



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

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13 December 2005

### LKA100504.E

Sri Lanka: The situation of the elderly, including elderly Tamils and those who have been displaced; the social services available to the elderly (2002 - 2005)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board of Canada, Ottawa

Information found by the Research Directorate among the sources consulted on the situation of the elderly in Sri Lanka does not distinguish between those who are Tamils and those of other ethnic groups.

### General Information

The 2001 national census found that roughly 9.2 per cent of Sri Lanka's population was made up of persons aged 60 years and older, or the elderly (*Daily News* 27 Oct. 2005). According to the findings of a research project on the elderly in Sri Lanka that was published by the Overseas Development Institute (ODI) in the United Kingdom (UK) in April 2004, Sri Lanka's population aged 60 years and older will increase to 18 per cent by 2020 and to 27 per cent by 2040 (Apr. 2004, 4). The ODI indicates that by 2025, Sri Lanka will have "the third oldest population in Asia and the largest share of elderly in the world relative to its income status" (Apr. 2004, 3). The ODI study found that the incidence of poverty among the elderly in Sri Lanka is less than the national average, but that this is largely because "[t]he elderly predominantly reside in multiple-person households, with multiple income sources, and many remain economically active in later life" (ODI Apr. 2004, 43). About 30 per cent of retirement income for the elderly comes from transfers from the extended family, a network which the ODI assesses is undergoing important changes and will weaken as an informal source of social support for the elderly (*ibid.*, 17).

Information presented during an address at the Second World Assembly on Ageing describing the situation of the elderly in Sri Lanka in 2002, indicated that the majority of Sri Lanka's elderly lived in rural settings where the extended family was the main source of support (Sri Lanka 11 Apr. 2002). In contrast to the situation of the elderly living in rural areas, most of the elderly in urban areas lived alone and "face[d] loneliness and other accompanying problems stemming from insufficient family incomes coupled with a high cost of living" (*ibid.*). This situation was aggravated by the loss of traditional caregivers to domestic and international migration of young people (*ibid.*).

A paper prepared in 2003 by the South Asian Network of Economic Research Institutes provided the following figures on sources of economic support for the elderly in Sri Lanka in 2001: 5.7 per cent of it came from ongoing gainful

employment, 34 per cent from pension, and 39.3 per cent from support from one's children (Jan. 2003, 28).

## **Pension Schemes**

The findings of the ODI research project indicate that "there is no ... universal state pension available to the elderly in Sri Lanka and 72% of the working age population (predominant[ly] informal sector workers and those outside the labour force) are not covered by formal retirement savings schemes" (ODI Apr. 2004, 17). The ODI explained that formal pension schemes in Sri Lanka consist of "fully-funded and pay-as-you-go (PAYGO) schemes covering both formal and informal sector workers" (ibid., 45). Sri Lanka's retirement system included the following pension schemes:

- 1 - Employees' Provident Fund;
- 2 - Public Service Pension Scheme;
- 3 - Farmers', Fishermen and Self-Employed Scheme;
- 4 - Approved Private Provident Fund (ibid., 47-48).

According to the ODI, most pension schemes available to workers do not provide adequate income to retirees (ibid., 50) for a number of reasons including "insufficient nominal contributions related to low income [and] insufficient years of contributions" (ibid.). The majority of those without pension coverage "are outside the labour force and many of them do not have the ability or the means to contribute" to a formal scheme, while others have incomes which are too low or irregular to permit them to contribute regularly despite being eligible for coverage (ibid., 57-58). Low and irregular income earners include farmers, fishermen and the self-employed (ibid., 58).

In 1996, the Ministry of Social Welfare introduced a social security and pension scheme that provides a pension for "poor elderly persons who have contributed towards the development of the country" and who had been employed in the informal sector (Sri Lanka 11 Apr. 2002). However, the ODI reported that because of financial difficulties, the Ministry of Social Welfare was distributing only a small amount of income to a small proportion of the elderly poor (ODI Apr. 2004, 29). Government contributions to the elderly, whether in the form of pensions or social assistance, constituted about five per cent of total income for the elderly (ibid.). According to the 2003 report by the South Asian Network of Economic Research Institutes, there were some 371,722 government pensioners in Sri Lanka in 2000 - 2001 (Jan. 2003, 36).

In its annual budget for 2004, the government of Sri Lanka allocated a 10 per cent increase in pensions beginning 1 January 2004 (*Daily News* 24 Nov. 2003). It also established a Pension Reforms Office to "study and coordinate a pension reform process" (ibid.). Information on the implementation of pension reforms could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

## **Government Policy and Initiatives**

In a statement made at the Second World Assembly on Ageing in April 2002, the head of the delegation for the government of Sri Lanka pointed out that *Act No. 9 of 2000 for the Protection of Rights of the Elders* had been enacted with provisions for the following:

- Establishment of the National Council for Elders.
- Protection of the rights of elders.
- Registration of persons and organizations providing services to elders.
- Establishment of a national fund for the welfare of elders.
- Appointment of boards to inquire into complaints of elders and determine claims for their maintenance and other miscellaneous matters relating to their problems (Sri Lanka 11 Apr. 2002).

The act also provided that the elderly could pursue legal action if their rights were "not secured" (*ibid.*).

In a *Daily News* feature article, Manel Abeysekera with the non-governmental organization NGO Forum on Ageing (NFOA) explained that in September 2004 the National Council for Elders completed a draft "Charter for Elders" as well as a draft national policy for elders (27 Oct. 2005). The national policy set out priority areas such as improving the health and well-being of the elderly and providing the latter with a supportive network (*Daily News* 27 Oct. 2005). By October 2005, the national policy on ageing had yet to be implemented by the government (*ibid.*). The NFOA is, according to the *Daily News*, a grouping of organizations interested in the welfare of the elderly and is registered with the Ministry of Social Services (23 Sept. 2005). Its activities include raising awareness among the elderly about obtaining senior citizenship identity cards, lobbying the private sector for better rates on food and medication for the elderly and providing skills training to caregivers of the elderly (*Daily News* 23 Sept. 2005).

At the Second World Assembly on Ageing, the Sri Lankan government stated that it had introduced special identity cards for persons over the age of 65 years, which entitled them to receive priority treatment when accessing services of government departments, hospitals, banks, and other organizations (Sri Lanka 11 Apr. 2002; *Daily News* 11 Feb. 2002). However, in February 2002 *Daily News* reported that previously, cards under this scheme were issued to persons above the age of 70, but the age limit had been lowered to 60 (*ibid.*). *Daily News* also reported that the Department of Social Services was issuing 25,000 special identity cards for elders in addition to the 100,000 cards already distributed (*ibid.*).

According to the Sri Lankan delegate at the Second World Assembly on Ageing, the Ministry of Social Welfare had established day care centres in rural and urban centres for elders who do not live with family members (Sri Lanka 11 Apr. 2002). Additionally, the Ministry together with HelpAge Sri Lanka established a training program for home nurses (*ibid.*; HelpAge n.d.). In October 2002, it was estimated that 0.4 per cent of the population (or 5,000 persons) lived in homes for the elderly (*The Island* 1 Oct. 2002). A December 2002 *Daily News* article stated that the Sri Lankan Social Services Ministry operated over 600 care

facilities for the elderly (11 Dec. 2002). In attempting to address allegations of abuse in these homes, the Ministry introduced a new system of standards, which included the provision of certain facilities in the homes, verifying the professional qualifications of staff, and maintaining the residents' records (*Daily News* 11 Dec. 2002).

A collaborative project launched by the Ministry of Health and Social Services and HelpAge Sri Lanka in June 2002 also sought to improve the quality of life for elderly people living with families whose income was at or below the poverty line (*The Island* 1 Oct. 2002). The project, which was named the Voluntary Home Care Service, was initiated in Balangoda, Imbulpe, Opanayake and Embilipitiya, and provided free service to those unable to pay for basic care (*ibid.*). Information on the current status of this project could not be found by the Research Directorate among the sources consulted.

### **Displaced Elderly**

The elderly have been identified as a "vulnerable" group within the internally displaced population of Sri Lanka (The Refugee Council Sept. 2003, 26; NRC 1 Sept. 2005, 82). According to the United Kingdom-based Refugee Council, the elderly are among those who are "unable to work or cannot find suitable employment" and are therefore dependent on dry food rations provided by the World Food Programme or the government (Sept. 2003, 26). According to the Council, "IDPs [internally displaced persons] are not provided cash and are unable to purchase other basic necessities" (*ibid.*).

The 26 December 2004 tsunami left many elderly persons internally displaced, and according to a news article by *The Christian Science Monitor*, senior survivors and their needs are being ignored (12 Jan. 2005).

Additional information on the situation of internally displaced elderly persons in Sri Lanka could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

This Response was prepared after researching publicly accessible information currently available to the Research Directorate within time constraints. This Response is not, and does not purport to be, conclusive as to the merit of any particular claim for refugee protection. Please find below the list of additional sources consulted in researching this Information Request.

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#### Additional Sources Consulted

The High Commission of Sri Lanka, in Ottawa, did not respond to a letter requesting information within the time constraints of this Response.

**Internet sources, including:** Amnesty International (AI), *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2004*, European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), *Freedom in the World 2005*, HelpAge Sri Lanka, Human Rights

Commission of Sri Lanka, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka, Integrated Regional Information Networks (IRIN), Official Website of the Government of Sri Lanka, Social Security Administration (United States), South Asia Analysis Group, World News Connection.

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