
Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey Annual Bulletin 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 labour indicators in Sri Lanka. The survey was initiated in the first quarter of 1990 and is continued quarterly based on international standards recommended by the International Labour Organization (ILO)

The Survey used 25,750 sampled housing units across the country, based on districts and residential sectors. Accordingly, this Survey did not cover the collective residents and institutionalized population.

This bulletin contains labour force, employment and unemployment statistics based on the data collected from January to December 2023.

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- ☐ Labour force participation rate is 48.6% for the year 2023
 - ☐ Unemployment rate for the Survey period is 4.7%
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Content

Labour Force (Page 1)

Employment (Page 2)

Unemployment (Page 3)

Selected Labour Force Indicators (Page 4)

Source Publication

<http://www.statistics.gov.lk/LabourForce/StaticInformation/Bulletins/SriLankaLabourForceSurveyAnnualBulletin-2023>

Labour Force

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

Labour Force Participation Rate (LFPR)

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

Table 1.1: Labour force participation rate by gender – 2023

Gender	Economically active population (No.)	Labour force participation rate
Total	8,408,331	48.6
Male	5,503,595	68.6
Female	2,904,736	31.3

Table 1.2: Distribution of economically active/ inactive population by gender – 2023

Gender	Economically active population		Economically inactive population	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total	8,408,331	100.0	8,898,161	100.0
Male	5,503,595	65.5	2,521,164	28.3
Female	2,904,736	34.5	6,376,997	71.7

Reported labour force participation rate is 48.6 in 2023 (Table 1.1). Given the estimated counts in Table 1.2 estimated economically active population is around 8.4 million. About 5.5 million (65.5%) of economically active population are males. Economically inactive population accounts for about 8.9 million and of that majority are females (71.7%).

Table 1.3: Percentage distribution of economically active population by gender and district – 2023

District	Economically active population (%)		
	Total	Male	Female
Total	100.0	65.5	34.5
Colombo	100.0	64.2	35.8
Gampaha	100.0	67.0	33.0
Kalutara	100.0	63.9	36.1
Kandy	100.0	63.1	36.9
Matale	100.0	63.4	36.6
Nuwara Eliya	100.0	60.1	39.9
Galle	100.0	64.0	36.0
Matara	100.0	69.5	30.5
Hambantota	100.0	65.8	34.2
Jaffna	100.0	71.9	28.1
Mannar	100.0	70.1	29.9
Vavuniya	100.0	62.7	37.3
Mullaitivu	100.0	70.5	29.5
Kilinochchi	100.0	72.2	27.8
Batticaloa	100.0	71.3	28.7
Ampara	100.0	77.9	22.1
Trincomalee	100.0	74.8	25.2
Kurunegala	100.0	62.9	37.1
Puttalam	100.0	66.9	33.1
Anuradhapura	100.0	64.5	35.5
Polonnaruwa	100.0	73.3	26.7
Badulla	100.0	61.1	38.9
Monaragala	100.0	68.2	31.8
Rathnapura	100.0	65.2	34.8
Kegalle	100.0	60.3	39.7

As shown in Table 1.3 percentage of female economically active population is lower than that of males in every district. The highest percentage of female economically active population is reported from Nuwara Eliya (39.9%) while the lowest reported from Ampara (22.1%).

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.

Reference Period:

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

Employment Rate

The proportion of employed population to the total labour force.

Table 2.1: Employment statistics by gender – 2023

Employment Statistic	Sri Lanka	Male	Female
Employed population	8,009,916	5,307,563	2,702,354
Labour Force	8,408,331	5,503,595	2,904,736
Employment rate	95.3	96.4	93.0

Table 2.3: Percentage distribution of employed population by employment status and gender – 2023

Employment status	Total	Gender	
		Male	Female
Total	100.0	66.3	33.7
Employee	100.0	64.7	35.3
Employer	100.0	88.2	11.8
Own account worker	100.0	74.3	25.7
Contributing family worker	100.0	25.5	74.5

Figure 2.1 Percentage distribution of employment status - 2023

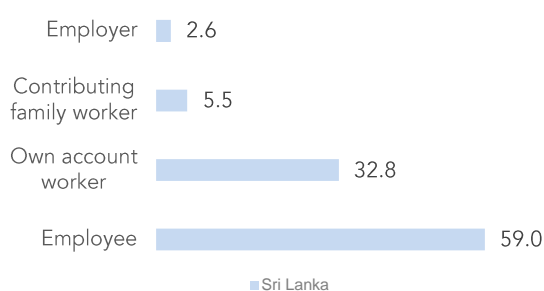


Table 2.2: Percentage distribution of employed population by major industry group Sector, province and District - 2023

Sector/province	Total	Major industry group		
		Agri.	Ind.	Ser.
Sri Lanka	100.0	26.1	25.5	48.4
Sector				
Urban	100.0	3.9	24.9	71.2
Rural	100.0	28.7	26.1	45.2
Estate	100.0	60.4	17.4	22.2
Province				
Western	100.0	5.3	31.3	63.4
Central	100.0	31.6	21.9	46.5
Southern	100.0	31.4	23.5	45.0
Northern	100.0	30.9	20.4	48.7
Eastern	100.0	31.5	22.5	46.0
North Western	100.0	27.7	28.0	44.3
North Central	100.0	47.6	16.2	36.1
Uva	100.0	52.7	13.4	33.9
Sabaragamuwa	100.0	33.4	30.8	35.8
District				
Colombo	100.0	2.0	26.6	71.4
Gampaha	100.0	4.3	34.8	60.9
Kalutara	100.0	13.8	33.8	52.4
Kandy	100.0	20.1	26.3	53.5
Matale	100.0	21.1	24.0	54.9
Nuwara Eliya	100.0	58.1	13.0	28.9
Galle	100.0	26.1	25.6	48.4
Matara	100.0	33.1	23.6	43.3
Hambantota	100.0	38.5	20.2	41.4
Batticaloa	100.0	21.6	19.8	58.6
Ampara	100.0	53.0	12.2	34.8
Trincomalee	100.0	32.6	24.4	43.0
Jaffna	100.0	45.5	18.6	35.8
Mannar	100.0	33.7	27.0	39.3
Vavuniya	100.0	30.7	23.6	45.7
Mullaitivu	100.0	31.6	22.2	46.2
Kilinochchi	100.0	32.3	21.5	46.1
Kurunegala	100.0	28.1	28.3	43.6
Puttalam	100.0	26.9	27.4	45.7
Anuradhapura	100.0	48.7	15.6	35.7
Polonnaruwa	100.0	45.2	17.7	37.1
Badulla	100.0	52.3	12.6	35.1
Monaragala	100.0	53.4	14.8	31.8
Rathnapura	100.0	41.6	29.2	29.2
Kegalle	100.0	21.3	33.1	45.6

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.

Table 3.1: Unemployment rates by age groups and gender – 2023

Age group (Years)	Sri Lanka		Gender	
	No.	(%)	Male	Female
Total	398,415	4.7	3.6	7.0
15 – 24	181,027	23.0	19.4	29.5
25 – 29	100,763	13.0	8.7	20.4
30 – 39	56,381	3.3	2.2	5.4
Over 40	60,244	1.2	0.9	1.7

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 and gender – 2023

Level of Education	Sri Lanka		Gender	
	No.	(%)	Male	Female
Total	398,415	4.7	3.6	7.0
Below G.C.E. (O/L)	130,910	2.8	2.5	3.7
G.C.E. (O/L)	93,969	6.0	4.6	8.9
G.C.E. (A/L) & Above	173,535	8.0	5.8	10.2

According to the Table 3.2, when level of education is considered the highest unemployment rate (8.0%) is reported from the G.C.E. (A/L) & above group. It is 5.8 percent and 10.2 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 Uva province (6.6%). Female unemployment rates are higher compared to that of male in all provinces. In Southern & Eastern provinces comparatively very high female unemployment rates are observed. When the district level distribution is considered the highest unemployment is reported from Badulla District (8.0%) while the lowest rate is reported from Mannar.

Table 3.3: Unemployment rates by gender and province – 2023

Sector/ province	Unemployment rate (%)		
	Total	Male	Female
Sri Lanka	4.7	3.6	7.0
Sector			
Urban	4.6	3.1	7.4
Rural	4.8	3.6	7.0
Estate	4.9	5.0	4.8*
Province			
Western	4.3	3.2	6.5
Central	5.4	4.3	7.2
Southern	6.5	4.4	10.6
Northern	3.4	2.3	5.9
Eastern	4.0	2.2	9.2
North Western	3.4	2.9	4.4
North Central	4.8	3.3	7.8
Uva	6.6	5.5	8.4
Sabaragamuwa	4.4	3.9	5.3

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

Table 3.4 Unemployment rates by district – 2022

District	Unemployment rate (%)	District	Unemployment rate (%)
Colombo	3.7	Kilinochchi	3.9*
Gampaha	4.0	Batticaloa	6.1
Kalutara	6.3	Ampara	3.1*
Kandy	7.4	Trincomalee	2.5*
Matale	3.5	Kurunegala	3.4
Nuwara Eliya	2.9*	Puttalam	3.5
Galle	6.2	Anuradhapura	5.2
Matara	6.1	Polonnaruwa	3.9*
Hambantota	7.3	Badulla	8.0
Jaffna	4.0	Monaragala	4.0
Mannar	2.1*	Rathnapura	3.9
Vavuniya	3.0*	Kegalle	5.2
Mullaitivu	2.2*		

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

Selected Labour Force Indicators

Indicator	Year							
	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Labour force participation rate								
by gender								
Total	53.8	54.1	51.8	52.3	50.6	49.9	49.8	48.6
Male	75.1	74.5	73.0	73.0	71.9	71.0	70.5	68.6
Female	35.9	33.6	33.6	34.5	32.0	31.8	32.1	31.3
by residential sector								
Total	53.8	54.1	51.8	52.3	50.6	49.9	49.8	48.6
Urban	49.8	50.5	49.6	50.2	47.0	46.9	47.2	46.0
Rural	54.6	54.8	52.3	52.7	51.3	50.5	50.3	49.1
Unemployment Rate								
by gender								
Total	4.4	4.2	4.4	4.8	5.5	5.1	4.7	4.7
Male	2.9	2.9	3.0	3.3	4.0	3.7	3.7	3.6
Female	7.0	6.5	7.1	7.4	8.5	7.9	6.5	7.0
by selected age group (year)								
20-29	14.2	13.5	15.0	15.3	18.1	18.3	16.2	17.0
20-24	19.9	17.8	20.1	20.3	25.2	26.8	21.8	21.6
25-29	9.2	9.5	10.4	11.0	12.0	11.4	11.7	13.0
by selected educational level								
GCE A/L and above								
Total	8.3	8.1	9.1	8.5	9.8	9.1	7.8	8.0
Male	4.7	5.0	5.1	5.0	6.2	6.2	5.5	5.8
Female	11.9	11.3	13.2	11.9	13.6	12.2	10.1	10.2
Employed population								
by gender								
Total	7,947,683	8,208,179	8,015,166	8,180,693	7,999,093	8,113,507	8,147,731	8,009,916
Male	5,149,948	5,279,158	5,300,310	5,368,896	5,372,947	5,414,280	5,373,965	5,307,563
Female	2,797,735	2,929,021	2,714,855	2,811,796	2,626,146	2,699,228	2,773,766	2,702,354
by industry (percentage)								
Total	7,947,683	8,208,179	8,015,166	8,180,693	7,999,093	8,113,507	8,147,731	8,009,916
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agriculture	2,153,874	2,140,185	2,043,698	2,071,940	2,169,679	2,213,015	2,158,559	2,088,344
%	27.1	26.1	25.5	25.3	27.1	27.3	26.5	26.1
Industry	2,097,503	2,331,494	2,239,262	2,258,421	2,152,746	2,109,482	2,158,199	2,043,154
%	26.4	28.4	27.9	27.6	26.9	26.0	26.5	25.5
Service	3,696,306	3,736,500	3,732,206	3,850,332	3,676,668	3,791,011	3,830,973	3,878,418
%	46.5	45.5	46.6	47.1	46.0	46.7	47.0	48.4
by no. of hours per week (percentage)								
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
* 0	4.4	4.7	5.6	6.4	14.6	9.6	5.8	4.2
1-9	1.5	1.7	1.7	1.7	2.1	2.0	2.1	2.4
10-39	26.2	26.1	25.7	26.8	27.1	29.6	31.9	31.2
40 & above	67.9	67.5	66.9	65.1	56.2	58.7	60.3	62.1

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


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

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