Sri Lanka Labour Force Statistics
Quarterly Bulletin, Third Quarter 2023

Department of Census and Statistics

Ministry of Finance, Economic Stabilization and National Policies

Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey (LFS) is designed to measure the levels and trends of employment, unemployment and labour force in Sri Lanka. LFS has been conducted quarterly, since the first quarter of 1990.

This bulletin contains labour force, employment and unemployment statistics for the third quarter 2023 based on the data collected in July, August and September in 2023 covering the whole country.

This bulletin is based on the quarterly sample of 6,440 housing units. The survey covers persons living in housing units only and it excludes the institutional population.

❑ Labour force participation rate is 48.8% for the third quarter of 2023.

❑ Unemployment rate for the survey period is 4.7%.

Content

Source Publication

Labour Force

All persons aged 15 years & over who are currently economically active during the reference period (Labour Force = employed persons + unemployed persons)

Reference Period:

Previous week of the survey week
(3rd week of every month)

Labour force participation rate (LFPR)

Labour force as a percentage of the population aged 15 years and over.

Labour Force (Economically Active Population)

Table 1: Economically active population by gender and sector, third quarter - 2023

Sector	Economically Active Population					
	Total	%	Male	%	Female	%
Sri Lanka	8,404,925	100	5,432,622	64.6	2,972,302	35.4
Urban	1,361,605	100	914,718	67.2	446,887	32.8
Rural	6,670,848	100	4,284,565	64.2	2,386,283	35.8
Estate	372,471	100	233,339	62.6	139,132	37.4

Table 2: Economically inactive population by gender and sector, third quarter - 2023

Sector	Economically Inactive Population					
	Total	%	Male	%	Female	%
Sri Lanka	8,822,337	100	2,505,730	28.4	6,316,607	71.6
Urban	1,651,834	100	479,504	29.0	1,172,331	71.0
Rural	6,843,398	100	1,932,302	28.2	4,911,096	71.8
Estate	327,104	100	93,925	28.7	233,180	71.3

According to the Table 1, the estimated economically active population is about 8.4 million in the third quarter 2023. Of which 64.6 percent are males and 35.4 percent are females. The economically inactive population is about 8.8 million. Out of the economically inactive population 28.4 percent are males and 71.6 percent are females. (Table 2)

Table 3: LFPR by gender and year, 2018 - 2023Q3

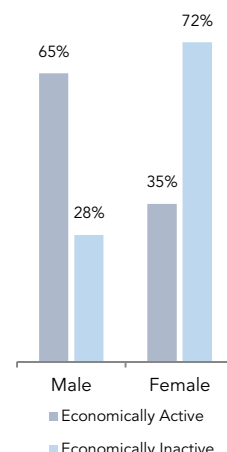| Year	Total	Male	Female
2018	51.8	73.0	33.6
2019	52.3	73.0	34.5
2020	50.6	71.9	32.0
2021	49.9	71.0	31.8
2022	49.8	70.5	32.1
2021 Q3	49.5	71.0	30.9
2022 Q3	49.0	70.4	31.0
2023 Q1	49.9	69.6	32.7
2023 Q2	48.6	68.8	31.1
2023 Q3	48.8	68.4	32.0

Table 3 provides the information on LFPRs by gender since year 2018. Referring the Table 3, it is important to note that, male participation to the labour force is always higher than that of female.

Table 4: LFPR by age group and gender, third quarter – 2023

Age group (Years)	Total	Male	Female
Sri Lanka	48.8	68.4	32.0
15 - 19	7.3	11.5	3.2*
20 - 24	45.2	56.8	33.9
25 - 29	66.5	87.9	47.7
30 - 34	66.4	94.7	45.2
35 - 39	66.3	96.0	41.8
40 - 44	71.0	95.8	47.9
45 - 49	66.7	93.2	45.5
50 - 54	66.1	91.7	44.2
55 - 59	59.6	82.5	38.5
60+	28.6	45.3	15.7

*These Figures are to be treated with caution as the corresponding CV (Coefficient of Variation) Values are high.

Figure 1: Distribution of economically active vs inactive population, third quarter 2023

Considering the Table 4, the distribution of LFPR by age group and by gender depicts high male participation compared to female in all age groups. The highest participation rate for male is reported from age group 35 - 39 years (96.0%), while that for female is reported from 40 - 44 age group (47.9%).

Employment

Employed

Persons, who worked at least one hour during the reference period, as paid employees, employers, own account workers or contributing family workers are said to be employed. This also includes persons with a job but not at work during the reference period.

Employment Rate

The proportion of employed population to the total labour force.

Table 5: Distribution of employed population by main industry (third quarter 2022 – third quarter 2023)

Quarter	Sri Lanka	Major Industry Group		
		Agriculture	Industries	Services
2022 Q3	8,010,340	2,152,377	2,076,868	3,781,095
(%)	100.0	26.9	25.9	47.2
2022 Q4	8,015,006	2,258,476	1,946,352	3,810,178
(%)	100.0	28.2	24.3	47.5
2023 Q1	8,199,792	2,187,563	2,090,031	3,922,198
(%)	100.0	26.7	25.5	47.8
2023 Q2	8,014,492	2,058,421	2,104,249	3,851,822
(%)	100.0	25.7	26.3	48.1
2023 Q3	8,006,250	2,032,281	2,001,320	3,972,650
(%)	100.0	25.4	25.0	49.6

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Table 5 shows the percentage distribution of employed population by main industry from third quarter 2022 to third quarter 2023. During third quarter of 2023, the total number of employed persons in Sri Lanka is estimated as 8.0 million. Of which, about 49.6 percent engaged in service sector, 25.4 percent in agriculture sector and 25.0 percent in industry sector. In the third quarter of 2023, there is an increase in employed persons in service sector compared to the third quarter of 2022.

Main industry categories and sub sectors

Agriculture

Agriculture Forestry and Fishery (A)

Industries

1. Mining & Quarrying (B)
2. Manufacturing (C)
3. Construction, Electricity, gas, steam and air conditioning supply, Water supply, sewerage, waste management and remediation activities (D, E, F)

Services

1. Wholesale and retail trade, repair of motor vehicles and motor cycles (G)
2. Transportation and storage (H)
3. Accommodation and food services activities (I)
4. Information and communication (J)
5. Financial and insurance activities (K)
6. Professional, scientific and technical activities (M)
7. Administrative and support service activities (N)
8. Public administration and defence compulsory social security (O)
9. Education (P)
10. Human health and social work activities (Q)
11. Other service activities (S)
12. Activities of households as employers; undifferentiated goods and services - producing activities of households for own use (T)
13. Real estate activities (L) Arts, entertainment and recreation (R) Activities of extra territorial organizations & bodies (U)

Table 6: Distribution of employed population by employment status in agriculture and non - agriculture sectors, third quarter - 2023

| Employment Status | Sri Lanka | | Sector | | | |
| | | | Agriculture | | Non-Agriculture | |
	No.	%	No.	%	No.	%
Sri Lanka	8,006,250	100.0	2,032,281	25.4	5,973,969	74.6
Employee	4,826,824	100.0	719,192	14.9	4,107,632	85.1
Public	1,218,628	100.0	21,557*	1.8*	1,197,071	98.2
Private	3,608,196	100.0	697,635	19.3	2,910,561	80.7
Employer	191,946	100.0	24,487*	12.8*	167,458	87.2
Own Account Worker	2,579,039	100.0	1,034,298	40.1	1,544,742	59.9
Contributing Family Worker	408,442	100.0	254,305	62.3	154,137	37.7

*These Figures are to be treated with caution as the corresponding CV (Coefficient of Variation) Values are high.

According to the Table 6 Majority of the workforce are private sector employees followed by own account workers. Non agriculture sector covers 74.6 percent of employed population in Sri Lanka, employees and own account workers are highly constraining in that sector.

Table 7 depicts the percentage distribution of male and female employed population by main industry sectors. Highest employment share is in service sector and this is true for both male & female, while the lowest shares are for industry sector. Among employed females 24.0 percent is in agriculture sector while this share is 26.1 percent for males.

Figure 2 : Distribution of employed population by employment status and Agriculture/ Non- Agriculture sector, third quarter - 2023
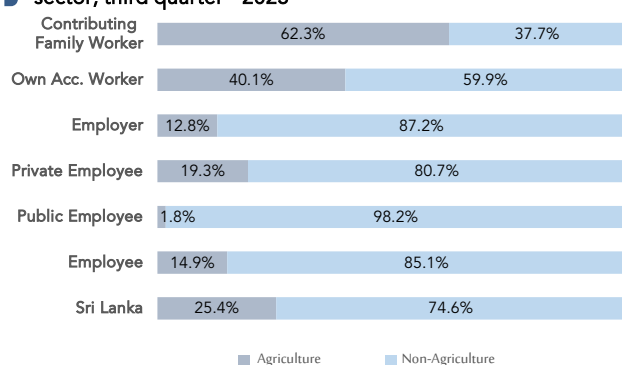
Table 7: Percentage distribution of Employed population by major industry group & gender, third quarter – 2023

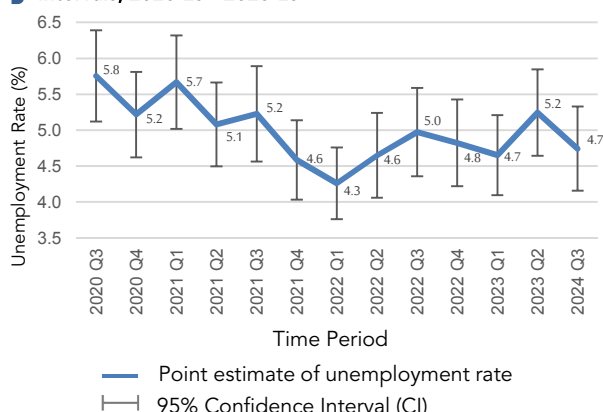| Major Industry group | Sri Lanka | Gender | |
		Male	Female
Sri Lanka	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agriculture	25.4	26.1	24.0
Industry	25.0	25.8	23.5
Services	49.6	48.1	52.6

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Unemployment

> ### Unemployed
>
> Persons available and/or looking for work, and who did not work and taken steps to find a job during last four weeks and ready to accept a job given a work opportunity within next two weeks are defined as be unemployed.
>
> ### Unemployment Rate
>
> The proportion of unemployed population to the total labour force.

Figure 3 : Unemployment rates and it's 95% confidence intervals, 2020Q3 - 2023Q3

The number of unemployed persons is estimated as 398,674 during the third quarter 2023. The unemployment rate for the third quarter 2023 is 4.7 percent.

As shown in Figure 3, it is very important to note that, when the changes in unemployment rate is explained the corresponding sampling errors[1] and the confidence limits need to considered.

Table 8: Number of unemployed and unemployment rate by age group and gender, third quarter - 2023

Age group (Years)	Unemployment Rate (%)			
	Sri Lanka		Gender	
	Number	Sri Lanka	Male	Female
Sri Lanka	398,674	4.7	3.7	6.7
15 - 24	181,535	23.4	21.3	27.4
25 - 29	106,748	13.4	9.4	19.8
Over 30	110,391	1.6	1.0	2.7

1 Sampling error

When a sample, rather than the entire population, is surveyed, estimates differ from the true values of population they represent. This difference, or sampling error, occurs by chance, and its variability is measured by the sampling error of the estimate.

For more details, please refer the explanatory note given under the labour force link in the DCS website; www.statistics.gov.lk

Figure 4 : Unemployment rate by age group and gender, third quater 2023

As per the table 8, overall unemployment rate reported for female is 6.7 percent and it is 3.7 percent for male. Youth unemployment rate (age 15 – 24 years) corresponding to the third quarter 2023 is 23.4 percent and that is the highest reported unemployment rate among all age groups. Further the unemployment rates for males and females are 21.3 and 27.4 percent respectively for age group 15 - 24.

The survey results further reveals that the unemployment among females is higher than that of males, in all age groups. Youth and female unemployment contribute more to the overall unemployment of the country.

Table 9: Number of unemployed and unemployment rate by level of education, third quarter - 2023

Level of Education	Unemployment Rate (%)			
	Sri Lanka		Gender	
	Number	Sri Lanka	Male	Female
Sri Lanka	398,674	4.7	3.7	6.7
Below GCE O/L	119,360	2.6	2.2	3.4
GCE O/L	92,511	6.0	4.7	8.7
GCE A/L & above	186,804	8.4	6.8	9.9

Figure 5 : Unemployment rate by level of education and gender, third quater 2023

The highest unemployment rate is reported from the G.C.E.(A/L) and above group which is 8.4 percent. Corresponding percentages are 6.8 percent and 9.9 percent for males and females respectively. Female unemployment rates are higher than those of males in all levels of education.

Survey results further shows that the problem of unemployment is more acute in the case of educated females than educated males, which was observed consistently over the results of previous survey rounds as well.

Selected Labour Force Indicators

Indicator	Year									
	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2021Q3	2022Q3	2023Q1	2023Q2	2023Q3
Labour force participation rate										
by gender										
Total	51.8	52.3	50.6	49.9	49.8	49.5	49.0	49.9	48.6	48.8
Male	73.0	73.0	71.9	71.0	70.5	71.0	70.4	69.6	68.8	68.4
Female	33.6	34.5	32.0	31.8	32.1	30.9	31.0	32.7	31.1	32.0
by residential sector										
Total	51.8	52.3	50.6	49.9	49.8	49.5	49.0	49.9	48.6	48.8
Urban	49.6	50.2	47.0	46.9	47.2	45.6	46.8	47.5	46.8	45.2
Rural	52.3	52.7	51.3	50.5	50.3	50.2	49.5	50.4	49.0	49.6
Unemployment rate										
by gender										
Total	4.4	4.8	5.5	5.1	4.7	5.2	5.0	4.7	5.2	4.7
Male	3.0	3.3	4.0	3.7	3.7	3.7	4.2	3.4	4.1	3.7
Female	7.1	7.4	8.5	7.9	6.5	8.2	6.4	7.0	7.4	6.7
by selected age group (year)										
20 – 29	15.0	15.3	18.1	18.3	16.2	18.3	16.6	17.1	16.4	17.7
20 – 24	20.1	20.3	25.2	26.8	21.8	24.6	20.8	21.5	22.0	23.1
25 – 29	10.4	11.0	12.0	11.4	11.7	13.1	13.3	13.6	11.6	13.4
by selected educational level										
GCE A/L an above										
Total	9.1	8.5	9.8	9.1	7.8	9.6	8.7	8.3	8.0	8.4
Male	5.1	5.0	6.2	6.2	5.5	6.5	7.4	4.7	6.3	6.8
Female	13.2	11.9	13.6	12.2	10.1	12.9	10.0	12.0	9.9	9.9
Employed population										
by gender										
Total	8,015,166	8,180,693	7,999,093	8,113,507	8,147,731	8,043,868	8,010,340	8,199,792	8,014,492	8,006,250
Male	5,300,310	5,368,896	5,372,947	5,414,280	5,373,965	5,430,176	5,302,442	5,402,656	5,323,491	5,234,273
Female	2,714,855	2,811,796	2,626,146	2,699,228	2,773,766	2,613,692	2,707,898	2,797,136	2,691,001	2,771,977
by industry (percentage)										
Total	8,015,166	8,180,693	7,999,093	8,113,507	8,147,731	8,043,868	8,010,340	8,199,792	8,014,492	8,006,250
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agriculture	2,043,698	2,071,940	2,169,679	2,213,015	2,158,559	2,390,849	2,152,377	2,187,563	2,058,421	2,032,281
%	25.5	25.3	27.1	27.3	26.5	29.7	26.9	26.7	25.7	25.4
Industry	2,239,262	2,258,421	2,152,746	2,109,482	2,158,199	1,969,427	2,076,868	2,090,031	2,104,249	2,001,320
%	27.9	27.6	26.9	26.0	26.5	24.5	25.9	25.5	26.3	25.0
Services	3,732,206	3,850,332	3,676,668	3,791,011	3,830,973	3,683,592	3,781,095	3,922,198	3,851,822	3,972,650
%	46.6	47.1	46.0	46.7	47.0	45.8	47.2	47.8	48.1	49.6
by no. of hours worked per week (percentage)										
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
0*	5.6	6.4	14.6	9.6	5.8	14.7	6.4	4.7	4.8	4.5
1 – 9	1.7	1.7	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.2	2.1	2.1	2.6	2.8
10 – 39	25.7	26.8	27.1	29.6	31.9	30.4	34.2	30.5	32.6	30.9
40 & above	66.9	65.1	56.2	58.7	60.3	52.7	57.3	62.7	60.0	61.8

* has a job but not at work during the reference week
Note: Working age population considered as age 15 & over population

The Vision of DCS
To be the leader in the region in producing timely statistical information to achieve the country's development goals.

The Mission of DCS
Making contribution in the socio-economic development of the country by providing accurate timely statistics, more effectively by means of new technology, and utilising the services of dedicated staff under a strategic leadership to become a prosperous nation in the globalised environment.