



UNITED NATIONS  
SRI LANKA



# 20 23 ANNUAL RESULTS REPORT

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© United Nations in Sri Lanka

Cover Photo: UN Sri Lanka

## 2023 UN COUNTRY ANNUAL RESULTS REPORT SRI LANKA

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# CONTENTS

FOREWORD BY THE  
RESIDENT COORDINATOR 04

UN COUNTRY TEAM 06

2023 AT A GLANCE 07

UN SUPPORT TO  
NATIONAL PRIORITIES 08

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**1** SDGs IN SRI LANKA 10

**2** RESULTS 18

**3** 2024 PRIORITIES 48



Keep an eye out for QR code gateways to discover more about the UN in Sri Lanka







Photo: UN Sri Lanka

## FOREWORD BY THE RESIDENT COORDINATOR

It gives me great pleasure to present an overview of the results achieved by the United Nations in Sri Lanka in 2023. This report showcases the collective work of the United Nations to support Sri Lanka's national priorities and the Sustainable Development Goals. The following pages present the progress we have achieved together with the Government and a broad set of civil society and private sector partners, against our collective commitments outlined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework 2023-2027. The Cooperation Framework brings together 21 UN entities to contribute to a resilient, peaceful and cohesive society where development is inclusive, just, sustainable and rights-based, leaving no one behind.

In 2023 our work shifted away from humanitarian responses towards a recovery and support of Sri Lanka's sustainable development aspirations. It was a year of challenges and some progress, demonstrating the resilience of the Sri Lankan people and the dedication of our partners. Our collaboration with the Government of Sri Lanka, civil society, private sector, international financial institutions and development partners was instrumental in translating the 2030 Agenda into tangible outcomes. I extend my deepest appreciation to our partners, and to the nearly 1,000 UN personnel, over 90% of which are Sri Lankan, who have worked tirelessly across the country to deliver on our commitments for the people of this country.

Looking forward, the UN in Sri Lanka remains committed to supporting Sri Lanka's reform program and poverty alleviation efforts, while striving for comprehensive social protections. We will continue to be guided by the promises we made as part of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals: to focus on the most vulnerable and leave no one behind, and to prioritise solutions that are sustainable, inclusive and anchored in human rights for all. With peaceful and timely elections anticipated over the coming year, we stand ready to aid Sri Lanka in achieving its national vision for sustainable development.

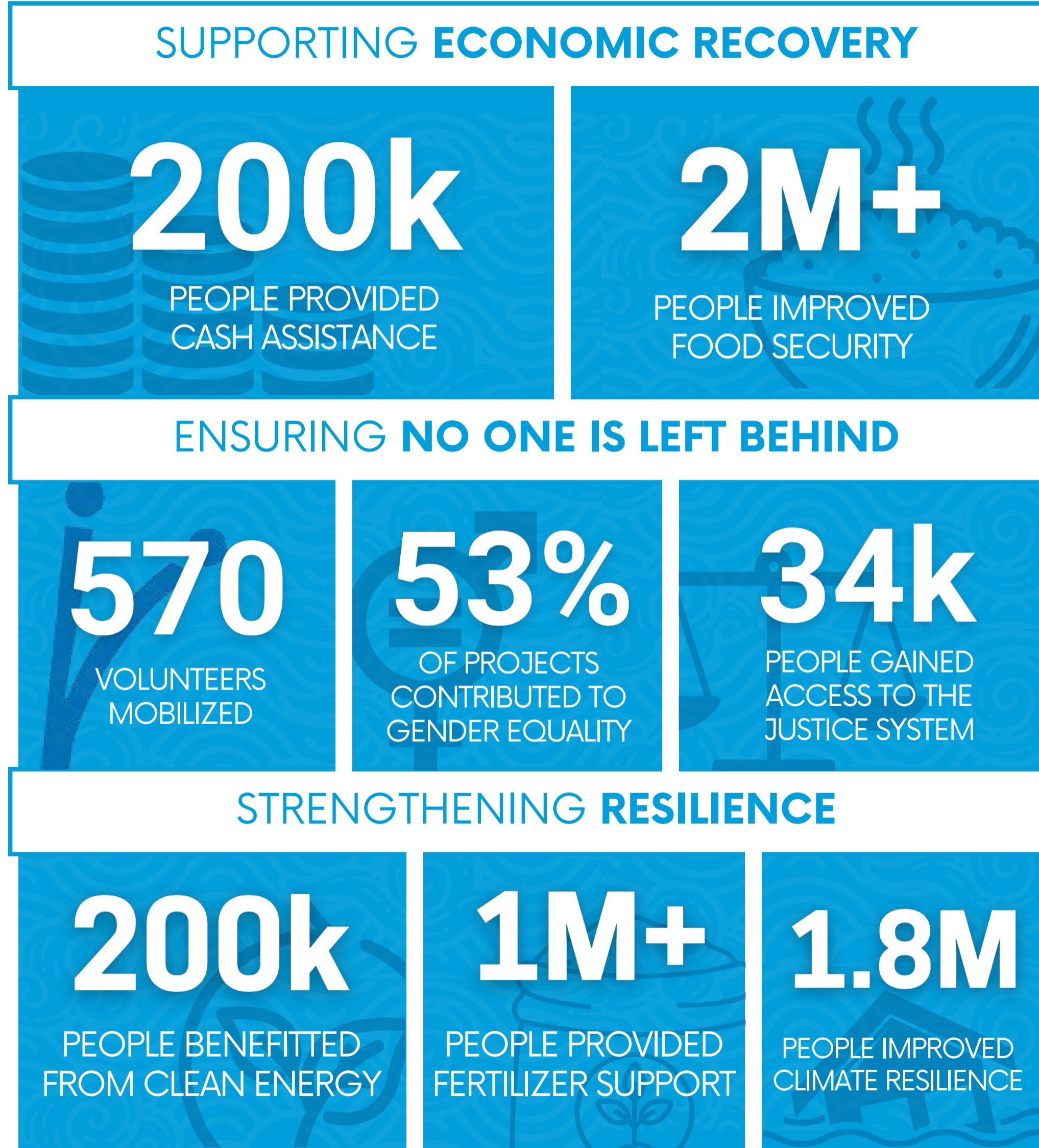
Marc-André Franche



# UN SRI LANKA COUNTRY TEAM



# 2023 AT A GLANCE





# UN SUPPORT TO NATIONAL PRIORITIES

The UN Country Team is committed to working together with the Government and people of Sri Lanka in support of national development priorities alongside the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the SDGs.

The United Nations Sustainable Development Cooperation Framework for 2023–2027 articulates the collective vision and contributions of the UN system in its support of Sri Lanka’s accelerated actions towards the achievement of the SDGs. The Framework is structured around four interrelated and mutually reinforcing Strategic Priorities:

-  **Inclusive and Equitable Human Development and Well-Being**
-  **Resilient and Green Recovery for Shared Prosperity and Environmental Sustainability**
-  **Social Cohesion and Inclusive Government and Justice**
-  **Gender Equality**

The UN contributes to a set of six Outcomes derived from these Strategic Priorities. The collective results promote a vision where all people in Sri Lanka—especially the most vulnerable—contribute to and benefit from inclusive, just, sustainable, and rights-based development in a resilient, peaceful, and cohesive society, ultimately leading to the achievement of the 2030 Agenda and its SDGs.

## 1 Strengthened, Resilient & Equitable Social Service Systems & Enhanced Well-Being

By 2027, more people in Sri Lanka, particularly the most vulnerable, access and benefit from equitable, resilient and gender-responsive quality social services and with enhanced well-being and dignity.

## 4 Inclusive Governance, Justice & Rule of Law

By 2027, people in Sri Lanka, particularly the most vulnerable, have increased trust and confidence to claim and benefit from enhanced, non-discriminatory, gender-responsive, participatory and efficient governance and justice systems and rights-based development.

## 5 Social Cohesion, Sustaining Peace & Human Rights

By 2027, the people of Sri Lanka live in a society which is more cohesive and strengthened by transformative and rights-based processes and mechanisms which support peaceful coexistence and human rights for all.

## 2 Sustainable & Inclusive, Green-Led Growth, People-Centered Economic Recovery, Livelihoods & Productivity

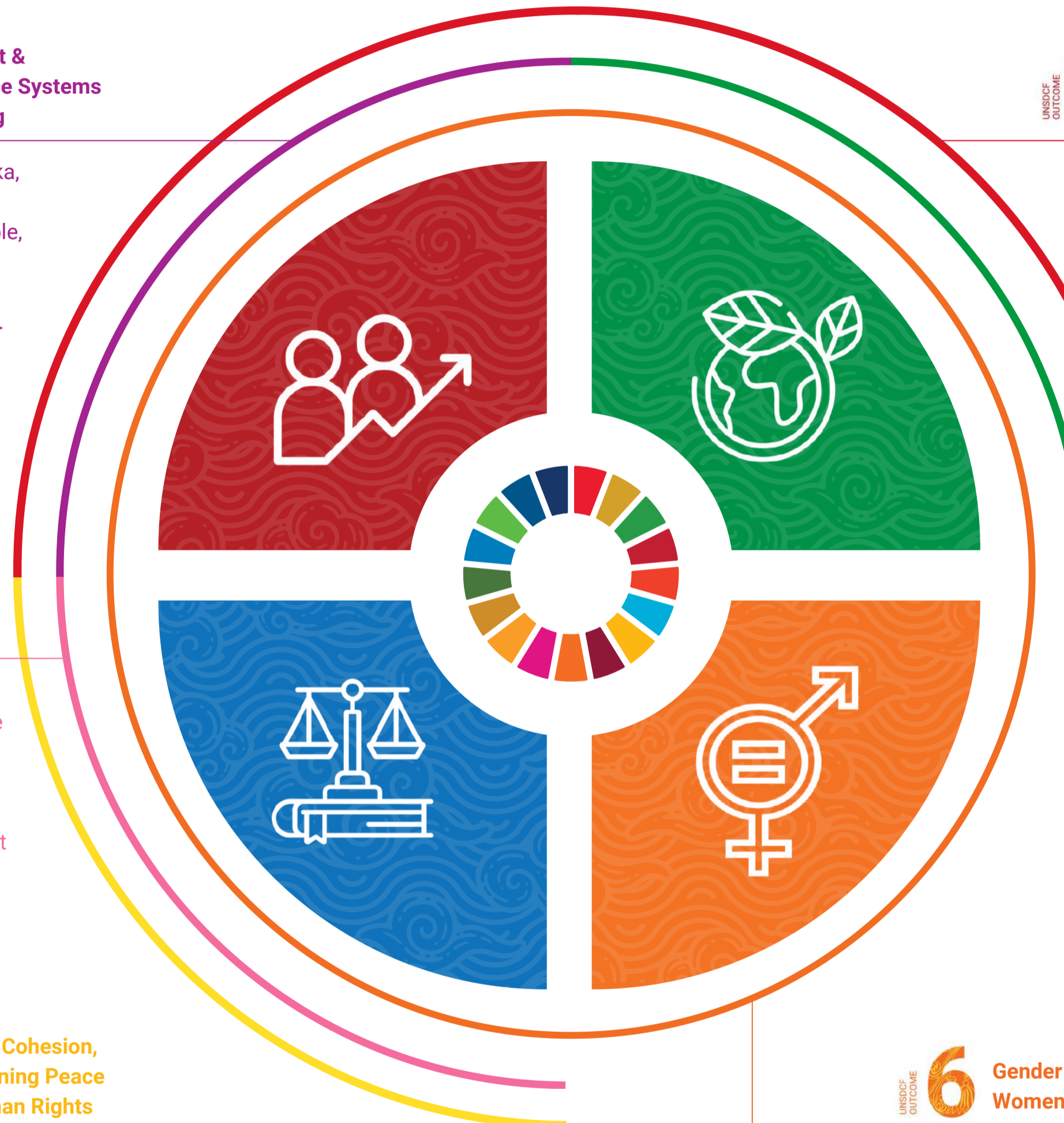
By 2027, more people in Sri Lanka, particularly youth and the most vulnerable, have equitable, decent, just work and income opportunities, and benefit from and contribute to inclusive, gender-transformative, resilient and green-led economic recovery, growth and diversification.

## 3 Natural Resource Management, Climate Resilience & Environmental Sustainability

By 2027, more people and communities in Sri Lanka, especially the vulnerable and marginalized, are more resilient to climate change and disaster risks, have enhanced water and food security, and benefit equitably from ambitious climate action and increasingly sustainable management and protection of the environment and natural resources.

## 6 Gender Equality & Women’s Empowerment

By 2027, women and girls enjoy and are empowered to exercise their full rights, representation, and agency over all aspects of their lives, and live free from discrimination and violence.







# 1 SDGs IN SRI LANKA

Photo: UNDP Sri Lanka





Photo: UN Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka showed signs of recovery in 2023 following the peak of its economic crisis in 2022. Increased income from remittances, tourism and exports throughout the year gradually improved access to essential imports like fuel, food and medicine. However, conditions for economic and human development remained challenging. The economy contracted 2.3 per cent in 2023 as tight financing conditions, rising input prices and supply chain disruptions weighed on key parts of the economy. The World Bank forecasts indicate poverty peaked at 27.9 per cent in 2023 (\$3.65/day, 2017 PPP), while UNDP's Multidimensional Vulnerability Index showed 55.7% of Sri Lankans were multidimensionally vulnerable in 2022/23. Preliminary WFP estimates show household food insecurity increased from 17 per cent in March to 24 per cent in the second half of 2023.

Amid these challenges, the IMF approved a 48-month, USD 3 billion Extended Fund Facility for Sri Lanka in support of a comprehensive reform agenda, though continued IMF support hinges on Sri Lanka achieving a sustainable public debt level through restructuring efforts with its creditors.

Democratic governance concerns persisted as the local government elections slated for March 2023 were indefinitely postponed citing funding constraints.

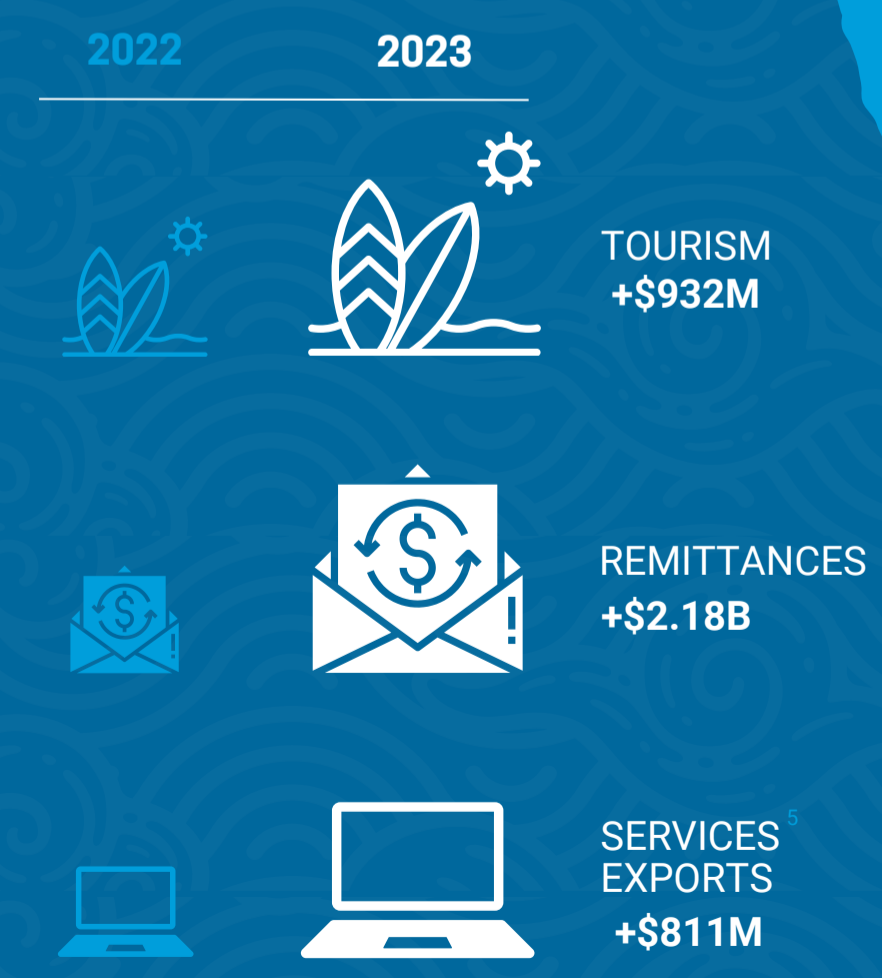
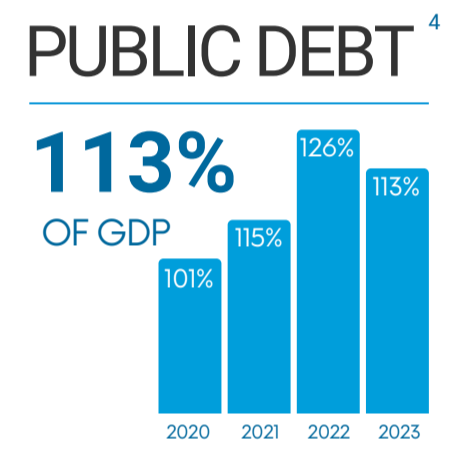
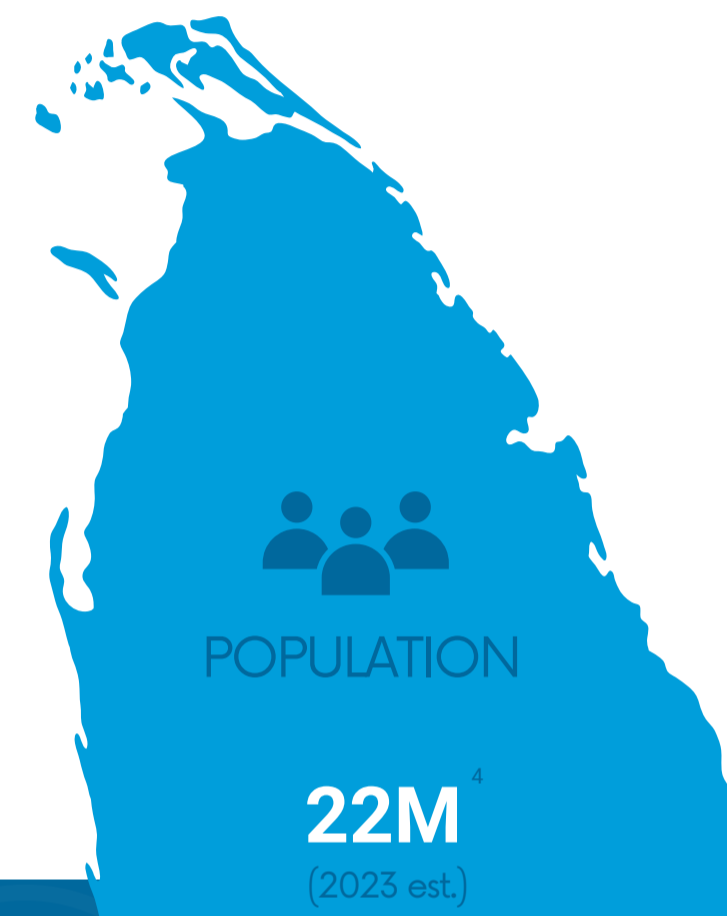
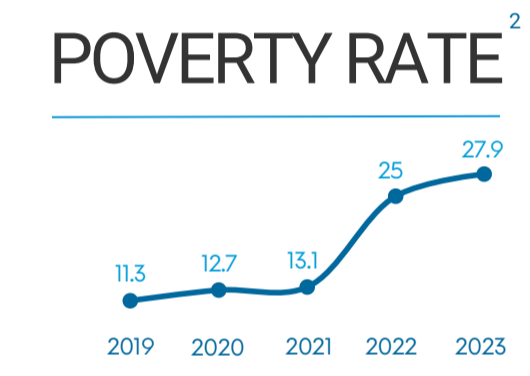
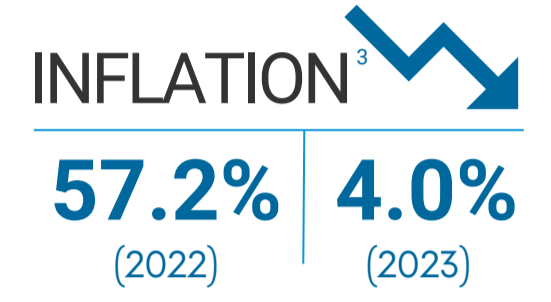
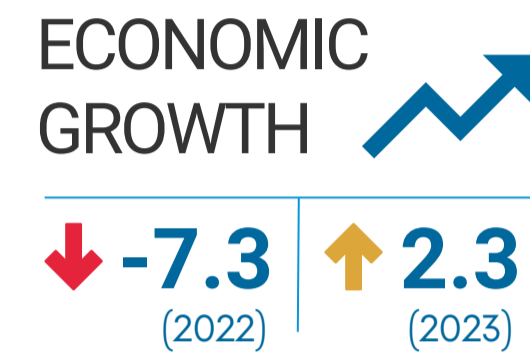
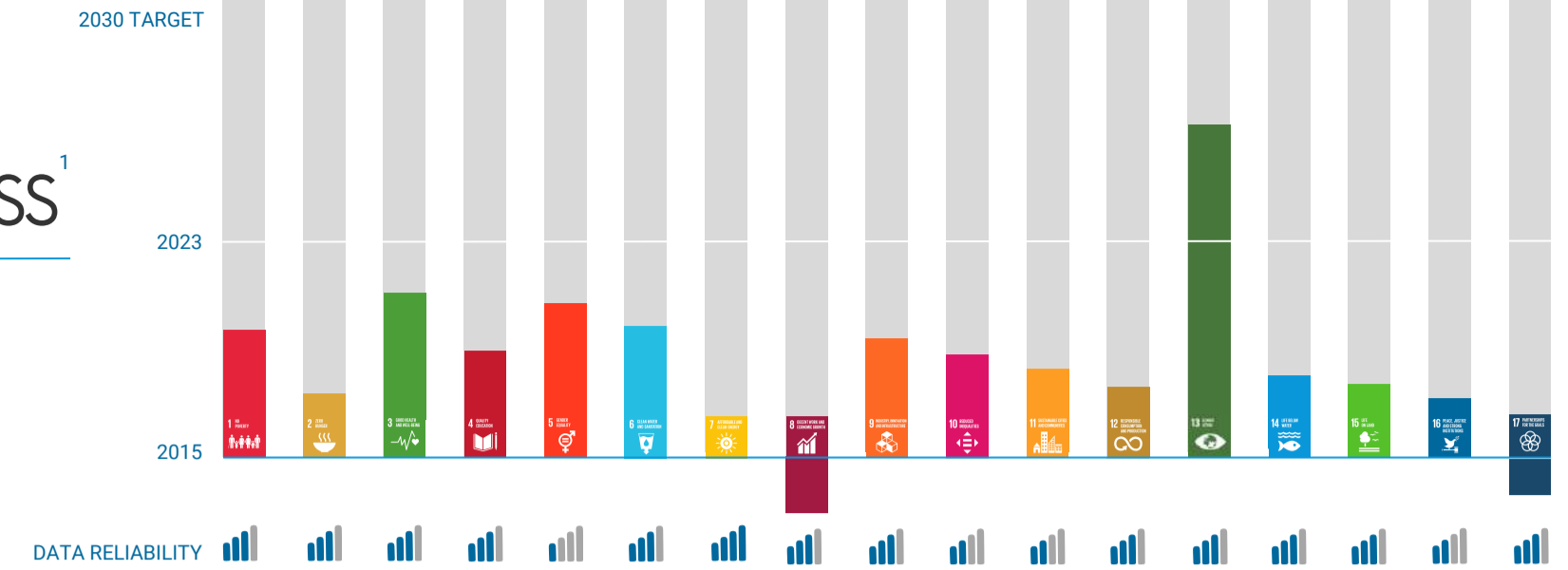
The President announced Provincial Councils and Local Government elections in 2025, following national elections in 2024. At times, law enforcement responded forcefully to periodic protests, primarily spurred by economic policy decisions. Inter-communal tensions, notably around disputed religious sites and citizen-land disputes in Northern and Eastern Provinces, continued to raise concerns about social cohesion.

A number of legislative proposals such as the Online Safety Bill, Broadcasting Regulatory Commission Bill, Anti-Terrorism Bill, NGO Bill faced opposition and raised concerns as they would curtail basic freedoms, including freedoms of expression and association, and might have a negative effect on governance and economic recovery. Moreover, to combat drug trafficking, the government launched a nationwide anti-narcotic operation, criticized domestically and internationally for alleged human rights abuses.

Looking ahead to 2024, Sri Lanka's ability to achieve sustainable development is closely linked to the effective implementation of reforms, including broadening its tax base, enhancing social safety nets and implementing fiscal and institutional reforms. These issues are likely to influence the political landscape, especially in the context of national elections.

## SDG PROGRESS<sup>1</sup>

**69.4**  
83 / 166



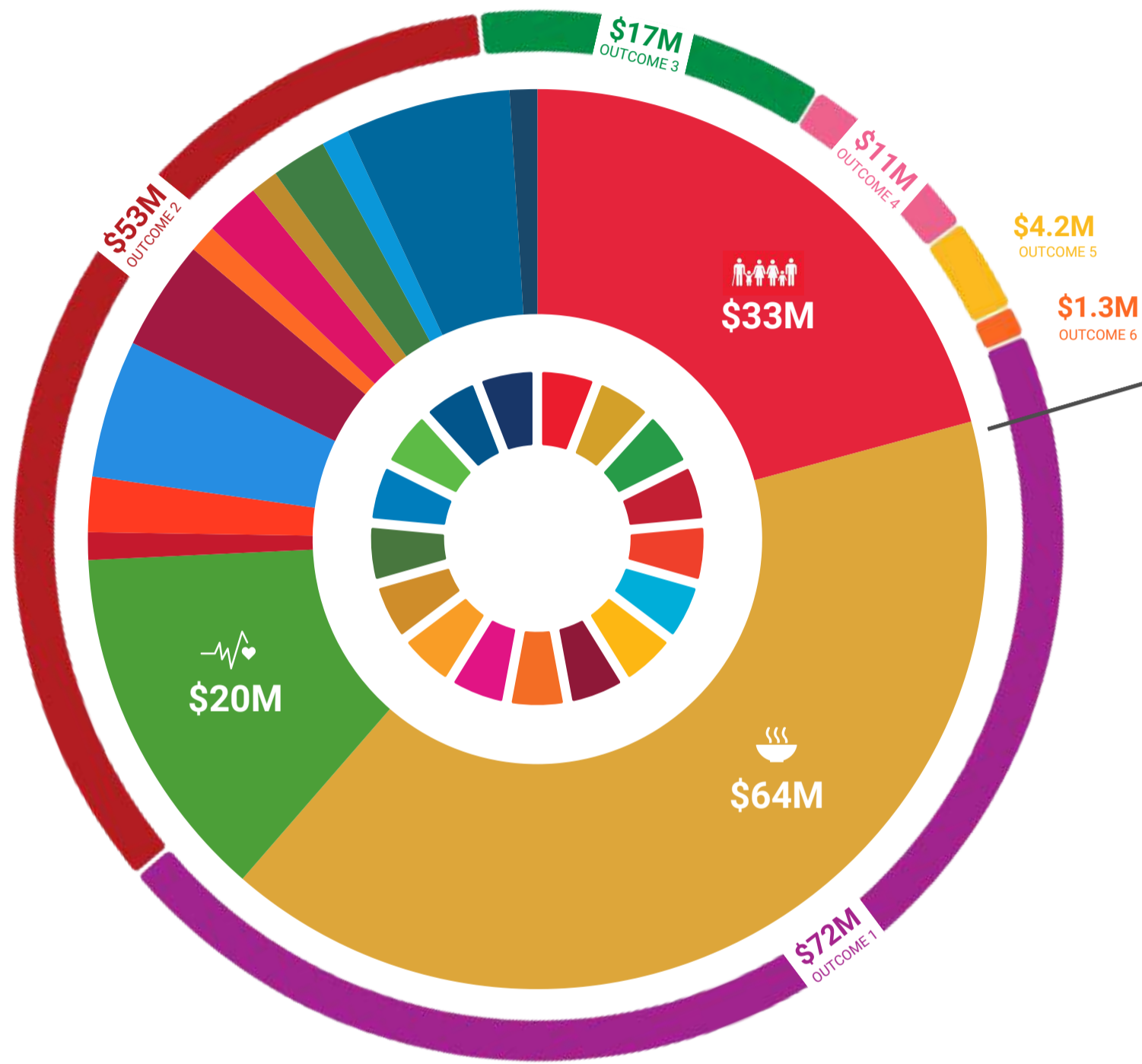
**1 IN 2 ARE MULTIDIMENSIONALLY VULNERABLE**  
(2023 est.)

**1 IN 4 ARE FOOD INSECURE**





# FINANCING FOR SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT



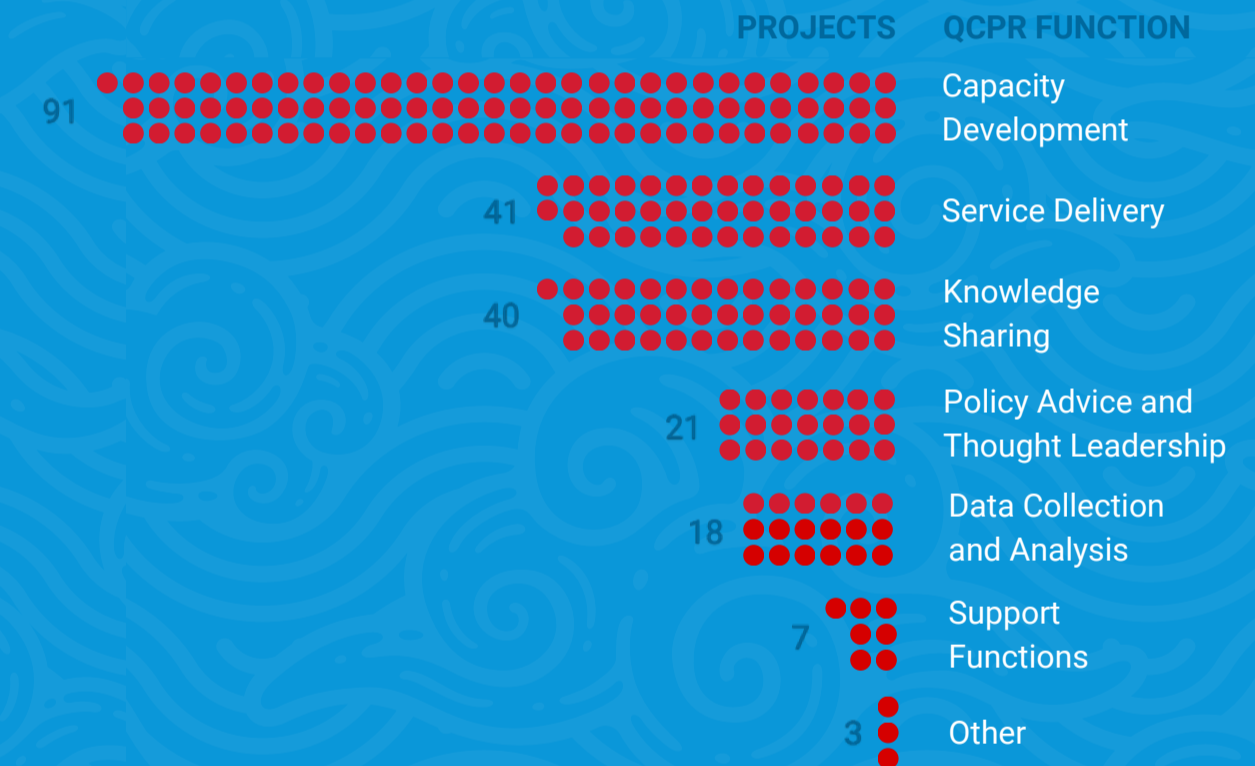
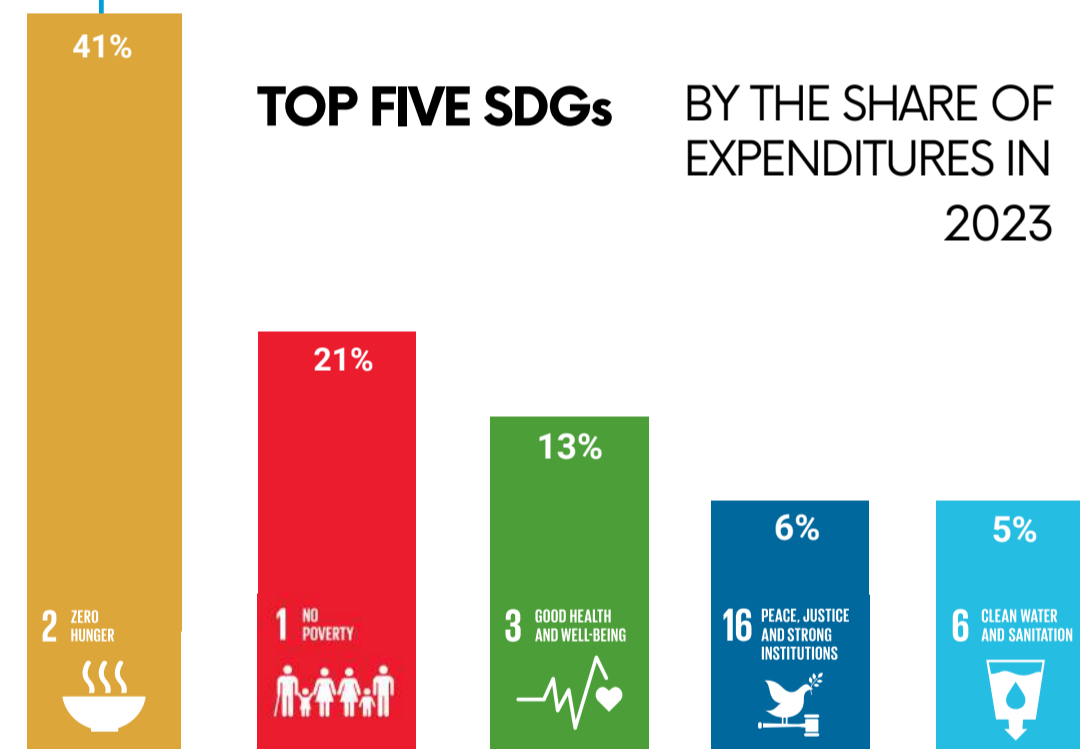
## EXPENDITURE BY TYPE OF CONTRIBUTING PARTNERS



## EXPENDITURE BY TOP CONTRIBUTING PARTNERS



## TOP FIVE SDGs BY THE SHARE OF EXPENDITURES IN 2023



**\$158M<sup>B</sup>**

Total expenditure

**163**

Active projects

**150**

Single agency programme

**13**

Joint programmes

## BUSINESS OPERATIONS STRATEGY



Strengthened collaboration for efficiency

**26%**

Efficiency increase

**\$412k**

Realized efficiency gains





# PARTNERSHIP FOR THE 2030 AGENDA

The UN Sri Lanka SDG Fund provides a strategic framework for mobilizing resources towards catalytic joint UN initiatives through its resilience and peace-building windows.

Building on the humanitarian efforts initiated in 2022, the Fund's resilience window has been instrumental in addressing the challenges of protracted crises. This includes addressing the challenges of food insecurity, enhancing a shock-responsive social protection to better equip vulnerable communities to respond to future crises, strengthening the climate resilience of government authorities and vulnerable communities, and on building resilient health systems.

Peacebuilding of the UN were largely focused on terms of promoting access and shoring up livelihood for displaced and returnee populations, supporting resettlement work, protecting and promoting civic space and continuing support to reparations related work.

Moving forward, the Fund's interventions will be strategically directed towards addressing sensitive issues, catalysing change, fostering innovation, and prioritizing underfunded development areas. This approach underscores our commitment to addressing the most pressing and underserved needs in our pursuit of sustainable development.

**\$17M**

2023 expenditure

**10**

Participating UN agencies

**15**

Active projects in 2023

**60%**

Joint programmes

### CONTRIBUTING PARTNERS





# 2 RESULTS



Photo: UNDP Sri Lanka



## STRENGTHENED, RESILIENT & EQUITABLE SOCIAL SERVICE SYSTEMS & ENHANCED WELL-BEING



### ACCESS TO QUALITY HEALTH CARE SERVICES

In 2023 Sri Lanka's public health system continued to experience pressures due to shortages of essential medicines, outward migration of health workers, and signs of increasing population-level risk factors for non-communicable diseases (NCDs).

The United Nations was engaged in developing and implementing 15 national health policies in conjunction with government counterparts in 2023, including national plans on medication safety, antimicrobial resistance, risk communication during public health emergencies and a national nutrition policy for 2023-2030. Primary care strengthening initiatives included 379 medical facilities benefiting from improved cold chain equipment and monitoring services, enhancing vaccine storage and healthcare delivery.

 **136,000+**  
people reached with medicines and other essential health items

 **15 policies**  
for improving national health received UN technical support

 **6,000+**  
young people educated on sexual and reproductive health

 **150**  
mobile clinics provided maternal and child health, HIV and MHPSS support

The continuation of the UNs emergency response and development programmes saw more than 136,000 women and youth receive medicines and essential health items. Workforce training initiatives bolstered the health sector's response capabilities, with 1,100 health workers receiving mental health and psychosocial support training. The deployment of 151 mobile clinics significantly enhanced access to essential health services for women, girls, and people with disabilities, addressing critical healthcare needs across communities.

These achievements demonstrate a concerted effort to mitigate the impacts of fiscal constraints on public health expenditure that are likely to continue into 2024, and provide a foundation to support continued progress towards Universal Health Coverage.



Photo: UNOPS Sri Lanka

### A NEW SPACE TO WELCOME NEW LIVES



For years, the district General Hospital located in the center of Matara, Sri Lanka had been serving expectant families and their new babies from towns and villages around the hospital, up to several hundred kilometers away. Recently, however, the capacity of the maternal and neonatal ward had fallen short of what was needed to serve the growing needs of the community.

The United Nations, in collaboration with the Korea International Cooperation Agency, moved to address these needs and increase access to vital maternal and neonatal care through the rehabilitation and construction of a new ward which ultimately became a dedicated maternal and neonatal hospital.

With a 357-bed capacity, four operation theatres, new medical vehicles, equipment and furniture, the Korea Sri Lanka Friendship Hospital has

almost doubled the provision of obstetrics, gynecological and neonatal services. The community's improved access to vital healthcare has helped double the delivery number of newborns from approximately 200 per month to 400.

The new hospital also has a new lactation management unit and is planning to expand other necessary services such as the psychiatric unit, where medical professionals can offer support services to families that need them.

“  
**In the previous hospital, we had to put two beds together to be given to three patients. But now the bed capacity has increased and mothers have enough space.**

Nishani  
Head Nurse at Korea Sri Lanka Friendship Hospital



 **360,000**  
pregnant and breastfeeding  
women received nutrition-rich foods

 **930,000+**  
children aged 5-10 received  
fortified rice and lentils

 **650,000+**  
children received supplementary  
food and ration packs

 **195,000+**  
women, boys and girls  
received cash-based  
social protection



## FOOD SECURITY AND NUTRITION



Food insecurity and nutrition in Sri Lanka remained at concerning levels throughout 2023, particularly among children.

UN-supported programmes reached over 2 million Sri Lankans with much-needed cash and in-kind assistance. Key initiatives included providing therapeutic food to children with severe malnutrition, supplying pregnant and breastfeeding women with nutrient-rich foods, and ensuring fortified meals for schoolchildren, directly benefiting their growth and health.

Beyond immediate nutritional support, the UN focused on policy development to enhance the country's future capacity to combat malnutrition. These efforts produced the launch of the National Nutrition Policy and action plans aimed at securing food and improving nutrition for all.

The UN also spearheaded distribution of micro nutrient supplements, promotion of breastfeeding, and engagement with local communities to foster positive dietary habits, further cementing its commitment to strengthening resilience in food security and nutrition.

## WATER, SANITATION AND HYGIENE (WASH)

UN-supported outreach and WASH-related health promotion activities reached 192,000 beneficiaries in 2023, while project activities expanded pipe-borne water networks and provided materials to complete government-funded water supply projects, purification and testing. UN agencies facilitated upgrades to WASH facilities in 116 health clinics, provision of hygiene items in 28 clinics, improved sanitation facilities in four hospitals and urban basic services to 800 plantation sector households.

Photo: WFP Sri Lanka





Photo: UNFPA Sri Lanka

## ACTING FOR CHANGE

In Sri Lanka, one in four women have experienced physical or sexual violence. Addressing this pressing issue, the United Nations harnessed the transformative power of theatre to raise awareness and challenge the social and cultural norms fueling sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV).

To reach communities isolated by technological and geographical barriers, the UN partnered with local drama groups to organize 34 interactive theater workshops. The workshops were designed to be more than just performances; they were interactive sessions in which audience members were invited to actively participate and engage with the performers. The initiative was a collaborative effort, garnering support from high-level state institutions, local government entities, and civil society organizations, ensuring a broad and impactful reach.

These workshops spanned across nine provinces and 12 districts, creating a widespread network of engagement that engaged over 54,000 participants, including women, girls, school students, and other community members. By using art as a medium, these workshops facilitated open dialogues, challenging participants to reflect on and question ingrained societal norms.

To amplify the impact of these workshops, the UN extended its reach through targeted messaging around SGBV across nine television channels, eight radio stations, and several social media platforms. As a result, the campaign successfully reached nearly 4 million Sri Lankans.



## SOCIAL PROTECTION

2023 saw a significant increase in expenditure on cash-based social assistance programmes, while the introduction of the Aswesuma scheme marked a pivotal step in reforming how beneficiaries are selected for poverty-targeted cash transfers. These reforms were complemented by integrated cash transfer programmes from UN agencies that reached nearly 200,000 people. These initiatives provided essential financial support while improving access to clean water and nutrition, supporting livelihoods and access to education, and facilitating prevention of gender-based violence.

UN policy development efforts supported the finalization of Sri Lanka's National Social Protection Policy, and consultations on pilot interventions focusing on social and economic empowerment for social assistance beneficiaries.

## EDUCATION

2023 saw greater continuity of formal education and skills development compared to previous years, though capacity constraints, learning loss, affordability issues and workforce challenges continue to weigh on the system.

UN agencies supported new approaches to foundational literacy and numeracy as part of the government's three-year action plan for learning recovery, and secondary curriculum reforms focusing on citizenship and skills integration. UN agencies also supported the upskilling of more than 20,000 young people, including children with disabilities, and specialized green skills enterprise incubation and entrepreneurship training for 1,500 more.

 **192,000**  
people gained access to clean water

 **40,000+**  
families  
able to improve personal hygiene

 **20,000**  
young people  
developed new 'life skills'

 **4M**  
people reached by advocacy against sexual and gender-based violence

 **3,200**  
people  
improved access to basic urban infrastructure



## SUSTAINABLE & INCLUSIVE, GREEN-LED GROWTH, PEOPLE-CENTERED ECONOMIC RECOVERY, LIVELIHOODS & PRODUCTIVITY



### 1M+ farmers

provided fertilizer to support production and livelihoods



### 121 MSMEs

received technical and financial support

Economic challenges in 2023 translated through to a softening labour market, as total employment reached its lowest level since the COVID-19 pandemic, and the labour force participation rate its lowest level since 2009.

Amidst these challenges, UN agencies continued their support towards a sustainable, green and gender-responsive economic recovery. The UN's support of the government's Labour Market Recovery and Transformation Strategy aims to support job creation, skills enhancement, and institutional reforms to aid workers and businesses through the period of structural reform.

The UN also facilitated the launch of Sri Lanka's Integrated Guidance and Referral System, streamlining connections between foreign employers and local employment agencies, alongside the introduction of the National Skills Passport, enhancing workers' qualifications recognition. The UN further contributed to strengthening food systems and value chains, assisting in revising food safety policies, promoting quality standards in agriculture, and supporting smallholder farmers with resources for improved production. These efforts extended to the fisheries sector, emphasizing

sustainability and reducing food loss and UN support for technical education, entrepreneurship, and skills development was significant, particularly among women-owned enterprises and returning migrant workers.

UN assistance provided essential skills, financial support for business upgrades, and opportunities for digital engagement and trade. Key UN strategies focused on bolstering Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises (MSMEs), particularly in the agriculture and fisheries sectors, enabling over 76,000 smallholder paddy farmers to enhance productivity and expand revenue, while improving food systems, value chains, and food safety standards.

Looking ahead to 2024, the UN will maintain its comprehensive policy and technical assistance to foster economic recovery and job market transformation. Areas of particular focus will include linking skilled Sri Lankan workers with foreign employment opportunities, promoting advanced agricultural practices, and ensuring decent work in vulnerable sectors. This continued support aims to bolster Sri Lanka's economic resilience and inclusive growth, providing a foundation for recovery and long-term sustainability.



Photo: ILO Sri Lanka

## SHIFTING GEARS & BREAKING BARRIERS



Despite the global significance and growth of the maritime industry, women's participation at ports is only 18 per cent. Encouraging more women promotes a workforce with diverse insights and perspectives that can drive the industry forward, while also meeting the sector's increasing labour demand.

Ruchini is among the handful of women transfer crane operators in Sri Lanka's Colombo port. She is a participant in a UN-supported work-based training programme empowering women to challenge stereotypes and take up careers in the largely male-dominated maritime industry.

The three-month programme equips participants with a wide range of technical skills and awareness on occupational safety and health measures. Through this project, the UN implemented skills training and work-based learning opportunities not only in the maritime

“ I want to encourage, support more women to step into new career fields, like the maritime sector. The opportunities are endless, and we deserve to seize them.

Ruchini  
Transfer crane operator in Sri Lanka's Colombo port

sector, but also in tourism and care. Over 700 aspirant and returnee migrant workers benefitted from the programme, including women and persons with disabilities, ensuring safe migration pathways and access to decent work opportunities in higher-skilled sectors. With women's participation in Sri Lanka's labour force stagnant at around 30 per cent, training programmes such as these create opportunities for more women to enter the labour market and benefit from employment in skilled categories and better-paying positions.



## SEEDS OF INNOVATION



In his 30 years as a farmer, Rathnayake struggled to unlock the full potential of his onion seed cultivation. Lacking the resources and proper equipment to protect his crops, he used bamboo trees and polythene sheets as makeshift shelters.

However, these structures could not withstand heavy rains and wind, often blowing away and leaving his crops exposed to the elements. As the sole breadwinner for his family, low yields and financial hardships often left him contemplating abandoning onion cultivation altogether.

Rathnayake's hope in his agricultural endeavors was rekindled when the UN started to support him and over 90 other smallholder farmers in producing high-quality seeds for improved onion and chilli production, providing the necessary training and equipment.

This support strengthened their crop management practices, providing a shield against pests and rain damage while maximizing water and fertilizer efficiency and reducing the need for chemical pesticides and weedicides. As a result, the seed cultivation thrived and the farmers' yields soared.

“

**I used to harvest around 2-3 kg of onion seeds. Thanks to the rain shelters and training we received, we are now expecting to harvest 12-15 kg of seeds per season.**

Rathnayake  
Farmer from Kalugala



Photo: FAO/Ravindra Rohana



## 3

NATURAL RESOURCE MANAGEMENT,  
CLIMATE RESILIENCE &  
ENVIRONMENTAL SUSTAINABILITY

Climate change poses serious threats to Sri Lanka's development and resilience. In 2023, the United Nations continued to assist the country's efforts to fulfill its commitments under the Paris Agreement and facilitate a transition to low-carbon energy and green growth initiatives. The UN's concerted efforts helped ensure the government's ability to implement its Nationally Determined Contributions (NDCs).

Key initiatives included the NDC Implementation Plan for 2021-2030, the launch of the revised National Policy on Climate Change at COP28, and the 2050 Carbon Net Zero Roadmap which will help Sri Lanka achieve carbon neutrality.

These efforts were complemented by UN-supported policies and plans promoting environmentally sensitive areas, e-mobility, sustainable tourism and enhanced waste management.

The UN in Sri Lanka enhanced environmental stewardship by promoting sustainable practices among nearly two million people whose livelihoods depend on climate-sensitive resources, including farmers, fishers, and tour operators. The UN's advocacy also led to tangible improvements in policy and increased awareness regarding the environmental and health impacts of mercury in skin lightening products.

 **82,000+**  
people

enabled to adopt sustainable practices

 **1.8M**  
people

improved climate resilience

 **50,000+**  
people transitioned to clean energy

 **15-20%**  
income increase for 104 MSMEs  
with sustainable tourism certification





Advocacy approaches included training in sustainable practices, economic recovery support, and direct assistance with cash and resources, significantly benefiting small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs) in the tourism sector, with a noteworthy increase in income for those achieving sustainable tourism certification.

The UN also provided technical assistance in advancing disaster risk reduction and management, establishing the SFDRR monitoring forum, and promoting integrated approaches to managing disaster risks and climate resilience. Efforts to ensure sustainable water safety and management, including the development of a National Drinking Water Policy 2024 and a National Drought Plan, demonstrate a comprehensive strategy adopted to bolster Sri Lanka's environmental sustainability, resilience, and readiness in facing climate-related challenges.

The UN in Sri Lanka played a vital role in supporting the facilitation of the 5th Asia Pacific Ministerial forum and the 5th AP Youth Forum held in Sri Lanka. The forums featured discussions on multilateral climate action and convened youth from across the region to develop an environment manifesto which was integrated into the 6th session of the UN Environment Assembly.



 **200**  
tuk-tuks  
powered with renewable energy

 **200,000+**  
people benefitted from services delivered with clean energy

 **6,000**  
farmers  
completed sustainable agriculture trainings

## PADDLING TOWARDS A SUSTAINABLE FUTURE



As a developing country, Sri Lanka still depends on non-replenishable energy resources. Amid the economic crisis, this reliance led to soaring energy expenses for both households and businesses. Small enterprises, such as Kamal Shrimp Farm, were significantly affected, pushing them to explore innovative energy solutions.

In response to these challenges, a collaborative initiative between the UN and the Sri Lankan and Chinese governments initiated the Transitioning to Sustainable Energy Uses (TSSC Project). This project aims to enhance energy access for better service delivery and promote sustainable farming practices, assisting Sri Lanka in meeting its Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emission reduction goals by 2030.

For Kamal Shrimp Farm, the project enabled the installation of solar-powered aerator systems, shifting from the use of electricity to power the aeration systems that promote growth of shrimp and results in a good harvest. This green alternative not only reduced the farm's electricity demand to 10,400 kWh/month but also achieved an annual energy saving of 13,680 kWh.

Each solar panel, boasting a capacity of 2kW, contributes to generating 1,140 kWh of electricity monthly. This accounts for 14% of the aerators' total electricity consumption. Consequently, Kamal Shrimp Farm enjoys an annual saving of over Rs. 500,000 in electricity costs, with the investment expected to pay for itself in less than 6 years.

Beyond the financial benefits, this initiative has made a positive environmental impact by significantly reducing greenhouse gas emissions, cutting down as much as 7.4 tonnes of carbon dioxide annually.

“ I have personally seen the benefits of switching to solar energy. Our savings on electricity have been considerable, which has helped our farm to prosper.

Nimal  
Managing Director of Kamal Shrimp Farm




Photo: UNDP Sri Lanka




UNSDCF OUTCOME **4** **INCLUSIVE GOVERNANCE, JUSTICE & THE RULE OF LAW**




**25**  
projects



**134**  
local government authorities improved efficiency of their service delivery



**95%**  
of active multi-day fishing vessels equipped with a vessel monitoring system for improved maritime safety and security



**75**  
High Court Judges better equipped to adopt child friendly process



Photo: UNDP Sri Lanka

Against a challenging backdrop of economic turbulence and governance reforms tied to its IMF programme commitments, Sri Lanka introduced several legislative changes that sparked debate over civic space and human rights. Opposition from civil society organizations and public dissent even led to the withdrawal of some of these legislative proposals, underscoring the need for more inclusive and consultative legislative processes.

The UN's promotion of a people-centric, efficient public sector led to the formulation of important policies and action plans, including the National Policy on Migration for Employment and the National Action Plan on Sexual and Gender-Based Violence. The efficiency, service delivery and accountability of 134 local government authorities were improved. These initiatives, supported by public consultations and workshops around the country, pushed Sri Lanka's legal and institutional frameworks towards greater transparency, accountability, and inclusivity, with an emphasis on gender equality, disability inclusion, and human rights.

UN initiatives to combat forced labor and trafficking in persons bolstered governmental capacity, providing for a victim-centric approach to protect survivors. The UN further strengthened the prevention and response to human smuggling and other transnational crimes by improving the efficiency of the Border Risk Assessment Centre.

United Nations interventions enhanced Sri Lanka's ability to plan, deliver and monitor evidence-based and SDG-driven development. Successful efforts included promoting green financing and budget tagging across government institutions, aligning public expenditure estimates with SDG guidelines for improved monitoring and identification of priority areas for investment, and unlocking new finance streams.

UN assistance also improved the availability and use of timely, reliable data for effective decision-making in development planning and implementation. For example, the UN supported



**34,000+**  
people

gained greater access to the justice system

the Department of Census and Statistics in developing a roadmap to formulate the National Strategy for the Development of Statistics and capacitation on data anonymization. The continuous efforts of a wide range of actors, including the UN, to bridge data gaps increased the number of available SDG indicators from 46 to 156 within 6 years.

Another key focus of the UN was the enhancement of legal and operational frameworks through training and technical assistance to key commissions such as the Legal Aid Commission, Right to Information Commission and the Bribery Commission and the judiciary.

The Human Rights Commission of Sri Lanka (HRCSL) is now better equipped to follow rights-based and victim centric approaches to inquiry, investigation, prevention and unannounced visits to places of detention. Through UN support the HRCSL launched a guideline to the state and law enforcement on dealing with civilian protests. These efforts bolstered human rights protection mechanisms and ensured that child-friendly judicial processes were more widely adopted.

Initiatives like the Citizens' Budget and child-friendly governance reforms further solidified public engagement and governance accountability. Support for environmental conservation and the deployment of technologies such as the Vessel Monitoring System enabled the UN to reinforce maritime security and safety, and promote sustainable natural resource management practices in alignment with global environmental goals.





## KEEPING FAMILIES UNITED

Shanthi, a former child soldier and single mother, found herself and her two daughters in an extremely vulnerable position in Sri Lanka's post-conflict environment. Working as a cleaner, courageously embraced the role of the family's breadwinner but struggled to provide adequate care due to financial constraints. She had no choice but to place her daughters in an institution, hoping they would receive the necessary care, education, and nourishment.

Six months after their institutionalization, it became apparent that her daughters were not faring well without their mother. Recognizing the urgency of the situation, the UN, in collaboration with the Probation Department, initiated steps to reunify the family under the JURE project. This not only brought Shanthi and her daughters back together but also supported Shanthi's new livelihood through the financing of an irrigation system for her peanut farm, enabling her to provide for her family.

Shanthi's story is not uncommon in Sri Lanka. The JURE project represents a proactive shift to counter this narrative and align child welfare management with the National Policy for Alternative Care of Children. It involves key stakeholders from the judiciary, law enforcement, and local government to ensure comprehensive care.

By 2024, the UN had prevented over 1,000 children from being institutionalized and reunited nearly 300 children with their families. Moreover, 512 of the most vulnerable families have benefitted from economic support and social worker follow-ups, reinforcing family bonds and promoting self-sufficiency.

“ —  
With her **newfound independence**, my mother became a successful farmer and a dedicated mother who could finally care for us.

Latha  
Shanthi's daughter





5

## SOCIAL COHESION, SUSTAINING PEACE & HUMAN RIGHTS



14  
projects



**1600+**  
returnees

assisted in obtaining  
civil documentation

2023 saw the UN in Sri Lanka focus on advancing social cohesion, peace, and human rights through a variety of strategic initiatives. The UN provided support in developing the zero draft of a national media policy through a series of national consultations with the government. Once finalized, the policy will pave the way for more a robust and accountable media environment by addressing the spread of hate speech and disinformation.

Similarly, an island-wide consultation process was supported where feedback was sought from academics, civil society groups, rights activists, social media influencers and other stakeholder for the draft code of practice for social media platforms to enhance self-regulation online. The resulting feedback was duly included in the Code that was then submitted to social media platforms for endorsement.

Ongoing UN commitment to facilitating constructive dialogue and reform was demonstrated through a series of online consultations with CSOs over the proposed Anti-Terrorism Bill. These exchanges led to nine official submissions to the bill's National Consultation Process.



**275**

CSOs working on social cohesion  
received technical and financial support



**268**

returnees supported with  
income-generating opportunities

Additionally, the UN supported an independent needs assessment for the Office on Missing Persons and strengthened the skills of 36 staff of Office for Reparations to engage more effectively with communities, focusing particularly on youth and those affected by conflict. This was part of broader UN efforts to implement community-based reparations.

In the education sector, the UN aided in reviewing the National Action Plan on Education for Social Cohesion, leading to revisions that address emerging issues including hate speech and digital literacy. The validated action plan, enriched by these insights, is scheduled for launch in March 2024, marking a step forward in reinforcing social cohesion through education.

## CEMENTING A BETTER FUTURE



In the wake of Sri Lanka's devastating Civil War, communities were shattered, with widened societal tensions and many displaced from their homes and forced to live in refugee camps.

Among those uprooted was Vakshala, who, along with her family, was forced to leave her home in Kinnayadi. The war left its mark on her family, particularly her mother, who sustained injuries that greatly affect her life to this day.

The path to recovery began in 2014 when Vakshala's family returned to their ancestral home in Kinnayadi. Upon their return, the family embarked on the arduous journey of rebuilding their lives from the ashes of conflict by starting a business in cement block production.

Vakshala's turning point came when she was introduced to a UN-led programme through her local Divisional Secretariat office.

“  
I am very happy to be back in  
my hometown of Kinnayadi.  
There is no place like home.”

Vakshala  
Small-business owner

Recognizing her potential and the critical need for support, the UN conducted a thorough evaluation, leading to her participation in a transformative 5-day training programme. The programme not only equipped Vakshala with crucial business insights to expand her business but also laid the foundation for her family to recover and rebuild their community which had been torn apart by decades of conflict.



Photo: UNDP Sri Lanka



## REBUILDING LIVES

Sri Lanka's civil war resulted in loss of life, destruction of homes, and many survivors fleeing the island became refugees in other countries. This was the case for several fishing communities in coastal towns along the North and East, including the community of Passaiyoor which was displaced up to four times during the conflict.

The Expanded Support of Durable Resettlement and Reintegration (EDRR) Project, which was launched in Jaffna district in 2023, supports the community members of Passaiyoor by providing livelihood assistance in the form of the financial, technical and material resources that returnees need to heal and create a sustainable path forward.

The project is implemented in collaboration with multiple partners at all levels of society with the aim to promote justice, foster social cohesion, and prioritize sustainable and secure integration of conflict displaced persons for achieving durable peace in Sri Lanka.

Srikanth is one of the fisherman in Passiyoor who benefitted from a customized reintegration plan as part of the EDRR, which also considered his mental health and psychosocial needs. Despite his 12 years of fishing-experience, he faced many challenges in resuming his fishing business, as he didn't have his own fishing gear and had to depend on other fishermen for their nets.

The support provided by the UN allowed him to engage in his trade successfully and sell his catch at Passaiyoor fish market. As a result, he is now able to sustain himself and his family through his fishing business.



Photo: IOM Sri Lanka





# GENDER EQUALITY & WOMEN'S EMPOWERMENT



 **500**  
MSMEs

owned by women provided  
resources and training



National Policy on  
Gender Equality  
and Women's  
Empowerment  
**launched**

 **100%**

of state-owned shelters and  
safe houses enabled to provide  
uninterrupted support for  
survivors of GBV

In 2023, women and girls were disproportionately affected by Sri Lanka's economic crisis and the social dislocation it caused. Disruption of child education and shortages of fuel, gas and electricity increased stress on women as primary care givers. Unemployment has also shifted gender roles within households, with men and women reporting heightened levels of anxiety and women taking on new roles and/or multiple jobs to compensate for lost family income.

To address the disproportionate impact on women and girls, UN agencies came together with partners to advocate against violence perpetrated on women and girls and encourage a more unified approach to gender-responsive governance, in tandem with programmatic intervention.

UN support was instrumental in adopting Sri Lanka's first National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security. This plan, underscored by the formation of a Core Steering Committee, provides a robust framework for women's rights and gender equality.

This process was further strengthened by the development of the first National Policy on Gender Equality and Women Empowerment. The UN's technical assistance also shaped key legislation on Gender Equality, Women's Empowerment and the establishment of an independent National Women's Commission, providing leadership for women's rights and activities focusing on gender socialization and equalities.



Photo: ILO Sri Lanka



A transformative approach to prevent violence against women through women economic empowerment was adopted targeting 600 women entrepreneurs who received Rs. 26 million worth relief packages. The UN provided training on financial literacy, product ideation and development that equipped 542 women entrepreneurs to access assets valued at Rs. 110 million. Women university undergraduates were empowered to pursue careers in STEM.

Through institutional support, the UN facilitated multi-sectoral coordination to address sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), conducting district-level consultations and integrating gender-based violence and sexual reproductive health into disaster management plans across disaster-prone districts. Emergency relief services continued, with investments in women-owned micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs). By participating in UN-led trainings on gender responsive practices, over 1200 government entities, case managers, and officers learned about ways to encourage leadership, participation, and decision-making among women and girls.



Looking ahead, the UN is set to support the Sri Lankan government in implementing the National Action Plan for Women, Peace, and Security, focusing on legal, policy, and institutional reforms that are gender-sensitive, enhancing protection and economic empowerment for women, and bolstering their role in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and resolution.

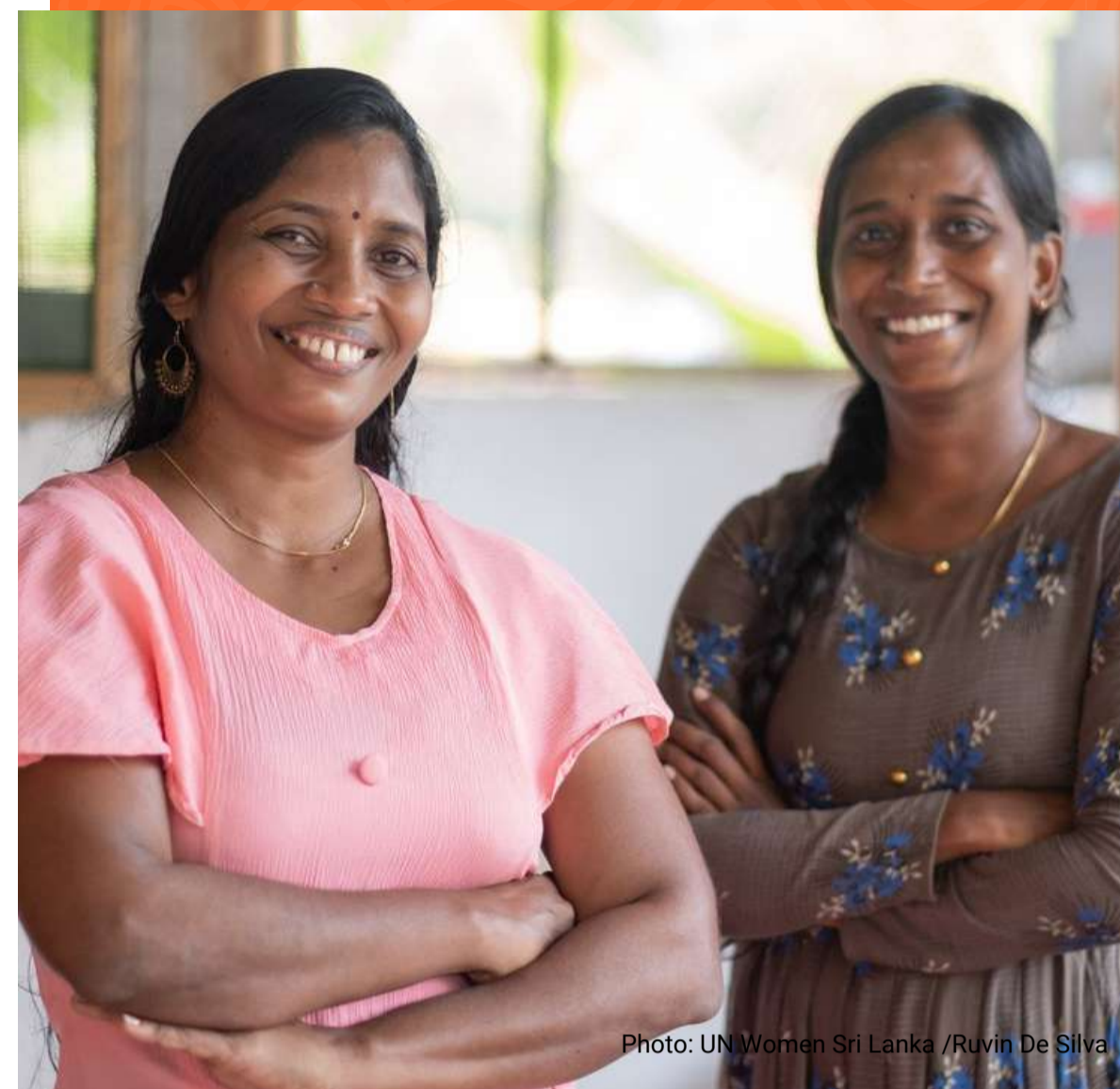


Photo: UN Women Sri Lanka /Ruvini De Silva

## BUSINESS FOR THE BETTER



Jena Jeyakanthi has been self-employed for two years, selling processed local herbs and vegetables under her own brand Good Life Products in Mannar, northern Sri Lanka. Jena says that she started this business to be 'self-reliant and to create a healthy society'.

However, running a business on her own has not been easy, especially during an economic crisis. The shortage of gas, fuel and power cuts made it even harder to continue.

Jena participated in a UN-led initiative aimed at empowering women to become, funded by the Government of Australia. In 2023, the project empowered nearly 100 women entrepreneurs to become economically independent and thus less vulnerable to violence.

## A SAFE SPACE FOR WOMEN IN CRISIS



The Association for Women with Disabilities (AKASA) is a network of self-help groups dedicated to creating opportunities and empowering women to lead lives with dignity and independence. Here, women and girls are not merely survivors; they are given the tools to thrive.

One of 11 women's shelters being supported by the UN, this safe house has become a lifeline offering shelter and a path towards healing for women with disabilities who have survived harrowing experiences of violence.

In the heart of Thalawa, AKASA stands as a symbol of resilience, healing and empowerment and is a testament to the strength of women and girls with disabilities who, with the right support and guidance, can rise above adversity to reach for the sky.



Photo: UN Women /Ravindra Rohana



Photo: UN Sri Lanka



## INSPIRATION IN ACTION



In response to the significant economic challenges that Sri Lanka has grappled with, twelve underserved low-income communities in Colombo have adopted an integrated approach. In collaboration with the Colombo Municipal Council, the UN contributed to initiatives such as establishing urban gardens in 600 households and raising awareness on food production, nutritional and hygiene practices as a means of fostering dignity, resilience, and independence among vulnerable communities.

These include lactating and pregnant mothers, women-headed households, families with individuals with disabilities, and women with children below five years old. By encouraging cost-saving healthy practices, these initiatives improved nutrition for women and children, thereby strengthening community-level social cohesion and trust.

Additionally, the programme provided essential health services, including maternal health and family planning, alongside services to prevent and respond to gender-based violence. This comprehensive approach aims to not only promote the overall well-being of communities, but also provide opportunities for inter-generational knowledge sharing and skills development for young UN Volunteers and V-Force volunteers in Sri Lanka.

“Working on this project has given me the satisfaction of playing a role in someone’s life, **helping people** who may not be able to help themselves.

Yumna  
UN Community Volunteer Peer Educator



Photo: UNV Sri Lanka



# 3 2024 PRIORITIES



## Supporting a sustainable and inclusive recovery

In 2024, Sri Lanka will face an important transition from economic stabilization to recovery. Investments in healthcare, education, and social protection despite prevailing fiscal constraints will ensure this transition is sustainable and inclusive. Improving the efficiency, coverage, and targeting of Sri Lanka's major social assistance programmes is a key part of this response, as is reversing the learning losses felt in general education and maintaining continuity and access to essential health services amidst fiscal consolidation.

## Tackling corruption and improving governance

Government has committed to extensive anti-corruption and governance reforms in 2024, with proposed new legislation in stolen asset recovery, public financial management and public procurement. Effective implementation of these reforms is important, as is the capacity for non-government stakeholders to be able to monitor their implementation and for entities to be accountable and responsive to the public.

## Sustaining a lasting and inclusive peace

In 2024, maintaining peace faces challenges from restricted state services due to economic reforms and limited civic freedom. Land disputes, involving state conservation and security, have grown complex in the Northern and Eastern Provinces. The pandemic and economic issues have stalled over 27,000 housing projects, undermining trust and exacerbating vulnerability. An election year, the current economic and social climate may potentially pose a threat to social cohesion, with new laws potentially curtailing political engagement. Strengthening civil society and ensuring election safety and fairness, especially for women, youth, and marginalized groups, is essential.

## Accelerating climate action

At the COP28 Conference in November 2023, Sri Lanka underscored its commitment to climate action for 2024. The government has signaled its intention to leverage international fora such as the Climate Justice Forum and the Tropical Belt Initiative to mobilize climate financing. Renewable energy is a key part of the government's Climate Change policy, underpinned by the commitment to achieve 70 per cent of electricity generation from renewable sources by 2030. State-owned enterprise reform is expected to provide opportunities for new investments in renewable energy, with Sri Lanka's emissions reduction commitments under the Paris Agreement implying an increase in renewable electricity capacity of nearly a third between 2022 and 2030.

Photo: UNDP Sri Lanka



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Photo: ILO Sri Lanka





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