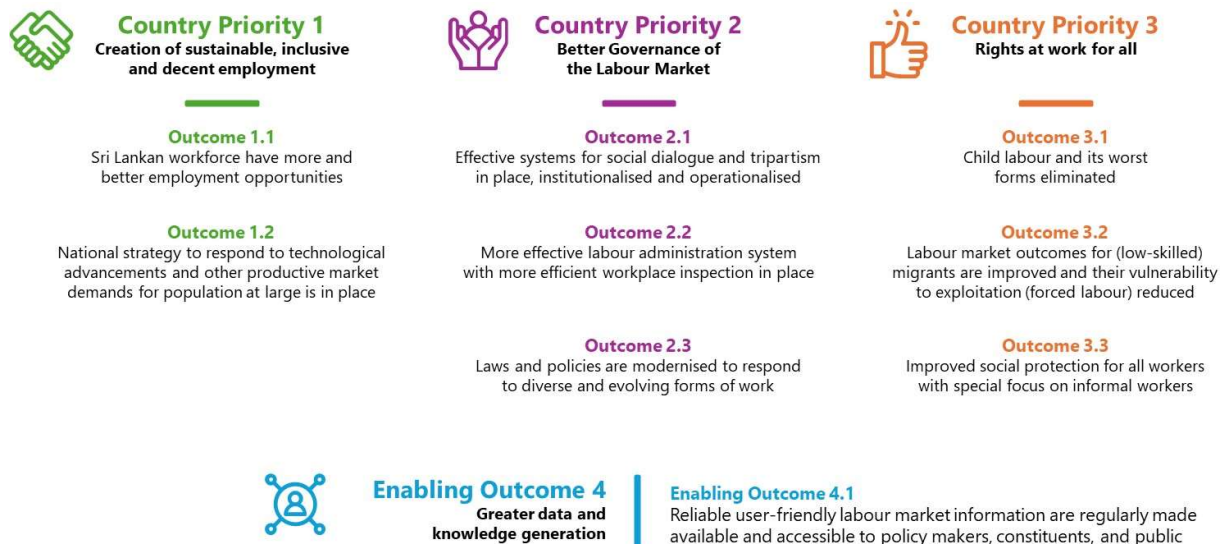


Figure 6 - Sri Lanka DWCP 2018-2024 Logic of intervention

The DWCP implementation is materialized via Country Programme Outcomes (CPOs), which, in turn, are anchored in technical and development cooperation projects.

<u>DWCP Outcome</u>	<u>CPO Description (biennium 2024-2025)</u>
1.1: Sri Lankan workforce have more and better employment opportunities	LKA 102 - National strategy formulated to respond to technological advancements and other productive market demands for population at large LKA 107 - Sri Lankan workforce have more and better employment opportunities

³⁰ This information is part of the internal document produced by the DWCP Review Team that conducted the *Sri Lanka Decent Work Country Programme 2018-2022 Review*

	LKA 801 - Strengthened institutional capacity of employers' organizations
1.2: National strategy to respond to technological advancements and other productive market demands for population at large is in place	LKA 102 - National strategy formulated to respond to technological advancements and other productive market demands for population at large LKA 132 - Laws and policies are modernized to respond to diverse and evolving forms of work
2.1: Effective systems for social dialogue and tripartism in place, institutionalised and operationalised	LKA 102 - National strategy formulated to respond to technological advancements and other productive market demands for population at large LKA 131 - Effective Labour administration systems and efficient workplace inspection in place
2.2: More effective labour administration system with more efficient workplace inspection in place	LKA130 - Effective systems for social dialogue and tripartism in place, institutionalised and operationalised LKA 131 - Effective Labour administration systems and efficient workplace inspection in place LKA 826 - Strengthened capacity of member States to ratify and apply international labour standards and to fulfil their reporting obligations
2.3: Laws and policies are modernised to respond to diverse and evolving forms of work	LKA 802 - Strengthened institutional capacity of workers' organizations LKA 132 - Laws and policies are modernized to respond to diverse and evolving forms of work
3.1: Child labour and its worst forms eliminated	LKA153 - Child Labour and its worst forms eliminated
3.2: Labour market outcomes for (low-skilled) migrants are improved and their vulnerability to exploitation (forced labour) reduced	LKA154 - Labour market outcomes for migrants are improved and their vulnerability to exploitation (forced labour) reduced
3.3: Improved social protection for all workers with special focus on informal workers	LKA 155 - Improved social protection to all workers with special focus on informal workers
4.1: Reliable user-friendly labour market information are regularly made available and accessible to policy makers, constituents, and public	LKA 176 - Strengthened labour market information for evidence-based policy

Table 4 - DWCP Outcomes mapped against the CPOs (Source: CO Programming Unit)

According to the ILO Development Cooperation Dashboard³¹, thirty-four (34) DC projects were implemented in the country during the DWCP implementation period, 2018 to 2024 - Annex II.

The DWCP specifically mentioned that the ILO's role was not of a funding agency, although it could play a strong supporting role in mobilizing external funding, both from within its own regular resources and through reaching out to the donor community. In fact, the DWCP results matrix identified the financial resources (in USD) estimated to be available and those that had to be mobilised for each outcome. The table below represents the latest version of that information, which was provided by the CO during the Review.

Outcome	Estimated to be available	To be mobilised
1.1: Sri Lankan workforce have more and better employment opportunities	\$4 million	\$6.1 million
1.2: National strategy to respond to technological advancements and other productive market demands for population at large is in place	\$30,000	\$351,620
2.1: Effective systems for social dialogue and tripartism in place, institutionalised and operationalised	\$25,000	\$475,000
2.2: More effective labour administration system with more efficient workplace inspection in place	\$20,000	\$350,575
2.3: Laws and policies are modernised to respond to diverse and evolving forms of work	\$25,000	\$225,000
3.1: Child labour and its worst forms eliminated	\$0	To be estimated
3.2: Labour market outcomes for (low-skilled) migrants are improved and their vulnerability to exploitation (forced labour) reduced	\$2.1 million	To be estimated
3.3: Improved social protection for all workers with special focus on informal workers	\$0	To be estimated
4.1: Strengthen labour market information for evidence based policy	\$20,000	\$ 350,000

Table 5 - Resource mobilization estimates to accomplish the DWCP objectives

According to the ILO's DC dashboard, the development cooperation projects were funded by different sources: ILO core voluntary funds (RBSA), multi-bilateral donors (Netherlands, Switzerland, Australia, United States of America, Japan, Sweden, Norway), Inter-Governmental organizations, such as the European Union; private/non-state actors,

³¹ <https://webapps.ilo.org/DevelopmentCooperationDashboard/#aa48b97>

Levi Strauss Foundation; and the United Nations (Multi Partner Trust Fund Office, UNDP; International Organization for Migration; World Health Organization).

Partner	Budget (USD)
Multi Donor	\$6.59 mln
MPTF/UNDP	\$2.45 mln
Switzerland	\$ 2.31 mln
Norway	\$2.30 mln
Core voluntary funds (RBSA)	\$2.05 mln
IOM	\$1.95 mln
Japan	\$1.16 mln
European Union	\$580,521
Netherlands	\$345,383
Total	\$23.49 mln

Table 6 - Top partner classifications 2018-2024 (Source: ILO DC Dashboard)

The DWCP internal review/realignment

As mentioned, the DWCP was extended until 2024, upon Government's proposal, based on two arguments: i) implementation challenges as a consequence of the global pandemic; and ii) to align with the national development policy (*Vistas of Prosperity and Splendour*) timeframe.

An internal review/realignment was conducted, in 2021, by the constituents, structured around three questions:

1. Do the stated outcomes remain relevant?
2. Are we making progress against these outcomes in the right way?
3. Are there better ways of achieving these outcomes?

Overall, at that time, constituents recognized that progress had not been fully achieved for all outcomes. Nevertheless, the three country priorities and the enabling outcome were assessed as remaining relevant.

Outcome	Progress
1.1: Sri Lankan workforce have more and better employment opportunities	Partially
1.2: National strategy to respond to technological advancements and other productive market demands for population at large is in place	Partially
2.1: Effective systems for social dialogue and tripartism in place, institutionalised and operationalised	Partially
2.2: More effective labour administration system with more efficient workplace inspection in place	Partially
2.3: Laws and policies are modernised to respond to diverse and evolving forms of work	No
3.1: Child labour and its worst forms eliminated	Yes
3.2: Labour market outcomes for (low-skilled) migrants are improved and their vulnerability to exploitation (forced labour) reduced	Yes

3.3: Improved social protection for all workers with special focus on informal workers	Partially
4.1: Reliable user-friendly labour market information are regularly made available and accessible to policy makers, constituents, and public	Partially

Table 7 - DWCP outcomes assessment by constituents during the internal review

However, as referred in the internal document produced by the Review Team, “Outcome 3.2 *“Labour market outcomes foe (low-skilled) migrants are improved and their vulnerability to exploitation (forced labour) reduced”* needed to be broadened to include incoming foreign migrant workers and socio-economic reintegration of repatriated migrant workers affected by COVID-19”.

Progress achieved

ILO's established reporting mechanisms look at the corporate level, on a biennium basis through the ILO's Programme and Budget outcomes, taking into consideration the Country Programme Outcomes.

At the country level, the Decent Work Country Programmes are the ILO's programming instrument. They provide a framework that identifies the priorities of ILO's constituents and specifies the planned support of the Office for the achievement of results under those priorities.

In Sri Lanka, the DWCP defined two mechanisms to monitor the implementation and performance of the programme: the Project Advisory Committees and, at the DWCP level, a **Tripartite Task Force**. The DWCP Task Force role was to monitor progress, provide guidance to the programme together with advice on addressing challenges faced in implementation, to serve as a forum to assess DWCP's contributions to the SDGs and to ILO's global outcomes and indicators as articulated in the ILO Programme and Budget.

The Task Force meetings' minutes confirm that DWCP progress was being reported mainly at the project level, although an initial effort to build a monitoring and reporting system, based on the DWCP framework, with reporting responsibilities shared between all parties, did not succeed. The solution adopted placed a weaker emphasis on each constituent's contribution to the priorities or outcomes agreed under the DWCP.

The Tripartite Task Force, chaired by the Ministry of Labour, and co-chaired by the ILO, serving primarily as a secretariat function, should meet three times per year. According to the Task Force meeting minutes, the DWCP Tripartite Task Force met ten (10) times during the Programme's period of implementation, i.e. 2018-2024. These meetings were not only held in Colombo, but occasionally included field study visits, with exposure to projects' implementation and interaction with beneficiaries, such as Jaffna and Chilaw, as identified below.

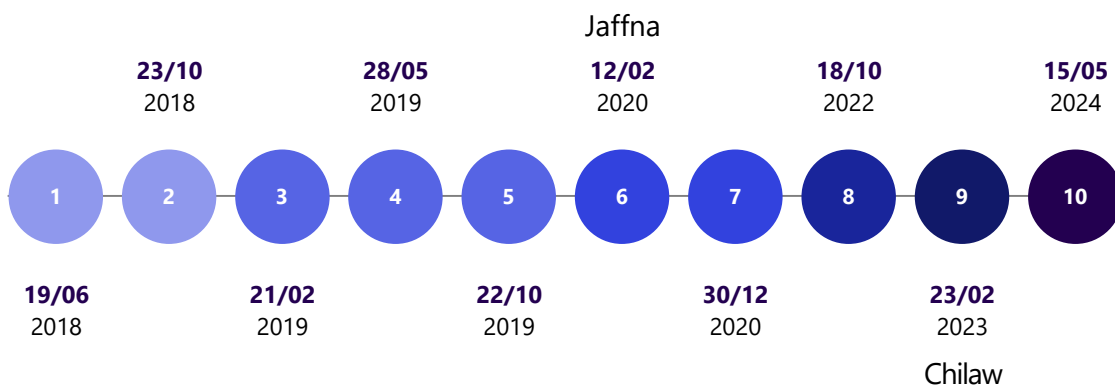


Figure 7 - DWCP Task Force meetings' timeline

The described programming and reporting reality does not favour the picturing of a shared narrative regarding the progress that is being achieved under the realm of the DWCP.

The next section, illustrates some of the milestones achieved through the implementation of development cooperation projects and technical assistance. These have been reported in various internal documents (evaluation reports, the Decent Work Results platform, biennium implementation reports 2018-2019, 2020-2021, 2022-2023), which follow different requirements, objectives and timeframes. Therefore, for the Review, the findings were placed into the DWCP framework (country priorities and outcome level), by pulling together information from various sources to develop a narrative around the priorities defined by constituents.

Country Priority 1 milestones

O1.1 - Sri Lankan workforce have more & better employment opportunities

- The National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA) was supported to scale up an existing programme that offers trade persons the opportunity to gain National Vocational Qualifications (NVQ) certification of their skills through the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) testing and certification
- The Recognition of Prior Learning facilitated the implementation of an existing, but underutilized, policy on skills certification in Sri Lanka
- Partnership established between the Employers' Federation of Ceylon (EFC) and the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) on strengthening the Skills passport system
- TVEC conducted 620 RPL assessments for returned and aspirant migrant workers, completed 8 skills-gap filling programs, and upskilled 859 aspirant migrant workers through the Vocational Training Authority (VTA) of Sri Lanka
- The Unions were involved in training and awareness raising campaigns on skills development targeting returnee and aspiring migrant workers
- Projects such as LEED+, in the Northern Province, operationalized entrepreneurship, innovation and SME development, through 5 private sector value chains, creating thousands of jobs, and livelihoods and ensuring enterprise sustainability
- Sri Lanka's first National Policy on Cooperatives was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers on 30 July 2019
- The Northern Province Department of Cooperative Development developed interventions to extend its services to war-affected resettled communities
- Government authorities in the Northern Province integrated gender and disability inclusion using ILO tools in their programmes on entrepreneurship and enterprise development (2020). Several advancements regarding persons with disabilities were noted: a draft policy, the creation of Disabled Persons Organisations (DPOs) at the divisional secretariat level, supported by the Provincial Department of Social Services, Development of a database, engagement of private sector companies to facilitate disability-friendly work environments

- Employers' Federation of Ceylon, in consultation with Governor of Northern Province and Ernest & Young, facilitated an investor delegation to the Northern Province, in 2023, to promote investment in agriculture and fisheries in the war-affected Northern Province of Sri Lanka
- The State Ministry of Rural Development applied the LEED+ approach for six value chains
- An enabling environment for youth entrepreneurship was created due to the adoption of a policy framework by the Central Bank of Sri Lanka and the Ceylon Chamber of Commerce (2023)
- The Start and Improve Your Business (SIYB) Association of Sri Lanka adopted e-SIYB training manuals to local context, translated them into Sinhala and Tamil languages and provided training in digital mode to selected migrant workers (2021)

O1.2 - National strategy to respond to technological advancements & other productive market demands for population at large is in place

- Research was conducted on the Future of Work in Sri Lanka: Shaping Technology for a Brighter Future (2019)
- A survey was commissioned to assess the impact of the multiple crises on MSMEs and the findings were shared at a high-level consultation
- The Labour Market Recovery and Transformation Strategy, which focuses on addressing the impacts of the multiple crises on MSMEs, was developed
- The Strategy should help grow resilient businesses and decent jobs through strategic interventions in the areas of: a) Job creation, b) skills enhancement, and (c) institutional reform
- An inter-ministerial action committee, under the leadership of the Minister of Labour and Foreign Employment, and the President's Secretary, comprising key secretaries from various ministries, including Education, Finance, Tourism, Fisheries, Transport, Plantation and Industry, was established

Country Priority 2 milestones

O2.1 - Effective systems for social dialogue & tripartism in place, institutionalised & operationalised

- The Ministry of Labour held a consultation with the ILO, where the ILO formulated its roadmap and recommendations regarding minimum wages, which took place at the Secretary's Office in the Ministry of Labour Relations, December 2019
- Upon requests for a national wage-setting mechanism, the ILO provided technical assistance and presented the Minimum Wage Setting Machinery background paper, a draft report on a "National Minimum Wage System in Sri Lanka" (2020)

- A presentation on the Global Wage Report took place, September 2021, promoting strengthening the minimum wage system based on different country experiences taking the experiences from other wage systems around the globe
- The Government adjusted the rate of the National monthly minimum wage of the private sector employees at Rs. 16,000, and at the daily minimum wage of Rs. 640 - National Minimum Wages (Amendment Act, No 16 of 2021)
- Although Sri Lanka has ratified the Minimum Wage Fixing Convention, 1970 (No. 131), there is no consultative procedure in practice for setting and undertaking regular adjustments of the national minimum wage and other sectoral wages, including plantation sector wages. The social partners would like to see a standing national mechanism that is tripartite, with technical assistance from the ILO for making the minimum wage system adequate, effective and inclusive
- The National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC) played a relevant role during COVID-19, but the strengthening of the NLAC did not progress as foreseen, despite numerous efforts from the Country Office towards the enhancement of the NLAC: a high-level tripartite delegation to South Africa, led by the Minister of Labour, was facilitated by the ILO to study the operations of the National Economic Development and Labour Council (NEDLAC), as a pre-cursor to the mentioned activity. A Task Team appointed by the Minister drafted a new Act, a Constitution, Protocols and an organogram (with support from ILO) for re-establishing NLAC as a statutory body. The report of the committee was submitted to the Minister, however, with the change of Government, it was shelved
- Social Dialogue & Workplace Cooperation mechanism has been successfully institutionalised in two pilot sectors (i.e., public transport and public health) (2023)
- Establishment of Workplace Forums, Sectoral Councils and National Dialogue Council for the Prevention and Resolution of Disputes across the entire Public Service was endorsed by Cabinet (2023)
- Ministry of Public Administration issued a circular in February 2024 operationalizing the cabinet decision, which makes it mandatory for all Government Ministries and Departments to set-up forums at workplace level for prevention and resolution of disputes.
- Bipartite mechanisms on grievance handling have been established at enterprise level through piloting of grievance handling guidelines in selected sectors (manufacturing, services, banking, and finance)

O2.2 - More effective labour administration system with more efficient workplace inspection in place

- Establishment of a case management system initiated by the Department of Labour to support the rapid resolution of disputes, including those arising from the COVID-19 pandemic
- Dispute resolution capacity of the Department of Labour enhanced (20 officials trained as conciliators out of which 10 are women)

- Employers' organizations introduced grievance handling guidelines at the enterprise level in selected sectors (i.e., service sectors, banking, finance and manufacturing)
- An OSH Diagnostic Study in the plantation sector was completed in collaboration with the NIOSH
- With the support of ILO's Specialist, a workplan was designed towards progressive ratification of several ILO's Conventions
- The Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment (MoLFE) submitted seven out of eight reports due in 2022 (C011, C087, C098, C100, C111, C135, C144) before 1 September 2022 and provided replies to the comments of the ILO supervisory bodies. Likewise, in 2023, MoLFE submitted reports on C018, C029, P029, C045, C081, C095, C103, C105, C106, C115, C122, C131, C138, C160, C182, responding to the comments of the ILO supervisory bodies before 1 September 2023.

O2.3 - Laws and policies are modernised to respond to diverse & evolving forms of work

- Ratification of the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 1930 (P 29) (2019)
- Training on forced labour was conducted for labour inspectors and police officials, and a brainstorming workshop was conducted for senior and operational officials of the government who were responsible for combating forced labour with the participation of the Ministry of Labour, Department of Labour, Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, and Department of Police
- The PROTECT Union and Domestic Workers Union conducted a rapid assessment of the impact of COVID-19 on 600 domestic workers and 50 employers (2020). A tripartite forum validated the results and recommendations. Also, conducted training programmes on social security resulting in 100 domestic workers registering for social security schemes.
- These workers' organisations have increased effective representation of workers for whom home is the workplace and have implemented campaigns for reform of labour laws to promote and protect domestic workers rights and for ratification of C189 and C190
- The Ministry of Labour and other social partners validated the first draft of the gender-responsive diagnoses of: 1) care economy workers to facilitate transition to formality; and 2) home-based women workers and other informal economy workers in global supply chains and their linkages with subcontractors or MSEs in the informal economy. These should be used as evidence on decent work deficits of informal economy workers, in line with C177 (2021)

Country Priority 3 milestones

03.1 - Child labour and its worst forms eliminated

- Communication gap analysis in awareness of child labour and legal standards was executed by the Department of Labour, with the support of the ILO, and presented to the National Steering Committee on Child Labour
- Sri Lanka obtained “pathfinder status” under the Alliance 8.7³²(in September 2019) and a roadmap was adopted³³
- and as fulfillment its obligation, the government further strengthen the legal structure which impact child labour
- The minimum age of admission to employment increased to 16 years to keep children in school for longer (2021)
- The draft list of hazardous occupations for children in employment was further reviewed, including now domestic work as a hazardous occupation for persons under 18 years of age, and adopted in 2021
- Department of Labour, with the labour officers from Colombo and Kalutara districts and identified Sri Lanka Police (Women and Child Desk), the Department of Probation, developed a package of innovative interventions for eliminating hazardous child labour through improving working conditions based on the revised hazardous list. Training was delivered to 182 officials
- Pilot testing on child labour module: Department of Census and Statistics to follow up with Finance Ministry to obtain clearance and approval (2024)

03.2 - Labour market outcomes for (low-skilled) migrants are improved & their vulnerability to exploitation (forced labour) reduced

- Ratification of the Protocol of 2014 to the Forced Labour Convention, 2019
- ILO Fair Recruitment Guidelines and Principles were disseminated through several initiatives: creation of a Digital Knowledge Hub (KH) platform for dissemination of evidence-based knowledge for policy dialogues was created and tested (2023); A toolkit and training on fair recruitment and forced labour have been provided to editors and journalists of both national and provincial media outlets; Research on recruitment costs was adapted to the national context
- Workers’ and employers’ organisations engaged in project activities related to Trafficking in Persons

³² Pathfinder countries are committed to be at the forefront of the fight to achieve SDG target 8.7, driving progress on the ground. Through an inclusive approach bringing together all concerned stakeholders, [Pathfinder Countries](#) adopt Roadmaps to accelerate progress, and ensure the appropriate follow up.

³³ [ALLIANCE 8.7 ROADMAP-SRI LANKA.pdf](#)

- Specialized services to victims of trafficking, investigations and prosecutions of TIP cases have increased. However, challenges remain for effective legal aid and holistic assistance to victims
- The new National Labour Migration Policy and action plan for 2023-2027 was approved by the Cabinet of Ministers (2023)
- New services provided to Migrant Workers through digitalisation of existing Recognition of Prior Learning system and enrolment of Migrant Workers in the National Skills Passport initiative for job matching with employers
- More than 25 amendments to the Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) Act were agreed upon
- The Reintegration Unit was established within the SLBFE to support returning migrant workers
- A Training of Trainers (TOT) unit was established and training materials provided to expand training to all 900 Migration Development Officers in the country
- National Skills Passport adopted (2020)
- ITUC launched the Migrant Worker “Recruitment Adviser” platform, enables migrant workers to review their recruitment experience and access information about relevant legislations in Sri Lanka and countries of destination (2020). However, shortcomings have been identified in terms of sustainability of this initiative
- Institutional-level coordination between several entities (Department of Manpower and Employment, Small Enterprise Development Division, National Enterprise Development Authority and National Craft Council) was strengthened. Agreements with commercial banks (People's Bank, and Commercial Bank PLC) were established with a view to provide financial assistance to returnees repatriated, due to COVID-19, to start small businesses

O3.3 - Improved social protection for all workers with special focus on informal workers

- A study was conducted, with EFC, to repositioning social security system for private sector employment in Sri Lanka. This study analysed social security landscape and specially how reforms could benefit employees as well as employers. It laid the foundation to all other social security discussions including unemployment, maternity protection, informal sector coverage including domestic and migrants
- Aiming at increasing coverage of the Employees Provident Fund (EPF) to additional formal sector employees, as well as the informal sector, the ILO presented a Report on Comprehensive Social Security Policy for Private Sector Workers to the cabinet of the Ministry of Labour and discussion with the National Social Protection Committee under the Presidential Secretariat (2024)
- After an actuarial analysis, the Unemployment Insurance Scheme was designed
- Capacity Building Programme for the tripartite constituents: on Social Security, ILO Standards on social security, Unemployment Insurance Scheme Design

- Tripartite Study Tour for Indonesia (10 delegation) and Study Visit to India (7 delegation)
- Two-policy briefs on Maternity Protection and Social Security Reform Roadmap produced

Enabling outcome 4 milestones

O4.1 - Reliable user-friendly labour market information are regularly made available and accessible to policy makers, constituents, and public

- The Ministry of Labour is taking steps, via a consultancy work, towards the development of the new Labour Market information system architecture, in order to issue a procurement process. The new system is going to be coupled with the Skills Passport in one single platform. The investment still needs to be approved by the National Planning Department
- The Department of Census and Statistics has introduced the new standards in both the Labour Force Survey and Census of Population (a pilot study on implementation of the 19th ICLS resolution on work statistics was completed in 2019). However other statistical standards have not yet been adopted
- The ILO has conducted research in a wide range of topics:
 - The care economy and decent work in Sri Lanka: opportunities, challenges and future trends
 - Impact of multiple crises on Sri Lanka's micro, small and medium-sized enterprises
 - Labour market supply and demand for Sri Lankan migrant workers
 - The gender pay gap in Sri Lanka
 - Work in Fishing Convention, 2007 (No. 188): Netting Gains for Sri Lanka (2021)
 - Future of Work in Sri Lanka: Shaping Technology for a Brighter Future (2019)
 - Workforce and Migration Patterns of Sri Lanka's Tourism Industry: Implications for Growth of the Sector (2021)
 - Employment and Environmental Sustainability in Sri Lanka (2021)
 - Domestic Workers and Domestic Work in Sri Lanka (2021)
 - Green Jobs in Sri Lanka: Linkages between environmental sustainability and decent work (2020)
 - A Comprehensive Analysis of Remittances in Sri Lanka (2020)
 - Mainstreaming Disaster Resilience: Identifying Opportunities in National Policies and Legal Framework in relation to Rural Development (2020)
 - Assessment of key bottlenecks for private sector investment in the Northern Province (2020)
 - Opportunities and Challenges in Formation and Functioning of Trade Unions in Sri Lanka (2020)
 - Presence of Human Trafficking and Forced Labour in Labour Migration (2019)

- Review of Law, Policy and Practice of Recruitment of Migrant Workers in Sri Lanka (2019)

Review Findings

Relevance

The DWCP translated constituents' priorities in accordance with national development plans, other strategic documents and commitments (SDGs). The stakeholders interviewed agreed that the interventions were relevant and needed, particularly in times of crises (e.g. the job creation and enabling environment for returned migrants during COVID-19).

There was an attempt to adapt and navigate according to the evolving contextual conditions, as shown by the shift of focus towards the SME's, the in-bound and out-bound flows of migrants; or, operationally, by the introduction of OSH concerns during the pandemic, or a stronger emphasis on skills development, or the revision of the selected value-chains during the fuel crisis, the fertilizer or import bans occurred. This need for flexibility to address emergent issues was pitched by the CO to donors, which ultimately reflected in the resource mobilization capacity.

The projects implemented targeted a plethora of beneficiaries – intermediate and ultimate, typically within the range of the most vulnerable ones: female headed households, persons with disabilities, war affected women, aspiring and returned migrants, victims of trafficking, public sector officials, constituents, youth and women, farmers' and fishers' communities, cooperatives, the Northern Province, home-based workers. Nevertheless, there are reported cases of difficulties in targeting the right beneficiaries³⁴.

ILO's work is recognized by constituents and development partners, that highlight ILO's role in promoting a human-centred approach amidst a stronger emphasis on macro-economic aspects; the technical expertise provided; the exposure to other countries' experiences; the identification of new partnerships, as well as its capacity to deliver and well-manage the funds available.

Results

The DWCP achievements need to be framed within the country's situation. However, as described, some degree of progress was registered in all country priorities and outcomes. The course shifts were generically in line with the DWCP priorities given its broad wording and scope.

Constituents' opinions on the level and importance of the achievements varies. Trade Unions flag the lack of progress on topics like national tripartite dialogue, collective bargaining, freedom of association, for instance in the garment sector, or extension of OSH through a national law. Whereas EFC would like to see steady progress on bureaucracy reduction, public sector digitization, better quality data and information to support decisions, improvements on social security schemes to alleviate burden currently

³⁴ See LKA2050UND_ MPTF and LKA1602RBS

on employers, and reduction of restrictions to female participation in the labour market. On the other hand, the Government highlights the agreements achieved during COVID-19 to secure living conditions during the lockdowns, the minimum wage rises, the approach towards upskilling workers, or the ongoing legislative reforms regarding labour laws. Although different perspectives are not a surprise, the dissensus between constituents' opinions and expectations may be symptomatic of a weaker social cohesion and DWCP affiliation.

The ILO promoted different types of capacity building initiatives (training, field visits, participation in studies and research) targeting the three constituents, alongside with involvement in the design and implementation of projects' activities. However, a specific strategy taking into consideration the respective challenges and roles within the DWCP seems not to have been explicitly articulated. The exclusion of constituents from topics that could not immediately resonate with them³⁵ may have been a lost opportunity to build capacity and explore new avenues for collaboration.

Coherence

At the time of its formulation, the DWCP was aligned with the policies and priorities of the Government of Sri Lanka, such as the Public Investment Programme (PIP) of 2017-2020 and 'Vision 2025', the National Development Framework. 'Vision 2025' prioritised increasing employment opportunities as well as reskilling of the labour force to meet socio-economic demands, with special prominence for women and youth. The DWCP was also in alignment with sectoral policies such as the National Employment Policy, Child Labour Policy, Small and Medium Enterprise Policy, Skills Development Policy, Education Policy and existing labour laws. Additionally, the Government and the United Nations (UN) in Sri Lanka signed on August 2017 the United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSDF), 2018-2022, to which the DWCP had to contribute.

One of the traits of the 2018-2024 DWCP implementation is the fact that it embraces past experience and learnings: on the one hand, the three country priorities present a close wording to those defined in the previous DWCP, since these were considered as still relevant to the country's context and their full realization had not been achieved; on the other hand, several projects present a long track record (LEED evolved into EGLR, LEED+ and PAVE), building on previous results, best practices and lessons learnt, which eventually can feed next rounds of policy development and ground-level interventions.

In order to accomplish the DWCP intended results and the emergent needs, such as health and preventive measures during COVID-19, constituents were urged to engage in resource mobilization activities. The CO was able to secure some additional fundings, e.g. through RBTC top-up, slippage, and RBSA (2022-2023), but also from US Department of State, which awarded ILO Sri Lanka funds on peace-building to supplement the work in the Jobs for Peace and Resilience programme, from the UN Peace-Building Fund.

³⁵ Trade Unions initially were not involved in topics like returned migrant workers, entrepreneurship or other private sector initiatives

The growing number of development partners interacting in the economic and social landscape (World Bank, ADB, FMI, UN agencies, bilateral development cooperation actors) poses a challenge to synergies and interlinkages. This is a matter that should receive stronger emphasis from the Government side, but also the from the ILO, that could seek stronger connection with the Department of National Planning, but also within the UN sphere.

Impact, Sustainability and Transformation

Constituents and partners recognized that ILO's interventions have addressed the most pressing needs and have aimed at relevant groups of beneficiaries (e.g. MSME, women, persons with disability). The DWCP used a two-fold approach:

- i) by operating as an **implementation agency**, the ILO put in place interventions that targeted individuals, public officials, trade unions, associations and cooperatives, building bridges and partnerships between different agents (public and private sector), from different sectors and geographies, using tools like tripartite engagement, social dialogue, awareness raising activities, capacity building and knowledge sharing,
- ii) whilst promoting **normative work and technical guidance**, at local and national level, towards policy development, action plans and strategies design, conventions' ratification.

This strategy has created a positive feeding loop: experience gained in the field shapes and translates into policy decision-making, and policies implementation guide new interventions for operationalization, as seen in the crisis response to MSMEs during COVID-19 and how it shaped the need to foster OSH conditions, the existence of social security nets for formal and informal sector, and the type of actions needed to support small businesses, which account for 99% of business enterprises and employs 75% of the labour force.

This bundle approach was appreciated by certain donors facing a balancing act: on the one hand, the acknowledgment of the difficulties of obtaining solely normative milestones, due to Sri Lanka's political environment; on the other, the push to demonstrate and raise visibility on the results of development cooperation efforts building on success stories.

Although ILO's work had repercussions at multiple levels (individuals, constituents, community, district, provincial, nation-wide, sectoral) the existing reporting and communication mechanisms are not capturing and following systematically the level and intensity of the results and changes achieved.

The consultation workshop, delivered in Colombo during the review, intended to obtain participants' perceptions regarding the type of changes the DWCP originated. Working on a set of stories collected by the consultant, the participants were engaged in a reflexion activity about the meaning and significance of those stories – see Annex 3. They

were, then, asked to categorize the changes reported in the set of stories based on the following typology:

- **Incremental change** often entails adjustments that allow the usual state of affairs to continue (e.g. increasing awareness about water conservation).
- **Reform** involves addressing a problem, which may alter business as usual but does not fundamentally change the system (e.g. charging higher rates to encourage consumers to reduce their water use).
- **Transformative change** explicitly leads to a new system – that is, a new paradigm or regime, and new attitudes and values – while questioning the old ones (e.g. cities and their residents investing in sustainably landscaped outdoor spaces)

This exercise - explained in detail in Annex 3 - demonstrated that participants considered that all types of changes (incremental, reform and transformative) were occurring across different levels of intervention, country priorities and outcomes. However, the majority of changes discussed were categorized as incremental, and there was an overall sense that the country's context was less conducive to transformative changes.

	Stories	Observable type of change
1	Story 14: The most vulnerable ones Story 15: A passport for life Story 16: Zero waste	Incremental Incremental Transformative
2	Story 3: Working for common goals Story 5: Paving the way for women Story 12: We have a voice	Reform Incremental > Reform Incremental > Reform
3	Story 6: Seeing stakeholders with different lens Story 8: From sectoral to wider social protection Story 11: Who leads social protection?	Incremental > Reform Incremental > Reform Transformative
4	Story 2: Do we need statistical standards? Story 4: The power of negotiation Story 9: 0.8 or 2.9?	Reform Incremental Reform > Transformative
5	Story 3: Working for common goals Story 5: Paving the way for women Story 12: We have a voice	Transformative Reform Incremental
6	Story 7: Empowering coastal communities Story 10: Try again Story 13: Economic advancement or social transformation?	All types of change present Incremental + Reform Incremental + Transformative

Table 8 - Categorization of stories according to the type of change observable

This conclusion led to participants' suggestions around the need to design for change³⁶, but also to nurture incremental and reform changes with a view to sustain effects and wider results (e.g. the need for technical support to implement the Labour Migration Action Plan, the digitization and expansion of the skills passport, the coordination between different departments when working with victims of trafficking or returned

³⁶ A concept that could be equivalent to the one used in OECD's toolkit (2023) "Impact by design – Effective Results Frameworks for Sustainable Development".

migrants, the continued sensitization of public and private sectors to ensure better working conditions to persons with disability).

It is worth noting that constituents, although involved in project implementation and engaged in the DWCP formulation and follow-up, tend, in their discourse, to reflect a lower sense of ownership and responsibility for the results achieved and their sustainability, transferring that burden to the ILO.

The lack of a national tripartite mechanism tends to overshadow the discussions around results and obstacles hindering progress, whereas many tangible examples are mentioned in projects' evaluation reports as sources of difficulties to sustainability of the interventions (lack of resources to manage the Recruitment Advisor Platform, the low number of public officers in certain areas (labour inspection) or the understanding of their respective role and existing legal frameworks, management practices and mindsets in some cooperatives and public organizations, lack of integrated coordination among public entities intervening in the same reality).

Normative

The synthesis review indicated an uneven result for cross-cutting issues in the sample of documents analysed. **Gender equality** was the cross-cutting issue receiving more attention, which is consistent with the fact that women participation in labour market is relatively low, high gender pay gap at 27%, women are the ones facing higher demands in terms of domestic work and care responsibilities, dealing with restrictions to labour market participation and migration, gender roles and expectations, being also among those who were hardly hit not only by the civil war conflict but also by the consequences of the pandemic. This dimension was visible in the inclusion of gender-sensitive indicators in some project's logframes, the existence of gender disaggregated data, the introduction of special arrangements to enable women's participation in project's activities. However, evaluation reports signalled weaknesses in terms of proper and timely framing of gender inputs whether in design or implementation.

Although persons with disability share some of the mentioned constraints, a lower proportion of documents mentioned **disability inclusion** as a specific concern in the design or implementation of projects, which is also compatible with the lack of change stories related with this topic and target group. Likewise, **non-discrimination** references were limited to two of the sampled documents: i) one on entrepreneurship, which specifically developed activities to involve different ethnic/language groups, schools and colleges from more marginalised areas, and by promoting the idea that young women can be entrepreneurs (Convention n. 111 - Discrimination (employment and occupation)); the other, on migrant workers, that advocated for the inclusion of these workers into the category of vulnerable groups, which opened up access to a number of social benefits.

Environmental sustainability was one of the least mentioned cross-cutting issues, in the synthesis review but also during interviews, even though Sri Lanka is a country

exposed to climate change and prone to natural disasters, which may disrupt important economic sectors, like tourism, and exacerbate social tensions, e.g. food insecurity.

Regarding **international labour standards**, there are references to specific work or support provided by the ILO in order to advance the discussions or ratification of ILO's conventions, and its use in capacity building or awareness raising activities. And, although a working plan was developed by the ILS Committee with the ILO's specialist support, towards the ratification of several Conventions³⁷ there is no reference to such work and efforts, either in written documents or mentioned by stakeholders, which seems to be consistent with the government's view of addressing the conventions not by ratification but through approximation via national legislation, namely the new Employment Act.

Tripartite processes and social dialogue were mentioned in the sampled documents as part of ILO's toolkit. Examples include the mainstreaming of the Tripartite Consultation Convention (LKA1701USA), tripartite support to farmers (LKA1801MUL_LEED+), the use of tripartite inputs into interventions' design (Cluster_RBSA_Covid, RAS1706JPN), or tripartite consultations (RAS2109USA_SALE). But it has also been acknowledged that in certain interventions the level of involvement of workers and employers' organizations has not been equal (LKA1502CHE, LKA1701USA, LKA2050UND_ MPTF COVID, - RAS2109USA_SALE). Projects considered to have a greater connection with private sector, youth entrepreneurs, and migrant workers benefited less of the involvement of Unions.

Peace and reconciliation had been defined as a specific cross-cutting issue in the DWCP due to its contextual relevance, and mentions to it can be found particularly in those projects being implemented in the war affected regions. However, some evaluation reports pointed that the design of the interventions was not robustly grounded in a framework, such as the ILO Handbook on How to Design, Monitor and Evaluate Peacebuilding Results in Jobs for Peace and Resilience Programmes, to address the multidimensional issue.

Besides analysing the responsiveness to cross-cutting issues, it is imperative to assess the existence of **unintended or negative effects** (do no harm) on the population or social groups within or outside the programme's scope. On this regard, there is little evidence of how the DWCP and respective projects anticipated or dealt with these realities. Some evaluation reports and interviewees identified cases of negative effects due to the programmes' results or activities (e.g., grievances towards farmers benefited by the projects, increase violence towards women whose economic condition was

³⁷ C188 - Work in Fishing, 2007 (No.188), C155 - Occupational Safety and Health Convention, 1981 (No.155), C187 - Promotional framework for OSH Convention, 2006 - No.187), C129 - Labour inspection (agriculture) Convention, 1985 (No. 160), C181 - Private Employment Agencies Convention, 1997 (No. 181), C97 - Migration for Employment Convention (Revised), 1949 (No. 97), C143 - Migrant Workers (Supplementary Provisions) Convention, 1975 (No. 143), C189 - Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), C190 - Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No.190), C102 - Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), C121 - Employment Injury Benefits Convention, 1964 [Schedule I amended in 1980] (No. 121)

improved by the project). However, there is no evidence of existing practices to monitor or address eventual unintended or negative effects. Likewise, spillovers or positive unexpected results are also not been captured by the traditional monitoring and reporting practices (e.g., the development of a clean technique in the Batik industry, or the opening of daycare facilities in industries not supported by DWCP's projects but located in the same village).

Final remarks and ways forward

The context in which the DWCP was implemented added difficulties to the constraints already experienced in the three previous DWCP. A remarkable number of projects (34) was implemented, even with a reduced CO team and a limited pool of financial resources. All country priorities registered some degree of realization, even if focus had to shift during the period of implementation to respond to multiple crisis and emergent issues. Besides the vicissitudes on national tripartite mechanisms, the constituents were able to find ways to collaborate and explore bilateral mechanisms. The multiple crisis forged new partnerships and areas of intervention (e.g., migrants, recruitment agencies), which demonstrated the flexibility and responsiveness to address the most pressing needs in each moment.

Although the country's situation remains uncertain, building on the information collected during the review exercise, the following ways forward are suggested for consideration prior and during the next DWCP's formulation.

Content

1. Consistent follow-up and consolidation as the core drivers for the new DWCP

Effective policy implementation in Sri Lanka tends to be challenging. In order to ensure sustainability of the interventions developed under the DWCP 2018-2024, the new DWCP should bet on consolidation and support to effective implementation of the policies already approved, such as the National Labour Migration Policy, National Social Protection Policy, Labour Market Recovery and Transformation Strategy, the conventions ratified or under approximation via the new Employment Act, and the national ambitions towards targets like child labour eradication or the 3% employment quota in public sector entities.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
Tripartite constituents and CO-Colombo	Very high	Immediately to influence the next DWCP design and in the course of the implementation	Low

2. Address unfulfilled expectations

The expectations around effective tripartite social dialogue have not been fully achieved, and continue to carry on from DWCP to DWCP, having led to a recent paralysis of the National Labour Advisory Council (NLAC), even though its role during the COVID-19 pandemic was recognized by all constituents as fundamental to ensure job retention and income security to Sri Lankans. Likewise, a current topic in the previous DWCP's

formulation and reviews relates to wage setting and implementation mechanisms based on evidence, full consultation and unified approaches that are adequate, effective and inclusive, rather than politically-led or sectoral definitions.

The next DWCP formulation should take stock of the recurring topics that have not been successfully address, as the two mentioned above, and define a strategy to deal with pending issues.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
Tripartite constituents and CO-Colombo	Very high	Immediately to influence the next DWCP design and in the course of the implementation	Low

3. Support Trade Unions overcoming the movement's challenges

The key strategic initiatives proposed in the report *"Opportunities and Challenges in Formation and Functioning of Trade Unions in Sri Lanka"* should continue to be pursued, hand by hand with the implementation of a development capacity working plan, aiming at a less fragmented, more representative and empowered trade union movement.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
Trade Unions and CO-Colombo	High	Immediately to influence the next DWCP design and in the course of the implementation	ACTRAV's support

4. Labour market information and adjacent data gaps

The new Labour Market Information System can represent an opportunity for constituents, the ILO and other relevant stakeholders (such as the Central Bank, SLBFE

For) forge the basis to overcome the recurring issues around data gaps: fragmentation of data collection, lack of interoperability between public sector entities, delayed adoption of statistical standards, difficulties in terms of accessibility by third parties, need to include specific modules in the census or labour market surveys.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
Ministry of Labour	Very high	Immediately to influence the next DWCP design and in the course of the implementation	To be determined

Design

5. Scenario planning and risk analysis

The country's future remains uncertain, due to the national macro-economic situation, and to be seen impacts in the labour market, but also due to the current global instability, which can affect the country's development. In this context, instead of a linear approach to programming, a foresight exercise with the constituents, to envisage which priorities and lines of action could be feasible and desired if different scenarios happen, could be advisable.

Instead of realignment as a reaction, like the course shift due to COVID-19, constituents could discuss and strategize on how Decent Work and Social Justice would look like if different scenarios unfold, and what contribution each constituent and the ILO could bring to the table. Accordingly, a risk analysis should be introduced into the programming and monitoring practices, to confer agility and decision-making guidance during implementation.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
Tripartite constituents and CO-Colombo	High	Immediately to influence the next DWCP design	Regular budget

6. Timeframe

Considering the uncertainty and volatility of the country's context, and assuming policy implementation as a core element for the new DWCP, a shorter timeframe could be defined. This option would allow the DWCP alignment with the UNSDCF 2023-2027, which will be revised in 2025, as well as to any national development policies that may arise from the recent and upcoming elections.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
Tripartite constituents and CO-Colombo	High	Immediately to influence the next DWCP design	Not applicable

7. Improve cross-cutting issues inclusion

The cross-cutting issues (gender equality, disability inclusion, non-discrimination, environmental sustainability, tripartite processes, international labour standards, peace and reconciliation) should be present in the DWCP strategy and guide future projects in an explicit manner, ensuring real targeting and measurement.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
Tripartite constituents and CO-Colombo	High	Immediately to influence the next DWCP design and in the course of the implementation	To be determined

Governance

8. Revise the Tripartite Task Force monitoring practices'

Constituents should report back their contributions, concerns and recommendations having the DWCP framework (priorities, outcomes, outputs, activities) as a roadmap. The DWCP Tripartite Task Force meetings should be designed to promote the DWCP's ownership and progress tracking by constituents, positioning ILO as a mere secretariat.

Adding to the occasional field study visits, other participatory monitoring practices around topics of interest, such as missing stories, success cases, innovative interventions, could be experimented to capture unintended effects or implementation gaps. For effective monitoring, constituents should comply with the defined frequency of the meetings.

For the effect, the ILO capacity needs to be assessed, in line with recommendation 11, below.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
Tripartite constituents and CO-Colombo	High	Immediately to influence the next DWCP design and in the course of the implementation	Regular budget

9. Revamp the DWCP brand

The DWCP, as an overarching strategy defined by Sri Lanka's tripartite constituents and supported by the ILO did not echo or resonate with the majority of interviewees during the review exercise. To improve understanding of the larger framework in which development cooperation projects and technical assistance is being provided, the constituents and the ILO should enhance visibility and communication around the DWCP.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
Tripartite constituents and CO-Colombo	Medium	During the implementation	Regular budget

10. Leverage ILO's technical capacity

The ILO's specialized technical capacity is a distinctive competitive advantage but the role and intervention of the ILO's DWT experts still needs to be fully explored during the whole DWCP cycle: design, monitoring, review and evaluation. Specialists should be actively engaged in the new DWCP formulation and follow-up.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
CO-Colombo and DW Team Delhi	Very high	Immediately to influence the next DWCP design and in the course of the implementation	Regular budget

11. ILO's Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives organizational arrangements

The existing organizational arrangements and dynamics regarding the structure (vacant positions, shortage of certain capabilities), working methods (operational procedures) and communication (internal communication, knowledge management, institutional memory) between operations, programming and project units at the Country Office needs to be reviewed and shaped to fit the purpose.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
CO-Colombo and ROAP	Very high	First half of the Country Director term	To be determined

Support and resource mobilization

12. Forge stronger government relations and linkages

The nature and interconnectedness of the social problems trying to be addressed by the DWCP does not comply with well-established ministerial boundaries of any government's architecture. Although the Ministry of Labour remains as the main focal point within the Government, for efficiency and policy drive, the ILO should forge stronger relations with other relevant ministries and public sector organizations which have power or influence in policy and project's design or implementation, or in donor networking, namely the Ministry of Finance, Economic Stabilization and National Policies and the Department of National Planning, which are leading the National Social Protection Policy.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
Ministry of Labour and CO-Colombo	Very high	Continuously	None

13. Build leadership within the UN

Similar to what happened during COVID-19, the ILO, while chairing *Outcome Results Group II - Sustainable and inclusive, green-led growth, people-centred economic recovery, livelihoods and productivity*, should engage and coordinate the multiple efforts from UN agencies happening in matters under the DWCP realm (UNDP has become a part of the country's social protection policy dialogue and, together with UNICEF, has engaged in high level policy dialogue with the Sri Lankan government and other key stakeholders on social safety nets), reinforcing the *One UN principle*.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
CO-Colombo	Very high	Immediately to influence the next DWCP design and in the course of the implementation	Support from UNRC

14. Map development partners' priorities

Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows have been falling in regions outside the mediatic sphere of humanitarian crisis and war in Ukraine (OECD, 2024). The reduced fiscal space and existing debt imbalances in Sri Lanka demand for a sound resource mobilization strategy. A thorough mapping of current development partners' priorities, and an analysis of potential new partners is imperative to sustain the changes and policies needed for the country's growth and inclusion ambitions.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
CO-Colombo and ROAP	High	Before the new DWCP design	Support from HQ Partnerships and UNRC

15. Pitch the DWCP business case

The DWCP should invest in building a business case that can be pitched and modulated accordingly to potential development partners' priorities and interests, without losing sight of ILO's generic competitive and distinctive features (tripartism, social dialogue), but also the one's specific to the country (ground level knowledge that feeds into policy cycle, well-established networks in particular geographical areas, proven successful approaches, like LEED+ value chains, the MSME's understanding). Additionally, with a growing movement towards regional level interventions, opportunities to booster synergies, even between regions (safe migration corridors, skills recognition) should be followed-up.

Responsibility	Importance	Timeframe for follow-up	Resource implication
CO-Colombo, DW Team Delhi and ROAP	High	Continuously	Regular budget

Annexes

I. List of projects implemented under the DWCP 2018-2024

#	Project symbol	Project title	Full project status (July 24)	Funding Source
1 ³⁸	LKA/16/02/NOR	Employment Generation and Livelihoods through Reconciliation in Sri Lanka	Financially Closed	Multi-Bilateral Donors
2	LKA/21/02/NLD	Healthy socio-economic recovery of apparel sector micro and small enterprises in severely COVID-19 impacted Gampaha district of Sri Lanka	Activities Completed	Multi-Bilateral Donors
3	LKA/16/02/RBS	Disadvantaged and vulnerable groups in rural areas, especially in conflict-affected and economical lagging regions, have equitable and enhanced access to more and better jobs and expanded product markets	Financially Closed	Core voluntary funds (RBSA)
4	LKA/23/50/AUS	Better Work 2022-2027 - DFAT contribution – Sri Lanka component	Active	Multi-Bilateral Donors
5	LKA/16/01/RBS	Technical support on more and better jobs in plantation sector	Financially Closed	Core voluntary funds (RBSA)
6	LKA/15/02/CHE	Promoting decent work through good governance, protection and empowerment of migrant workers: Ensuring the effective implementation of the Sri Lanka National Labour Migration Policy - Upscaling and Consolidation - Phase III	Financially Closed	Multi-Bilateral Donors
7	LKA/20/02/RBS	National strategy formulated to respond to technological advancements and other productive market demands for population at large Sri Lankan workforce have more and better employment opportunities	Final FS Issued	Core voluntary funds (RBSA)
8 ³⁹	SRL/12/01/EEC	EU - Support to reconstruction and development in selected districts in north and east Sri Lanka	Financially Closed	Other Inter-Governmental Organizations
9	LKA/20/03/CHE	Promoting decent work through good governance, protection and empowerment of migrant workers: Ensuring the effective implementation of the Sri Lanka NLMP.	Active	Multi-Bilateral Donors
10	LKA/17/03/UND	Empower: Building peace through the economic empowerment of women in northern Sri Lanka	Financially Closed	United Nations
11	RAS/20/08/JPN	Safety + Health for All Workers in South Asia	Active	Multi-Bilateral Donors

³⁸ The majority of the project duration coincides with the previous DWCP, end date 31st October 2018

³⁹ The majority of the project duration coincides with the previous DWCP, end date 31st May 2018

12	RAS/17/06/JPN	Towards fair and sustainable global supply chains: Promoting formalization and decent work for invisible workers in South Asia	Financially Closed	Multi-Bilateral Donors
13	LKA/17/01/USA	EQUIP: Equipping Sri Lanka to Counter Trafficking in Persons	Financially Closed	Multi-Bilateral Donors
14	LKA/24/01/RBS	Creating decent work opportunities for domestic and community-based care workers through transformative actions for gender equality in Sri Lanka	Active	Core voluntary funds (RBSA)
15	LKA/22/50/JPN	Development of social insurance-based unemployment insurance scheme in Sri Lanka	Final FS Issued	Multi-Bilateral Donors
16	RAS/21/04/JPN	STRIDE - Building resilience for the future of work and the post COVID-19: Strengthening integrated policy framework for formalization and decent work (STRIDE)	Financially Closed	Multi-Bilateral Donors
17	GLO/19/53/EUR	Improving Synergies between Social Protection and Public Finance Management (ILO component)	Final FS Issued	Other Inter-Governmental Organizations
18	RAS/21/09/USA	South Asia Leadership in Entrepreneurship (SALE)	Active	Multi-Bilateral Donors
19	LKA/21/50/JPN	Healthy socio-economic recovery of informal sector micro and small enterprises in severely COVID-19 impacted districts of Sri Lanka	Financially Closed	Multi-Bilateral Donors
20	LKA/17/50/EUR	Global action to improve the recruitment framework of labour migration SRI LANKA	Financially Closed	Other Inter-Governmental Organizations
21	LKA/18/50/JPN	Support to re-establish and build resilience among micro and small enterprises in flood affected communities in Sri Lanka	Financially Closed	Multi-Bilateral Donors
22	LKA/24/01/IOM	Supporting migrant returnees and communities in vulnerable situations to ...(UPLIFT)	Active	United Nations
23	GLO/20/53/SWE	Increased capacity of constituents to provide adequate labour protection to workers in diverse forms of work arrangements, including on digital labour platforms, and in informal employment	Financially Closed	Multi-Bilateral Donors
24	GLO/23/50/REV	Revenue budget BW Programme	Active	Private / Non-State Actors
25	LKA/20/01/RBS	Effective systems for social dialogue and tripartism in place, institutionalized and operationalized	Final FS Issued	Core voluntary funds (RBSA)
26	LKA/20/04/IOM	Strengthening Socio-Economic Resilience of Returnee Migrants	Financially Closed	United Nations

27 ⁴⁰	SRL/15/01/IOM	Enhanced recognition of skills and reduced vulnerability of Sri Lankan construction workers in selected GCC countries – U.A.E. & Kuwait	Financially Closed	United Nations
28	LKA/20/01/WHO	Strengthening the Human Resources for health roadmap through promotion of inter-sectoral social dialogue for improved industrial relations in the health sector	Financially Closed	United Nations
29	LKA/22/01/NOR	Promoting advancement of vulnerable persons and enterprise	Active	Multi-Bilateral Donors
30	LKA/18/01/MUL	Local Empowerment through Economic Development and Reconciliation Project (LEED+)	Financially Closed	Multi-Bilateral Donors
31	LKA/20/50/UND	Healthy Socio-Economic Recovery of the Micro and Small Enterprise Sector of Sri Lanka (COVID-19)	Financially Closed	United Nations
32	LKA/19/03/USA	Support to Resettlement and Reconciliation through the United Nations Joint Programme for Peace	Financially Closed	Multi-Bilateral Donors
33	GLO/13/07/LSF	Better Work: worker education activities	Active	Private / Non-State Actors
34	LKA/19/02/WHO	Strengthening the Human Resources for Health roadmap through promotion of inter-sectoral Social Dialogue for improved industrial relations in the Health Sector	Financially Closed	United Nations

Note: The evaluation reports of the projects highlighted in bold were part of the sample used during the synthesis review phase

⁴⁰ The majority of the project duration coincides with the previous DWCP, end date 31st December 2018

II. List of stakeholders interviewed

#	Name/contact	Role	Date
1*	Asanthi Waas	Senior Finance and Administrative Assistant ILO CO	August 8
2*	Pramo Weerasekera	Programme Officer ILO CO	August 8
3*	Asitha Seneviratne	Programme Officer ILO CO	August 8, 9
4*	Bharti Birla	Enterprise Development Specialist - ILO DWT/Delhi	August 14
5*	Asmi Musthafa	Programme Officer ILO CO	August 14
6*	Simrin Singh	Country Director (2017-2023) ILO Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives	August 15
7*	Joni Simpson	Country Director ILO Office for Sri Lanka and the Maldives (2024 – to date)	August 16
8*	Tsuyoshi Kawakami	Occupational Safety & Health Specialist - ILO DWT/Delhi	August 16
9*	Mariko Ouchi	Senior Technical Specialist on Social Protection - ILO DWT/Delhi	August 19
10*	Mahandra Naidoo	Social Dialogue and Labour Administration Specialist - ILO DWT/Delhi	August 19
11	Reiko Tsushima Pamornrat Pringsulaka	Chief of Regional Programming Services Unit/Bangkok Regional Evaluation Officer/Bangkok	August 22
12*	Radhicka Kapoor	Senior Employment Specialist - ILO DWT/Delhi	August 26
13*	Erandika Dissanayake	National Project Coordinator	August 26
14*	Sher Verick	Head of the Employment Strategies Unit – ILO Headquarters	August 26
15*	Thomas Kring	Chief Technical Advisor	August 27
16*	Sriyani Mudiyansele	National Project Coordinator	August 27
17*	Kesava Murali Kanapathy	Programme Manager	August 27
18*	Gabriel Bordado	Skills and Employability Specialist - ILO DWT/Delhi	August 28
19*	Amish Karki	Labour Migration Specialist - ILO DWT/Delhi	August 28
20*	Dasun Kodithuwakku	National Project Coordinator	August 26
21*	Tomas Stenstrom	Senior Specialist on Employment Intensive Investments ILO DWT/Delhi	August 29
22*	Elena Gerasimova	Labour Law and Labour Standards Specialist ILO DWT/Delhi	September 2
23*	Peter Buwembo	Labour Statistician Specialist ILO DWT/Delhi	September 2
24	Prof Sunil Chandrasiri Dr Ramani Gunatilaka	Academia Consultant	September 3
25*	Nihal Devagiri	National Project Coordinator	September 3

26	Janaka Jayalath	Deputy Director General, Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission	September 3
27	Nandala Weerasinghe W. A. Dilrukshini Chandranath Amarasekara Suheetha Jegajeevan	Central Bank Governor Assistant Governor Assistant Governor Director of Economic Research	September 4
28	Rangitha Balasuriya	SDC Embassy of Switzerland	September 4
29*	Nishantha Warnasooriya	National Project Coordinator	September 4
30	R.P. A. Wimalaweera & Team	Secretary, Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment	September 4
31	Jeff M. Goonewardena Senarath Yapa	Chairman Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment Additional General Manager for International Affairs	September 4
32	R. Sivasuthan	Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade Embassy of Australia	September 5
33	Lesli Devendra K Marimuttu Chaminda Perera S P Wijekumaran Anton Marcus	Sri Lanka Nidahas Sevaka Sangamaya (SLNSS) National Trade Union Federation (NTUF) Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC) Ceylon Federation of Trade Unions (CFTU) Free Trade Zone & General Services Employees Union (FTZGSEU)	September 5
34	Anoop Satpathy	Wages Specialist - ILO Decent Work Technical Support Team/Colombi	September 5
35	Vajira Ellepola Adhil Kasim Ruvinda Welikala	Director General, Employers' Federation of Ceylon	September 5
36	Marc-André Franche Andreas Karpati	UN Resident Coordinator Head of Office RCO	September 5
37	Dhanuka Liyanagamage	Director National Enterprise Development Authority - NEDA	September 9
38	R. H. W. A. Kumarasiri	Director General National Planning Department	
39	Minoli Pinthuralage	Head of Protection Unit, International Organization for Migration Sri Lanka	September 11
40	Johann H. Hesse	Delegation of the European Union to Sri Lanka & the Maldives	September 11
41*	Johan Thomas Bjerkem	Embassy of Norway	September 11
42	Kenji Ohashi Hiroki Inoue	Head of Economic Cooperation & Second Secretary Embassy of Japan	September 13
	* online interviews		

III. Consultation workshop report

Assignment	Sri Lanka Decent Work Country Programme (DWCP) Review (2018-2024)
Duration of the assignment	July 2024 to end of September 2024
Consultant	Ana Diogo
Coordination and Management	Monitoring and evaluation focal point person in Sri Lanka and ILO ROAP Regional M&E Officer
Country Programme Review Task Force	Representatives from Country Office, tripartite constituents, and RO-Bangkok

Acknowledgments

I wish to express my gratitude to those that have shared their stories and authorized its use in the scope of the DWCP review consultation workshop. I want to extend my sincere recognition to ILO's staff, without whom it would not have been possible to deliver the workshop, and this report, in such a smooth manner.

Introduction

The Sri Lanka Decent Work Country Programme (2018-2024) is coming to an end. Hence, reflecting on significant changes, new challenges, opportunities, and lessons learnt from previous experience is relevant for the formulation of the next DWCP.

According to the Terms of Reference, the conceptual framework of Sri Lanka's DWCP review included a collaborative analysis of significant changes through a participatory consultation (workshop) with tripartite constituents, key partners and relevant stakeholders.

The main objectives of this consultation and joint analysis were to:

- Gather additional information from the participants
- Answer the review questions by reviewing and discussing the information on the DWCP
- Make evidence-based recommendations (both content and process) for the formulation of the new DWCP

A summary of the process, the findings and the stories are presented in the following sections. Additionally, the information contained in this report will feed into the DWCP review final report.

Process

The DWCP consultation workshop was designed inspired by the Most Significant Change technique, which is a form of participatory monitoring and evaluation⁴¹. Due to time constraints, and the ultimate purpose of the workshop, the technique was partially deployed, although trying to comply with its core steps⁴². It was customized by adding a presentation on types of change⁴³ (incremental, reform and transformative), followed by a guided inquiry to envision the changes desired by the different stakeholders.

The stories were collected both from projects' implementation and evaluation reports; existing communication materials; and by eliciting key informants' stories during interviews. The collection was free from any attempt of statistical representativeness. It was guided by a convenience sample: the key informants (storytellers) had a vested interest in the DWCP and were able to grant an interview during the data collection period of the review.

⁴¹ Davies, R. & Dart, J. (2005). The 'Most Significant Change' (MSC) Technique - A Guide to Its Use

⁴² From the 10-step process of the Most Significant Technique, the following steps are core: collection of SC stories (Step 4), selection of the most significant of these stories by at least one group of stakeholders (Step 5), feedback to relevant stakeholders concerning which SC stories were selected and why they were selected (Step 6).

⁴³ Inspired in the following work: ICAT Transformational Change Methodology, Chapter 3 – What is transformational change. Available in: Policy assessment of transformational change (climateactiontransparency.org)

The data collection was conducted both online and on site, prior and during the field mission. In total, sixteen (16) stories were collected. These stories were not subjected to validation or triangulation, they were used, intendedly, as the subjective expression of the storytellers' views and experience.

To maximize the DWCP framework, that should be familiar to participants in the workshop, the domains of change were defined *a priori* and replicate the three country priorities and the enabling outcome. After collection, the stories were classified according to the domain of change, outcome and output they aligned to - [Annex 2](#).

Domain of change (country priority)	# of stories
1. Creation of sustainable, inclusive and decent employment	6
2. Better Governance of the Labour Market	4
3. Rights at work for all	5
4. Greater data and knowledge generation	1

Table 9- Number of stories per DWCP country priority

In a nutshell, the process that was conducted can be represented like the following visual aid:



Figure 8 - Process followed inspired in the Most Significant Change technique

Operationalization

The joint analysis and discussion of the stories took place in Colombo, September 10th. During a 3-hour workshop, 23 participants⁴⁴, representing constituents, Academia, development partners and ILO officials (11) discussed the stories and its significance.

Overall, the workshop aimed at enlarging participants' understanding on how the DWCP is working and for whom it is delivering results, and to shed light on different stories related to the Programme, including unintended results, gaps and opportunities.

⁴⁴ See [Annex 1](#)

The workshop started with an overview of the contextual challenges experienced during 2018 to 2024: changes in government, the Easter attack, COVID-19, the financial crisis, to exemplify a few of the events which impacted the DWCP implementation. Having set the stage, some of the milestones achieved by constituents under the DWCP were listed.

To ground these achievements, participants, who had been organized in six (6) round tables, each representing one of the country's priorities plus the enabling outcome⁴⁵, were invited to engage in the first activity of the workshop.

Each group received a set of stories (3 out of 16), which they had to read aloud, then, they had to hold an in-depth conversation about the stories and the changes alluded in each one, explaining which stories they considered to be most significant. After, each group was invited to share their conclusions in plenary – detailed in the next section.

	Stories
Table 1 - Country Priority 1	Story 14: The most vulnerable ones Story 15: A passport for life Story 16: Zero waste
Table 2 - Country Priority 2	Story 3: Working for common goals Story 5: Paving the way for women Story 12: We have a voice
Table 3 - Country Priority 3	Story 6: Seeing stakeholders with different lens Story 8: From sectoral to wider social protection approach Story 11: Who leads social protection?
Table 4 - Enabling Outcome	Story 2: Do we need statistical standards? Story 4: The power of negotiation Story 9: 0.8 or 2.9?
Table 5 - Country Priority 2	Story 3: Working for common goals Story 5: Paving the way for women Story 12: We have a voice
Table 6 - Country Priority 1	Story 7: Empowering coastal communities Story 10: Try again Story 13: Economic advancement or social transformation?

Table 10 - Stories distribution per group

This activity was facilitated by ILO officials, which were assigned (2) to each table⁴⁶. Their notes on the group's dynamic, decisions and arguments are the basis for the next section of the report.

⁴⁵ Due to the number of participants, two tables were allocated to Country Priorities 1 and 2, since a larger number of stories also aligned to these two priorities. Conversely, less stories related to the Enabling Outcome were collected, therefore, the consultant selected two stories from the pool, one related with evidence-based decision making and another related to the power of training, and attributed them to the Enabling Outcome group/table.

⁴⁶ Facilitators and note takers: Table 1 Thomas Kring and Nora Langguth; Table 2 Asitha Seneviratne and Dasun Kodithuwakku; Table 3 Pamornrat Pringsulaka and Nishantha Warnasooriya; Table 4 Asmi Musthafa; Table 5 Pramodini Weerasekara and Reiko Tsushima; Table 6 Erandika Dissanayake and Joni Simpson

After the tea break, participants were exposed to a presentation on types of change (incremental, reform and transformative) and requested to categorize the stories they had been working on according to this typology – detailed in the next section.

This second activity was followed by a guided discussion, which aimed at unlocking the group's opinion on the type of changes that are being delivered under the DWCP projects and activities, and to explore their vision on the type of changes they would like to achieve, while reflecting on the enablers and obstacles that the country's context offers.

Findings

All groups were able to reach a decision on which story they considered most significant. Below, the stories chosen as well as a synthesis of the arguments used to support the decisions.

Table 1 - Country Priority 1

Story: 16: Zero waste

Argument: Sustainability. Although there was a consensus that all stories were relevant and needed, their potential for sustainability varied. Hence, the story selected was the one that appears to show stronger sustainability.

Besides the environmental impact (*"If Batik gets PETA approval, this will revolutionize the whole sector"*), one of the group's members argued that by coupling this economic activity with eco-tourism, the economic potential discussed in the story could even be leveraged.

Table 2 - Country Priority 2

Story: 12: We have a voice

Argument: Fundamental right. Participants highlighted how a safe and healthier working environment is a fundamental right. This was the main criteria to select the story, although they recognized that women empowerment and gender equality still have a way to go, and the experiences reported in the story can support such a change.

The majority (2 out of 3) voted for #12, with one vote for #3, which was the preferred one for the participant coming from public sector. In her words, social dialogue in workplaces can improve service delivery to citizens, by reducing the number of strikes.

Other arguments for selecting #12 include: the joint participation of Management and Workers together in the Training of Trainers; the recognition of workers and the improvement in productivity, positive attitude, and the cascade effect into the family realm of the learning acquired in the working environment.

Table 3 - Country Priority 3

Story: 8: From sectoral to wider social protection approach

Argument: Relevance. For the group, stories #8 and #11 are interconnected and both speak about social protection. Analysing the country's context, where many Sri Lankan

left the country to work abroad, there is an ageing workforce and public sector may need to be reduced due to the debt crisis, social protection, e.g. unemployment benefit, is seen as crucial and necessary (lessons learnt from COVID-19 situation).

Table 4 - Enabling Outcome

Story: 9: 0.8 or 2.9?

Argument: Data. The majority (2 out of 3) selected story #9, because of the power of data and evidence to support decision-making and discussions among constituents. However, one group member preferred story #4 due to the spillover effects of training one individual and achieving better performance at the organization level, hence better services to citizens.

Table 5 - Country Priority 2

Story: 3: Working for common goals

Argument: Nationwide impact. All stories were considered as showing relevance, but the majority chose story #3 as the most significant, with one group member preferring story # 5.

The significance of the story relates to the positive effects for productivity in the private sector when in the public sector industrial relations are harmonious. The effects of public sector's strikes, paralyzing the private sector, confers importance to dispute resolution mechanisms⁴⁷, such as the ones described in the story.

Table 6 - Country Priority 1

Story: 7: Empowering coastal communities

Argument: Soundness of the intervention. Each story was found with inspirational elements, but story #7 proved to be a more cohesive and structured case. Participants highlighted the following aspects: focus on disadvantaged region and social groups (women and PWDs), "leaving no one behind"; deployment of a holistic approach (skills development, collectivization, access to markets and finance, engagement of ecosystem partners, community-level empowerment (through Village Committees); adequate selection of partners, as well as the targeted industry. Additionally, there is statistical evidence to back-up the results obtained.

⁴⁷ The public sector is not covered under the Industrial Disputes Act, unlike the private sector. However, the story shows that the practices and knowledge gained in the private sector are influencing the public sector, although private sector inputs have not been sought in the process of introducing dispute settlement in the public sector.

On what regards to the second activity, the following background information was provided:

- **Incremental change** often entails adjustments that allow the usual state of affairs to continue (e.g. increasing awareness about water conservation).
- **Reform** involves addressing a problem, which may alter business as usual but does not fundamentally change the system (e.g. charging higher rates to encourage consumers to reduce their water use).
- **Transformative change** explicitly leads to a new system – that is, a new paradigm or regime, and new attitudes and values – while questioning the old ones (e.g. cities and their residents investing in sustainably landscaped outdoor spaces)

Based on this typology, participants were asked to categorize the stories they had been working on:

	Stories	Observable type of change
1	Story 14: The most vulnerable ones Story 15: A passport for life Story 16: Zero waste	Incremental Incremental Transformative
2	Story 3: Working for common goals Story 5: Paving the way for women Story 12: We have a voice	Reform Incremental > Reform Incremental > Reform
3	Story 6: Seeing stakeholders with different lens Story 8: From sectoral to wider social protection Story 11: Who leads social protection?	Incremental > Reform Incremental > Reform Transformative
4	Story 2: Do we need statistical standards? Story 4: The power of negotiation Story 9: 0.8 or 2.9?	Reform Incremental Reform > Transformative
5	Story 3: Working for common goals Story 5: Paving the way for women Story 12: We have a voice	Transformative Reform Incremental
6	Story 7: Empowering coastal communities Story 10: Try again Story 13: Economic advancement or social transformation?	All types of change present Incremental + Reform Incremental + Transformative

Table 11 - Categorization of stories according to the type of change observable

Analysis

1. The majority of changes were classified as incremental (10 out of 18), while the transformative type of change was the one less identified (3 out of 18, if counting those stories that were solely classified as transformative).
2. Contrary to what could be the expectation, even though the DWCP has provided support to constituents towards ILO's conventions ratification and the draft of policies, action plans and strategies, the reform type of change was only observable in 3 stories.

3. In some cases (7), participants understood that the predominant type of change could actually evolve into a different type. In other words, participants recognized that different that additional inputs or nudges could influence the type of change observed.
4. It was also a point of debate, if different types of change could coexist in the same story, as some groups debated that elements of different types of changes were observable in certain elements. For instance, according to the group, story 07 revealed elements of the three types of change:
 - Incremental change, as it increases employability skills through training and targets marginalized communities, women and People with Disability (whereas there are many of such interventions)
 - Reform, by targeting an industry which has growth potential, and can generate foreign exchange, and empowering the community through Village Committee
 - Transformative change, by enhancing the value chain, through initiating a win-win model for community and companies (so that sustainability is ensured): company conducting inputs and technical support, and loan guarantee), changing attitudes of community towards PWDs, through inclusive decision-making at Village Committees, empowering the community to demand their needs and linking with support system (like Banks)
5. Noteworthy, is the fact that the most significant change story was not always classified by participants as a transformative type of change (2 out of 6).
6. Additionally, when given the same set of stories (tables 2 and 5), there was no coincidence of opinion in terms of which story was more significant and the type of changes the stories represented.

After the two activities, the process of voting the most significant stories and classifying them according to the type of change participants perceived, a guided discussion was facilitated. The following key points were raised:

- Are scale and impact requirements for a change to be considered as transformative?
- How does time influence the type of change observable? (impact takes time to manifest itself)
- Under contexts of uncertainty and volatility, which types of change are most feasible?
- Is there a sequence between the types of change (e.g. incremental > reform > transformative)?
- What enables change? Is social dialogue an enabling factor?
- Can change (transformative) be planned with intentionality?
- Whose voices are represented in the stories collected?

When asked about the stories that were missing, both from the reported achievements of the DWCP or in the stories, these were the topics mentioned by participants and the consultant:

- People with Disability
- Child Labour
- Institutional capacity and resilience
- Examples of sustainability and environmental concerns
- Data and evidence-based policies and decision-making processes
- Tripartite mechanisms and social dialogue at national level
- Labour inspection
- Rights at work
- South Asia qualifications reference framework (SAQRF)

Final remarks

Like any other data collection technique, the use of MSC entails risks: unpredictability regarding the number and quality of the stories, the storytellers' willingness to participate in the process, time constraints, reliability of the stories, just to name a few.

The technique does not aim for statistical representativeness, but rather eliciting the different views of stakeholders to expand their understanding on the Programme and making visible the assumptions, biases and interests of those involved in the programme or benefiting from it.

By patchworking this technique alongside with strategic inquiry, the workshop tried to reframe participants understanding on the DWCP's achievements and expand the conversation around changes rather than focusing on outputs and deliverables and what remains as underperformance, without neglecting its importance.

In the concrete case, participants engaged actively in the activities and, almost intuitively, entered in the process of justifying their choices and preferences, adopting voting mechanisms even before such instruction was given. This seems to corroborate how storytelling can be an easier tool to engage stakeholders into meaningful conversations and focusing on more tangible aspects of the programme's delivery.

During the exercises, building on the stories, strategic and critical thinking of participants was unleashed. For instance, Table 6 discussed the intervention's features and missing elements of the stories; Table 5 debated how access of women to higher positions does not equate real decision-making power; whereas Table 2 questioned if changes in private sector are quicker than in public sector.

By placing the conversation around stories, participants seem to be able to voice the type of changes they would like to achieve (transformative), while recognizing the constraints and contextual factors that may justify the tendency towards incremental changes. Nevertheless, some participants sharply stressed that even though context may not be

inducive of transformative changes, these should be seen as guiding stars and that the DWCP should work in multiple levels to reach these different types of changes.

A dialogue based on stories of change due to the DWCP might have the potential to shift the mindset on stakeholders' ownership, namely if used as complementary tool to monitor the DWCP progress, beyond outputs or project-base reporting, providing a platform for trustworthy relations between the ILO, its constituents and other stakeholders. This short consultation workshop has unveiled the possibilities and paved the way for future exploratory exercises.

Stories collected

Story 1

Title: To ratify or not to ratify

The Sri Lankan Government through the Ministry of Fisheries requested the ILO's support in order to ratify Convention 188 – Work in Fishing Convention, 2007. The largest export markets for Sri Lanka are in Europe and the United States of America. Importers have been giving greater attention to labour rights in the sector, therefore, to remain competitive this convention ratification was important. Additionally, improving working conditions could be a way to make it a more attractive career option for the youth. The ILO framed the support to this request under the Local Empowerment through Economic Development and Reconciliation Project (LEED+).

A consultant was hired to draft a report for advocacy with the Government towards ratification of ILO convention C188. It was completed and presented to the Ministry of Labour and Ministry of Fisheries September 2020. Afterwards, the Terms of Reference for the Gap Analysis were developed jointly and the work concluded by March 2023 (due to COVID-19 and economic crisis). As part of the gap analysis consultations were held across the country with tripartite stakeholders.

At the validation workshop for the gap analysis a workplan was developed on steps needed - this included further consultations by government with local stakeholders across the country and development of a set of regulations. The regulations were formally handed over in December 2023 to the two Ministers - who both committed to ratification in their speeches at the event. The Ministry of Labour has since repeated that promise at the International Labour Conference, in June 2024.

Story 2

Title: Do we need statistical standards?

In 2018 and 2019, the ILO supported the Department of Statistics towards the implementation of the statistical standards, that had been adopted in 2013. Sri Lanka was one of the first countries to get this type of support.

As surveys are being conducted regularly in the country, the pilot was designed to ensure that the introduction of the new statistical standards would preserve, as possible, the continuity of the statistical series. In spite of this, the statistical standards have not been adopted and since that time two additional Statistical Conferences took place, having introduced new changes, namely in the concept of employment, which now excludes work without pay.

The adoption of the statistical standards allows a more accurate picture of the reality and certain aspects, such as unpaid work, women's activities, disparities. If not, the analysis of the problems and the solutions adopted may lack an evidence base and reflect in the quality of policies and projects being adopted.

Story 3

Title: Working for common goals

The primary function of the public sector is to deliver public goods and services. However, adversarial employee-management relations, frequent industrial actions, and service disruptions have hindered effective service delivery, leading to public outcry, dissatisfaction, and social tension. At the same time, employees are also experiencing dissatisfaction and stress. A lack of skills and competence among employees further impacts their performance.

Unlike the private sector, the public sector lacks a robust dispute prevention and settlement mechanism and an environment and institutionalized platform for dialogue. With increased strikes in relevant sectors, such as health and transportation, the Cabinet of Ministers in Parliament approved a proposal to use social dialogue in the public sector. The ILO was able to mobilize regular budget funds to support this initiative, which would be piloted in those two sectors, in two particular locations. The pilot with the railways surprised everyone by how fast there was buy-in from participants. Although, initially, in the training activities provided, there was some reluctance, soon the interest was sparked, the training methodology, based on a 2-day residential training for management and trade unions, based on dialogue rather than a top-down approach, allowed the creation of trust among participants. The workplace forums were established, here different professional categories can meet and talk, taking joint decisions. The forums meet regularly, they set up the meeting agenda and every voice has an equal vote and saying. The information is accessible and transparent to all by using minutes provided and announcing the decisions publicly. Complaint boxes managed in a transparent way are also available for those who prefer it.

There has been a reduction in strikes related to industrial relations. The members of the workplace forums now have a stronger sense of ownership and responsibility towards their workplace and have shown increased interest in revising work processes. They have even taken the initiative to involve passengers in improving the services, such as organizing a campaign to invite passengers to participate in a train cleaning operation.

Based on the results of the pilot programmes, the Cabinet of Ministers has now directed the Ministry of Public Administration, provincial Councils and Local Government to extend the programme to the entire public sector.

Story 4

Title: The power of negotiation

The Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) is the main state agency that deals with all administrative and mandatory issues concerning migration for employment. Under the project Promoting Decent Work through good governance, protection and empowerment of migrant workers: Ensuring the effective implementation of the Sri Lanka National Labour Migration Policy – Phase III it was possible to build the capacity of government officials.

An officer reported that he had been involved in a 60-hour course on Labour Migration issues, namely the implementation of Labour Migration agreements. This was a training composed by an online component followed by an on-site experience at the International Training Centre of the ILO. This was a good experience, he said.

Now he can participate in the discussions on these agreements with a different perspective. Before, the negotiations were power-based, and they felt compelled to accept the agreement. But, now, he looks at the agreement and is able to flag and point out what is lacking in the agreement and argument with confidence. The agreement must be a win-win situation, he said. At the table of negotiations, the Sri Lankan officers are now better equipped to securing the rights of the migrants.

Story 5

Title: Paving the way for women

The Better Work programme in Sri Lanka is contributing to achieve gender equality by the work it is doing in the apparel sector, where the majority of the workforce are women. Although being the majority, these workers were not accessing roles of higher responsibility. So, in partnership with the Employer's Federation of Ceylon, the project gave career advice and supported these women achieving managers' position or becoming supervisors. We have seen that the wages of female machine operators have increased.

Similarly, the project intended to promote more women into leadership roles inside the Trade Unions' structures, a milestone that still needs continued work. The women's participation in the workforce in Sri Lanka is still low, therefore activities that contribute to not only attract but improve women's career paths contribute to a change of this situation.

Story 6

Title: Seeing stakeholders with different lens

Since 2010, Switzerland has been supporting the Safe Labour Migration Programme (SLMP) in Sri Lanka with the purpose of maximizing the benefits for migrant workers. Back in 2010, we saw that the thinking from employment centres, trade unions, migrants regarding the employment agencies was bad. However, with the last phase of the project - National Labour Migration Policy Phase IV, the employment agencies have received recognition. With the Employer's Federation of Ceylon the licensed registered agencies are in the system now. They were capacitated and trained on migrants' work. The Trade Unions also benefited from training. A remarkable difference in the mindset of each of these actors is now visible.

We also worked with the Civil Society organizations. These are relevant actors as they keep the work in the field, close to the communities. The project developed training materials specifically to work with the CSO's, conducted awareness campaigns, capacity building and assessed how the practices have changed. These materials were actually adopted in the realm of a different programme, GOALS, and are now being used in other countries and even the International Organization for Migration is using them in their work.

This has proved to be a durable solution with the engagement of all actors.

Story 7

Title: Empowering coastal communities

There is a growing and unmet global demand for seaweed but, despite the huge export potential, the seaweed industry remains at the infancy stage in Sri Lanka and no advanced processing is taking place due to the lack of seaweed volumes.

The World Bank estimates that the growth of 10 emerging seaweed markets alone could be up to 11.8 billion USD by 2030. In Sri Lanka, the seaweed sector offers a unique opportunity to generate livelihood and employment opportunities for marginalized coastal communities while shift discriminatory gender norms.

Under the PAVE project, the ILO is promoting the growth of the seaweed sector to increase the income of marginalized women, men and people with disabilities. The company provides inputs and technical support to increase the yield of farmers thus securing steady local supply. The farmers benefit from access to a market, improved yield and increased income. The model thus creates a win-win for coastal communities and companies, while generating export revenues for Sri Lanka. The farmers also benefit from improvements in OSH with the company providing gloves and shoes to avoid cuts on feet and hands.

Currently, from the 600 farmers engaged, more than 80% are women and, of these, 18 have disabilities. The number of farmers grew, so has their income, which is now drawing more women to join cultivation.

Alongside, the ILO has organized gender empowerment and leadership training for the seaweed women and their communities. This led to the establishment of a Village Committee, including seaweed women, to address community issues identified during the trainings. Two issues identified were lack of access to banking and poor quality of the road. Since then, the Village Committee approached banks and succeeded in establishing a connection with the Bank of Ceylon. The Bank has conducted financial literacy training to the farmers, and the company has agreed to be a guarantor for the top seaweed farmers so they can apply for loans. The Village Committee also succeeded in advocating to the Road Development Department to build a better road, which is currently under construction.

Story 8

Title: From sectoral to wider social protection approach

During 2021, the project “Supporting the Social Protection response to the impact of COVID-19 – Tourism Sector in Sri Lanka”, funded by the European Union, was implemented. This had been a request of the Minister of Tourism to extend social protection to tourism sector.

The ILO Social Protection Specialist clarified that a sector-based approach to social protection was not the optimal solution. Since the available funds were only sufficient for a study, this was conducted and submitted to the Ministry of Tourism.

After, a request from the Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment, social security for the working people was presented to the ILO. This consisted of a list of topics such as: formal private sector employees social security including unemployment insurance, maternity protection and old age benefits, extension to informal sector workers, etc. A work to encompass all the topics suggested and its complexity would require a significant amount of resources, time and expertise. Before preparing any project document, the Specialist met the relevant focal points in the Ministry of Labour. At that time funding from Japan had been confirmed (USD 200.000), which enabled more realistic conversations with the constituents. The interest was focused on the design of the new social insurance scheme. Tripartite consultations occurred and training was provided. A relevant experience was a field visit to Bangkok, which included officers from the Ministry of Finance/National Planning Department. This enabled the establishment of a working relationship and a channel with this relevant Ministry.

In Sri Lanka, a Provident base fund scheme and some employers’ liability based, where employers pay directly to employees (maternity and employment injury), but there is no scheme in case of unemployment. This is why it is important to engage into this unemployment benefit scheme. And COVID-19 demonstrated there was no safety-net. How to give some life guarantee when unemployment is a big challenge?

The Government decided to start explore this insurance, therefore, the ILO conducted the actuarial valuation and submitted officially to the Ministry. It was recognized the importance of this insurance, the Social Protection policy document has been officially adopted and launched recently. How will the action plan be implemented under this framework? At least it was already recognized that social insurance as a path, a pillar of social protection. This was an achievement for us.

Story 9

Title: 0.8 or 2.9?

During the discussions with Constituents about the unemployment benefit there were different positions: the Government was worried about the sustainability issue; Employers were putting on the table a reasonable proposal, actually higher than the foreseen in the Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102); while the Trade Unions were looking at additional features, like longer periods of benefit.

Considering that the implications in the contribution rates would vary, the reported conducted by the ILO provided the general evaluation based on the standards - C102 and C168 Employment Promotion and Protection Against Unemployment Convention, 1988, identifying what should be the level of contributions in each scenario.

The Annex of the Report included an analysis based on constituents' claims. Three options were presented: Option 1: 0.80 - 1.00, Option 2: 0.85, Option 3: 2.90. This evidence-based discussion and training was a good exercise with constituents. It showed the space available for other types of benefits and to engage in those further discussions. We will now move on into maternity insurance. Hence, it was a good moment to discuss, with numbers, what can happen next. It also helped to clarify what the ILO can do on this topic to support constituents.

Story 10

Title: Try again

In September, Spark Skilled Youth Entrepreneurship Competition 2024 took place. N., who was part of the group of the 10 finalists of the competition, but did not succeed to be shortlisted for the final three, is not sad. She says: this was our second attempt in Spark. Last year we came top-35 and we were bumped. But this year, we tried again and we made it to the top 10. What has changed in us was this: we didn't quit. We came back again. Spark gave us the ability to keep trying, going and going again. Personally, I don't speak a lot in front of mics, but Spark has transformed me into a talkative person. I have the courage now, even to meet new people. It is okay if you don't win. The process is what matters. And the process was amazing. We learnt a lot!

Her colleague, A., says, when starting a business, you don't know who to contact exactly. Spark gave us a platform to expose our ideas. Other than that, we got several insights where to go for getting the certifications, where to register our business, how to move forward. Execution might be blurry if you don't understand these steps. Spark has given us a map in your hand.

We are going to pursue this path, finish our studies and put more effort into making this idea a business reality. My parents want me to get a degree, because this is a risky path. You need resilience, there are many challenges. My mother is scared, it's normal, so I will get my degree but pursue this business.

Story 11

Title: Who leads social protection?

In Sri Lanka, there was no clear government definition of social protection. Also, there was a lack of a lead agency which developed relevant policies, proposed legislation, and provided oversight to the sector. This absence of a lead agency led to little coordination or policy coherence, which has resulted in overlap and duplication of programmes.

When supporting the Government to define an unemployment benefit scheme, the ILO promoted two visit studies. The one to Indonesia was the most important one. It influenced the delegation's in-depth knowledge by looking at their structure, system and operational model. Before establishing such a system Indonesia also similar status like Sri Lanka's social security system which is mostly fragmented.

The tripartite delegation consisted of representatives from the Ministry of Labour, the Department of Labour, the Employers' Federation of Ceylon (EFC), the Sri Lanka Nidahas Sevaka Sangamaya (SLNSS) and the Ceylon Workers Congress (CWC). When the Delegation came back, the Country Office did a debriefing session. There was a strong enthusiasm and the Cabinet approved the institutional structure. This is an umbrella that now needs to be implemented. The President appointed a National Committee on Comprehensive Social Protection under the presidential secretary chaired by Ministry of Labour. Before the coordination was lacking. Existing social security operation modality is fragmented in Sri Lanka by operating different programmes by different government entities. There was no inter-coordination between those entities to discuss and bringing the all-social security schemes under one umbrella. This committee was facilitated to bring all stakeholders come together and discuss this matter. This strong initiative will lead to bring social safety net under one umbrella with better coordination. Now, there is a difference. The National Social Protection Policy was launched, technical comments were given by the ILO, and unemployment insurance under the labour market portfolio was included. The approval of the Cabinet for the policy was granted on 15 July 2024.

Story 12

Title: We have a voice

Sri Lanka is a major exporter of plantation crop products such as tea, coconut and rubber. The plantation industry is the country's single biggest employer, but workers run a greater risk of occupational injury compared to workers in other sectors. The main risks arise from unguarded machinery in factories, exposures to fertilizers, pesticides, and other agro-chemicals.

An ILO study of Sri Lanka's tea smallholder sector has identified safety at work as a serious concern for workers, especially when doing dangerous tasks, such as spraying agrochemicals without protective gear. Labour inspections are not usually carried out in the tea, rubber and coconut smallholder subsector unless complaints are lodged with the labour office. The number of Labour Inspectors in the country is very reduced (13).

Sri Lanka does not have a national Occupational Safety and Health policy, this matter is only covered in the Factories Ordinance, which excludes the accidents in the fields. Under the Safety + Health for All Plantation Workers in South Asia, the ILO, in partnership with the Employers' Federation of Ceylon, has been supporting the implementation of workplace committees to promote the safety & health of workers.

The establishment of the Committees, composed by workers and managers in equal proportion, implies the delivery of a series of tasks and commitments. The workers and managers have gone through a training programme, provided by the ILO, where they became familiar with national OSH laws, fundamental conventions and other international labour standards. Using social dialogue, workers and managers, have to identify low-cost improvements in the estate and work processes, and put in place the corresponding resolution.

In a rubber plantation, workers have adopted an incident register, documenting with pictures the situations that need to be address. Based on this they meet regularly (every 3 months) and, using social dialogue, engage with the middle managers. A Human Resources officer (woman) said: "we now understand the weaknesses and know which changes need to be produced. We have also trained the other divisions, thanks to the training we got. We have even written to the administrative authorities requesting changes in the estate". "We are now closer to the management, before we were afraid to speak", says a fieldworker. They mention that due to these practices, they have also included other relevant topics in their actions, such as the medical revisions or nutrition concerns. For them, the biggest change is that they are now proactive, they take the lead and follow-up. These learnings are also brought to the family and household context.

The manager said: "We gave them the space and support. We need to take care of them, we are concerned", he said.

Story 13

Title: Economic advancement or social transformation?

“We have observed the work done by the ILO in the Northern Province, working with small enterprises owners, government stakeholders, cooperatives. We saw developments in ensuring the update of policies, capacity building and awareness campaigns, work around occupational safety. But the beauty of this project was the creation of businesses at the village level, how women and their families were empowered economically and how they have easier access to economic opportunities.

For me, change happened as an unintended impact, in the families and community. The acceptance of women working in the day time and husbands helping in the household tasks. In fisheries villages, men work at night and during the day, now, they take care of their children, prepare their lunch, for instance. The female participation in the workforce in Sri Lanka is low and even when they have higher qualifications, they drop out their jobs because of care responsibilities. The learning we got from this was that in certain environments this transformation can happen. This was possible in the fisheries (crab), but we did not see the same in rural settings. In the banana cultivation, women were doing rather well. That attracted men to the village and to marriage proposals. A woman did not accept it and she suffered from violence in the family. Eventually, she had to give up her work. We saw how LEED+ tackled the economic potential of women, empowerment that led to investments in their children’s future and stronger bonds within the family, but we need to untap the reasons of low participation in the workforce.”

Story 14

Title: The most vulnerable ones

The Census of Population and Housing, in 2012, accounted for more than 1.5 million people with disability in the country. For historical reasons, this is particularly relevant in the North. Many of these people have not been integrated in economic activities. Organizations did not see them as active workers. The private sector saw them as a burden.

Through this project we wanted to show the commitment of people with disability and change the mindset and behaviours of the small and medium enterprises (SME), government officials and employers. Other type of support to SME was conditioned to the recruitment of people with disability. After a period of reluctance, these employers saw the commitment of these workers. This experience at the grassroots level, showed to the government authorities, led to buy-in and support was asked to revise the policy on disability at the provincial level. Now, they even have a budgetary line to support people with disability at provincial level.

However, when the economic crisis hit the SME and they had to close or reduce staff, people with disability were the first to leave. Now, we start to see some recruitment again, especially because the youth is migrating and there is a lack of workforce. But the obstacles exist, like lack of transportation or facilities that are not suitable for the needs of these workers.

Story 15

Title: A passport for life

During COVID-19, due to the flow of returned migrants, the skills passport and the recognition of prior learning initiatives were boosted. This system of documentation ensures the skills, expertise and experience of a worker is recorded in a methodical manner, both within and across sectors.

“Before, people had to come to Colombo to request their skills passport at a TVET Centre, submit the paperwork and wait. Now, we started the digitalization of the process, we have trained officers in the 25 districts to interact with the system and to promote this programme approaching the industry and the chambers to explain the advantages of the skills passport.

With the automation of the process, the service levels are higher, the approval is given online and the clearing takes 24 hours. We saw an increase in the number of requests. There is interest from the employers’ side, they were struggling to get their workers certified. Now, the authority was given to expand the processing bodies, the industry itself is handling the recognition of prior learning. This means better access points, more assessments being done and more certifications issued. This is good for workers, employers and for the TVET.”

Story 16

Title: Zero waste

Batik manufacture involves the use of dyes of various colours, giving different shades to the fabric. In this industry fiber reactive dyes dissolved in water are used extensively for the dyeing process. After being used for the dyeing process, the effluent water carrying dye and other chemicals are discharged to the environment causing a serious environmental hazard. The batik manufacturers are required to adhere to the regulations imposed on the discharge of effluents.

NEDA and the ILO partnered under the Healthy socio-economic recovery of apparel sector Micro and Small Enterprises in severely COVID-19 impacted Gampaha District of Sri Lanka.

In the framework of this project, a young couple who took part in the project found a way to produce batik without waste, something that does not even exist in Indonesia. The technique limits the use of water and fiber reactive dye to a bare minimum. The water used can be reused repeatedly. It can be recycled many times-over, without discharging to the environment. The process innovation is now going through registration of the patent.

Annexes

1. List of participants

#	Institution	Role
1	Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment	Government
2	National Apprentice and Industrial Training Authority (NAITA)	Government
3	Ministry of Education	Government
4	Department of Labour	Government
5	Department of Labour	Government
6	Department of Labour	Government
7	Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment	Government
8	National Enterprise Development Authority (NEDA)	Government
9	National Enterprise Development Authority (NEDA)	Government
10	Ministry of Public Administration, Home Affairs, Provincial Councils	Government
11	National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH)	Government
12	Department of National Planning	Government
13	Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC)	Government
14	Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC)	Government
15	Employers' Federation of Ceylon	Employers
16	Sri Lanka Nidahas Sevaka Sangamaya (SLNSS)	Trade Unions
17	National Trade Union Federation (NTUF)	Trade Unions
18	National Trade Union Federation (NTUF)	Trade Unions
19	Free Trade Zone & General Services Employees Union	Trade Unions
20	National Union of Seafarers Sri Lanka (NUSS)	Trade Unions
21	University of Colombo	Academia
22	Consultant	Academia
23	SDC/Swiss Embassy	Partners
34	ILO officials (11)	ILO

2. Stories alignment to the DWCP

#	Domain of change	Outcome/Enabling	Output	Story title
1	Country Priority 2	2.2: More effective labour administration system with more efficient workplace inspection in place.	2.2.2: Increased capacity of social partners for implementation of ILO Conventions	To ratify or not to ratify
2	Enabling Outcome 4	4.1: Reliable user-friendly labour market information are regularly made available and accessible to policy makers, constituents, and public	4.1.1: Regular labour market information is generated and overseen by the coordination mechanism committee	Do we need statistical standards?
3	Country Priority 2	2.1: Effective systems for social dialogue and tripartism in place, institutionalized and operationalized.	2.1.2: Enhanced national tripartite social dialogue in labour and social policy making	Working for common goals
4	Country Priority 3	3.2: Labour market outcomes for (low-skilled) migrants are improved and their vulnerability to exploitation (forced labour) reduced	3.2.1: Regulatory framework on labour migration, forced labour and trafficking strengthened	The power of negotiation
5	Country Priority 2	2.1: Effective systems for social dialogue and tripartism in place, institutionalized and operationalized.	2.1.3: Enhanced bi-partite workplace cooperation	Paving the way for women
6	Country Priority 3	3.2: Labour market outcomes for (low-skilled) migrants are improved and their vulnerability to exploitation (forced labour) reduced	3.2.1: Regulatory framework on labour migration, forced labour and trafficking strengthened	Seeing stakeholders with different lens
7	Country priority 1	1.1: Sri Lankan workforce have more and better employment opportunities	1.1.2: Enabling environment and reduced barriers for women, youth and those with disabilities to enter labour market are in place	Empowering coastal communities
8	Country Priority 3	3.3: Improved social protection for all workers with special focus on informal workers	3.3.1: Increased coverage and accessibility of social protection	From sectoral to wider social protection approach
9	Country Priority 3	3.3: Improved social protection for all workers with special focus on informal workers	3.3.1: Increased coverage and accessibility of social protection	0.8 or 2.9?

10	Country Priority 1	1.1: Sri Lankan workforce have more and better employment opportunities	1.1.2: Enabling environment and reduced barriers for women, youth and those with disabilities to enter labour market are in place	Try again
11	Country Priority 3	3.3: Improved social protection for all workers with special focus on informal workers	3.3.1: Increased coverage and accessibility of social protection	Who leads social protection?
12	Country Priority 2	2.1: Effective systems for social dialogue and tripartism in place, institutionalized and operationalized.	2.1.3: Enhanced bi-partite workplace cooperation	We have a voice
13	Country Priority 1	1.1: Sri Lankan workforce have more and better employment opportunities	1.1.1: Sri Lankan workforce, in particular to youth, women and persons with disabilities have skills/competencies recognised/certified	Economic advancement or social transformation?
14	Country Priority 1	1.1: Sri Lankan workforce have more and better employment opportunities	1.1.1: Sri Lankan workforce, in particular to youth, women and persons with disabilities have skills/competencies recognised/certified	The most vulnerable ones
15	Country Priority 1	1.1: Sri Lankan workforce have more and better employment opportunities	1.1.1: Sri Lankan workforce, in particular to youth, women and persons with disabilities have skills/competencies recognised/certified	A passport for life
16	Country Priority 1	1.1: Sri Lankan workforce have more and better employment opportunities	1.1.3: MSMEs equipped with solutions in line with the Decent Work Agenda to enhance their resilience, sustainability and competitiveness	Zero waste

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