



## Issue Brief

# Population Dynamics and Sustainable Development

Low Fertility, Population Ageing, and Migration in Sri Lanka and Its Implications for Development

2024



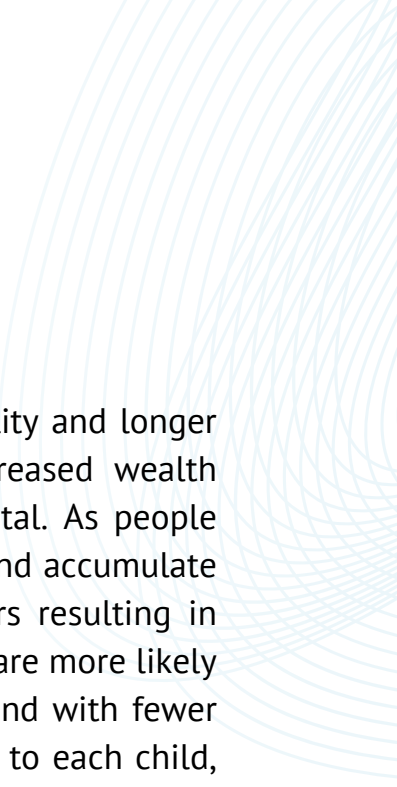

## Issue Brief:

# Population Dynamics and Sustainable Development: Low Fertility, Population Ageing, and Migration in Sri Lanka and Its Implications for Development

## Introduction

Sri Lanka is experiencing significant demographic shifts marked by declining fertility, population ageing, and changing migration patterns which present challenges and opportunities for sustainable development. These interconnected trends are a direct result of the country's development trajectory as the progress made in healthcare, education, and economic opportunities has contributed to improved living standards and longer life expectancy leading to decline in fertility and population ageing. However, these shifts, unlike in more developed countries, are occurring in a context of persistent inequality, lower per capita income, and less developed institutions and carry implications for socio-economic development, health care and social structures. It presents challenges but also the potential for a 'demographic dividend' that must be harnessed to ensure sustainable development.

A 'demographic dividend,' is a period of accelerated economic growth that can be harnessed if strategic investments are made in human capital. Sri Lanka missed the first demographic dividend, which arises when declining fertility rates increase the proportion of the working-age population, though there was a slight rebound in the mid-2020s after the window began closing in 2018. This missed opportunity underscores the importance of investing in human capital to take advantage of the second demographic dividend.

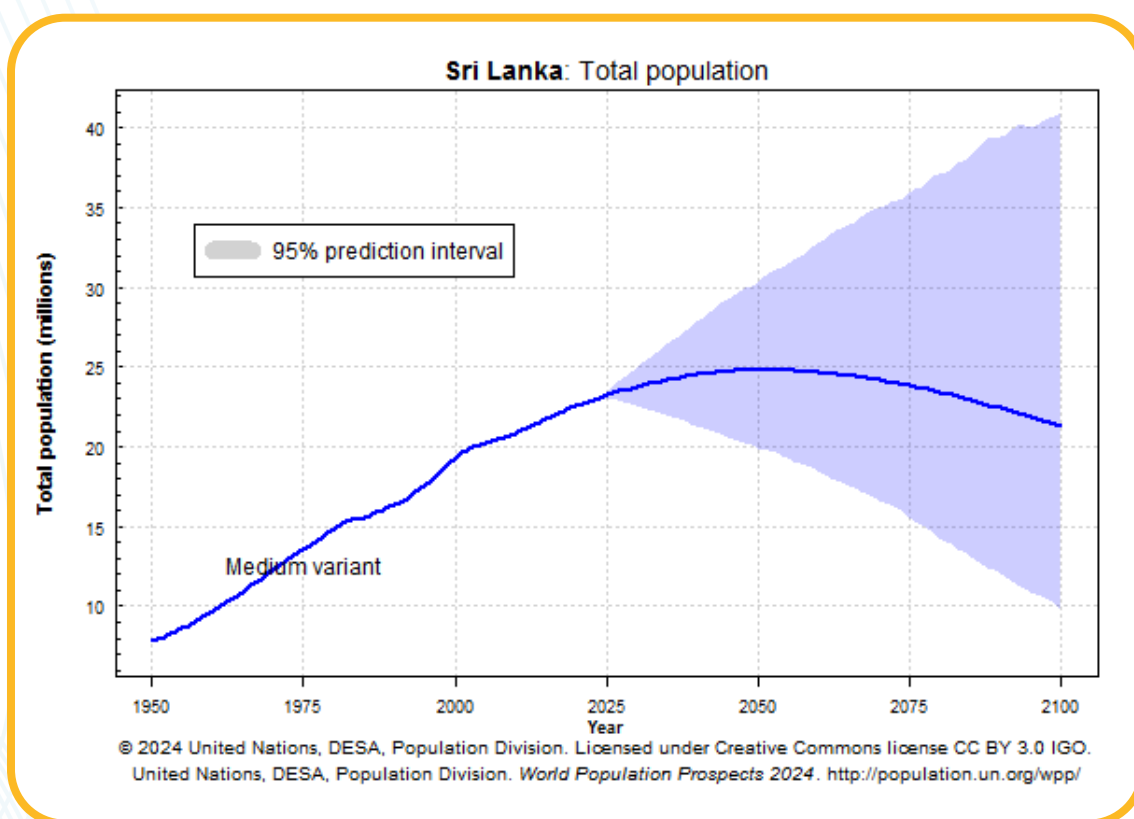


The second demographic dividend, driven by lower fertility and longer life expectancy, offers economic benefits through increased wealth accumulation and enhanced investments in human capital. As people anticipate living longer, they are more inclined to save and accumulate resources to support themselves during their later years resulting in increased wealth accumulation. As wealth grows, people are more likely to invest in the health and education of their children and with fewer children to support, parents can allocate more resources to each child, leading to better overall outcomes and enhanced investments in human capital. To leverage this opportunity, Sri Lanka must implement policies that address inequality, strengthen institutions, and promote inclusive economic growth, turning demographic shifts into a catalyst for sustainable development and improved living standards.

Therefore, understanding demographic changes is crucial for policymakers and planners to make informed decisions to reap the benefits of the demographic dividend. This issue brief provides an overview of the critical population dynamics in Sri Lanka—low fertility, an ageing population, and migration—and their implications for the country’s sustainable development. These issues are particularly relevant in the context of the Summit of the Future, a high-level event which will be hosted by the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) from 22 - 23 September, 2024. At this summit, world leaders will come together to forge a new international consensus to accelerate efforts to meet existing international commitments and respond to emerging challenges and opportunities. The outcome will be an inter-governmentally agreed Pact for the Future, providing a platform for initiatives and commitments from a diverse range of stakeholders.

# Population Dynamics in Sri Lanka

Recent mid-year population estimates of the Department of Census and Statistics estimate the total population to be 22.037 million,<sup>1</sup> compared to 20.359 million in 2012.<sup>2</sup> While the population is estimated to have grown in size, the annual rate of population growth has been declining since 1953, remaining at an average annual growth rate of 1.1 percent during 1981-2012.<sup>3</sup> This decline in annual rate of population growth is attributed to declining birth rate, low death rate and outward migration. The population is likely to peak around 24.8 million by 2050 before beginning to decline.<sup>4</sup> To fully understand this demographic trend, it is important to examine the specific changes in fertility, mortality, age structure, and migration patterns.

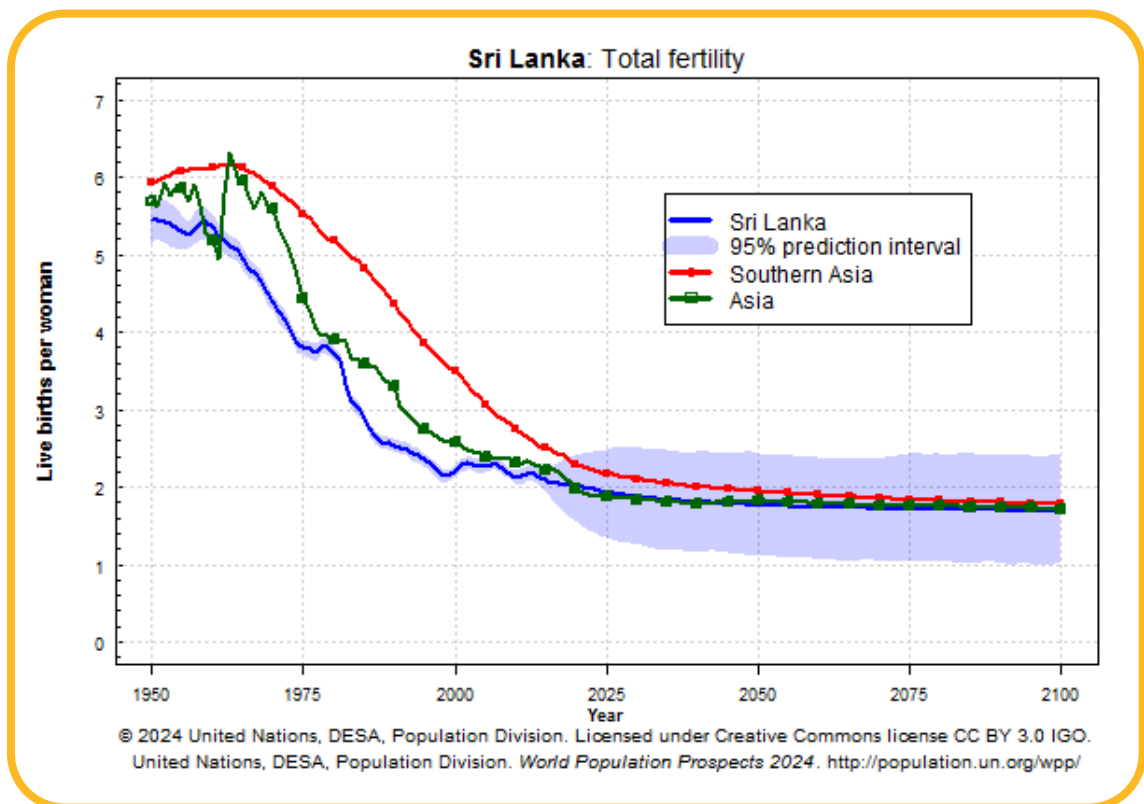


- [1] Sri Lanka, Department of Census and Statistics, Mid Year Population (Available at [http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Population/StaticInformation/VitalStatistics/MidYearPopulation\\_web\\_release2023Sep\\_En](http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Population/StaticInformation/VitalStatistics/MidYearPopulation_web_release2023Sep_En))
- [2] Department of Census and Statistics, Census of Population and Housing 2012 Key Findings, (UNFPA, 2014)
- [3] *ibid.*
- [4] United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division, "World Population Prospects 2024" (Available at <https://population.un.org/wpp/>)

## Low Fertility:

Sri Lanka has witnessed a marked decline in the Total Fertility Rate (TFR), dropping from 5.3 children per woman in 1953 to an estimated 1.97 children per woman in 2023, which is below the replacement level of 2.1.<sup>5</sup> The key determinants of fertility decline are postponement in marriage and childbirth, childlessness, rise in contraception and terminations.

Socio-economic factors such as increased educational and employment opportunities for women, job insecurity and high costs of living, along with obstacles to balancing work and family life,



[5] *ibid.*

particularly for women, significantly contribute to low fertility. Sociocultural factors, including traditional gender roles, lack of workplace flexibility, lack of right based and gender responsive policies, and changes in societal values regarding family size also play a crucial role. Additionally, the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic crisis may have contributed to this trend, as many individuals have postponed marriage and childbearing due to financial uncertainties and health concerns. At the individual level, low fertility reflects couples' increased capacity to control pregnancies and space out births, but it also highlights the difficulties that women and men encounter when trying to start a family or plan for additional children.<sup>6</sup>

## Mortality:

The Crude Death Rate of Sri Lanka has shown a spike in recent years from a rate of 6.7 deaths per 1,000 of the population in 2019 to a rate of 8.2 deaths per 1,000 of the population in 2023.<sup>7</sup> The leading causes of death in 2019 were primarily ischemic heart disease and other Non-Communicable Diseases (NCDs).<sup>8</sup> While the COVID-19 pandemic may have contributed to the recent spike in mortality, identification of the exact causes require further investigation. Additionally, in 2017, Sri Lanka recorded a maternal mortality rate of 39.3 per 100,000 live births and a neonatal mortality rate of 6.2 per 1,000 live births. By 2020, the maternal mortality rate reduced to 30.2 per 100,000<sup>9</sup> live births while the neonatal mortality rate remained almost static at 6.4 per 1000 live births.<sup>10</sup> These mortality trends indicate potential shifts in population dynamics, highlighting the need for targeted healthcare interventions to address emerging challenges.

[6] United Nations, Population and Development Branch, Low fertility: A review of the determinants, Working Paper No.2 (UNFPA, July 2019)

[7] Department of Census and Statistics, Crude Birth Rates & Crude Death Rates by Province, District & Sex, 2019 - 2023(cont.) (Available at

<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/Population/StatisticalInformation/VitalStatistics/CrudeBirthRatesCrudeDeathRatesProvinceDistrictSex2019-2023>)

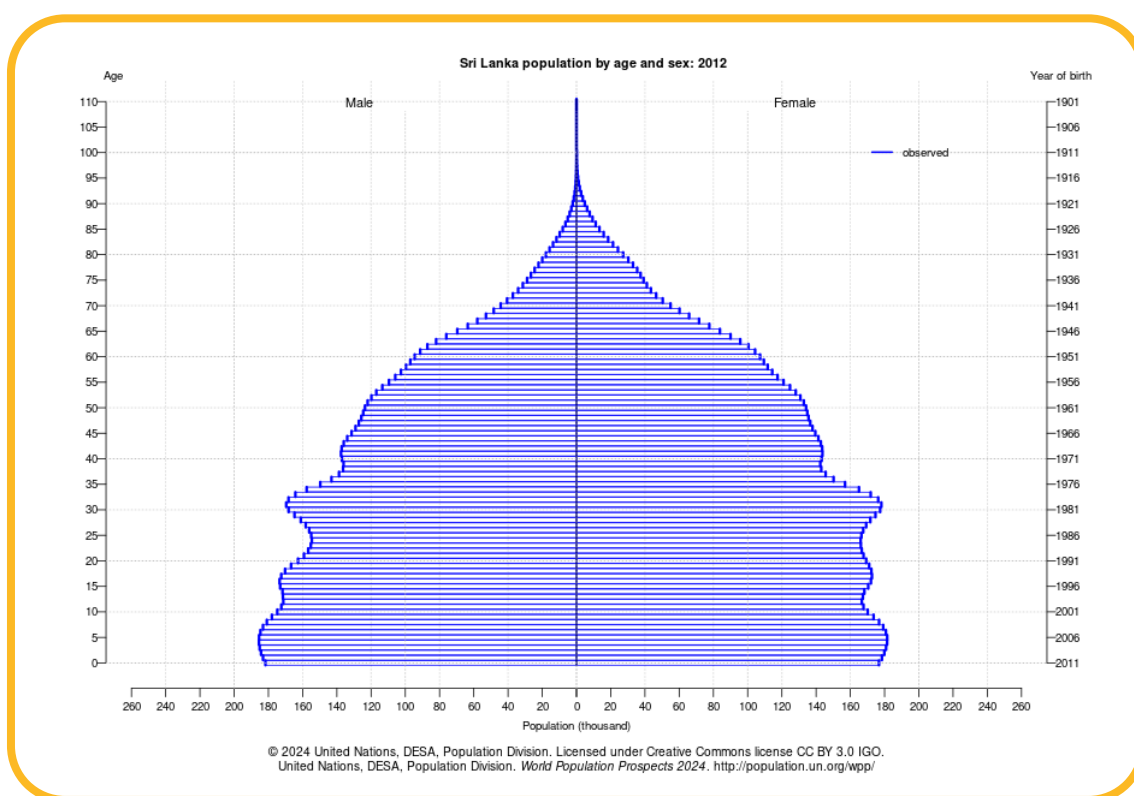
[8] World Health Organization, "Data", Sri Lanka (Available at <https://data.who.int/countries/144>)

[9] Sri Lanka, Ministry of Health, Performance and Progress Report 2023

[10] *ibid.*

## Changing Age Structure:

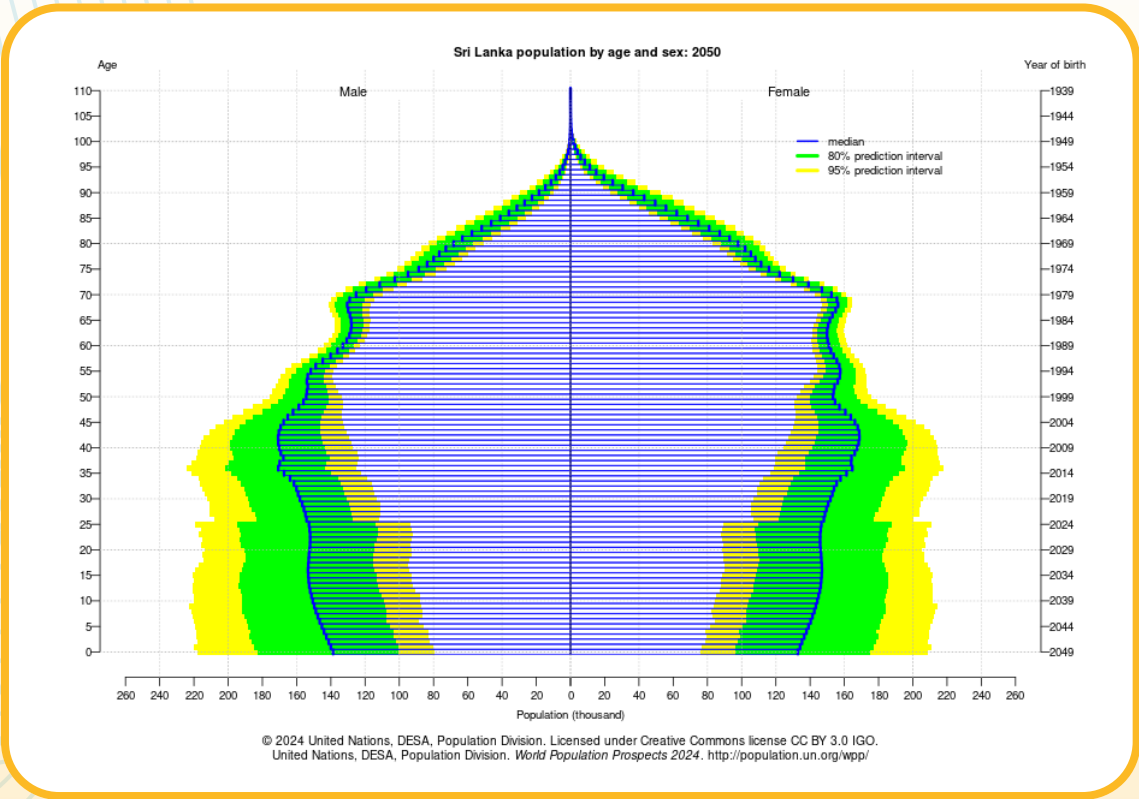
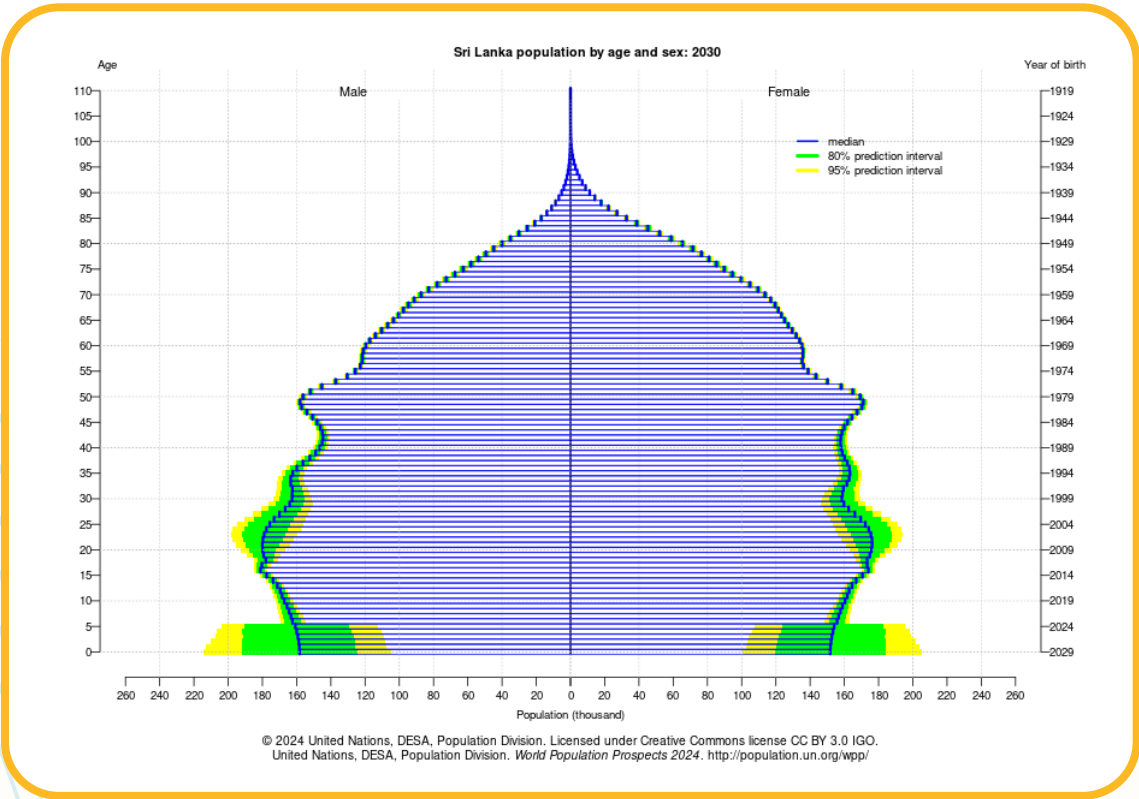
The population age structure is transitioning with the 'youth bulge' and 'population ageing'. Sri Lanka's population is aging rapidly, with one in four Sri Lankans projected to be over the age of 60 by 2041,<sup>11</sup> a significant increase from the 12.4% reported in 2012.<sup>12</sup> By age 60, females are living longer than males, resulting in the feminization of aging. Additionally, the working-age population is projected to decline from 2030.<sup>13</sup> All this is occurring at a much lower per capita income level than many other countries.



[11] Dr. E. L. Sunethra J. Perera, Ageing Population of Sri Lanka: Emerging issues, needs and policy implications, Thematic Report based on Census of Population and Housing 2012 (UNFPA, 2017)

[12] *ibid.*

[13] Asian Development Bank, Growing old before becoming rich: Challenges of an aging population in Sri Lanka (ADB, 2019)





## Migration Patterns:

Migration, both internal and international, has profoundly influenced Sri Lanka's demographic and economic landscape. With an annual outflow of 230,000 to 250,000 labor migrants, predominantly to the Middle East, the country has developed a substantial population that significantly contributes to the economy through remittances, averaging USD 7 billion per year.<sup>14</sup> However, this migration trend also leads to brain drain and family separation issues. Sri Lanka was ranked 20th globally for brain drain,<sup>15</sup> with 7.6 index points in 2023,<sup>16</sup> heavily affecting areas such as education and the health sectors. Inward migration has risen, attracting both low-skilled and high-skilled workers to address labor shortages. Additionally, internal migration—driven by disparities in infrastructure, opportunities, and the effects of climate change—adds further complexity to migration dynamics. The COVID-19 pandemic and the economic crisis have exacerbated these challenges, underscoring the need for robust policy frameworks to manage migration effectively and address its socio-economic implications.

The changes in fertility, mortality, age structure and migration creates a complex web of socio-economic challenges and opportunities that profoundly impact the country's sustainable development trajectory. A decline in fertility rates directly contributes to an aging population which in turn exerts pressure on social welfare systems and the labor market. While migration can help mitigate labor shortages and support economic stability, it is also influenced by population ageing, as countries with older populations attract younger migrants seeking opportunities. The out-migration of skilled labor exacerbates these challenges by shrinking the available workforce and contributing to brain drain. Additionally, migration can impact fertility rates in both sending and receiving countries, as migrants may adopt different reproductive behaviours in their new environments.

[14] Sri Lanka, Ministry of Labour and Foreign Employment, National Policy and Action Plan on Migration for Employment Sri Lanka 2023 - 2027 (2023)

[15] The Global Economy.com, "Human flight and brain drain - Country rankings", Human flight and brain drain index. (Available at [https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/human\\_flight\\_brain\\_drain\\_index/](https://www.theglobaleconomy.com/rankings/human_flight_brain_drain_index/))

[16] World Population Review, "Brain Drain Countries 2024" (Available at <https://worldpopulationreview.com/country-rankings/brain-drain-countries>)

These shifts significantly impact critical sectors like healthcare, education, social welfare systems undermining national efforts towards human capital development, economic stability, and social well-being. Therefore, it is imperative to identify the key challenges posed by population dynamics to design comprehensive and forward-looking policies that not only respond to current challenges but also anticipate future needs.

## Population Dynamics and Implications for Sustainable Development

Population dynamics present significant opportunities to foster sustainable development. The pursuit of development essentially means striving for a better quality of life and enhancing human wellbeing, which fundamentally hinges on the consumption of goods and services.<sup>17</sup> Achieving adequate consumption requires not only a more equitable distribution of economic resources, but is also dependent on higher levels of production. Furthermore, social progress, characterized by improvements in human wellbeing, is closely tied to increased economic output. However, this increase in output exerts pressure on all natural resources, and unsustainable consumption and production patterns that deplete these vital and irreplaceable resources could ultimately undermine the foundations of economic growth and social progress. Hence, it is crucial that efforts to promote social progress, which necessitates higher economic output, do not compromise environmental sustainability. These efforts, which are at the heart of sustainable development strategies, are strongly influenced by population dynamics.

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[17] Population Matters for Sustainable Development, (UNFPA, 2012)

Demographic change affects politics, economies, culture, social relations, climate change, and resource allocation. It changes consumption patterns which bring challenges in budgeting for infrastructure, health services, social protection and other areas. Estimates using the National Transfer Accounts (NTA) show that the country would need an additional Rs. 76 billion for public consumption by 2037 mainly due to the future growth of the older population who require social protection measures and additional funds for healthcare.<sup>18</sup> However, with the current economic recession, these figures are likely to change significantly in the future.

## Economy:


A critical concern for sustainable economic growth is the shrinking workforce caused by declining birth rates and out-migration of workers, which can hinder productivity if investments in human capital are not made. These implications affect the overarching sustainable development goals such as ending poverty; promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all; as well as gender equality.

Efforts to address the shrinking workforce have governments considering measures to increase fertility. However, evidence shows that no country has been able to reverse the trend to maintain replacement level fertility. Further, such efforts create real risks to women's rights, choices, and bodily autonomy. SDG data from 68 countries show that, 44% of partnered women are unable to make decisions over health care, contraception, or sex.<sup>19</sup> Any coercive measure to increase fertility can worsen this situation.

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[18] Population Dynamics and the Economic Life Cycle: An Analysis of National Transfer Accounts for Sri Lanka (UNFPA, 2021)

[19] United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Statistics Division (Available at <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/report/2023/Goal-05/>)



Instead, efforts should focus on utilizing the full potential of the labour force. In 2021, the total labour force participation was 49.9 per cent and unemployment level rate was 5.1%. Despite high educational attainment among women, their labour force participation rate is only 31.8 per cent. A key contributor to this is women's increased domestic and care responsibilities. Women spend three times more time than men per day in unpaid domestic services and spend 1.02 hours per day on unpaid caregiving work compared to 0.29 hours spent by men per day.<sup>20</sup> Youth and older persons are also not fully engaged in the labour force. Youth (15 - 24 years) unemployment rate was 26.5% in 2021 with higher female youth unemployment (36.2 per cent) than male youth unemployment (21.3 per cent). Further, the National Transfer Accounts shows that labour force in Sri Lanka goes beyond age 60, which provides opportunities to expand the age of the workforce.<sup>21</sup>

Therefore, to address the shirking labour force, Sri Lanka must focus on measures to increase productivity by investing in its current labour force. Estimates from the National Transfer Accounts shows that labour productivity growth would increase aggregate labour income by Rs. 872 billion in 2037 compared to an increase of aggregate labour income by Rs. 373 billion in the demographic change-only scenario.<sup>22</sup> This highlights the significant economic gains achievable in 2037 if labour productivity is increased. However, these projections are sensitive to economic conditions and the recent economic crisis faced by Sri Lanka will significantly impact the anticipated growth figures, altering the forecasted increases in aggregate labour income.

Migration introduces both benefits and challenges to Sri Lanka's economy. While labor migration, particularly to the Middle East, generates substantial remittance inflows that can boost local economies and provide capital for investment, over-reliance on these remittances creates vulnerabilities.

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[20] Department of Census and Statistics. Sri Lanka Time Use Survey (2017).

[21] Population Dynamics and the Economic Life Cycle: An Analysis of National Transfer Accounts for Sri Lanka (UNFPA, 2021)

[22] *ibid*

Fluctuations in global labor markets can disrupt this income stream, impacting household finances and national reserves. Furthermore, many Sri Lankan women migrate for domestic work, often facing precarious conditions and exploitation, hindering the realization of SDG 08. Their access to healthcare, especially sexual and reproductive health services, is also limited due to dual discrimination based on migration status and gender, posing a challenge to SDG 03.<sup>23</sup> To build economic resilience and promote well-being, Sri Lanka must diversify its economy, reduce reliance on remittances, enhance skills development, create local jobs, and address the specific challenges faced by migrant workers, particularly women.

The "silver economy" - the economic activity generated by the needs and spending power of older adults - presents another avenue for growth. As the population ages, there will be increasing demand for products and services tailored to older individuals, such as healthcare, leisure activities, and age-friendly technologies. Capitalizing on this demographic shift can create new jobs, stimulate innovation, and contribute to economic development.

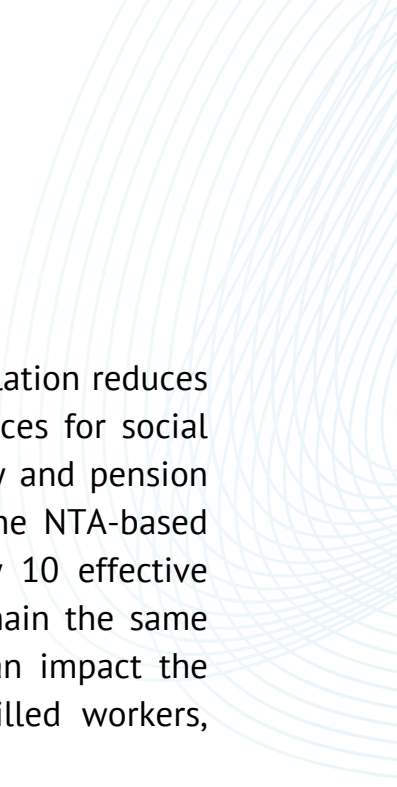

## Social Protection:

Declining fertility and rapid ageing will apply greater demands on the social protection system to cater to the needs of the changing population structure. In 2023, the age dependency ratio is estimated to be 52 dependent person for every 100 working age person, of which 34 were child dependents (younger than 15 years) and 18 were old age dependents (older than 64 years).<sup>24</sup> Projections estimate that the total dependency ratio will grow significantly after 2041 due to rapid increase in old-age dependency.<sup>25</sup>

[23] Violeta Alarcão and others, Intersections of Immigration and Sexual/Reproductive Health: An Umbrella Literature Review with a Focus on Health Equity (Justice in Sexual and Reproductive Health: An Intersectional Approach, 2021).

[24] World Bank Group, Age dependency ratio (% of working-age population). (Available at <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SP.POP.DPND?locations=LK&view=chart>)

[25] W. Indralal De Silva, A Population Projection of Sri Lanka, For the New Millennium 2001 - 2101: Trends and Implication (Institute for Health Policy, 2007)



As the older population increases and working-age population reduces it will create a disproportionate burden on public finances for social protection as fewer workers contribute to social security and pension funds while the number of retirees increases. As per the NTA-based support ratio, there are 07 effective workers for every 10 effective consumers in the economy and this is projected to remain the same from 2016 to 2037. Additionally, migration patterns can impact the balance of the labor force and the availability of skilled workers, influencing the sustainability of social support systems.

The budget allocation for social protection expenditure in 2023 represents 1.18 per cent of GDP for social insurance and 0.42 per cent of GDP for social assistance programmes.<sup>26</sup> Within the current IMF programme, the government has increased social safety net expenditure to a minimum of 0.6 per cent of GDP. This year, the government is launching the new National Social Protection policy aimed at reforming the current social protection programme to a universal lifecycle social protection system. This reform combined with the future demands created by rapid ageing, requires strategic fiscal policies to ensure the sustainability and equitable distribution of resources. These challenges present an opportunity for the social protection system to innovate and act as agent of change and not just a cost burden by contributing to social well-being and economic growth.

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[26] Fiscal Space for Social Protection (UNICEF Sri Lanka Working Paper, July 2023)

## Health Care System:

Sri Lanka has achieved significant health outcomes through its low-cost publicly financed 'free' health care model which has increased life expectancy. The health system which is already challenged by resource constraints brought on by the economic crisis will face additional pressure due to rapid population ageing. The burden of non-communicable diseases which accounts for nearly 75% of deaths in the country<sup>27</sup> is expected to increase. The total life expectancy is 77 years (73 years for males and 80 years for female)<sup>28</sup> compared to healthy life expectancy of 67 years which means that 10 years of healthy life is lost due increased morbidity and disability requiring specialized and comprehensive long-term care.<sup>29</sup> These factors will increase future demand for health services and will require considerable investments. Currently, Sri Lanka's public health expenditure is around 1.5 per cent of GDP<sup>30</sup> and the per capita health consumption is greater for older persons compared to other age groups of the population.<sup>31</sup>

In addition to chronic illnesses and disability, mental health issues among older persons are on the rise with reports revealing high rates of depression, dementia and cognitive dysfunction among older patients.<sup>32</sup> As per the Demographic and Health Survey 2016, a total of 0.7 per cent of household members were reported to be undergoing treatment for any kind of mental illness, with a higher proportion among older persons (above 60 years). Loneliness and social isolation further compound these challenges, significantly impacting the quality of life and independence of older persons. Therefore, Sri Lanka faces a growing challenge in supporting its older population due to the rising demand for geriatric care which is exacerbated by the migration of skilled healthcare workers and the ongoing financial crisis.

[27] Lalini Rajapaksha and others, Sri Lanka Health Systems Review (WHO Regional Office for South-East Asia, 2021)

[28] World Bank Group, Life expectancy at birth, (years) (Available at <https://genderdata.worldbank.org/en/indicator/sp-dyn-le00-in>)

[29] René Leon Solano, "Sri Lanka must increase its efforts to protect and promote the human capital of the elderly", World Bank Blogs, October 2021 (Available at <https://blogs.worldbank.org/en/endpovertyinsouthasia/sri-lanka-must-increase-its-efforts-protect-and-promote-human-capital-elderly#:~:text=in%20South%20Asia-,Sri%20Lanka%20must%20increase%20its%20efforts%20to%20protect%20and,human%20capital%20of%20the%20elderly&text=In%20Sri%20Lanka%2C%2012.3%25%20of,older%20adults%20in%20South%20Asia.>)

[30] Budget Brief: Health Sector, Sri Lanka 2021 (UNICEF, 2021)

[31] Population Dynamics and the Economic Life Cycle: An Analysis of National Transfer Accounts for Sri Lanka (UNFPA, 2021)

[32] Perspectives on Population Ageing in the Asia-Pacific Region (UNFPA, 2017)

To address these issues it is essential to invest in geriatric care facilities and training for healthcare staff to manage both physical and mental health needs. These measures are crucial for ensuring dignified, healthy aging, aligning with Sri Lanka's commitment to achieving SDG 03 while maintaining a sustainable healthcare workforce.

Additionally, feminization of aging adds another layer of complexity. The lack of adequate support for aging women and caregivers can exacerbate gender inequalities and impact their quality of life. Moreover, as the population ages, women disproportionately bear the burden of caregiving for elderly family members, often at the expense of their own health and economic stability. These factors necessitate policy makers to ensure that gendered dimensions of aging are addressed in policy development and implementation, ensuring SDG 5.

## **Family and Social Support:**

The migration of women, coupled with low fertility and an ageing population, significantly impacts family and social dynamics in Sri Lanka. As primary caregivers, women's absence disrupts child-rearing, elderly care, and overall family cohesion, leading to emotional strain and social disconnection.

Low fertility and an ageing population places a greater burden on middle-aged adults, who must care for older relatives with fewer younger family members to assist, leading to increased stress and weakened social support networks. Additionally, the decrease in family size can result in diminished social support networks, which are crucial for providing emotional and practical assistance. As the population of older persons grows, the breakdown of social support networks could lead to social isolation, especially among those living alone or widowed, highlighting the need to address elder abuse and develop community-based support systems to ensure their well-being.



# Policy Considerations

The complex and multifaceted challenges presented by the combined effects of low fertility, population ageing, and migration requires comprehensive and forward-thinking policies to maximize the benefits of the demographic change while promoting a more equitable and resilient society.

The demographic dividend is central to this discussion. Sri Lanka has already experienced the first demographic dividend, and the second demographic dividend is projected to commence around 2037. To realize the second demographic dividend, Sri Lanka must provide the opportunity and mechanism for individuals to accumulate wealth needed for their older years. Measures must be taken to strengthen the financial system and ensure access to all. By accumulating wealth, individuals will have greater financial independence which will lessen the burden on their families and the government, and boost capital, productivity and per capita income.<sup>33</sup>


To increase productivity and boost economic growth, Sri Lanka must maximize the full potential of its labour force by creating decent employment opportunities for all. The government is working towards this and has set a target to reduce the population of unskilled labour to 10 per cent of the workforce by 2030.<sup>34</sup> One way to achieve this is by tackling youth unemployment. Economic policy measures should target job creation with a focus on the quality and the quantity of jobs. Further, policy measure should include greater investment in education and skills development to improve human capital.

Another key policy measure is to close the gender gap in the labour market and increase the investment in the human capital of women and girls.

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[33] Population Reference Bureau, *Beyond the first dividend: Sustaining the Second Demographic Dividend* (2013).

[34] Sri Lanka, Department of National Planning, *Public Investment Programme 2021 - 2024* (2021))




Through this, Sri Lanka can realize the gender dividend - the increased economic growth that could be realized with investments in women and girls.<sup>35</sup> In the Economic Transformation Act, the government has set a target to increase female labour force participation rate to 50%. This requires increased investments and targeted interventions. Given that women's unpaid care and domestic work responsibilities is a key contributor for their low participation in paid labour market, policy effort should aim to balance workforce participation with family responsibilities through flexible work arrangements, and support women in caregiving roles through affordable-market based child and elder care support and facilities. Further, efforts should focus on changing social and gender norms and encourage male members of the family to share care and domestic responsibilities. Empowering women economically not only boosts individual well-being but also strengthens the overall economy. When more women enter the labour market, the support ratio will increase, providing more opportunities to increase savings and asset accumulation and boost economic growth.

Concerns about the shirking labour force, resulting from declining fertility and population ageing can be addressed through extending the working age. Evidence shows that the labour force in Sri Lanka extends beyond 60 years. Therefore, current formal labour force age should be reviewed and retirement age could be extended to reflect the improved health outcomes and increased life expectancy of the population. This measure will also support in reducing the pressure on the public pension system.

Policy measures to tackle the issue of declining fertility rates must apply a nuanced approach that prioritizes women's rights and choices rooted in international human rights frameworks such as the 1994 International Conference on Population and Development (ICPD) Programme of Action, which 179 countries including Sri Lanka endorsed.

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[35] Kate Belohlav, Investing in Women and Girls for Gender a Dividend, Population Reference Bureau (Available at <https://www.prb.org/resources/investing-in-women-and-girls-for-a-gender-dividend/>)



Even with declining fertility rates, upholding the ICPD principles on Sexual and Reproductive Health and Rights (SRHR) remain vital and countries must align their laws, policies, and practices with these rights, ensuring they do not restrict access to contraceptives, misrepresent health information, or use coercive medical practices. These principles support individual autonomy in decisions about marriage, parenthood, and family size. Therefore, efforts to raise fertility rates must avoid coercive measures that compromise women's autonomy. Instead, the focus should be on advancing gender equality, ensuring equal opportunities in the workforce, and guaranteeing comprehensive services including sexual and reproductive health and rights for all.

The 2024 State of World Population (SWOP) report emphasizes the importance of ending inequalities in SRHR, particularly among at-risk population groups. In Sri Lanka's context, this includes addressing child marriage, teenage pregnancies, and gender-based violence (GBV), which disproportionately affect marginalized communities. Tackling these issues are vital for advancing gender equality and directly aligns with achieving the three transformative results (3TRs) of ending preventable maternal deaths, meeting the unmet need for family planning, and eliminating gender-based violence.

The declining fertility rate and changing age structure highlight the urgent need to enhance maternal health services and address family planning requirements. As fertility rates drop, ensuring the safety of every pregnancy, particularly for older women, becomes crucial. Strengthening maternal health services and improving access to quality care are essential for reducing preventable maternal deaths. Additionally, addressing the unmet need for family planning services, ensuring that all individuals, particularly women, have access to contraceptive methods and reproductive health services is vital for maintaining reproductive health and empowering families to make informed decisions about their size and spacing. Moreover, the socio-economic challenges related to low fertility and population aging, such as traditional gender roles and workplace discrimination and gender segregation, are linked to gender-based violence.




Therefore, promoting gender equality, improving right based policies, and tackling gender-based violence are critical for fostering a supportive and equitable environment for families. Therefore, it is crucial to address the three transformative results (3TRs), in order to effectively address the multifaceted challenges posed by the demographic transition of Sri Lanka. A rights based and gender responsive approach, supported by policies such as provision of comprehensive SRH services, flexible working hours, parental leave, returnships to facilitate individuals to return to the workforce after a career break, affordable childcare and elderly care services, can create an environment where individuals can balance work and family life.

As Sri Lanka's population ages, the country must prioritize the expansion and improvement of healthcare services tailored to the specific needs of older adults. This includes investments in expanding service packages and health care force to provide comprehensive preventative care, chronic disease management, and mental health support. Further, efforts should also focus on controlling health expenditure growth. Policy efforts should focus on promoting healthy ageing through behaviour change and other initiatives. This will help to reduce the disease burden and future demand for health services.

Pension reforms should aim for sustainability and adequacy, providing retirees with a secure financial foundation. Furthermore, promoting social inclusion and active participation of older adults in community life can mitigate feelings of isolation and contribute to their overall well-being. Additionally, policies and robust frameworks should also be in place to address elderly abuse and neglect, ensuring that the aging population is protected and supported as an integral part of society.

In tandem with these efforts, effectively managing internal and international migration necessitates a multi-pronged approach. Labor market policies should address skill shortages and leverage the skills of migrants, while support systems for integration into new communities are vital for their successful contribution to the economy. International cooperation is essential to manage migration flows ethically and protect the rights of migrant workers, ensuring that migration benefits both sending and receiving communities.



At the heart of all these efforts, it is imperative to integrate sexual and reproductive health (SRH), population aging, and gender equality into Sri Lanka's core programs. These areas are inherently linked and should be central to the country's development agenda. Ensuring access to comprehensive SRH services is crucial not only for empowering individuals to make informed choices about family planning and reproductive health but also for addressing the challenges of a rapidly aging population. By placing gender equality and a rights-based approach at the center of these efforts, Sri Lanka can ensure that its policies are inclusive, equitable, and responsive to the needs of all its citizens.


A comprehensive population policy is the cornerstone of navigating Sri Lanka's demographic transition. These policies should integrate all aspects of demographic change, including aging, fertility, migration, and gender equality, into a cohesive framework. It should be evidence-based, adaptable to changing circumstances, and aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals. Moreover, the upcoming Summit of the Future could be utilized as a pivotal platform in garnering international support and global collaboration in addressing these key challenges by means of rights based and gender responsive approaches.

# UN Summit of the Future: Addressing Population Dynamics

The UN Summit of the Future, scheduled for September 2024 in New York, represents a transformative opportunity for addressing population dynamics through global collaboration and innovative strategies. The Summit's goal of crafting an inter-governmentally negotiated Pact for the Future will encompass sections on sustainable development and development financing; international peace and security; science, technology, innovation, and digital cooperation; youth and future generations; and transforming global governance. Additionally, the Summit will produce a global digital compact and a declaration on future generations, as outlined in Resolution 76/307. These outcomes of the Summit directly intersect with Sri Lanka's demographic challenges and strategic needs. Therefore, the Summit of the Future offers a pivotal opportunity for Sri Lanka to align its strategies with global efforts to tackle these demographic challenges. The Summit's focus on reaffirming the UN Charter, reinvigorating multilateralism, boosting implementation of existing commitments, agreeing on solutions to new challenges, and restoring trust, directly correlates with Sri Lanka's need to address its population shifts.

The Summit's emphasis on sustainable development and financing is particularly relevant for Sri Lanka, as it seeks to secure funding and support for strengthening its health and social security systems. Robust systems are essential for managing the needs of an aging population and ensuring comprehensive care and support. By engaging in international discussions, Sri Lanka can access global resources and best practices to enhance its social protection frameworks and healthcare infrastructure.

Furthermore, the Summit's focus on international peace and security offers Sri Lanka a platform to promote stability and address factors contributing to emigration and brain drain. By fostering a stable environment and mitigating the drivers of migration, Sri Lanka can better retain its skilled workforce and support economic growth.



Advancements in science, technology, innovation, and digital cooperation highlighted by the Summit provides Sri Lanka with opportunities to implement cutting-edge solutions for its demographic challenges. Innovative technologies can support healthcare improvements, enhance productivity, and address the implications of a shrinking workforce. By participating in these discussions, Sri Lanka can leverage global expertise to modernize its approach to sustainable development.

The Summit's focus on youth and future generations aligns with Sri Lanka's need to develop human rights-based and gender-responsive policies. By creating a supportive environment for families and addressing fertility desires free from discrimination or coercion, Sri Lanka can tackle the challenges posed by its demographic shifts. Engaging with global leaders and stakeholders allows Sri Lanka to adopt successful strategies and foster an environment that supports both current and future generations.

In summary, the UN Summit of the Future offers Sri Lanka a pivotal opportunity to align its strategies with global efforts to manage population dynamics. By participating in the Summit, Sri Lanka can access international resources, adopt best practices, and drive innovation, ultimately building a resilient society capable of addressing the complex challenges of low fertility, an aging population, and migration.

## Conclusion

Sri Lanka faces a complex interplay of demographic changes, including low fertility, population ageing, and significant migration patterns. These trends present multifaceted challenges to family structures, social security, healthcare systems and economic growth, while also offering opportunities for sustainable development.

The United Nations Summit of the Future is an anticipated global event aiming to address pressing global challenges and pave the way for an equitable, sustainable future. Scheduled to bring together world leaders, policymakers, experts, and stakeholders from diverse sectors, the summit is poised to shape international policies and foster collaborative solutions for a range of issues including climate change, technological innovation, global health, and social equity. The Summit provides a critical platform for Sri Lanka to engage with global leaders, share best practices, and develop innovative solutions to address low fertility rates, population ageing, and migration.

By aligning national policies with global standards and leveraging international cooperation, Sri Lanka can navigate its demographic transition towards a sustainable and inclusive future. This strategic approach not only strengthens the country's own development trajectory but also positions Sri Lanka as a vital contributor to the global dialogue on sustainable population dynamics, helping to shape the future for a more inclusive and equitable world for all.





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