



## Mapping of Data on Human Trafficking in Sri Lanka

The Asia Foundation, in partnership with the Nielsen Company and the Women and Media Collective have initiated a project to build an effective trafficking-in-persons (TIP) data collection and reporting system in Sri Lanka. Assessments were conducted with the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force (NAHTTF) to understand the government mechanism of data collection and sharing. Along with a survey of Civil Society Organizations working on the prevention of TIP, the promotion of safe labor migration and on responding to rights abuses and citizen grievances. The findings will guide the development of a new or enhanced data collection and reporting system.

**Civil Society Organizations (CSOs)** in Sri Lanka work mostly at the community level but also at district and national levels and focus on addressing a range of social and economic issues in the country. CSOs, therefore, refer to a wide array of organizations: community groups, non-governmental organizations (NGOs), labor unions, indigenous groups, charitable organizations, faith-based organizations, professional associations, and foundations.



51 Civil Society Organizations were surveyed from all 24 districts.

These organizations were selected primarily for their work in overseas labor migration. Of the organizations surveyed, 46 (90%) work at grassroot level on labor migration

### Key Findings:

- 41 (80%) of CSOs report that organizations have a good rapport with government authorities and work closely with government officials within their projects. They provide support in conducting trainings for government officers at Divisional Secretariat level on issues such as human rights, gender-based violence, and training for Para Legal Assistants.
- 39% state that they have been working for 10-20 years on safe labor migration and have remained sustainable because people have confidence about approaching the CSOs with their issues. CSOs are easily accessible with regard to assistance for needs of the community.
- Evidence is not needed to lodge a complaint with a CSO. When a complaint is lodged, the issue and possible redressal mechanisms will be discussed, and the CSO advises on specific procedures that may need to be followed. In contrast, government officials require evidence regarding the complaint before accepting the responsibility to record it.
- Although Safe Labor Migration awareness trainings are done by many stakeholders, trafficking is a topic that is not emphasized upon. The everyday use of the word 'trafficking' in Sinhala and Tamil is very minimal.
- 47 (92%) organizations report that they have come across migrant workers who may have been trafficked.
- CSOs reportedly receive complaints from family members regarding migrant workers and occasionally from the migrant workers themselves; the CSOs submit these complaints to the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE). The onus of determining what needs to be done falls on the CSO however, since the CSOs are also unaware of the complaint mechanism in place for human trafficking, they direct the complaints to the SLBFE.
- CSOs find the process of follow up to be tedious; it is imperative that the victims and the family be contacted and visited regularly. For some CSOs, the lack of funds to allocate for follow up of complaints, lack of knowledge of the systems in place to refer complaints to; or not knowing which stage of the migration process to categorize the complaint under, were noted as challenges.
- All surveyed organizations believe that the community is oblivious to the fact that trafficking takes place in the country and therefore do not know what trafficking is. When the victims are unaware that they are being trafficked, they suffer in silence; they are often ashamed to complain as they blame themselves.
- CSOs report that people are trafficked in many ways; Migrant workers are at risk of being trafficked as overseas employment migration takes place on a large scale. Migration also takes place internally on promises of legal and safe employment in the country. However, such employment can end up in unsafe/exploitative working conditions or in sex work.

**What CSOs do:** It was found that 90% of the organizations conduct awareness programs, referrals and counseling:



### **Awareness, training and capacity building programs**

- Awareness on safe migration
- Livelihood support programmes
- Reintegration of returnee migrants: counseling for reintegration
- Work placements
- Small enterprise development
- Organic food production
- Disaster management
- Financial literacy
- Assistance for returnees to obtain the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) certificate from NAITA



### **Referral:**

80% of the organizations direct complaints received to the SLBFE and the Police.

The SLBFE mainly deals with complaints at the in-service stage (no communication, breach of contract and wages not paid, top the list of complaints). If it is a labor migration case, the CSOs direct it to the SLBFE while all other cases and pre-departure complaints are directed to the Police



### **Protection services:**

Safe houses : Sisters of the Good Shepherd run a registered safe house based in Colombo for migrant women. Many women who seek shelter are pregnant or have been physically abused while working overseas.

Praja Diriya Padanama provides protection for returnee migrant women who face abuse. This is not registered as a safe house but the Police direct victims such as sex workers to the organization.

## **Recommendations:**

- Review of Standard Operating Procedures to clearly define the role of CSOs and the services that they can provide, and setting up guidelines to monitor their progress by the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force.
- Inclusion of services provided by CSOs on National reporting would expand Sri Lanka's provision of protection services for potential victims of trafficking. As mentioned in the Standard Operating Procedures, the CSOs are important for the Identification, Protection and Referral of Victims of Human Trafficking. Determining whether the victims identified by the CSOs are actually victims of human trafficking or other forms of exploitation is not part of their role, as investigations on human trafficking are carried out by the Criminal Investigation Department (CID).
- The CSOs carry out the pivotal role of providing protection services to potential victims of human trafficking, such as support in provision of basic needs, counselling, shelter, or referral to medical services. Therefore, mechanisms should be in place to capture the depth of work carried out by CSOs which is victim centered and which would enhance National level reporting on Trafficking in Persons.
- CSOs maintain close links with the government authorities at divisional level and they provide much needed training and support to government officers. Provision of protection services can be improved if there could be a mechanism for officers at divisional level and the CSOs to work together on identifying and referring potential incidents of trafficking. Most officers working at grassroot level are part of the institutions/ ministries that are represented in the National Anti-Human Trafficking Task Force.
- Once a comprehensive training package is delivered to the CSOs on identifying TIP cases, a process should be created where the CSOs can report potential TIP cases to the NAHTTF which would enable the CID to conduct investigations on the complaints. It will help CSOs to identify potential cases and be involved with protection services and referral.