



# Evaluation Summary



International  
Labour  
Office

Evaluation  
Office

## *Project Title – Equipping Sri Lanka to Counter Trafficking in Persons (EQUIP): Final Independent Evaluation*

### Quick Facts

<b>Countries:</b>	<i>Sri Lanka</i>
<b>Final Evaluation:</b>	<i>20/04/2021 – 31/07/2021</i>
<b>Evaluation Mode:</b>	<i>Independent</i>
<b>Administrative Office:</b>	<i>ILO Country Office-Sri Lanka</i>
<b>Technical Office:</b>	<i>Fundamentals and MIGRANT, DWT/CO New Delhi</i>
<b>Evaluation Manager:</b>	<i>Rattanaporn Poungpattana, Monitoring and Evaluation Officer, ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific</i>
<b>Evaluation Consultant(s):</b>	<i>The Centre for Poverty Analysis (CEPA), Sri Lanka</i>
<b>Project Code:</b>	<i>LKA/17/01/USA</i>
<b>Donor(s) &amp; Budget:</b>	<i>United States Department of State, Bureau of South and Central Asian Affairs (SCA) (US\$ 1,180,402)</i>
<b>Keywords:</b>	<i>Trafficking in Persons, Forced Labour, Evaluation, Sri Lanka</i>

### Background & Context

#### Summary of the project purpose, logic, and structure

The EQUIP project is implemented by ILO, and The Asia Foundation (TAF) and HELVETAS Swiss Intercooperation (Helvetas). The project was funded by the Bureau of South and Central

Asian Affairs (SCA) of the United States Department of States (USDOS) and was implemented from September 2017 to July 2021. The Project presented a unique strategy to address the issue of trafficking in persons (TIP) in Sri Lanka. It proposed a set of interventions with the three overarching aims: ‘Prevention, Protection and Prosecution’. ILO and the project partners set out to achieve four objectives that fall under these main goals – of which ILO implemented objective 1 (Research and awareness to inform regulations and practice) and objective 2 (Ensuring fair and ethical business recruitment practices), and TAF and Helvetas implemented objective 3 (Protection services for identified victims) and objective 4 (Prosecuting and investigating offenders).

Interventions within the project included grass root awareness campaigns, research to address knowledge gaps, training interventions, and supporting the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force (NAHTTF) to improve existing processes. The main geographic scope of the project was in the districts of Colombo, Kandy, Kurunegala and Gampaha.

#### Present Situation of the Project

The project has concluded, although some activities within objective 2 that were delayed due to the COVID-19 pandemic is currently ongoing.

#### Purpose, scope, and clients of the evaluation

The evaluation was conducted from April to July 2021 with the objective of assessing relevance, validity of design, coherence and synergy,

effectiveness, efficiency, impact, and sustainability of the project.

### **Methodology of evaluation**

The ILO's policy guidelines for evaluation (3rd edition, 2017) provides the basic framework. The evaluation will be carried out according to the ILO's standard policies and procedures, and comply with the United Nations Evaluation Group (UNEG) norms and standards and the OECD/DAC evaluation quality standards.

As the COVID 19 pandemic continues to persist, this evaluation is guided by ILO's Implications of COVID-19 on evaluations in the ILO: An internal guide on adapting to the situation.

The primary data collection was qualitative in nature and comprised interviews with stakeholders, focus group discussions with beneficiaries and in-depth interviews with community members. Secondary data was collected from project documents, reports, and other relevant resources.

### **Main Findings & Conclusions**

#### *Relevance*

The EQUIP project was relevant as Sri Lanka has been ranked under the "Tier 2 Watch List" in the USDOS annual TIP Report since 2013. This indicated the urgent need for the country to put in place robust measures to combat TIP. Although NAHTTF was active since 2010, and Standard (SOP) on Identification, Protection and Referral of Victims of Human Trafficking was in place since 2015, in practice it was ineffective. Similarly, the lack of awareness specifically in relation to victim identification, the legal framework surrounding TIP, and the referral procedure at the first responder level made the project relevant to direct beneficiaries of the project. The project was also relevant in addressing the awareness gaps at the grassroots level; TIP was normalised at the ground level as (potential) migrant workers were not aware of safe migration routes and relevant authorities that can help in the process of migration, and the absence of legal recourse rendered them vulnerable to the abuses they faced.

The COVID-19 pandemic further exacerbated the risk of TIP in the country due to the economic instability caused by the pandemic. Thus, the project remained relevant even during the pandemic.

#### *Validity of Intervention Design*

ILO and its project partners worked closely with other stakeholders in designing, developing, and implementing, which contributed to the well thought out design of the project. Moreover, the project was able to design its interventions to address the needs of the beneficiaries at grassroots level, by carrying out two Knowledge Attitudes and Practices (KAP) surveys; one which informed the training interventions and the other which contributed to the design of the awareness campaigns.

The geographic scope of the project was mainly limited to four districts and has constrained the wide scale impact that could have been achieved. However, this gap was, to some extent, addressed later in the project through the implementation of the TOT Unit within the Ministry of Foreign Employment (MFE) and putting in place measures in other government institutions to multiply its efforts. The design of activities ensured that trade unions (TUs) and civil society organisations (CSOs) are engaged throughout the project in implementing key components under the prevention pillar, thereby mainstreaming 'international labour standards' and 'social dialogue'. Moreover, 'decent work' is addressed through capacity building and awareness programmes for government stakeholders, intermediaries, and community members.

The timeframe of the project was inadequate to measure many of the long-term and sustainable impacts envisaged, specifically in relation to behavioural changes. It has been evidenced that project activities of this nature would generally require about 5-10 years, in combination with other factors and similar interventions, to affect sustainable changes. However, collaborating with other similar projects and ensuring a smooth transition through the project design indicates that

the project could be sustained to achieve long-term, transformative impacts.

### *Coherence and Synergy*

In relation to creating coherence and synergies with other stakeholder working on TIP, ILO and the project partners have been successful in cooperating with other organisations, specifically in terms of materials and resource sharing, thus avoiding overall duplication of efforts and ensuring effective project delivery and sustainability. Although there may have been some repetition in training interventions for government stakeholders conducted by prior projects, this is not seen a negative impact, as repetition may be needed to refresh and regenerate knowledge amongst beneficiaries.

### *Gender Mainstreaming and Non-Discrimination*

The very nature of the feminisation of the labour migration sector has led the project to focus mainly on women, lacking an approach that considers the gendered realities of men in the TIP landscape. Therefore, the overall project design lacked a gender mainstreaming approach where explicit inclusion of a gendered approach to prevention, protection and prosecution of TIP could not be observed. However, following commissioned research on the topic, specific measures were taken to include this approach in the awareness raising campaigns and the component on reintegration of migrant workers. Yet, there is space for improvement in addressing the deeper socio-cultural issues especially in relation to the prevention pillar of the project. On the other hand, the project made special arrangements for women during implementation of activities, facilitating their active participation.

### *Effectiveness*

The project has, somewhat progressed towards achieving the overall objectives albeit minor setbacks, as explained below.

Under **objective 1**, the project was able to create awareness regarding forced labour (FL) and TIP, which in turn informed regulations and practice.

Similarly, the project has been able to capacitate those in the regulatory framework thereby increasing technical knowledge regarding TIP. This was achieved at three levels; first responders and those who contribute to investigation and prosecution have been capacitated and has demonstrated an overall increase in knowledge on FL and TIP; through campaign material the project was able to create awareness at the grassroots regarding the dangers of irregular migration and the vulnerabilities that lead to TIP. However, the effectiveness of the campaign in changing mind sets of potential migrants has been recognized as a gap; and awareness programmes were conducted targeting TUs, which has equipped TU constituents with the required knowledge, to organize, advocate and assist migrant workers.

**Objective 2** indicates the least achievement as only four out of six activities were completed. Therefore, the effectiveness of this aspect in ensuring fair and ethical business recruitment practices amongst recruitment agents has not been seen. However, Migration Development Officers (MDOs) have been better equipped to conform to ethical and fair recruitment principles and guidelines. This can be observed through a qualitative improvement of change in reporting, which can be attributed to the capacity building programmes conducted through this project. Although MDOs have not been able to put knowledge into practices as expected due to the pandemic restrictions and other external factors, the trainings were highly commended, despite minor areas of improvement that were raised.

Moreover, implementing the Migrant Recruitment Advisor (MRA) in Sri Lanka is a notable achievement, as it not only has the potential to prevent TIP and help victims of TIP but has also included TUs as core partners of the project, in turn ensuring the prioritisation of countering TIP amongst TUs in the country. However, migrant workers engagement with the MRA is low, thus the effectiveness of this aspect has not reached its potential as expected.

**Objective 3**, to improve protection services to ensure identified victims receive specialised care

services, was partly achieved through the capacity building programmes targeting relevant service providers. Counselling Assistants (CAs) have improved their knowledge and awareness regarding TIP and more specifically on how to effectively identify and refer victims of TIP. Although the project implemented the capacity building component for shelter staff, the results of this intervention are yet to be seen due to external challenges and limitations. Whilst capacity building programmes were conducted and for the first time ensured that the Legal Aid Commission (LAC) focuses on TIP is a notable achievement of the project, however those who received legal aid or victim's assistance from the LAC has seen a low rate of achievement, as only one victim has received legal aid since the inception of the project.

Through **objective 4**, the project's interventions may have contributed to the increase in investigation and prosecution of offenders of TIP, owing to the training of officials on victim identification, legal procedures, and referrals processes. The capacity building components have contributed towards the knowledge and skill development of prosecutors and police officers. Although there were some minor setbacks due to the pandemic restrictions, the training programmes have been commended for introducing the prosecutors to a holistic understanding of TIP, the legal complexities, and the impact of a victim-centred approach. Although there were some setbacks in providing training to police officers, the Human Trafficking and Smuggling Investigation Bureau (HTSI Bureau) of the Criminal Investigation Department (CID) were trained further, possibly contributing to the increased number of investigations. Furthermore, supporting the NAHTTF for enhanced coordination of counter TIP efforts was a key aspect under this objective. Although not satisfactorily achieved as expected, the project partners should be commended for using all means possible to maintain a positive engagement with the NAHTTF, despite challenges in engagement.

Considering the results-based management of the project, it should be commended for its flexibility to change indicators and activities to adapt to the ground realities, including but not limited to the COVID-19 pandemic. Suggestions were also made for changes mid-way through the project, based on gender inclusivity, inadequacies posed by quantitative measures and the need to assess behavioural changes. However, certain drawbacks in communication and coordination between ILO and project partners were identified, that impacted the 'spirit of partnership'.

The project was able to effectively navigate through the pandemic although it altered project activities drastically, especially in relation to working with recruitment agents. The project also created synergies across other project managed by partners, leading to resource sharing and coordination, which in turn benefited the effective roll-out of project activities. The overall flexibility and support provided by the donor, and by ILO to project partners and other stakeholders ensured the smooth implementation of project activities.

#### *Efficiency*

Overall, the project has been efficient in the use of funds, although the timely delivery of some of the activities were hindered by the pandemic. 67 percent of the budget has been allocated for programme costs which is an efficient ratio to carry out activities. The project has made use of 89 percent of the funds as of 1st July 2021, which is credible given the number of external shocks that prevented some activities from taking place or been scaled down. Moreover, exchange rate gains and savings in other areas have been efficiently repurposed to implement new activities, and although there were cost implications caused by COVID-19, it was well-managed by reallocating savings to cover additional costs. However, it has been noted that the project could have been more flexible in providing technological infrastructure to carry out activities effectively during the pandemic, as there was a gap in access to technology among beneficiaries which hindered the effective implementation of some activities.

### *Impact Orientation and Sustainability*

At the policy level, the project was able to create an impact by contributing to influencing the ratification of The Protocol, which ensures Sri Lankan government's commitment to countering TIP. However, the challenges affecting coordination of national TIP efforts through NAHTTF have led to missed opportunities. At the ground level, the project placed great emphasis on engaging with and capacitating the first responders has led to an improved quality in service provision, mainly in relation to identification and referral of victims. However, the full impact of this effort is yet to be seen as service providers have not been able to put their skills in use due to the pandemic restrictions. Additionally, the inter-agency and inter-ministerial linkages created through the project has led to better coordination amongst MDOs, CAs and Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE) officers. However, since the trainings were only limited to the four districts, the impact of this is yet to be seen across the country. Similarly, by capacitating the legal officers of LAC, victims from marginalised backgrounds have the opportunity to receive legal aid. However, whether victims from marginalised backgrounds will seek the services of the LAC without being referred by a first responder, is a question of contention.

An impact was also created at a ground level by raising awareness about TIP. Education entertainment introduced through the project has had a positive impact in cautioning potential migrant workers about the dangers of irregular migration. However, there are still structural constraints that may not deter them from taking irregular routes to migrate. On the other hand, including TUs in the project has led to them prioritising the issue of TIP in their work and has created an impact that can be sustained in the future, given the continued support given to TUs through similar projects.

The project should be commended for putting measures in place to ensure the sustainability of the project's efforts beyond its lifecycle. For instance, the project partners' continuous

engagement with key government stakeholders ensures the sustainability of the project's efforts. Knowledge retention and continued skills development has also been ensured by providing training material to government partners and the establishment of the TOT unit. Yet, limitations of resources of the government can affect the sustainability of these efforts. The DPF initiated by project partners is another measure in place that can further sustain the efforts of countering-TIP beyond the project's lifecycle by collectively addressing the pressing needs in relation to TIP.

### *Conclusion*

The project proposed a set of interventions with the four core objectives of raising awareness, ensuring fair and ethical business recruitment practices, improving protection services for identified victims, and to increase investigation and prosecution of offenders. The evaluation concludes that the project has effectively put in place the core measures needed to get a step closer to "a Sri Lanka absent of trafficking", albeit with some limitations and gaps that could be addressed in future interventions.

### **Recommendations**

1. Supporting and follow up on the implementation of The Protocol.
2. Including health sector workers and Grama Niladhari who often act as first responders as a target group for increasing awareness, knowledge and skills on TIP and providing information on referrals.
3. Continue and build on synergies created by the DPF that include agencies with extensive prior work experience on TIP to sustain EQUIP impacts.
4. Those activities that could not take place as planned due to COVID-19 restrictions and other externalities should be considered for future project design and shared with the other stakeholders working in the area of TIP for future implementation.
5. Creating a database of all project stakeholders including resource persons and consultants

and share brief project updates at suitable time intervals.

6. Incorporating consistent and structured communication channels among ILO and project partners.
7. Incorporating a gender mainstreaming approach to trafficking in persons at the design phase, cutting across all three pillars of prevention, protection, and prosecution.