



Sri Lanka Labour Force Survey

Annual Bulletin - 2019

Department of Census and Statistics
Ministry of Finance, Economy and Policy Development

In the past, information on labour force characteristics, employment and unemployment etc. were collected through labour force and socio - economic surveys conducted at five year time intervals. However, the employment and unemployment data are required at very short intervals to monitor the programmes implemented in the employment generating policies of the government. Therefore, to satisfy this need, the Department of Census and Statistics (DCS) designed a labour force survey on a quarterly basis, to measure the levels and trends of employment, unemployment and labour force in Sri Lanka on a continuous basis. The survey was commenced from the first quarter of 1990 and is being continued by the DCS. In 2019 the survey was conducted from January to December. This bulletin is based on an annual sample of 25,750 housing units covering all districts of the country.

1. LABOUR FORCE: HIGHLIGHTS - 2019

Working Age Population

All persons above specific age limit (15 years and above) of either gender are identified as working age population. This population consists with two groups namely economically active & inactive.

Economically Active Population (Labour Force)

The economically active population or the labour force comprises all persons of working age who are either “employed” or “unemployed” during the reference period (The week before the survey period).

Labour force = Employed + Unemployed

Table 1.1: Labour Force participation rate by gender – 2019

Gender	Economically active population (No.)	Labour Force Participation rate
Total	8,592,010	52.3
Male	5,554,192	73.0
Female	3,037,818	34.5

Table 1.2: Distribution of economically active / inactive population by gender – 2019

Gender	Economically active population		Economically inactive population	
	No.	%	No.	%
Total	8,592,010	100.0	7,832,006	100.0
Male	5,554,192	64.6	2,055,920	26.3
Female	3,037,818	35.4	5,776,085	73.7

Reported labour force participation rate is 52.3 in 2019 (Table 1.1). Given the estimated counts in Table 1.2 in 2019, estimated economically active population is around 8.6 million. About 5.6 million (64.6%) of economically active population are males. Economically inactive population accounts for about 7.8 million and of that majority are females (73.7%).

Table 1.3: Percentage distribution of economically active population by gender & district – 2019

District	Economically active population (%)		
	Total	Male	Female
Total	100.0	64.6	35.4
Colombo	100.0	64.0	36.0
Gampaha	100.0	66.1	33.9
Kalutara	100.0	65.2	34.8
Kandy	100.0	63.7	36.3
Matale	100.0	60.8	39.2
Nuwara Eliya	100.0	60.4	39.6
Galle	100.0	63.2	36.8
Matara	100.0	65.3	34.7
Hambantota	100.0	67.3	32.7
Jaffna	100.0	71.4	28.6
Mannar	100.0	76.6	23.4
Vavunia	100.0	67.5	32.5
Mullativu	100.0	76.9	23.1
Kilinochchi	100.0	73.7	26.3
Batticaloa	100.0	71.3	28.7
Ampara	100.0	75.9	24.1
Trincomalee	100.0	76.3	23.7
Kurunegala	100.0	60.8	39.2
Puttalam	100.0	64.8	35.2
Anuradhapura	100.0	59.7	40.3
Polonnaruwa	100.0	68.7	31.3
Badulla	100.0	63.6	36.4
Moneragala	100.0	62.4	37.6
Ratnapura	100.0	62.6	37.4
Kegalle	100.0	62.2	37.8

2. EMPLOYMENT: HIGHLIGHTS - 2019

Table 2.1: Employment statistics by gender - 2019

Employment Statistic	Sri Lanka	Male	Female
Employed population	8,180,693	5,368,896	2,811,796
Labour Force	8,592,010	5,554,192	3,037,818
Employment rate	95.2	96.7	92.6

Employed: During the reference period, persons, who worked as paid employees, employers, own account workers or contributing family workers are said to be employed.

This also includes persons with a job but not at work during the reference period.

Table 2.2: Percentage distribution of employed population by major industry group, Sector, Province and District - 2019

Sector/Province	Total	Major Industry Group		
		Agri.	Ind.	Serv.
Sri Lanka	100.0	25.3	27.6	47.1
Urban	100.0	4.2	26.0	69.8
Rural	100.0	28.0	28.1	43.9
Estate	100.0	54.8	25.0	20.1
Province				
Western	100.0	5.2	32.4	62.4
Central	100.0	31.9	26.7	41.5
Southern	100.0	28.4	28.7	43.0
Northern	100.0	29.3	23.1	47.5
Eastern	100.0	29.5	24.5	46.1
North Western	100.0	27.1	31.2	41.8
North Central	100.0	45.2	16.4	38.4
Uva	100.0	52.9	12.9	34.2
Sabaragamuwa	100.0	33.0	30.6	36.4

Agri. - Agriculture sector,

Ind. - Industries sector,

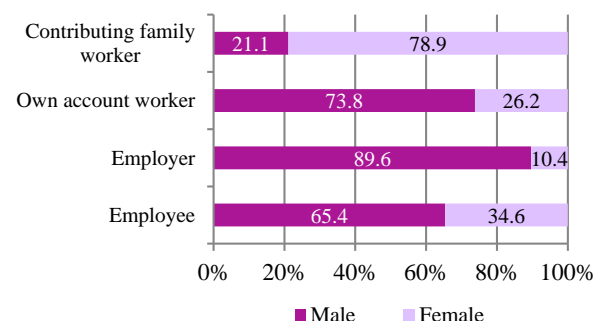
Serv. - Service sector

Table 2.3: Percentage distribution of employed population by employment status & gender - 2019

Employment status	Total	Gender	
		Male	Female
Total	100.0	65.6	34.4
Employee	100.0	65.4	34.6
Employer	100.0	89.6	10.4
Own account worker	100.0	73.8	26.2
Contributing family worker	100.0	21.1	78.9

District	Total	Major Industry Group		
		Agri.	Ind.	Serv.
Colombo	100.0	1.6	28.2	70.2
Gampaha	100.0	4.4	37.4	58.2
Kalutara	100.0	13.7	31.1	55.1
Kandy	100.0	20.1	28.4	51.5
Matale	100.0	30.3	25.2	44.4
Nuwara Eliya	100.0	51.2	24.9	23.9
Galle	100.0	25.6	31.5	42.9
Matara	100.0	31.6	25.0	43.3
Hambantota	100.0	29.0	28.3	42.7
Batticaloa	100.0	22.2	24.1	53.8
Ampara	100.0	43.9	18.3	37.8
Trincomalee	100.0	30.9	23.5	45.6
Jaffna	100.0	47.4	18.2	34.4
Mannar	100.0	34.8	26.2	39.0
Vavunia	100.0	30.9	28.9	40.2
Mulativu	100.0	31.2	22.9	45.9
Kilinochchi	100.0	24.6	20.8	54.5
Kurunegala	100.0	28.6	30.8	40.6
Puttalam	100.0	23.7	32.0	44.3
Anuradhapura	100.0	46.7	15.7	37.6
Polonnaruwa	100.0	41.7	17.9	40.4
Badulla	100.0	55.4	11.0	33.6
Monaragala	100.0	48.6	16.0	35.4
Rathnapura	100.0	39.6	28.7	31.7
Kegalle	100.0	23.6	33.4	43.0

Figure 2.1: Percentage distribution of employment status by gender – 2019



3. UNEMPLOYMENT: HIGHLIGHTS - 2019

Unemployed: Persons available and/or looking for work, and who did not work and taken steps to find a job during last four weeks and ready to accept a job given a work opportunity within next two weeks are said to be unemployed.

Table 3.1: Unemployment rates by age groups and gender - 2019

Age group (Years)	Number	Unemployment Rate (%)			
		Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	Gender	
				Male	Female
Total	411,318	4.8	3.3	7.4	
15 - 24	201,698	21.5	17.6	28.7	
25 - 29	93,793	11.0	6.6	18.5	
30 - 39	59,009	3.1	1.3	6.3	
Over 40	56,818	1.2	0.9	1.7	

The unemployed population, reported in 2019 is 411,318. Survey reports that unemployment rates for male and female are 3.3 percent & 7.4 percent respectively. Among all age groups, unemployment rates of females are higher than those of males. Youth unemployment (age 15 – 24 years) rates are the highest for both sexes, compared to other age groups (Table 3.1).

Table 3.2: Unemployment Rates by level of education & gender – 2019

Level of Education	Number	Unemployment Rate (%)			
		Sri Lanka	Sri Lanka	Gender	
				Male	Female
Total	411,318	4.8	3.3	7.4	
Grade 10 & below	140,781	2.8	2.4	3.8	
G.C.E. (O/L)	98,346	6.5	4.9	9.6	
G.C.E. (A/L) & above	172,191	8.5	5.0	11.9	

According to the Table 3.2, when level of education is considered the highest unemployment rate (8.5%) is reported from the G.C.E. (A/L) & above group. It is 5.0 percent and 11.9 percent for male and female respectively.

Table 3.3 and Table 3.4 show the distribution of unemployment rates by sector, province & district respectively. When the provincial distribution considered the highest unemployment rate is reported from Southern province (6.7%). Female unemployment rates are higher compared to that of male in all provinces. In Eastern & Northern provinces comparatively very high female unemployment rates are observed. When the district level distribution is considered the highest unemployment is

reported from Matara District (7.5%) while the lowest rate is reported from Kilinochchi.

Table 3.3: Unemployment rates by gender, sector and province - 2019

Sector / Province	Unemployment rate (%)		
	Total	Male	Female
Sri Lanka	4.8	3.3	7.4
Sector			
Urban	5.0	4.0	6.8
Rural	4.8	3.2	7.7
Estate	4.6	4.1	5.3
Province			
Western	4.0	3.2	5.6
Central	6.0	4.3	8.7
Southern	6.7	4.9	9.9
Northern	5.0	3.0	10.3
Eastern	6.4	3.1	15.8
North Western	4.1	2.6	6.6
North Central	3.3	2.1	5.3
Uva	4.0	2.8	6.0
Sabaragamuwa	4.4	3.1	6.6

These figures are to be treated with caution, as the corresponding CV (Coefficient of variation) values are high.

Table 3.4: Unemployment rates by district - 2019

District	Unemp. rate (%)	District	Unemp. rate (%)
Colombo	4.1	Kilinochchi	2.4
Gampaha	4.3	Batticaloa	7.2
Kalutara	3.2	Ampara	6.9
Kandy	6.6	Trincomalee	4.5
Matale	7.4	Kurunegala	4.7
Nuwara Eliya	4.2	Puttalam	2.8
Galle	5.7	Anuradhapura	3.1
Matara	7.5	Polonnaruwa	3.6
Hambantota	7.3	Badulla	4.0
Jaffna	6.0	Monaragala	4.0
Mannar	5.4	Rathnapura	4.2
Vavunia	4.6	Kegalle	4.7
Mullativu	2.8		

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Selected Labour Force Indicators ...

Indicator	Year							
	2012	2013	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019
Labour force participation rate								
By Gender								
Total	52.5	53.7	53.2	53.8	53.8	54.1	51.8	52.3
Male	74.9	74.9	74.6	74.7	75.1	74.5	73.0	73.0
Female	32.9	35.4	34.6	35.9	35.9	36.6	33.6	34.5
By residential sector								
Total	52.5	53.7	53.2	53.8	53.8	54.1	51.8	52.3
Urban	48.3	47.7	48.7	48.6	49.8	50.5	49.6	50.2
Rural	53.4	54.9	54.1	54.8	54.6	54.8	52.3	52.7
Unemployment Rate								
By Gender								
Total	4.0	4.4	4.3	4.7	4.4	4.2	4.4	4.8
Male	2.8	3.2	3.1	3.0	2.9	2.9	3.0	3.3
Female	6.3	6.6	6.5	7.6	7.0	6.5	7.1	7.4
By selected age Group (Year)								
20 – 29	11.3	13.1	13.6	14.2	14.2	13.5	15.0	15.3
20 – 24	16.7	19.3	19.9	19.7	19.9	17.8	20.1	20.3
25 – 29	6.6	7.6	8.2	9.4	9.2	9.5	10.4	11.0
By selected educational level								
GCE A/L and above								
Total	7.6	8.7	8.2	9.2	8.3	8.1	9.1	8.5
Male	4.6	5.7	5.4	4.7	4.7	5.0	5.1	5.0
Female	10.8	11.8	11.1	13.5	11.9	11.3	13.2	11.9
Employed population								
By Gender								
Total	7,488,704	7,681,279	7,700,489	7,830,976	7,947,683	8,208,179	8,015,166	8,180,693
Male	5,046,057	5,024,340	5,075,426	5,097,798	5,149,948	5,279,158	5,300,310	5,368,896
Female	2,442,647	2,656,938	2,625,064	2,733,178	2,797,735	2,929,021	2,714,855	2,811,796
By industry (Percentage)								
Total	7,488,704	7,681,279	7,700,489	7,830,976	7,947,683	8,208,179	8,015,166	8,180,693
%	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
Agriculture	2,333,342	2,321,215	2,222,859	2,244,547	2,153,874	2,140,185	2,043,698	2,071,940
%	31.2	30.2	28.9	28.7	27.1	26.1	25.5	25.3
Industry	1,940,615	1,996,730	2,027,426	2,018,171	2,097,503	2,331,494	2,239,262	2,258,421
%	25.9	26.0	26.3	25.8	26.4	28.4	27.9	27.6
Services	3,214,746	3,363,334	3,450,205	3,568,259	3,696,306	3,736,500	3,732,206	3,850,332
%	42.9	43.8	44.8	45.6	46.5	45.5	46.6	47.1
By no. of hours worked per week (percentage)								
Total	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0	100.0
0 [#]	4.5	5.2	5.2	5.5	4.4	4.7	5.6	6.4
1 – 9	1.1	1.8	1.3	1.7	1.5	1.7	1.7	1.7
10 – 39	26.1	27.5	27.6	27.2	26.2	26.1	25.7	26.8
40 & above	68.3	65.5	65.9	65.7	67.9	67.5	66.9	65.1

Has a job but not at work during the reference week

Note : Age 15 years and over population is considered as working age population

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