Press Release

Census of Population and Housing 2024 - Final Report

Department of Census & Statistics
Ministry of Finance, Planing and Economic Development

Census of Population and Housing – Key Findings, 2024

The 15th Census of Population and Housing of Sri Lanka was successfully conducted in 2024 and was conducted under the legal authority of the Census Ordinance. 2024 census represents a historic milestone as the first census to have used Information and Communication Technology fully for a national-scale data collection. The Census was carried out under the technical guidance of the Department of Census and Statistics and the direction of the District Administration, with participation from a wide range of government officials and other indivuduals who are specially trained for census data collection. The census enumerated all individuals within the country based on their place of usual residence and also collected comprehensive information on housing characteristics. The census moment was defined as 00:00 hours on 19 December 2024.

Population Overview – In 2024, Sri Lanka is undergoing a demographic shift, characterized by a decline in the child population and an increase in the elderly population compared to 2012.

The total population of Sri Lanka is reported as 21,781,800, with a national population density of 350 persons per square kilometer. The Western Province remains the most populous, containing 28.1 percent of the total population. Gampaha reported as the district with the highest population (2,436,142), while Mullaitivu district reported as the least populous district (122,619).

- Aging Index: This shows how many elders are there for 100 children aged 0-14. The index has reached 87, meaning there are 87 elderly persons (60+) for every 100 children (0-14).
- Elderly Population: Individuals aged 60 and over now make up 18.0% of the population, while the child cohort has contracted to 20.7%.
- Median Age: The median age has risen to 35 years, a five-year increase compared to the 2012 census.
- The national sex ratio is 93.3 males per 100 females, which has gone down from 93.8 in 2012.

Marital and Fertility Data - Delayed marriage, lower fertility, and rising widowhood indicate demographic transition.

- Among the population, 41.8 percent have never married, compared to 30 percent in 2012.
- The Singulate Mean Age at Marriage is 29.2 years for males (27.2 in 2012) and 25.6 years for females (23.4 in 2012).
- Widowhood among persons aged 65 and above is 44.2 percent for females (38.4% in 2012) and 10.5 percent for males (8.6% in 2012).
- The Total Fertility Rate (i.e. average number of live births a female aged 15-49 years would have by the age of 49) is 1.3, and the Total Marital Fertility Rate is 2.7.
- The working-age population (15–59 years) constitutes 61.3 percent of the total, with a child dependency ratio of 33.7 and an old-age dependency ratio of 29.4.

Ethnicity and Religion

- The Sinhalese constitute the largest ethnic group, numbering 16,144,037 and accounting for 74.12 percent of the population.
- Sri Lankan Tamils number 2,681,627 (12.31%), while Sri Lanka Moors/Muslims account for 2,283,246 persons (10.47%).
- The Indian Tamil (Malaiyaga Thamilar) population is reported at 600,360 (2.76%).

- Other ethnic groups include Burghers (31,721; 0.15%), Malays (26,650; 0.12%), Sri Lanka Chetty (2,443; 0.01%), Bharatha (1,183; 0.01%), and Veddas (1,373; 0.01%). The population classified under "Other" ethnic groups accounts for 9,160 persons (0.04%).
- At the provincial level, the Sinhalese population records the highest proportions in the Southern (94.8%), North Central (90.5%), Sabaragamuwa (86.5%), North Western (84.8%), and Western provinces (83.6%). The Northern Province is predominantly inhabited by Sri Lankan Tamils (91.5%), while the Eastern Province reports the highest proportion of Sri Lanka Moors/Muslims (39.5%). The Indian Tamil population is mainly concentrated in the Central Province (15%).
- In terms of religion, Buddhists account for 69.8 percent of the population, followed by Hindus (12.6%), Muslims (10.7%), Roman Catholics (5.6%) and other Christian denominations (1.3%). The proportion reported under other religions remains minimal.

Education and Literacy - Educational attainment and literacy have improved since 2012. Female participation in higher education has increased. Digital literacy is rising, especially among youth.

- The highest percentage of the population aged 25 years and over (58.4%) has attained a secondary level of education, and this trend is consistent across both sexes. Furthermore, at the tertiary education level, the proportion of females exceeds that of males.
- Compared with the data from 2012 Census of Population and Housing, there is a significant decline in the proportion of individuals who reported no schooling or only primary education as their highest education qualification. ~~by 2024.~~
- Among aged 25 years and above, 6,690,333 individuals (48.2%) had attained G.C.E. (O/L) or higher qualifications in 2024, compared to 4,498,135 individuals (37.3%) in 2012.
- The proportion of the population reporting tertiary education as their highest qualification has increased from 18.2% in 2012 to 26.2% in 2024, with a more pronounced increase observed among females than males.
- Overall, compared to the 2012 Census, the proportion of the population with higher educational qualifications has increased in 2024, with relatively higher gains observed among females.
- Computer literacy among those aged five years and over was 34.7%, while digital literacy was 67.6%. The 20–24 age group had the highest computer literacy, and the 15–19 age group led in digital literacy, with over 15% of those aged 70 and above digitally literate.

Housing and Living Conditions - Housing quality, sanitation, and technology access have improved since 2012. Access to electricity and gas increased; reliance on kerosene/firewood has decreased.

- A total of 6,030,541 occupied housing units were reported in 2024, compared to 5,207,740 in 2012. Shows an increase of 822,801 housing units.
- The rural sector accounts for the largest share, followed by the urban and estate sectors.
- Gampaha District reports the highest number of occupied housing units, while Mannar records the lowest.
- The majority of housing units are single houses, with 82.2 percent being single-story. Most housing units (84.6%) are owned by household members.
- A critical demographic finding is the prevalence of Single-Person Households, which account for 10.5 percent of the total. Within this category, 640,704 households consist of individuals living alone; notably, 370,229 of these are aged 60 and over and of them majority are females (71.3%).
- In terms of basic facilities, 92.2 percent of households have access to drinking water within the housing unit or premises. Electricity from the national grid is used by 98.0 percent of households, increasing from 87.0 percent in 2012, while kerosene use has declined to 1.6 percent. For cooking, 55.4 percent of households use firewood and 42.4 percent use gas.
- Sanitation facilities are available within the housing unit for 62 percent of households, and 99.6 percent use water-sealed toilets. Mobile phone usage is reported at 93.8 percent.

Health and Disability - Health challenges, especially NCDs, remain significant.

- Functional difficulties are reported by 3,223,413 individuals, equating to 35 persons per 1,000.
- According to data for 2024, 19.2 percent of the population (4.18 million people) are reported to be suffering from non-communicable diseases (NCDs).
- Based on self-reported information, the highest prevalence rates are observed for High blood pressure (10.1%) and Diabetes (8.5%).

- These conditions mainly reported from females and older individuals, with more than half of the population aged 60 years and over affected by at least one chronic disease.
- As the level of education increases, the risk of experiencing non-communicable diseases gradually decreases. This indicates the existence of a significant "health literacy gap."

Migration

- Lifetime migrants account for 13 percent of the population. Gampaha (+357,528) and Colombo (+191,524) record the highest net lifetime in-migration, with Gampaha emerging as the main destination.
- Districts such as Kandy, Matara, Nuwara Eliya, and Galle show the highest net lifetime out-migration, while Kurunegala remains nearly balanced. Northern districts including Vavuniya, Kilinochchi, and Mullaitivu indicate positive lifetime migration patterns.
- When migration from previous district of residence is considerd Gampaha and Colombo each report over 0.5 million in-migrants, while Colombo also records high out-migration. Mullaitivu shows the lowest out-migration and Batticaloa the lowest in-migration. The number of persons belonging to households who are temporarily residing abroad is 672,249. Of this group, the majority (61.3%) are males.

Labor Force and Employment - Male participation dominates, female labour force participation remains low. Employment increased since 2012; youth unemployment remains a concern.

- The labour force participation rate (LFPR) in Sri Lanka is 47.3 percent, with a significantly higher rate for males (67.4%) compared to females (28.9%). Males account for 68.0 percent of the economically active population, while females represent 70.6 percent of the economically inactive population.
- A total of 7.67 million persons are employed, of whom 69.3 percent are males.
- The unemployment rate stands at 6 percent, with the highest unemployment observed among the 20–24 age group.
- The economically inactive population accounts for 52 percent of the working-age population, mainly due to household responsibilities, education, and old age. The labor force participation rate is 47.3 percent, with an employment rate of 94 percent and an unemployment rate of 6 percent.

Accordingly, the Census of Population and Housing 2024 offers a comprehensive overview of Sri Lanka's demographic, social, and housing characteristics. The data collected will serve as a vital foundation for informed planning, policy formulation, and the implementation of development programmes across the country.

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Director General
10 April 2026

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"To be the leader in the region in producing timely statistical information to achieve the country's development goals."

The Mission of DCS

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