COUNTRY STUDY

OUT-OF-SCHOOL CHILDREN IN SRI LANKA

SUMMARY REPORT

ALL CHILDREN IN SCHOOL BY 2015

Australian Aid

UNESCO Institute for Statistics

UNICEF
Message of the Hon. Minister of Education

When a high literacy prevails in a country it is possible to come to the conclusion that the country has a high level of education. Sri Lanka already has a literacy rate of 92.3 percent. It is our expectation to bring it up to 100 percent by 2015. With this in view, the Ministry of Education and the Provincial Education Departments are implementing various programmes. The study promoted by UNICEF on non-school-going children is a timely contribution to reinforce these efforts.

By conducting this survey in several selected Divisions, it has been possible to identify much analytical information about children of school-going age who do not attend school. The contributory factors to this situation are analysed thus providing an opportunity to adopt remedial measures.

The survey has identified poverty, illiteracy of parents, distance to school and various disabilities as the main reasons for some children avoiding school. The best approach to provide education to these children is formal school. It is therefore important that principals and teachers do their best to make education available to all children in their respective feeder areas. In this context, more admission to school is not only sufficient. It is equally important to adopt suitable, student-friendly teaching methods and to use modern technological equipment. While drawing the attention of all education professionals to this need, I would like to express my appreciation of the Non-formal and Special Education Branch of this Ministry which has helped in this study with great commitment and also of the Provincial Education Departments which have provided much valuable assistance. I would also like to express my thankfulness to UNICEF for sponsoring this study and to CENWOR for handling it.

Bandula Gunawardane
Minister of Education
Message from the UNICEF Representative

UNICEF Sri Lanka welcomes this opportunity to take part in the Global Initiative on Out-of-School Children, a joint project by UNICEF and UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), through the publication of this country report, Out-of-School Children in Sri Lanka: Country Study. This report presents an analysis of the most recent and reliable statistical information on out-of-school children in Sri Lanka, and examines the factors that lead to exclusion from schooling in the country. Its aim is to provide policy-makers with information about gaps in data, analysis and policy on the participation of children in school and so guide concrete reforms in the education sector and beyond to ensure that all children can exercise their right to education.

Sri Lanka has an excellent record on bringing children aged 5–14 years into school, following seven decades of universal free primary and secondary education. However, it is also acknowledged that some children with particular characteristics are vulnerable to exclusion from school or might be prevented from completing a full basic education of good quality. Using statistics gathered by the Ministry of Education, this study has identified profiles of children who fall into five dimensions of exclusion and are consequently most likely to be out of primary or lower secondary school or at risk of dropping out.

Out-of-school children often face deep-rooted structural inequalities and disparities. This study found that in Sri Lanka these are most commonly linked to income poverty, child labour, inadequacies in the supply of schools and teachers, deficiencies in the teaching–learning process, lack of facilities for children with disabilities, conflict and disasters caused by natural hazards, lack of political commitment and politicization of the system, weak coordination and implementation of programmes, problems with monitoring and data collection, and inadequate budget allocations and resource distribution.

By understanding the bigger picture through this systematic analysis, it is hoped that policies and strategies to address the problem of out-of-school children in Sri Lanka can be refined and strengthened to ensure the more equitable targeting of excluded groups of children, both by programmes within the education sector and more widely through multi-sectoral social protection measures.

UNICEF Sri Lanka would like to thank the Ministry of Education for their support and leadership throughout this country study. We also acknowledge the work of the Centre for Women’s Research (CENWOR) for their technical expertise in producing this country study. UNICEF Sri Lanka is grateful for the continuous support of the Government of Australia and hope that the recommendations made will help policy-makers to drive forward their efforts to further reduce the number of out-of-school children.

Reza Hossaini
Representative
UNICEF, Sri Lanka
Country Study:
Out of School Children in Sri Lanka,
Summary Report

Introduction
This Out of School Children Study in Sri Lanka is part of the Global Initiative on Out of School Children launched by UNICEF and the UNESCO Institute for Statistics in 2010. Its objectives are to explore currently available statistical information on out of school children (OOSC), identify factors that contribute to exclusion from schooling, and examine existing policies that are effective in enhancing participation as well as the gaps in policy and in the implementation of policies and programmes.

This global study uses the Five Dimensions of Exclusion (5DE) to analyse the problem of OOSC. Dimension 1 represents children of pre-primary school age who are not in pre-primary or primary education. Dimension 2 captures the out-of-school population of primary-school-age children (not in primary or secondary education) and Dimension 3 captures OOSC in the lower-secondary-school age group (not in primary or secondary education). Dimension 4 covers children in primary school who are considered at risk of dropping out, and Dimension 5 covers children in lower secondary school who are at risk of dropping out. In the Sri Lanka study Dimension 1 was excluded as reliable data is not available.

Figure 1.1: Five Dimensions of Exclusion (5DE)

Firstly, macro-level data sources were examined to determine how many and which children were out of school and which children were at risk of dropping out. OOSC were also classified by whether or not they were engaged in child labour in order to see whether child labour contributes to why children are not in school. The three main data sources used were the Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2006/07, the Annual School Census 2010 and the Child Activity Survey 2008/09. Using data from these sources, profiles of children in the 5DE were created. However, it should be noted that the DHS did not cover the five districts of the conflict-affected Northern Province, thus data on OOSC could be under-reported.

1 All figures quoted in this Executive Summary are derived from these three data sources, unless otherwise indicated.
According to the DHS, 2006/07, it was concluded that Sri Lanka has a relatively small proportion of out of school children - 1.5 percent of the primary school age children and 2.0 percent of the lower secondary school age (Department of Census and Statistics, 2006). There was gender parity in access to primary and secondary education and urban and rural differences were not very wide. There was very little difference in the rates of primary school age out of school children in the five wealth quintiles but there was a clear trend of declining rates from the poorest to the richest quintile in secondary education, particularly in senior secondary education.

The more recent and representative survey of Household Income and Expenditure, 2009/10 (Department of Census and Statistics, 2011) has reported that 98.2 percent of boys and girls in the 5-14 age group (primary and lower secondary levels) were in school- 98.6 percent in the urban sector, 98.3 percent in the rural sector, and 95.6 percent in the estate sector which had been disadvantaged for decades in former colonial enclaves. Those who never attended school were 1.0 percent of the age group and those who dropped out were 0.8 percent, the highest percentages were 2.0 percent and 2.3 percent respectively in the estate sector.

To refine the profiles of excluded children, the barriers and bottlenecks that are responsible for non-enrolment or dropout of children in Sri Lanka were identified, mainly through an analysis of micro-level studies on OOSC. Policies to address the barriers and bottlenecks were examined in terms of their impact on the exclusion of children. In addition, social protection measures that encourage the education of children and reduce the numbers of OOSC were identified. Finally, recommendations have been made on ways to improve the policy framework to ensure that all children in Sri Lanka are able to access a full cycle of basic education and are protected from exclusion.

Profiles of OOSC

- Children in Dimension 1, pre-primary OOSC, are more likely to be from the estate sector than rural and urban areas, and from poorer families than richer families. Gender is not a significant factor in non-attendance; however, girls in the estate sector are much less likely than boys in the estate sector to be attending an education programme. The overall attendance rate for four-year-olds is 92.7 percent.

- Children in Dimension 2, OOSC of primary school age, are as likely to be girls as boys, are also more likely to be from the estate sector than rural and urban areas, and to be from poorer families than richer families. In terms of absolute numbers, more primary-school-age children are out of school in urban areas than in rural or estate areas. Children in this dimension are less likely to be involved in child labour than those in Dimension 3 (older children). Disparities at primary level tend to be less pronounced than at lower secondary level. It is possible that a number of five-year-olds are not in a school as a result of admission regulations. It is estimated that 1.9 percent of primary-school-age children are out of school.

- Children in Dimension 3, OOSC of lower secondary school age, are slightly more likely to be boys, especially older ones, than girls. There is no disparity between children in rural and urban areas. Children in this dimension are most likely to belong to households in the poorer wealth quintiles. Of children in Dimension 3 who are engaged in child labour, they are most likely to be boys and children from urban areas. It is estimated that 3.3 percent of lower-secondary-school-age children are out of school.

- Children in Dimension 4 are at risk of dropping out of primary school. They are as likely to be boys as girls. Children of this age are not very likely to be involved in child labour; but for those that are, a high proportion are still attending school and therefore at risk of dropping out. Boys are more likely than girls to be in-school working children. There are more overage boys than girls in primary school and repetition rates are higher for boys than for girls. Current dropout rates for in-school children aged 5–9 years are around one percent.

- Lower-secondary-school-age children at risk of dropping out (Dimension 5) are more likely to be boys than girls. Involvement in child labour puts children at risk of dropping out, particularly for boys; however, by this age, many working children have already become OOSC. There
are more overage boys than girls in lower secondary school and repetition rates are higher for boys than for girls. Current dropout rates for lower-secondary-school-age children climb from 1.0 percent for 10-year-olds to 5.1 percent for 13-year-olds.

**Barriers and Bottlenecks to education**

Although national statistics show few patterns of exclusion at primary and lower secondary levels, with no significant findings on age, gender, wealth or rural–urban divide, it is acknowledged that a substantial number of children aged 5–14 years are still out of school and are being denied their right to an adequate basic education. Examination of micro-level studies on OOSC revealed the following common barriers to education.

Demand-side socio-cultural barriers and bottlenecks influencing exclusion (non-enrolment, dropping out prematurely from school and high absenteeism) center on family poverty with other vulnerabilities. Poor health and disabilities also were found to prevent children from obtaining a full cycle of basic education. The inability of very low income families to spend on clothing, stationery, private coaching and books, and children kept back from school to look after younger siblings, to seek employment to support the family and to assist parents’ activities such as farming, fishing and small businesses emerged as determinants of non-participation in education. The absence of a conducive home environment and lack of study space and facilities are also barriers linked to poverty. Among other barriers which impact negatively on children's school attendance and performance are lack of parental encouragement for children to attend school regularly, migration of mothers for temporary employment overseas, fathers' alcoholism, neglect of children, and consequent emotional distress suffered by children.

In the case of supply side barriers, lack of provision for education for children with disabilities, relatively lower level of facilities and services for institutionalised children (including a total lack of access for children in detention), disparities in basic facilities, services, teacher availability and quality among provinces, districts and sectors have been highlighted. Deprivation and marginalisation linked to factors such as residence in locations lacking transport and other basic facilities and lack of access to schools with good educational facilities were seen to result in non-enrolment and drop out. Studies also pointed out how long years of armed conflict in the north and east and adjacent districts had caused disruption in people’s lives, school closure, poor teacher deployment and poor teacher attendance, irregular school attendance, low performance and drop out, and also children being recruited as child soldiers by rebel groups in affected areas.

The responses of caregivers and children indicated that children in disadvantaged families were particularly demotivated by negative attitudes of teachers, uninteresting lessons, and harassment by teachers and peers. This situation could partly be due to the social distance between the teacher community and the communities from which these children are drawn as well as poor attendance and poor achievement which arise from poverty and poverty-related disadvantages which make children less motivated in studies. In addition, it could also stem from the teacher-centered, transmission – mode of education which has undergone little change in spite of continuous efforts to reform education.

Although gender does not appear to be a major factor leading to the lack of access to or dropout from education, it is noteworthy that gender appears to be a socio-cultural barrier in certain ethnic groups (e.g., plantation Tamils and Moors/Malays). In some communities, there may be cultural factors that pull girls out of school and into work. In the study by Kannangara et al. (2003) of child domestic workers, girls were more often employed than boys and approximately 59 percent of child domestic workers were from Tamil-speaking communities. The field survey conducted for this study found that some girls in the Muslim community dropped out of school after menarche; this was most prevalent in low-income families.

Studies have shown that currently the percentage of out of school children is relatively higher among the Sri Lankan Tamil children as a result of the closure of schools during the long drawn-out armed conflict in the Northern and Eastern provinces. In the historically under-privileged plan-
tation families of Indian Tamil origin enrolment rates in the 5-14 age group have risen to around 95 percent, and gender disparities have been virtually eliminated. These families are still disadvantaged in access to quality senior secondary education.

**Policies and programmes envisaged to address barriers and bottlenecks**

Policies and programmes to address these barriers were examined from the perspectives of the educational and social protection needs of primary and lower secondary school age children.

The Education Sector Development Framework and Programme (ESDFP) 2006–2010 and Transforming School Education as the Foundation of a Knowledge Hub 2011–2015 are Sri Lanka’s two foremost policies supporting the country’s education system. Both address the barriers to education to a large extent and are supported by policies developed by the Ministry of Education and the ministries of other related sectors.

The ESDFP is helping to address the need for greater parental awareness through participatory bottom-up planning at the school level and the reinvigoration of Compulsory Attendance Committees. To address gender concerns, the ESDFP states that ‘schools will promote gender integration and mutual respect for boys and girls, and emphasize equal rights and equality in all aspects of life and mutual respect for each other’. Gender issues have also been addressed through amendments to legislation concerning early marriage and through a focus on providing adequate sanitation facilities for girls in programmes on school infrastructure enhancement. The policy for Transforming School Education promotes equal access for boys and girls to globalized knowledge and avenues for advancement. Health concerns are addressed though School Medical Inspections and the recently introduced School Health Promotion Policy and Programme 2008–12. Malnutrition is addressed through school-feeding/school meals programmes for primary grades.

**Gender**

Gender disparities in education have largely been eliminated in Sri Lanka as a result of the long-standing policy of free education. In fact, girls have higher retention rates than boys. By the end of the 1960s, there were more girls than boys in upper secondary grades as boys tended to dropout early to join the labour force and girls continued in schools in the context of the provision of free education. In 2009, 57.5 percent of those enrolled in Grades 12 and 13 were girls (MOE, 2009a). Clearly, the preponderance of coeducational schools (96.6 percent) has accelerated progress towards gender parity. Sri Lanka has achieved the third Millennium Development Goal of eliminating disparities in enrolment in education in primary, secondary and tertiary education as a consequence of the positive social policies implemented over many decades. Significantly, gender parity was achieved at the primary level by 2006, even in the historically disadvantaged estate sector, with 94.4 percent of boys and 94.8 percent of girls enrolled (DCS, 2006).

No specific gender-related policies and programmes have been introduced, as it is not perceived to be a major concern. However, while gender parity has been achieved, gender equality has been delayed. This is commonly attributed to positive sex-disaggregated data creating complacency that has overshadowed the need to promote substantive gender equality through education processes such as the curriculum and teaching–learning activities. A negative and visible outcome is gender differences in enrolment in science, commerce and arts streams at upper secondary level and higher levels of education. It is a matter of concern that education policies and programmes have yet to be directed at empowering girls to challenge gender stereotypes and societal norms, to enlarge their education and career choices according to their aptitudes, and to exercise agency in their decision-making with regards to situations that affect their quality of life.

**Demand-side economic policies and strategies**

**Poverty**

Poverty is largely tackled through the national policy of free education at primary, secondary and tertiary levels as well as scholarships, free textbooks, free school uniforms and subsidized transport. The ESDFP includes guidelines to ensure that no child is left out of school due to poverty.
Social protection programmes also target poor households; for example, the Samurdhi Poverty Alleviation Programme provides scholarships for the schooling of eligible children in very poor beneficiary families. The Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Affairs also supports the education of poor children.

While these policies have cumulatively contributed to declining poverty levels in the country, and the incidence of poverty is reported by the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) to have declined to 8.9 percent in 2009/10 from 15.2 percent in 2006/07, multi-dimensional poverty continues to be the major overarching factor that has denied the right to education of around 2 percent of the compulsory age group comprising the ‘hard to reach’ children from the most vulnerable groups. Micro studies and our own field investigation undertaken with this study have identified the areas of concentration of out of school children-urban low income neighborhoods, disadvantaged rural communities, plantation families and currently, areas that were affected by the armed conflict. Contrary to the national non schooling rate, dropout rates in the most disadvantaged administrative Divisions have been between 11 percent and 15 percent (DCS, 2006). Consequently, Sri Lanka has only ‘nearly achieved’ the second Millennium Development Goal of universal primary education.

It appears however that the number of children in vulnerable groups who are outside the education system points not only to poverty related factors but also to the gap between policy and implementation as a result of the lack of commitment on the part of some officials working at the local level. It was noted, for instance, that despite the responsibility given to Non Formal Education officers at local level to ensure compliance with the compulsory education regulations, only around 50 percent of the Compulsory Attendance Committees appointed to seek out of school children and assist them to enter or re-enter school were active. The number of centres for ‘street’ children had declined from six to four from 2006 to 2010. The second strategy adopted to facilitate access to schools is the extension of the non-formal education/functional literacy centres and the promotion of lateral entry to formal schools when sufficient skills in literacy and numeracy have been acquired in order to provide a ‘second chance’ to out of school children. The numbers of centres and children enrolled have increased since 2006 but they can meet the educational needs of a very small proportion of out of school children.

**Child Labour**

Child labour is a strategy of poor families to encourage children to engage in economic activities to augment household income to meet basic needs. At the same time, however, it denies the right of children to education, and consequently to opportunities for upward occupational mobility, and places the child in an exploitative and abusive work environment. Sri Lanka has ratified the ILO Conventions 138 and 182 on prohibition of child labour under 14 years, and worst forms of labour for children under 18 years, and has made the relevant amendments to the Employment of Women, Young Persons and Children Act. The Ministry of Labour with the support of ILO has introduced in 2009 and 2010 a Decent Work Policy and a Road Map to eliminate the worst forms of child labour.

Despite these initiatives, the Child Activity Survey, 2008/2009 (DCS 2011) found that 2.5 percent or 107,259 of the total child population were engaged in ‘child labour’- 1.0 percent in non-hazardous work and 1.5 percent in hazardous forms of child labour. Studies have recorded the experiences of children some of whom have been trafficked for exploitative economic activities such as domestic service, manufacturing industries in the informal sector, domestic agriculture, plantation labour, fishing, casual manual labour, begging on streets, and commercial sex work. The field study found two young boys, seven and eleven years old, working in full view of officials appointed to ensure compulsory attendance in schools or child protection. Children were found to work as manual labourers, in domestic service, assisting in small shops, electrical work, carpentry, farming, care of livestock and vending. All these children are deprived of access to education.

The informal sector, unprotected by labour legislation, clearly has incidence of child labour and the juxtaposition of the experiences of these children and the regulatory framework in the education and employment sectors calls for public concern and legal action.
Migration of mothers

There are currently no policies targeting the educational vulnerabilities of children whose mothers have migrated for labour purposes. This is an obvious policy gap, and again could be addressed through linking policies on social protection to the education of children with migrant mothers, benefiting children mostly in dimension 3 who have fallen out of school because of family dysfunction.

Although special assistance is provided for children of female migrant domestic workers who have qualified for the Grade 5 scholarship, children of other women female workers are vulnerable to dropping out. The new National Policy on Labour Migration 2009 also addresses this issue; it proposes a registration and monitoring system that tracks all children of migrant workers at divisional level, and provides support services and benefits to children and families in distress and neglected and abused children.

Supply-side policies and strategies

Distribution of schools

The uneven distribution of schools is a primary concern of the Mahindra Chintana: Development Framework 2010, which intends the development of 1,000 secondary schools attached to 4–5 primary schools in each locality. The policy for Transforming School Education also envisages a primary school in each village and a secondary school within a reasonable distance. The Education Act recognizes the need for the removal of disparities in the distribution of schools.

Imbalances in the types of school that exist can lead to inequities in the allocation of school resources. This is reflected in high regional variations in average learning achievements. The National Education and Research and Evaluation Centre study (NEREC, 2003) looked at learning achievements of 16,383 Grade 4 students across the country. The proportion of students attaining mastery of their first language (Sinhala or Tamil) varied from 54.5 percent in Northern Province to 72.8 percent in Western Province. Similarly, mastery of mathematics ranged from 50.3 percent in Northern Province to 71.1 percent in Western Province, and mastery of English varied from 35.6 percent in Northern and Eastern Provinces to 54.3 percent in Western Province. The urban–rural differences in these three subjects were also significant. Some 50.3 percent of students in urban schools attained mastery in their first language compared to 33.2 percent in rural schools; 51.3 percent in urban schools attained mastery in mathematics compared to 34.8 percent in rural schools; 21.6 percent in urban schools attained mastery in English compared to 6.7 percent in rural schools. Colombo, Gampaha, Matara and Kalutara had the highest achievements, and Trincomalee, Nuwara Eliya, Batticaloa, Mullaitivu and Kilinochchi had the lowest. ‘Being weak in studies’ is often cited by children as a reason for dropping out of school.

Exclusion from education can also be affected by the lack of particular types of school and by the distance required to travel to get to school. In 2001, 68.5 percent of plantation schools were Type 3 schools with only primary grades (Korale, 2004). This could have an effect on the ability of children to transition to lower secondary education in these areas, and their willingness to stay in primary school. The National Education Commission’s (NEC, 2003) study on rationalization of schools found that, as a result of the closure of some small schools, an additional 5–30 children had dropped out of each school in 34 percent of the 221 schools examined.

Where children have to travel a long distance to school or where travelling is difficult or dangerous, this contributes to raised levels of dropout; this is seen especially in the conflict-affected districts of Batticaloa, Trincomalee and Ampara (MOE et al., 2009). Gunawardane and Jayaweera (2004) also found that ‘distance to school’ was a factor in children’s non-attendance in the schools they sampled.

School infrastructure facilities

The ESDFP and Transforming School Education policy both include provisions for constructing and improving school infrastructure such as toilets and water supply, classrooms, science laboratories, computer rooms and playgrounds. The Child-Friendly Schools Programme introduced by
UNICEF is being integrated across more primary schools.

Disparities in the provision of education facilities have reinforced the marginalisation of the poor and vulnerable groups of children. Policies and programmes which have sought to address quality related barriers and disparities have not met expectations.

According to the School Health and Nutrition Unit of the MOE, 17.0 percent of schools had no access to water in 2010; this ranged from 0.9 percent in Colombo to 21.9 percent in Moneragala, 22.9 percent in Anuradhapura, 23.9 percent in Badulla, 26.9 percent in Nuwara Eliya and 29.2 percent in Ampara (MOE, 2011c). Additional data indicate that 74.3 percent of schools have teachers’ toilets and 73.5 percent to students’ toilets, while 81.9 percent have access to electricity and 37.2 percent to telephones (MOE, 2010). A study conducted in 2009 in 617 households in selected locations in 10 districts representing the nine provinces found that 72.2 percent households had improved sources of drinking water, 88.1 percent had satisfactory sanitation facilities and 64.1 percent had both these amenities. However, wide disparities were apparent within the three sectors (urban, rural and estate), between districts and across income quintiles (Jayatissa and Hossaine, 2010).

In 2007, the MOE classified schools according to the level of ‘congeniality’, with a low score indicating poor infrastructure and facilities. As Table 1 shows, the conflict-affected Northern and Eastern Provinces, the rural North Central Province and the Central Province with its concentration of plantations have the highest percentage of schools classified as “uncongenial” or ‘very uncongenial’.

Table 1: Classification of schools according to level of ‘congeniality’ by province, 2007

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Province</th>
<th>Very congenial</th>
<th>Congenial</th>
<th>Non-congenial</th>
<th>Uncongenial</th>
<th>Very uncongenial</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Western</td>
<td>24.4</td>
<td>41.4</td>
<td>27.7</td>
<td>5.9</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central</td>
<td>10.5</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>30.3</td>
<td>10.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Southern</td>
<td>11.7</td>
<td>31.0</td>
<td>34.0</td>
<td>18.1</td>
<td>5.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Northern</td>
<td>4.1</td>
<td>18.6</td>
<td>15.8</td>
<td>13.4</td>
<td>47.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Eastern</td>
<td>5.4</td>
<td>19.3</td>
<td>17.4</td>
<td>21.0</td>
<td>36.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Western</td>
<td>11.5</td>
<td>21.7</td>
<td>30.1</td>
<td>23.5</td>
<td>13.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North Central</td>
<td>7.2</td>
<td>17.0</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>31.8</td>
<td>28.1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Uva</td>
<td>6.7</td>
<td>23.2</td>
<td>32.5</td>
<td>26.7</td>
<td>10.8</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sabaragamuwa</td>
<td>15.9</td>
<td>25.2</td>
<td>31.1</td>
<td>23.7</td>
<td>4.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sri Lanka</td>
<td>11.6</td>
<td>24.6</td>
<td>26.8</td>
<td>21.3</td>
<td>15.6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


The quality of school facilities has a profound impact on whether children enroll in school or decide to drop out early. This is especially true for schools with inadequate sanitary amenities. Children in all dimensions are affected by poor quality infrastructure. Policies and funding must especially address the shortcomings in infrastructure for schools in conflict-affected and poor districts at both primary and secondary levels; this is important for children in Dimensions 2 and 3 to bring them into school and for children in Dimensions 4 and 5 to keep them in school. Improvement in sanitation and water facilities will particularly help prevent girls in Dimension 5 from dropping out. School sanitation programmes are an obvious place for coordinated policy between the ministries of education and health.

**Teacher deployment**

The issue of teacher deployment and training is addressed in the ESDFP. One objective is to ‘introduce divisional-level teacher recruitment and deployment to ensure availability of required teachers to all schools.’ The training of teachers is also addressed through a variety of measures from pre-service to in-service training as well as re-training where appropriate. Curriculum reform
is also envisaged, particularly with respect to ‘increasing the relevance of the curriculum to future requirements and to higher order abilities through curriculum and examination reforms.’

There are 215,141 teachers in Sri Lanka, of whom 71.2 percent are women. However, the impact of gender norms appears to account for the fact that only 25 percent of school principals are women.

A major policy issue that impacts the quality of education available for children in disadvantaged communities is the inequitable distribution of teachers, and shortages of teachers in critical subjects juxtaposed with surplus teachers in others. It has been claimed that the use of the uniform ‘ready reckoner’ computation in allocating teachers to schools has perpetuated the inequitable distribution of teachers over the years. More discouragement is the deviation from recruitment policies by politicization of deployment, transfer and promotion practices. A third factor is the reluctance of teachers to work in schools with minimal amenities and those located in difficult areas. The proposal in the ESDFP to allocate an allowance amounting to 40 percent of salary to teachers in remote and difficult areas as an incentive has been accepted but has yet to be implemented as a result of budgetary constraints. Consequently, schools in disadvantaged locations continue to be marginalized with respect to qualified and committed teachers and are vulnerable to closure as ‘uneconomic’ and inefficient institutions, resulting in deprivation for the very poor of their right to education. The gulf between policy and practice remains wide and largely unbridged.

Child abuse

The incidence of child abuse in the home, at school and in communities, which is often hidden behind a façade of privacy, has become a more visible issue of concern in Sri Lanka since the last decade of the 20th century. Measures have been taken to protect children in and out of school from violence and other forms of abuse through legislation and access to services. However, the impact has been minimal. An administrative circular from the MOE prohibiting corporal punishment has been sent to schools repeatedly without much impact.

Amendments to the Penal Code in 1995, 1998 and 2006 included increases in punishments for rape and the specifying of incest, grave sexual abuse and sexual harassment as criminal offences. The National Child Protection Authority (NCPA) has a mechanism for handling complaints such as a ‘hotline’ and a legal officer and police unit to take action in court. Its role is to work with Child Promotion and Rights Officers of the Department of Probation and Child Care and District Children’s Development Committees on issues of child abuse, and also with Non-Formal Education Officers to investigate why children are not in school and facilitate school attendance. The Department of Probation and Child Care is mandated to protect the rights of children including those in conflict with the law. Under the Commissioner of Probation and Child Care, Child Rights Promotion Officers (CRPOs) at divisional level are expected to create awareness on child rights and on the need to prevent child abuse, and to report such abuse to the Divisional Secretary and to the District Probation Officers. These probation officers have no legal power but are required to work with the police to send offenders to court.

There is clearly a wide gap between policies and their implementation and children continue to be vulnerable to all forms of abuse and violence. For instance, despite the issuing of a Ministry circular prohibiting corporal punishment in schools, there is evidence of a high incidence of such violence still continuing. A recent study on school participation noted that 60 percent of principals and 71 percent of teachers said that corporal punishment was administered in their schools, and children often complain of harsh punishments as a reason for dropping out (Jayaweera and Gunawardena, 2009). While probation officers are known to have taken principals and teachers to court following complaints by parents, school authorities often appear to be disinclined to take action to eliminate such abuse. It appears that punishment as a means to enforce discipline in schools continues to be favoured with impunity and that there is inadequate supervision and monitoring of enforcement of the MOE circular on corporal punishment by local education officials.

Disabilities

In response to widely voiced concerns, legislation in the form of the Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act 1996 was enacted to meet the needs of those with physical, mental,
psychiatric and multiple disabilities. A National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities was set up in 1996 in the Ministry of Social Services, and community or project assistants were appointed to assist social service officers at the local level in implementing programmes. A National Policy on Disability has been implemented since 2003 to promote equity and inclusion as equal citizens for those with disabilities. The policy addresses a wide range of needs including accessibility to schools, combating of negative socio-cultural attitudes, promotion of inclusive education, development of skills, and access to teacher training through the NIE and a National College of Education assigned to train teachers for inclusive education (Ministry of Social Services, 2003). ESDFP also acknowledges that children with disabilities needed specific attention to ensure their access to education. The Non-Formal Education Division of the Ministry of Education has developed a number of services for children with disabilities.

In 2009, 2,742 children (55.5 percent boys and 44.5 percent girls) were enrolled in 25 Special Schools and 52,786 in state schools (60.8 percent boys and 39.2 percent girls) (MOE, 2009b). However, since 2006, attrition rates have been high and only around half have transitioned from primary to secondary level. Annual reviews of the ESDFP indicate that progress has been slow in enrolling more children with disabilities. Many of these children, therefore, continue to be marginalized and vulnerable.

Governance and management policies and strategies

Natural disaster and conflict

In the aftermath of the tsunami and three decades of armed conflict, policies and programmes have addressed the need to rehabilitate and reconstruct schools and to facilitate the participation in education of affected children including former child combatants of the LTTE. Access to schools had been affected by the intermittent closure of schools, displacement of families and child conscription, although voluntary informal classes and the ‘Catch up’ programmes had been conducted in some locations. Despite the re-opening or reconstruction of schools, there are continuing problems such as distance to schools, lack of public transport, shortage of teachers and educational facilities, and poor living conditions in resettled locations.

The Disaster Management Act of 2005 introduced legislation and established a Central Disaster Management Centre to facilitate disaster risk reduction. ‘National Guidelines for School Disaster Safety’ were developed in 2008 with GIZ support for school security, awareness, inclusion of disaster related aspects in the school and teacher education curriculum, and arrangements for school safety but this programme has yet to reach all schools. A land mine risk education programme in former conflict affected areas and an emergency preparedness and response programme are supported by UNICEF. National Policy and a Comprehensive Framework of Actions on Education and Social Cohesion and Peace’ was also developed in 2008 with GIZ to prevent conflict by fostering national harmony in Sri Lanka’s multicultural society. A Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit has been established in the Ministry of Education but a recent evaluation indicated that there was as yet little impact on school programmes.

The Ministry of Education is currently addressing problems created in the education system by conflict. As well as repairing infrastructure and returning schools to normalcy, it has established Psychosocial Care Units and Psychosocial Resource Centres in all nine provinces. The Ministry of Social Services provides assistance to the victims of disaster. The Central Disaster Management Centre has been established to provide legislative and institutional arrangements for disaster risk reduction. The Ministry of Disaster Management and Human Rights has developed National Guidelines for School Disaster Safety. A National Policy and a Comprehensive Framework of Actions on Education and Social Cohesion and Peace has been developed, and a Social Cohesion and Peace Education Unit established in the Ministry of Education.

One objective of the ESDFP is to transform the planning process through a bottom-up approach such as with the introduction of Annual School Development Plans. It also aims to improve the monitoring of the education programme with a Results-Based Monitoring Framework and a Public Expenditure and Quality of Education Tracking System.
The ESDFP’s third theme is ‘increasing equity in the distribution of resources’. It has implemented several new measures and modified the formula for allocations in order to direct more resources to disadvantaged districts.

The country’s main social protection programme is the Samurdhi Poverty Alleviation Programme, which comprises a consumption income transfer for poor households along with a compulsory savings component and social insurance. The programme covers 35–40 percent of the population. However, expenditure on this programme has declined in recent years from 1.9 percent of GDP in 2001 to 0.2 percent in 2009.

**Political will**

Political will has been manifested at the highest level in all policies to promote and facilitate participation in education. However, the absence of a similar commitment among some implementers at local level and negative extraneous interventions have undermined the achievement of optimal results. Some lack of clarity in the lines of ‘authority in the implementation of the devolution policy since 1987 has created confusion in lines of authority.

**Coordination of programmes**

Absence of effective coordination is seen in three areas of programme operation: within the education sector, between sectors and with donors. It was noted earlier that mechanisms have been created for coordination at the local level, e.g., the Compulsory Attendance Committees to implement the compulsory education regulations, and the District Child Development Committees functioning under the Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Affairs. While these committees are expected to have representation from state agencies meetings were reported to be irregular and collaboration to be limited.

**Planning and implementation of programmes**

A breakthrough in the traditional centralization of planning and plan implementation towards a participatory approach was partially achieved with the introduction of the ESDFP. The objective has been to transform the planning process through a bottom-up approach, with Annual School Development Plans being prepared at the school level in cooperation with local stakeholders and the community as an initial step. While this innovation has been set in motion and the preparation of Annual School Development Plans has been incorporated in the planning process, there have inevitably been ‘teething problems’ as a result of the lack of capacity in schools and local education offices to cope with the new procedures.

A study in 2008 carried out in 135 schools in 27 zones in all nine provinces found that 85 percent of schools had annual plans, minimally in small primary schools; however, in the majority of these schools the plans had been prepared by the principal, deputy principal and a few senior teachers without the expected participation of the School Development Society, past students, students, parents and community representatives (Coalition for Educational Development, 2008). There were complaints that the planning guidelines were complicated and that the delay in receiving funds and the inadequacy of funds had affected the implementation of plans (Jayaweera and Gunawardena, 2007). Nevertheless, this innovation has contributed towards increased effectiveness of the planning process, identification and inclusion of OOSC, and a better distribution of resources that could accelerate the task of bringing all children into the school system.

A further innovation that has had positive consequences has been the focus on higher order processes and the accelerated learning campaign to improve student learning outcomes in core subjects; this is likely to reduce the incidence of dropout (World Bank, 2006–2010). An innovation in the management sphere has been the incorporation of efforts towards school-based management through the Programme for School Improvement (PSI); the intention is to empower stakeholders in the local community to become more involved in their school, as they are likely to be more sensitive to the needs of local children from disadvantaged families. Awareness campaigns for this programme were carried out and seed grants allocated to schools in 65 pilot zones under the ESDFP (MOE, 2006; World Bank, 2011a). An evaluation of selected primary schools found that, among other things, parents in poorer communities had become more aware of the impor-
tance of supporting children in their school work, and thereby ensuring their continued attendance
in school (World Bank, 2011a).

Another positive initiative has been the child-friendly schools programme sponsored by UNICEF
which has had an impact on bringing OOSC to school, improving the quality of the teaching–
learning process, and ensuring community participation in planning and management even in
small, disadvantaged schools. The child-friendly approach needs however to be integrated in all
schools.

**Monitoring**

The weakest aspect of management and delivery mechanisms is the absence of an effective
monitoring process that ensures smooth implementation of policies and programmes and pro-
vides feedback for corrective action. Although the ESDFP has developed a Results-Based Moni-
toring and Evaluation Framework, which is expected to be used at all levels of implementation, in
actual practice there is very little monitoring, as seen clearly in the poor enforcement of compul-
sory education regulations and minimal activities of District Child Development Committees. This
weakness in monitoring stems from the lack of capacity of some members of school and office
staff to engage in such tasks and/or the low priority accorded to tasks. There also appears to be
structural weakness in the education sector caused by the marginalization of Divisional Offices
in the planning, implementation and monitoring of education programmes, despite the fact that
this office, unlike the zonal office, has a manageable number of schools and communities in its
domain for implementation and ongoing monitoring of programmes.

**Availability of data**

Sri Lanka has comprehensive and efficient data-gathering and analysis procedures implemented
by the national agency, the Department of Census and Statistics, and by the Central Bank and
line ministries and other sectoral agencies such as the ministries of education, health and labour
that focus on programmes for children in or out of school. Unfortunately research and evaluation
studies are constrained by the fact that not all this information is in the public domain and acces-
sible to data users perhaps due to resource limitations, and that accessing data within these
institutions is a time-consuming process, as was experienced first-hand by this study.

**Recommendations**

Although Sri Lanka has an inclusive and universal education policy that has resulted in the vast
majority of school-age children being enrolled in school and successfully completing a full cycle of
basic education, there are a number of concerns that still need to be addressed. Overall, a major
outcome of the study is to underscore the need to bridge the gap between policies and imple-
mentation of policies and programmes to ensure that all children irrespective of socio-economic
background have the right to education and to a quality of life free from stress and violence. The
following recommendations are intended to support the further strengthening of the education
system to help ensure that no child is excluded. They are also intended as responses to social
protection as well as education concerns.

**Demand-side socio-cultural recommendations**

- Curricula for teachers and schools should include materials that will promote critical thinking
  on socio-cultural issues and change stereotypical attitudes in order to promote gender equal-
  ity and social harmony.

**Demand-side economic recommendations**

- As proposed in recent education policy documents, the age for compulsory education should
  be extended to 16 years, as many studies have observed that it is difficult to exit poverty
  without an education to at least GCE O Level standard. A scholarship scheme at the end
  of Grade 9 should be introduced with donor assistance (as in the Asian Development Bank
  scholarships) to assist children with recognized ability in economically disadvantaged fam-
ilies to continue studies without having to engage in economic activities. However, it is acknowledged that would require further resources from national and local governments; this should also be addressed.

• The Compulsory Education Regulations and ancillary policies such as alternative provisions for admission of children without birth certificates and prohibition on the levying of school admission fees/donations should be strictly enforced. Compulsory Attendance Committees should be activated to visit homes to identify OOSC. They should be enabled to take proactive measures to raise awareness among parents and caregivers on the value of education and provide support to ensure that children are not deprived of their right to education.

• If education is to compensate to some extent for poverty, education programmes should focus directly on vulnerable groups and meet their specific needs for assistance in order to facilitate their access to education. For instance, a small committee of stakeholders familiar with the needs of targeted communities could be appointed to develop specific programmes to ensure that such initiatives are not lost in larger programmes.

• Sri Lanka should develop a universal social insurance scheme, as targeted programmes such as the Samurdhi programme have had less impact than the free education and health services policies. Meanwhile, as a transition measure, the Samurdhi programme should be revamped to meet the needs of only the most vulnerable families.

• Assistance should be obtained to extend the school meals programme to secondary schools in disadvantaged locations.

• The current policy of providing nutritional supplementation should be continued.

• School Medical Inspections should be extended to all schools so that early detection of illnesses and disability and referral for specialized treatment is possible.

• The National Education Commission should formulate a policy to meet the needs of children with disabilities and request the Ministry of Education to sensitize the provincial and zonal authorities regarding this policy, especially on the need for resource allocations sufficient for effective implementation.

• The Ministry of Education and Provincial Ministries of Education should establish Special Education Units in schools, which can cater to severely disabled children, and train a cadre of teachers for such units. In addition, as present policy is to include children with special needs who are not severely affected in mainstream classes, inclusive education should be offered as an optional subject in all teacher education programmes.

• Awareness programmes should be conducted to address stigma surrounding disability.

• Labour legislation should be implemented effectively to prohibit child labour and hazardous employment not only in the formal sector but also in the informal sector as a universal policy.

• The National Child Protection Authority should be strengthened with human and financial resources to equip it to monitor child abuse at the local level.

• The circular prohibiting corporal punishment should be implemented purposefully, and education and social protection officials should monitor implementation and take legal action against violations. Alternative and positive approaches and strategies should be adopted to create a ‘disciplined’ environment in classrooms.

• An accelerated learning and action programme needs to be implemented to reinvigorate education and social protection services in conflict-affected areas.

• The Disaster Safety Policy and the Social Cohesion Policy should be incorporated in the primary and secondary school curricula, as they have not reached many schools at present.
Supply-side recommendations

- Innovative ways of making the school an inclusive institution—catering to diverse student needs, preparing teachers in inclusive education to support a child-friendly learning-teaching environment, and providing cost-effective resources to encourage student participation—should be piloted and implemented at both local and national levels. Improvements in infrastructure should ensure that schools are gender-sensitive and disabled-friendly and include inputs such as separate toilets for boys and girls, safe water, child-friendly classrooms, playgrounds and sports equipment, and appropriate technological facilities.

- The nature of the examination-dominated and overloaded school curriculum appears to be a factor that pushes children out of school. Curriculum guides should give priority to providing adequate space and time for creative and practical work appropriate for all types of learners and different learning styles.

- Considering the number of children who are unable to cope with studies and perform poorly before dropping out of school, it should be mandatory that Standard Assessment Records are maintained for all children from when they enter school. Recording of periodic assessments should be continued throughout schooling so that growth and progress of all children, including children with disabilities, can be assessed and assistance provided where necessary.

- It is critical to develop teachers through pre-service and in-service training who understand their role not as disciplinarians but as empathetic facilitators. This is especially important in ensuring the participation and retention of children from deprived socioeconomic backgrounds and disadvantaged locations.

- An in-service multi-grade teaching programme should be offered for all teachers serving in schools with multi-grade classes to equip them to cater to the special circumstances in these schools.

- Considering the importance of pre-primary education in the development of young children, there is an urgent need to improve the quality of preschool teachers, their conditions of service and the infrastructural facilities provided in early childhood development (ECD) centres, in compliance with the guidelines for minimum standards laid down by the Ministry of Child Development and Women’s Affairs.

Political, governance, capacity and financing recommendations

- Priority should be given to capacity-building of all local-level officials to improve their knowledge and skills relating to the implementation of programmes.

- Coordination mechanisms such as the District Child Development Committees should be strengthened, as they cut across education, social protection and health. Monitoring mechanisms should be established at the provincial level to monitor their performance. Awareness should be created among officials of relevant ministries on the importance of collaboration in order to synergize their efforts to achieve maximum success.

- Mechanisms should be introduced at provincial, district/zonal and divisional levels for the purpose of monitoring the implementation of programmes.

- It is suggested that education policy should strengthen the role of divisional administrations to ensure effective implementation and monitoring of programmes in schools. This would also facilitate collaboration with divisional-level officials in other ministries and promote a focused approach to non-enrolment of children in school.

- All data should be disaggregated by sex and division to facilitate monitoring, and should be easily accessible to researchers and the public. It is suggested that data for the estate sector should be presented separately so that it is possible to monitor progress in this sector.

- Financial provision for education should be increased steadily to six percent of GDP and
around 20 percent of the total government budget to support access to education and improve the quality of education. It has been reported that provision for some forms of social protection has declined. It is important to increase financial provision in this area in order to eliminate the effects of poverty and strengthen the capacity of disadvantaged families to ensure that children’s rights are upheld.