

Our Work in Sri Lanka

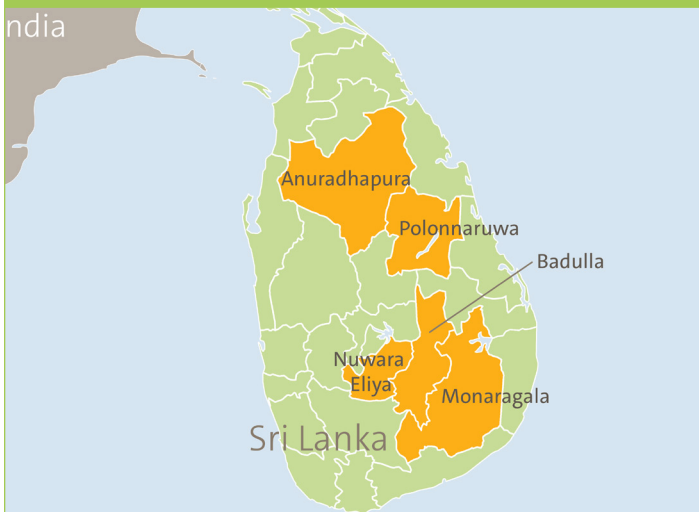


In some areas of Sri Lanka, girls' literacy rates **fall behind** boys' literacy rates by

19%



Our Presence in Sri Lanka



Country Overview

The island nation of Sri Lanka has a tumultuous history of colonization, violent war, devastating poverty, and natural disasters. Centuries of foreign invasions culminated in Sri Lanka becoming a British colony, known as Ceylon, until their liberation in the mid-twentieth century. The country continued to see political unrest when tensions between ethnic groups erupted into a long and bloody civil war in the 1980s that lasted until 2009. This conflict took place between the Tamil in the north and east of the country and the Sinhalese majority, and ultimately cost the lives of over 60,000 Sri Lankans.

The population is still experiencing the aftermath of the war. According to the World Food Programme, almost one third of children under five years old are underweight and 22 percent of the total population is malnourished and lacks sustainable access to water. These issues are most prevalent in rural areas, where 85 percent of the population lives.

In the short amount of time since the war has ended, however, the country has shown signs of great progress. Sri Lanka is experiencing rapid social and cultural transformation as access to technology, electricity and mass media increases.

Country Information

Population	21 million
Land area	65,600 km ²
Languages of instruction	Sinhala & Tamil
Launch of operations	2005
Room to Read offices	Colombo



Educational Landscape

Sri Lanka is a country of contradictions and its education system reflects that. Education is valued in Sri Lankan culture and both primary and secondary schooling is free and compulsory. Consequently, adult literacy rates are among the highest in Asia. Despite these triumphs, there are many deeply established issues with the system. Longstanding disparities in education exist between the more prosperous regions and the impoverished regions. Roughly 65 thousand children in the north and east of the island are out of school.

Overall, quality issues plague the education system and have resulted in low achievement in basic competencies, with only 37 percent of students reaching mastery levels in their first language. A major detriment to educational quality is the shortage of teachers within the country, especially in conflict-affected areas. Of the existing pool of teachers, only 62 percent have received training. Additionally, many schools either have no library or an inadequate library filled with old books that are not engaging for children. With 23 percent of the population in poverty, purchasing quality reading materials is typically not an option.

Similarly, there are discrepancies across the different regions in educational access for girls. In many parts of the country, boys and girls are enrolled in school in equal numbers, and Sri Lankans are adopting more progressive attitudes toward gender equity in education. However, in several regions, girls still face discrimination and barriers to education. This is particularly true in the Tamil tea

plantation area and the central highlands area. In these locations, girls often work long hours for low wages, which prevents them from attending school, producing a literacy gender gap.

History and Results

The tsunami of 2004 devastated Sri Lanka's fragile infrastructure, further intensifying the suffering in impoverished and war-torn regions. In response, Room to Read decided to begin our expansion into Sri Lanka one year earlier than planned. We immediately went to work rebuilding schools in tsunami-affected areas and helping to create long-term infrastructure improvements, beginning in the Ampara District on the island's eastern coast.

In 2006, we launched our Girls' Education Program in the country to close the gender gap in various districts. In 2009, when the brutal civil war came to an end, we quickly took action and implemented our programs in the Mannar District in the Northern Peninsula, which had been devastated by the war. We have partnered with the Sri Lankan government to improve the infrastructure in the region.

Room to Read has now worked in seven of the country's nine provinces. We have had significant success in improving the quality and accessibility of education for hundreds of thousands of children.

2018 Sri Lanka Targets

Literacy Program	
Schools supported	277
Projected children benefited	65,340
New local language titles	10
Reprinted local language titles	10
Girls' Education Program	
Projected new participants	600
Projected total participants	4,270



Give with confidence. Room to Read has received 11 four-star ratings for best charities from Charity Navigator since 2007. We take pride in our transparency and accountability.

Room to Read Global Offices: San Francisco
Delhi • Hong Kong • London • Mumbai
New York • Sydney • Tokyo • Zurich