



# Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey

## Annual Bulletin - 2018

**Department of Census and Statistics**  
Ministry of Economic Reforms and Public Distribution

In the past, information on labour force characteristics, employment and unemployment etc. were collected through labour force and socio - economic surveys conducted at five year time intervals. However, the employment and unemployment data are required at very short intervals to monitor the programmes implemented in the employment generating policies of the government. Therefore, to satisfy this need, the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) designed a labour force survey on a quarterly basis, to measure the levels and trends of employment, unemployment and labour force in Sri Lanka on a continuous basis. The survey was commenced from the first quarter of 1990 and is being continued by the DCS. In 2018 the survey was conducted from January to December. This bulletin is based on an annual sample of 25,750 housing units covering all districts of the country.

It is observed that the working age household population (age 15 and above) has increased about 0.35 million from 2017 to 2018. Also the labour force survey reported that the labour force participation rate has declined 2.3% from 2017 to 2018 and the employed population has declined about 0.2 million. The employment decline is significant among female compared to male. The estimated unemployment rate is 4.4% and it is a 0.2 percentage point increase compared to 4.2% in 2017. There is a significant increase in inactive population, increase is about 0.53 million. The increase is mainly reported from female, youth (15-24) and elderly (age 60 and above).

### 1. LABOUR FORCE: HIGHLIGHTS - 2018

#### Working Age Population

All persons above specific age limit (15 years and above) of either gender are identified as working age population. This population consists with two groups namely economically active & inactive.

#### Economically Active Population (Labour Force)

The economically active population or the labour force comprises all persons of working age who are either “employed” or “unemployed” during the reference period (The week before the survey period).

**Labour force = Employed + Unemployed**

**Table 1.1: Labour Force participation rate by gender - 2018**

Gender	Economically active population (No.)	Labour Force Participation rate
<b>Total</b>	8,387,759	51.8
Male	5,464,236	73.0
Female	2,923,523	33.6

**Table 1.2: Distribution of economically active / inactive population by gender - 2018**

Gender	Economically active population		Economically inactive population	
	No.	%	No.	%
<b>Total</b>	8,387,759	100.0	7,808,473	100.0
Male	5,464,236	65.1	2,024,084	25.9
Female	2,923,523	34.9	5,784,390	74.1

Reported labour force participation rate is 51.8 in 2018 (Table 1.1). Given the estimated counts in Table 1.2 in 2018, estimated economically active population is around 8.4 million. About 5.5 million (65.1%) of economically active population are males. Economically inactive population accounts for about 7.8 million and of that majority are females (74.1%).

**Table 1.3: Percentage distribution of economically active population by gender & district – 2018**

District	Economically active population (%)		
	Total	Male	Female
<b>Total</b>	100.0	65.1	34.9
Colombo	100.0	66.0	34.0
Gampaha	100.0	68.3	31.7
Kalutara	100.0	65.7	34.3
Kandy	100.0	61.2	38.8
Matale	100.0	61.4	38.6
Nuwara Eliya	100.0	60.1	39.9
Galle	100.0	64.9	35.1
Matara	100.0	63.0	37.0
Hambantota	100.0	67.2	32.8
Jaffna	100.0	71.8	28.2
Mannar	100.0	77.0	23.0
Vavunia	100.0	67.4	32.6
Mullativu	100.0	74.2	25.8
Kilinochchi	100.0	72.5	27.5
Batticaloa	100.0	73.0	27.0
Ampara	100.0	74.7	25.3
Trincomalee	100.0	78.1	21.9
Kurunegala	100.0	62.1	37.9
Puttalam	100.0	64.0	36.0
Anuradhapura	100.0	60.3	39.7
Polonnaruwa	100.0	70.6	29.4
Badulla	100.0	60.5	39.5
Moneragala	100.0	68.2	31.8
Ratnapura	100.0	63.1	36.9
Kegalle	100.0	61.2	38.8

## 2. EMPLOYMENT: HIGHLIGHTS - 2018

**Table 2.1: Employment statistics by gender - 2018**

Employment Statistic	Sri Lanka	Male	Female
Employed population	8,015,166	5,300,310	2,714,855
Labour Force	8,387,759	5,464,236	2,923,523
Employment rate	95.6	97.0	92.9

**Employed:** During the reference period, persons, who worked 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.

**Table 2.2: Percentage distribution of employed population by major industry group, Sector, Province and District - 2018**

Sector/Province	Total	Major Industry Group		
		Agri.	Ind.	Serv.
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	100.0	25.5	27.9	46.6
Urban	100.0	4.4	25.5	70.1
Rural	100.0	28.3	28.5	43.1
Estate	100.0	54.1	26.7	19.2
<b>Province</b>				
Western	100.0	5.7	32.1	62.1
Central	100.0	33.8	25.8	40.4
Southern	100.0	29.2	27.3	43.5
Northern	100.0	28.7	24.2	47.1
Eastern	100.0	27.2	25.1	47.7
North Western	100.0	26.3	32.6	41.0
North Central	100.0	42.9	19.3	37.8
Uva	100.0	52.2	15.3	32.4
Sabaragamuwa	100.0	34.4	31.0	34.6

Agri. - Agriculture sector,

Ind. - Industries sector,

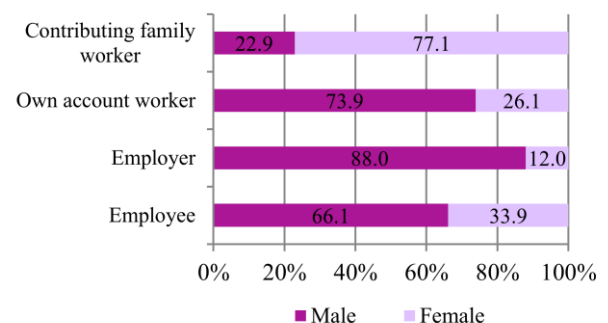
Serv. - Service sector

**Table 2.3: Percentage distribution of employed population by employment status & gender - 2018**

Employment status	Total	Gender	
		Male	Female
<b>Total</b>	100.0	66.1	33.9
Employee	100.0	66.1	33.9
Employer	100.0	88.0	12.0
Own account worker	100.0	73.9	26.1
Contributing family worker	100.0	22.9	77.1

District	Total	Major Industry Group		
		Agri.	Ind.	Serv.
Colombo	100.0	2.7	28.4	69.0
Gampaha	100.0	3.5	35.8	60.7
Kalutara	100.0	15.8	32.9	51.4
Kandy	100.0	20.7	26.8	52.5
Matale	100.0	37.0	25.7	37.3
Nuwara Eliya	100.0	52.4	24.3	23.3
Galle	100.0	27.2	27.7	45.1
Matara	100.0	30.9	25.0	44.1
Hambantota	100.0	30.3	29.7	40.1
Batticaloa	100.0	24.8	24.1	51.1
Ampara	100.0	45.7	18.9	35.4
Trincomalee	100.0	20.3	28.4	51.3
Jaffna	100.0	44.5	21.5	34.0
Mannar	100.0	33.8	24.6	41.6
Vavunia	100.0	28.9	27.2	43.9
Mulativu	100.0	26.3	25.4	48.3
Kilinochchi	100.0	26.3	21.5	52.2
Kurunegala	100.0	24.3	33.7	42.0
Puttalam	100.0	30.7	30.4	38.9
Anuradhapura	100.0	44.6	17.6	37.9
Polonnaruwa	100.0	39.1	23.3	37.6
Badulla	100.0	52.2	15.5	32.3
Monaragala	100.0	52.3	15.1	32.7
Rathnapura	100.0	41.4	26.7	32.0
Kegalle	100.0	24.7	37.1	38.2

**Figure 2.1: Percentage distribution of employment status by gender – 2018**



### 3. UNEMPLOYMENT: HIGHLIGHTS - 2018

**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 said to be unemployed.

**Table 3.1: Unemployment rates by age groups and gender - 2018**

Age group (Years)	Number	Unemployment Rate (%)			
		Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	Gender	
				Male	Female
<b>Total</b>	372,593	4.4	3.0	7.1	
15 - 24	197,448	21.4	16.8	30.0	
25 - 29	84,000	10.4	5.4	19.8	
30 - 39	55,853	3.0	1.4	5.9	
Over 40	35,291	0.7	0.5	1.1	

The unemployed population, reported in 2018 is 372,593. Survey reports that overall unemployment for males and female are 3.0 percent & 7.1 percent respectively. Among all age groups, unemployment rates of females are higher than those of males. Youth unemployment (age 15 – 24 years) rates are the highest for both sexes, compared to other age groups (Table 3.1).

**Table 3.2: Unemployment Rates by level of education & gender – 2018**

Level of Education	Number	Unemployment Rate (%)			
		Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	Gender	
				Male	Female
<b>Total</b>	372,593	4.4	3.0	7.1	
Grade 10 & below	121,871	2.4	2.2	3.1	
G.C.E. (O/L)	79,909	5.2	3.9	8.0	
G.C.E. (A/L) & above	170,813	9.1	5.1	13.2	

According to the Table 3.2, when level of education is considered the highest unemployment rate (9.1%) is reported from the G.C.E. (A/L) & above group. It is 5.1 percent and 13.2 percent for male and female respectively.

Table 3.3 and Table 3.4 show the distribution of unemployment rates by sector, province & district respectively. When the provincial distribution considered the highest unemployment rate is reported from Eastern province (6.0%). Female unemployment rates are higher compared to that of male in all provinces. In Northern & Eastern provinces comparatively very high female unemployment rates are observed. When the district level distribution is considered the highest unemployment is

reported from Mannar District (7.1%) while the lowest rate is reported from Mullativu.

**Table 3.3: Unemployment rates by gender, sector and province - 2018**

Sector / Province	Unemployment rate (%)		
	Total	Male	Female
<b>Sri Lanka</b>	4.4	3.0	7.1
<b>Sector</b>			
Urban	4.1	3.4	5.7
Rural	4.5	2.9	7.5
Estate	4.7	4.0	5.7
<b>Province</b>			
Western	3.1	2.4	4.5
Central	5.4	3.9	7.9
Southern	5.7	3.9	9.1
Northern	5.6	2.7	13.0
Eastern	6.0	4.0	11.8
North Western	3.6	1.7	7.0
North Central	4.5	2.8	7.4
Uva	5.2	3.4	8.3
Sabaragamuwa	4.3	3.4	5.8

**Table 3.4: Unemployment rates by district - 2018**

District	Unemp. rate (%)	District	Unemp. rate (%)
Colombo	3.6	Kilinochchi	3.8
Gampaha	2.5	Batticaloa	6.8
Kalutara	3.2	Ampara	6.1
Kandy	5.9	Trincomalee	4.5
Matale	5.0	Kurunegala	3.5
Nuwara Eliya	5.0	Puttalam	3.9
Galle	5.3	Anuradhapura	4.6
Matara	5.7	Polonnaruwa	4.2
Hambantota	6.6	Badulla	5.4
Jaffna	6.7	Monaragala	4.8
Mannar	7.1	Rathnapura	3.3
Vavunia	4.2	Kegalle	5.6
Mullativu	2.0		

These figures are to be treated with caution, as the corresponding CV (Coefficient of variation) values are high.

## Selected Labour Force Indicators ...

Indicator	Year							
	2011	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
<b>Labour force participation rate</b>								
<b>By Gender</b>								
Total	52.9	52.5	53.7	53.2	53.8	53.8	54.1	51.8
Male	74.0	74.9	74.9	74.6	74.7	75.1	74.5	73.0
Female	34.3	32.9	35.4	34.6	35.9	35.9	36.6	33.6
<b>By residential sector</b>								
Total	52.9	52.5	53.7	53.2	53.8	53.8	54.1	51.8
Urban	47.8	48.3	47.7	48.7	48.6	49.8	50.5	49.6
Rural	53.8	53.4	54.9	54.1	54.8	54.6	54.8	52.3
<b>Unemployment Rate</b>								
<b>By Gender</b>								
Total	4.2	4.0	4.4	4.3	4.7	4.4	4.2	4.4
Male	2.7	2.8	3.2	3.1	3.0	2.9	2.9	3.0
Female	7.1	6.3	6.6	6.5	7.6	7.0	6.5	7.1
<b>By selected age Group (Year)</b>								
20 – 29	12.4	11.3	13.1	13.6	14.2	14.2	13.5	15.0
20 – 24	17.7	16.7	19.3	19.9	19.7	19.9	17.8	20.1
25 – 29	7.7	6.6	7.6	8.2	9.4	9.2	9.5	10.4
<b>By selected educational level</b>								
<b>GCE A/L and above</b>								
Total	9.1	7.6	8.7	8.2	9.2	8.3	8.1	9.1
Male	5.4	4.6	5.7	5.4	4.7	4.7	5.0	5.1
Female	13.2	10.8	11.8	11.1	13.5	11.9	11.3	13.2
<b>Employed population</b>								
<b>By Gender</b>								
Total	7,591,591	7,488,704	7,681,279	7,700,489	7,830,976	7,947,683	8,208,179	8,015,166
Male	5,061,214	5,046,057	5,024,340	5,075,426	5,097,798	5,149,948	5,279,158	5,300,310
Female	2,530,377	2,442,647	2,656,938	2,625,064	2,733,178	2,797,735	2,929,021	2,714,855
<b>By industry (Percentage)</b>								
Total	7,591,591	7,488,704	7,681,279	7,700,489	7,830,976	7,947,683	8,208,179	8,015,166
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agriculture	2,511,266	2,333,342	2,321,215	2,222,859	2,244,547	2,153,874	2,140,185	2,043,698
%	33.1	31.2	30.2	28.9	28.7	27.1	26.1	25.5
Industry	1,819,608	1,940,615	1,996,730	2,027,426	2,018,171	2,097,503	2,331,494	2,239,262
%	24.0	25.9	26.0	26.3	25.8	26.4	28.4	27.9
Services	3,260,717	3,214,746	3,363,334	3,450,205	3,568,259	3,696,306	3,736,500	3,732,206
%	43.0	42.9	43.8	44.8	45.6	46.5	45.5	46.6
<b>By no. of hours worked per week (percentage)</b>								
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
0 <sup>#</sup>	5.2	4.5	5.2	5.2	5.5	4.4	4.7	5.6
1 – 9	1.7	1.1	1.8	1.3	1.7	1.5	1.7	1.7
10 – 39	29.9	26.1	27.5	27.6	27.2	26.2	26.1	25.7
40 & above	63.2	68.3	65.5	65.9	65.7	67.9	67.5	66.9

# Has a job but not at work during the reference week

Note : Age 15 years and over population is considered as working age population

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