



## RESPONSES TO INFORMATION REQUESTS (RIRs)

[New Search](#) | [About RIRs](#) | [Help](#)

10 December 2004

### LKA43213.E

Sri Lanka: Social services and support available in Colombo to displaced elderly Tamils and abused women (January 2003 - December 2004)  
Research Directorate, Immigration and Refugee Board, Ottawa

#### Displaced Elderly Tamils

References to displaced elderly Tamils in Colombo could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate. However, the following general information on social services and support available to senior citizens in Sri Lanka is relevant.

In an address to the Second World Assembly on Ageing that was held in Madrid, Spain, in April 2002, the head of the Sri Lankan delegation noted that since the first World Assembly on Ageing held in Vienna, Austria, in 1982, Sri Lanka had implemented a program that included "a number of far reaching measures for the welfare of elderly people" (Sri Lanka 11 Apr. 2002). These measures included

1. the establishment of the National Committee on Ageing which operates under the Ministry of Social Welfare and provides assistance in the development of policy, planning and program implementation concerned with the welfare of the elderly (ibid.);
2. the adoption of the National Policy on Ageing which provides "leadership and policy initiatives to create a healthy environment for older persons" (ibid);
3. the enactment of Act No. 9 of 2000 for the Protection of Rights of the Elders (ibid.);
4. the introduction of identity cards for persons over the age of 65 years, which accord a "special status" to the bearer and entitle him/her to priority service from government departments, hospitals, and banks, among others (ibid.);
5. the introduction of income security schemes such as the Public Service Pension Scheme and Employees Provident Fund for government and corporate sector employees; contributory schemes provided by the government and private sector organizations, such as banks; and the 1996 Social Security and Pension Scheme for those employed in the informal sector (ibid.). The 1996 scheme "provides a pension for poor elderly people who have contributed towards the development of the country" (ibid.).

6. the establishment of day care centers for elderly persons by the government, non-governmental organizations and volunteer organizations in urban and rural areas (ibid.); and
7. the implementation of training and awareness programmes, health camps, job placement services, distribution of eyeglasses and other "assistive devices to disabled elders" (ibid.).

In his concluding remarks, the head of the delegation noted that the government of Sri Lanka, in its attempts to address problems associated with the elderly, faced "severe resource constraints" (ibid.).

In late 2003, the government decided upon the following initiatives aimed at enhancing the welfare of the elderly in Sri Lanka: a 10 per cent increase in pensions beginning 1 January 2004, the implementation of special deposit schemes including premium interest rates for seniors, through the National Savings Bank and two state commercial banks, and the establishment of a Pension Reforms Office within the government to "study and coordinate a pension reform process" (*Daily News* 24 Nov. 2003).

Established in January 1986 (HelpAge n.d.b), HelpAge Sri Lanka is a non-governmental organization that "work[s] with and for the welfare of ...[o]lder [p]ersons to improve their quality of life irrespective of race, caste or creed" (ibid. n.d.a). The organization is a government-registered charity that is also registered as a social service organization with the Department of Social Services (HelpAge n.d.a). HelpAge is also a member of the National Committee on Ageing and a member of the London-based HelpAge International (ibid.). According to the organization's Website, HelpAge "is a household name in the country enjoying the confidence and support of the Government and the non-Governmental sector working effectively to empower the older population" (ibid. n.d.b). The organization is involved in fundraising, the development of need-based age care programs, day care services for the elderly, as well as eye care and home care (ibid.). In August 2004, HelpAge opened a second centre for elderly persons who suffer from dementia, an illness that causes "irreparable functional damage" leading to heavy dependency upon others (*Daily News* 14 Aug. 2004).

Despite the aforementioned initiatives, in a November 2004 speech, Water Supply and Urban Development Minister and Education Deputy Minister Dinesh Gunawardena said that

... although the country's rich cultural heritage encourages people to take care of elders at present, we need institutions to look after the elders. A lot of things are being done for the welfare of children, youth and other segments of society, but elders are left out. The welfare activities conducted for the benefit of elders are not adequate (ibid. 10 Nov. 2004).

### **Abused Women**

As at July 2003, there were six *Diri Piyasa*, or women's shelters, in Sri Lanka, located specifically in Kurunegala, Vavuniya, Moneragala, Walapone (Nuwara Eliya), Kandana and Colombo (*Daily News* 19 July 2003). The shelters provided free counselling services for women with mental and physical problems, medical and legal advice for women who have been sexually harassed or who are experiencing problems in their workplace or elsewhere, and protective arrangements, including police services (ibid. 1 May 2003; ibid. 19 July 2003).

More recent information on the status of these shelters could not be found among the sources consulted by the Research Directorate.

The Women's Bureau of the Ministry of Women's Affairs also carried out, as at July 2003, counselling services in various districts, as well as awareness programmes and economic initiatives to assist women who are self-employed through the provision of loans from a revolving loan fund (ibid.).

As at May 2003, Sahana Piyasa, or the Home of Comfort, a centre near the Colombo airport, is a place where female migrant workers who have been sexually abused while working abroad could go when they return to Sri Lanka (IPS 21 May 2003). Such women usually returned to Sri Lanka pregnant or with a child resulting from sexual abuse suffered at the hands of an employer or his family members or colleagues, and stayed at the Home of Comfort while deciding whether to keep their child or give it up for adoption (ibid.). According to Inter Press Service (IPS), "[a]t Sahana Piyasa, a hot meal and a comfortable bed awaits workers ... while the staff looks [after] their needs. No strictures are made, no morality [is] preached, only the troubled female worker's plight is discussed" (ibid.).

Established in May 1988, Women in Need (WIN), a non-governmental organization aimed at providing assistance to abused women and children, opened its third One Stop Crisis Centre at the De Soysa Maternity Hospital for Women on 8 March 2004 (*Daily News* 5 Mar. 2004). Two other One Stop Crisis Centres were previously opened and are maintained by WIN, one at the emergency unit of the Colombo National Hospital and the other at the Castle Street Hospital for Women (ibid.). The centres provide crisis counselling and legal aid to victims of violence who are admitted into the hospitals (ibid.). Headquartered in Colombo, WIN operates branch offices in Kandy, Matara, Anuradhapura and Badulla, through which abused women and children can access "counselling, befriending, legal services, legal representation in court, emergency shelter and empowerment programs" (ibid.). Other activities that are carried out by WIN include

[c]ounselling and psychological support for victims of violence and their families, legal support and legal services, 24 hour hotline, temporary shelter for victims of violence, legal clinics, awareness programs for community based organisations, awareness programs for law enforcement officers, gender advisory services to CBOs, NGOs and GOs, networking and collaboration, legal reform and research, publishing of educational and awareness building materials, gender development projects and training and consultation (ibid.).

Additional information on social services and support available in Colombo to abused women 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.

#### References

*Daily News* [Colombo]. 10 November 2004. Nadira Gunatilleke. "We Need Institutions to Look After Elders - Dinesh." <<http://origin.dailynews.lk>> [Accessed 12 Nov. 2004]

\_\_\_\_\_. 14 August 2004. Nadira Gunatilleke. "Second HelpAge Dementia Centre Opened." <<http://origin.dailynews.lk>> [Accessed 19 Aug. 2004]

\_\_\_\_\_. 5 March 2004. Nadira Gunatilleke. "Women In Need Opens Crisis Support Centre, Counselling Desk." <<http://origin.dailynews.lk>> [Accessed 4 Mar. 2004]

\_\_\_\_\_. 24 November 2003. Chandani Jayatilleke. "Towards a Better Deal for Lanka's Elders." <<http://origin.dailynews.lk>> [Accessed 24 Nov. 2003]

\_\_\_\_\_. 19 July 2003. Indrani Iriyagolle. "The Problem of Violence Against Women." <<http://origin.dailynews.lk>> [Accessed 22 July 2003]

\_\_\_\_\_. 1 May 2003. Nadira Gunatilleke. "*Diri Piyasa* Centres to Cater to Women's Problems." <<http://origin.dailynews.lk>> [Accessed 1 May 2003]

HelpAge. n.d.a. "Objectives." <<http://helpagesrilanka.org/objectives.html>> [Accessed 9 Dec. 2004]

\_\_\_\_\_. n.d.b. "History." <<http://helpagesrilanka.org/history.html>> [Accessed 9 Dec. 2004]

Inter Press Service (IPS). 21 May 2003. Feizal Samath. "Sri Lanka: Abused Migrant Women Given Shelter and Time to Heal." (NEXIS)

Sri Lanka. 11 April 2002. *Statement by H.E. Mr. Chandra Wickramasinghe. Address by the Head of Delegation at the Second World Assembly on Ageing.* Madrid, Spain.

#### Additional Sources Consulted

Dialog.

**Internet sites, including:** Amnesty International (AI), BBC, *Country Reports on Human Rights Practices for 2003*, European Country of Origin Information Network (ECOI), *Freedom in the World 2004*, Human Rights Watch (HRW), Sri Lanka Ministry of Health, Nutrition and Welfare (not accessible), Sri Lanka Ministry of Social Welfare (not accessible), Sri Lanka Ministry of Women's Affairs (not accessible) TamilNet, United Nations Division for the Advancement of Women.

**The attached reproduction is a copy of an official work that is published by the Government of Canada. The reproduction has not been produced in affiliation with, or with the endorsement of the Government of Canada.**