



28%

of youth in Sri Lanka are **out of school** and unemployed.



Our Presence in Sri Lanka



Country Overview

Sri Lanka's history is plagued by a nearly three-decade-long Civil War, driven by ethnic conflicts and fought between the Sri Lanka government and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The Civil War spanned from 1983 to 2009, and the United Nations estimates the death toll to be as high as 100,000. Since the end of the war, systems, infrastructure and economic activity have improved gradually and human rights violations have decreased with the government's anti-corruption measures. Sri Lanka has also received substantial international aid to assist in rebuilding.

Today, tourism and the service sector industry are the primary employment options for low-income and low-skilled residents, which has contributed to poverty reduction. However, according to the World Bank, while the overall unemployment rate is low at 4.34 percent, youth unemployment is high at 21.4 percent. Additionally, there is unequal and low labor force participation for women.

Sri Lanka faced a new tragedy with the Easter Sunday terrorist attacks in Colombo, Negombo, Batticaloa, Dematagoda and Dehiwala on April 21, 2019. The bombings and explosions showed that the country is facing a rise in intolerance and growing sectarian divides. These attacks also negatively impacted schools, where classes were delayed, early curfews enforced, additional security needed, and extracurricular activities canceled.

Country Information

Population	21.7 million
Land area	65,610 km ²
Languages of instruction	Sinhala & Tamil
Launch of operations	2005
Room to Read offices	Colombo



History and Results

Room to Read implemented our Literacy Program in Sri Lanka in 2005 – one year earlier than initially planned – in response to the devastating 2004 tsunami. We have since worked in seven of the country’s nine provinces. In 2006, we also implemented our Girls’ Education Program in an effort to close the gender gap in certain provinces. We have had significant success not only improving the quality of instruction, but also the accessibility of education for more than a million children nationwide.

In 2009, when the Civil War officially ended, Room to Read quickly acted and implemented our programs in the Mannar District of the Northern Province, where much destruction took place. We worked closely with the government to improve infrastructure, access to educational resources and educational opportunities in the region.

Thanks to our partnership with the Sri Lankan government, we have witnessed systems-level change due to our programs. Most recently, we supported the government of Sri Lanka in developing a Teacher’s Guide for their national Reading Room initiative. With our guidance and feedback, the Teacher’s Guide has been finalized, and it will be piloted in 700 primary schools in 2020.

We are proud to see that our programs and projects are successful across Sri Lanka, and we will continue to be a catalyst for change by transforming the lives of thousands of children across the country.

Still, the country has shown signs of great progress and is experiencing rapid social and cultural transformation as access to technology, electricity and mass media increases every year.

Educational Landscape

Sri Lanka’s educational achievements are impressive. The country has the highest youth literacy rate in all South Asia at 98.9 percent, based on World Bank data. With free access to primary education, the World Bank reports that the net enrollment rate is 99 percent and the primary completion rate is more than 95 percent. Additionally, Sri Lanka has high gender parity in education, with an equal proportion of girls and boys enrolled in primary school and a slightly higher number of girls than boys enrolled in secondary school.

While educational outcomes are high, access and quality of education remain inconsistent across the country. Children living in regions that are still recovering from the Civil War do not have the same educational opportunities, because the lengthy conflict destroyed school infrastructure, led to a scarcity of teachers and teaching materials, and caused overcrowding in the classroom.

Additionally, much post-war reconstruction efforts diverted funds away from education. World Bank data shows that education spending is only 2.8 percent of the country’s GDP.

Our Results in Sri Lanka

Literacy Program	
New children benefited in 2018	58,026
Children benefited cumulatively	1,076,744
New schools in 2018	90
Schools cumulatively	2,006
New children’s books published in 2018	10
Books distributed cumulatively	2,956,619
Girls’ Education Program	
New participants in 2018	1,114
Number of participants cumulatively	7,166
New secondary school graduates in 2018	99
Secondary school graduates cumulatively	538

Give with confidence. Room to Read has achieved 13 fourstar ratings from Charity Navigator since 2007, an achievement that less than 1% of charities can claim.

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