

# Sri Lanka

## Refugee quota factsheet

## New Zealand Refugee Quota Sri Lankan Refugees

The New Zealand Government works with the United Nations Refugee Agency (UNHCR) to offer permanent resettlement solutions in New Zealand for 1000 refugees annually.<sup>1</sup> Refugees from Sri Lanka are included in the 2017/2018 refugee quota and will be resettled to New Zealand throughout the year.

Prior to their arrival in New Zealand the Sri Lankan refugees were living in Malaysia and Indonesia recognised as refugees by the UNHCR.

Before settlement in the community all refugees accepted under the annual refugee quota programme complete a six week reception programme at Auckland's Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre.

In order to become successfully resettled, refugees will be accessing the assistance of mainstream services such as health, education, housing and Work & Income. The New Zealand Red Cross is the key agency responsible for assisting quota refugees in their initial community settlement.

*This document aims to provide New Zealand's community-based professionals with general information about Sri Lanka, the human rights situation in Sri Lanka, the Sri Lankan culture as well as some general information on supporting successful refugee resettlement in your community.*

### Humanitarian situation and needs

Sri Lanka has been scarred by a long and bitter civil war arising out of ethnic tensions between the majority Sinhalese and the Tamil minority in the northeast. After more than 25 years of violence the conflict ended in May 2009, when government forces seized the last area controlled by Tamil Tiger (LTTE) rebels.

However the ending of a war does not automatically resolve the conflict that precipitated it. More than 100,000 people were killed, hundreds of thousands were displaced, and large parts of the country — mostly in the Tamil north — devastated.

Families and communities remain divided, and there remains a legacy of suspicion, resentment and trauma. This has led to a number of Sri Lankans continuing to flee, seeking refuge in surrounding countries including India, Indonesia and Malaysia. While most refugees from Sri Lanka are Tamils, Sinhalese who challenge the regime may also be at risk.

In January 2015, a new government initiated a new, more open dialogue with the international community, including human rights organizations. However, the government took no significant measures to end impunity for security force abuse, including police use of torture.

In August 2015, the United Nations Office of the High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) issued a scathing report on abuses committed by all sides during the conflict. The report documented credible accounts of unlawful attacks, killings, enforced disappearances, torture, sexual violence, and attacks on humanitarian assistance.<sup>2</sup>

In September 2017, Human Rights Watch reported that Sri Lanka has largely failed to implement a consensus UN resolution adopted two years earlier that outlined mechanisms for the Sri Lankan government to deliver justice, accountability, and reconciliation in the aftermath of the civil war.<sup>3</sup>

<sup>1</sup> This figure includes an additional intake of 250 Syrians in the 2017/2018 quota year before the permanent quota increase to 1000 refugees takes effect from 2018/19.

<sup>2</sup> Human Rights Watch, 27 January 2016, *World Report 2016 – Sri Lanka*

<sup>3</sup> Human Rights Watch, 13 September 2017, *Sri Lanka: 2 years on, scant progress on UN resolution*

## Cultural communications:

### ■ MEETING & GREETINGS

- › The older generation of Sri Lankans will use the term *namaste* (palms clasped together as if in prayer at chin level with a slight nod of the head).
- › The Sinhalese may say *ayubowan* (may you be blessed with a long life).
- › Tamils would say *vanakkam* (may you be blessed with a long life). In informal settings you may also hear *kuhomadu* (How do you do?).
- › The younger people generally shake hands.
- › Many Sri Lankan women will refrain from physical contact with a man outside their family so always wait to see if a woman extends her hand or not.
- › When addressing people you should always use the appropriate title followed by the surname. Always wait for the other party to move to a first name basis.

## Supporting successful refugee resettlement:

- › Be aware of differences between yourself and your client / student in terms of customs, values and belief systems, as well as perceptions of service delivery and treatment. It may be advisable to obtain the assistance of a cultural adviser, or someone familiar with the culture of your client's home country to help you develop culturally appropriate forms of service delivery when working with a new refugee community in your area.
- › Many adult refugees will have only had limited formal education so communication styles may need to be adjusted accordingly.
- › Refugees may also have difficulty comprehending the importance New Zealand society places on official documentation. Some refugees may associate the recording of personal information with suspicion because of past experiences in their home country. As such, it is important to ensure refugee clients understand why you are recording information, where it will be stored and with whom it will be shared.
- › Explain your role carefully to the client and always use a professional interpreter if the client is not proficient in English. If your organisation does not have established procedures for using interpreters, interpreting services can be found through the following organisations: Interpreting New Zealand - <http://www.interpret.org.nz/> and Language Line - <http://ethniccommunities.govt.nz/browse/language-line>
- › The Citizens Advice Bureau Language Connect provides free and confidential support in different languages. Advice on settlement needs, such as housing, renting, health, education and any other settlement issues. They can also help with immigration questions. Please call 0800 788877 (free phone) or email: [language@cab.org.nz](mailto:language@cab.org.nz)

## Language

The country's official languages are Sinhala and Tamil. Most Sri Lankans speak one of these as a first language as well as some English as a second or common language.

### ■ BASIC SINHALA AND TAMIL:<sup>4</sup>

#### Hello/welcome

Sinhala: *hello/ayubowan*

Tamil: *vanakkam*

#### Yes

Sinhala: *oh-oo*

Tamil: *aam*

#### Thank you

Sinhala: *es-toothee*

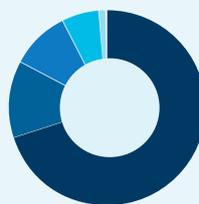
Tamil: *nandri*

#### No

Sinhala: *nay*

Tamil: *illai*

## Religion



- Buddhist 70.2%
- Hindu 12.6%
- Muslim 9.7%
- Roman Catholic 6.1%
- other Christian 1.3%
- Other 0.05%<sup>5</sup>

<sup>4</sup> Source: Thomas, Gavin, [2012], *The rough guide to Sri Lanka*, *Rough Guides*, London, p.228

<sup>5</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, 3 November 2016 [last updated], *The World Factbook: Sri Lanka*

New Zealand is one of thirty seven countries that take part in the United Nations Refugee Agency's regular refugee resettlement programme. Our annual refugee quota of 1000 refugees is a reflection of the government's commitment to fulfilling its international humanitarian obligations and responsibilities to provide protection to refugees.

The New Zealand Government and a number of local organisations, such as New Zealand Red Cross, are helping these families to access the goods and services they need to restart their life.



*For over 25 years, the Sri Lankan insurgency caused significant hardships for the population, environment and the economy of the country.*

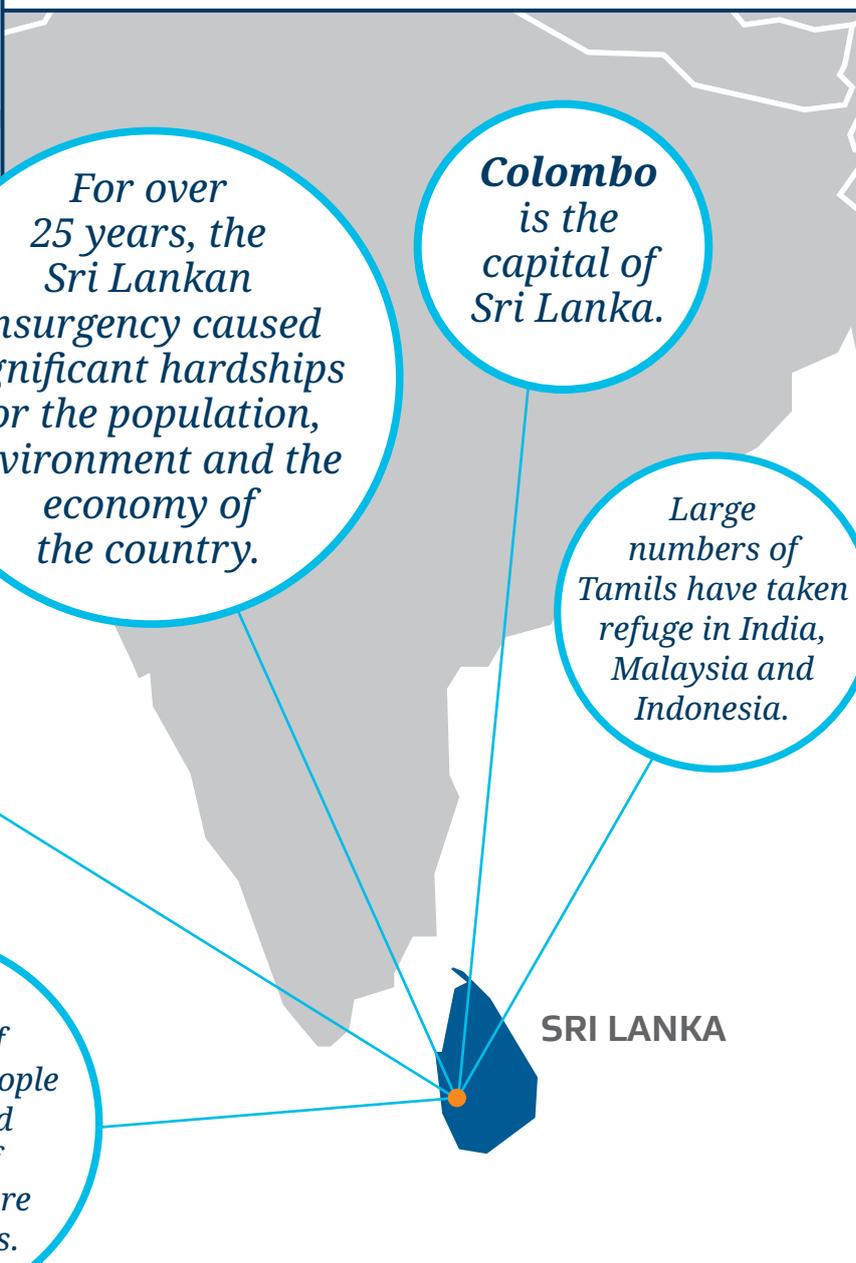
**Colombo**  
*is the capital of Sri Lanka.*

*Neither Malaysia nor Indonesia are party to the 1951 Refugee Convention or the 1967 Protocol. Sri Lankan refugees have few rights in these countries.*

*Large numbers of Tamils have taken refuge in India, Malaysia and Indonesia.*

*The war killed tens of thousands of people and displaced hundreds of thousands more over the years.*

**SRI LANKA**



## Additional Resources

- › New Zealand Immigration has factsheets and videos for refugees and family members settling in New Zealand which are available at <https://www.immigration.govt.nz/about-us/what-we-do/our-strategies-and-projects/supporting-refugees-and-asylum-seekers/information-for-refugees-settling-in-new-zealand>
- › Detailed UNHCR guidelines for working refugees are available in a publication called *Refugee Resettlement: An International Handbook to Guide Reception and Integration*, see <http://www.unhcr.org/4a2cfe336.html>
- › BBC, 4 September 2017, [last updated], *Sri Lanka country profile*, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-south-asia-11999611>
- › Freedom House, 12 June 2017, *Freedom in the World 2017 – Sri Lanka*, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/59479a6aa.html>
- › Every Culture, [2017], *Sinhalese*, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Rwanda-to-Syria/Sinhalese.html>
- › Every Culture, [2017], *Tamils*, <http://www.everyculture.com/wc/Rwanda-to-Syria/Tamils.html>
- › Human Rights Watch, [2017], *World Report 2017 – Sri Lanka*, <https://www.hrw.org/world-report/2017/country-chapters/sri-lanka>
- › United Kingdom: Home Office, 8 June 2017, *Country Policy and Information Note – Sri Lanka: Tamil separatism*, <http://www.refworld.org/docid/5967192c4.html>

## Contact Information

For more information about New Zealand's Refugee Quota programme, or New Zealand's Refugee Policy, please contact:

### **Sarah Ward**

Resettlement Caseworker Coordinator  
Refugee Quota Branch  
New Zealand Immigration  
Ph: 09 928 2844  
Email: [Sarah.Ward@mbie.govt.nz](mailto:Sarah.Ward@mbie.govt.nz)

If you require further information or support on any health or education issue for the refugees recently resettled in your region, please contact the following specialist agencies located at the Mangere Refugee Resettlement Centre:

### **Refugees as Survivors New Zealand (RASNZ)**

(09) 270 0870  
[www.rasnz.co.nz](http://www.rasnz.co.nz)

### **Refugee Health Screening Service**

(09) 276 6719  
[www.refugeehealth.govt.nz](http://www.refugeehealth.govt.nz)

### **AUT – Centre for Refugee Education**

(09) 921 9366  
[www.aut.ac.nz/community/aut-in-the-community/centre-for-refugee-education](http://www.aut.ac.nz/community/aut-in-the-community/centre-for-refugee-education)

### **INZ Resettlement Team**

(09) 928 2648  
[www.immigration.govt.nz](http://www.immigration.govt.nz)

### **New Zealand Red Cross**

0800 RED CROSS  
[www.redcross.org.nz](http://www.redcross.org.nz)

*Please note: No personal information will be released without written consent from the client.*