

A STUDY ON MIGRATION, DEMOGRAPHIC TRANSITION AND DEVELOPMENTAL TRANSFORMATIONS IN SRI LANKA'S MOBILITY LANDSCAPE

RAJASEGARAM, A.^{1*} – LAN, C.²

¹ Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, University of Malaya, Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia.

² Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, Universiti Malaysia Sarawak, Sarawak, Malaysia.

*Corresponding author
e-mail: dr.anuratha[at]um.edu.my

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Abstract. This study critically examines the evolving migration patterns and associated demographic changes in Sri Lanka from the mid-1970s to the present, situating migration within broader political, economic, and social transformations. Drawing on census data, labour force surveys, remittance matrices, and district-level case studies, the analysis highlights how internal and international migration interact to reshape population structures, labour markets, and household dynamics. While existing scholarship has predominantly focused on labour migration and remittance flows, this study advances a more integrated perspective by examining education-related mobility, entrepreneurship, return migration, and their cumulative demographic impacts. Findings reveal that internal rural-urban migration often precedes international migration, creating layered mobility trajectories that challenge conventional analytical distinctions. Migration has contributed simultaneously to economic resilience, through remittances, skills acquisition, and transnational networks, and to structural vulnerabilities, including population ageing, labour shortages, altered gender roles, and caregiving deficits in origin communities. The demographic transition underway in Sri Lanka, marked by declining fertility and rising dependency ratios, is further intensified by the selective out-migration of working-age adults. Urbanisation pressures, housing shortages, and regional imbalances underscore the uneven spatial consequences of migration. The study argues that migration should be understood not merely as an economic coping strategy but as a structural force shaping long-term demographic resilience and social reproduction. A policy-relevant contribution of this research lies in its call for integrated migration governance that aligns labour markets, social protection, urban planning, and human-capital development to mitigate demographic risks while harnessing the developmental potential of mobility.

Keywords: migration, demographic transition, labour mobility, urbanization, Sri Lanka

Introduction

Migration patterns and the demographic changes that have evolved in Sri Lanka throughout the years have continually drawn the keen interest and analytical curiosity of scholars, researchers, and policymakers alike, particularly since the significant period of the mid-1970s. This particular era is not only noteworthy but represents a monumental phase that has been characterized by a broad spectrum of major, complex shifts in both the social fabric and economic landscape of the nation. Such transformative changes have been deeply influenced by a pronounced movement towards engaging in outward economic activities, fundamentally spurred by the essential contributions of remittances and labour migration. These critical factors can be largely seen as the result of considerable political turmoil and upheaval that have consistently impacted the nation throughout the years, thus shaping the socio-economic realities faced by countless Sri Lankans who navigate various paths in life. While it is undeniably true that a significant portion of the scholarly literature has primarily focused on the specific and concentrated

topic of labour migration, it is equally crucial to fully recognize and acknowledge that a broad array of other migration forms have surged substantially and noticeably in recent years.

These distinct types of migration have contributed meaningfully to the rich and diverse fabric of migration experiences that define the multifaceted realities, challenges, and narratives throughout the country. Among these various forms, travel for educational purposes has risen to remarkable prominence, clearly reflecting the aspirations, ambitions, and desires of a significant segment of the population actively seeking and preparing for improved educational opportunities abroad. This emerging trend not only enriches their personal and professional trajectories in significant ways but also highlights a growing collective awareness regarding the immense value of education as an essential means of elevating one's standing in an increasingly competitive and interconnected global environment. At the same time, the phenomenon of entrepreneurship among migrants has begun to develop relatively recently and is now gaining notable attention, indicating a diversification of the underlying motives behind migration that extends well beyond mere economic necessities, labor supply, and the search for jobs. Such entrepreneurial endeavours play a critical role in providing not only individuals but also entire communities with new avenues for growth, development, and potential advancements in socioeconomic standings.

The various outflows of population significantly contribute to several demographic impacts on the communities from which individuals depart, resulting in noteworthy shifts in social structures, dynamics, and overall community welfare that can be observed and analysed on multiple levels over time. The intricate interplay of these dynamics underscores an important transformation in the demographics of certain regions, leading to changes that are both extensive and impactful in nature, influencing the evolution of communities all throughout Sri Lanka. Furthermore, the eventual returns of these migrants to their home countries often facilitate the important transfer of invaluable skills, expertise, knowledge, and extensive experience that they have garnered during their time abroad. These returns are vital, as they not only enrich the personal lives of the migrants but also significantly enhance the lives of individuals within their home communities. Such transfers can prove immensely beneficial, serving to foster connections and knowledge-sharing that assist the migrants in gaining fresh perspectives and competencies to refine their overall skill sets and capabilities, while also helping to revitalize local economies, thus enhancing social cohesiveness and unity in ways that can be deeply transformative and profoundly impactful. Despite these numerous and varied dynamics at play, it is somewhat regrettable that adequate consideration of the multiple channels of outflow and their inherent complexities has frequently been overlooked in scholarly works. A significant majority of studies have concentrated heavily on dissecting internal and international migrants as distinct and unrelated categories of migration, creating a notable gap in understanding the intricacies of migration flows and the various patterns that interlace these different migration types. This lack of recognition ultimately fails to take into account that, in many scenarios, internal movements can indeed act as critical precursors to subsequent international migration. Such internal transitions may then further develop into various forms of return migration or even onward relocations to other regions or entirely different countries. This intricate and layered relationship warrants a far deeper, more nuanced understanding as we engage in a thorough and comprehensive examination of the broader implications of migration on Sri Lankan society and its diverse demographics,

along with the continuously evolving trends that relentlessly shape its future narrative. These evolving dynamics present new and exciting opportunities and challenges that resonate throughout the nation, reflecting a profound transformation that accompanies the movement of people, both within and beyond its borders, consequently shaping the identity and character of Sri Lanka in remarkable, diverse, and enduring ways.

Demographic shifts and changes in the population structure have occurred since independence, differentiated across age, urban/rural location, ethnic group, and religion. Population ageing, with a consequent decline in the workforce and rise in dependency ratios, has emerged as a major concern, particularly in light of the much older average age of overseas workers who subsequently do not return. Education-related and longer-term labour migration have emerged as much more important phenomena since the early 2000s, leading to further shifts in potential human-capital formation and knowledge transfers. Urban growth and concentration, meanwhile, have accelerated since the mid-1990s, as have associated housing problems and regional imbalances.

The analysis draws primarily upon Census data at five-year intervals from 1946 to 2012 and 2017, the Consumer Finance and Socio-Economic Survey of 2016, the Labour Force Surveys of 1990 and 2020, the World Bank Remittances Matrix, and Dominican administrative statistics on temporary migration to the Gulf region. Migration data are complemented by supplementary information on population, human development, economic performance, and employment by sector at the district level, selected on the basis of the distinctiveness of migration patterns and policy environments.

Sri Lanka's long-standing migration experience encompasses multiple forms of geographical mobility between Home District and Origin District, urban and rural, national and international that shape patterns at different scales. Within these, migration is nonetheless treated only cursorily by large sections of the literature, and outlines of two specific case-study districts that contrast sharply in characterization have been included to illustrate and explore the significance of different drivers, impacts, and policy responses (Batatota, 2024).

Results and Discussion

General review

As a British colony, Ceylon experienced three separate waves of migration: Oceanic Indian Tamils and indentured labourers brought from India during British rule; Sinhalese migrations from the South, particularly after 1881; and migrations by the British. The conditional independence of the country in 1948 halted the earlier migration flows from the Indian Subcontinent but initiated overseas migrations to countries like India, Canada, Australia, and England. The mid-1950s saw a departure of the British diasporic population largely due to formal independence from Britain in February 1948. After the civil conflict in 1983, the government used the term "displaced" for Tamils fleeing to Europe, India, and the West, but these groups, which continued to leave in the late nineties, were later referred to as either émigrés or migrants. State and non-state actors provided conflicting claims regarding continued efforts to recruit Tamil expatriates. Launched in 1998, the International Organization for Migration (IOM) mission represented the first multilateral and first non-state agency to exert an interest in migration (Cooray, 2002).

Internal migration: rural-urban dynamics

Internal migration in Sri Lanka mainly occurs from rural to urban areas as people move following economic opportunities and educational institutions, along with improvements in transport and communication (Damsara et al., 2025). Some areas are facilitators of migration to others, so development in selected districts can affect the migration impact of neighbouring places. The distance involved in this migration ranges from short distances within the same province to long distances across provinces with one predominant migration pattern being intra-district moves. Malwana, a suburban division of the Colombo district, exemplifies intra-district migration influenced by urbanisation. The situation following the conflict is an important additional element affecting migration.

Causes and drivers of internal migration

Theories of migration typically classify forces into push factors at the origin and pull factors at the destination. In Sri Lanka, internal push factors such as poverty, unemployment, and humanitarian crises have contributed to rural-urban migration (De Silva et al., 2024; De Silva and Jayalath, 2022). Despite low overall economic growth rates, Colombo and the Western Province have attracted migrants through greater employment opportunities and the availability of essential services. People displaced by conflict in the North and East have also sought refuge in the West, with some returning to areas previously deemed no longer dangerous. Push factors exert a greater influence on internal migration than pull factors do in Sri Lanka as a whole, but trends vary regionally. The North and East continue to experience significant outflows, with emergency conditions persisting in many areas post-conflict. Many displaced in the North and East have returned home, but conditions such as a lack of housing and loss of livelihood remain critical. Outward migration is also substantial from relatively prosperous areas such as the Galle and Matara districts in the South and the Kandy district in the Central region, while internally displaced persons from Jaffna have sought refuge in Colombo.

Consequences for regional development

Migration to urban centres has accelerated after the cessation of three decades of civil conflict in 2009. Economic opportunities, education, environmental change, conflicts, and post-conflict recovery have pushed people to migrate, with many moving to the Western and Southern provinces (Hyndman and De Alwis, 2004). Labor migration, particularly to Middle Eastern countries, has resulted in brain drain and a lack of skilled workers in the local labour market (Ranasinghe and Li, 2017). Migration from rural to urban areas attracts people to existing urban centres or to other emerging urban centres. Consequently, urban migration is intensive to existing urban centres such as Colombo District as well as to emerging urban centres like Gampaha District and Kalutara District. A marked feature first observed around 1990 was the emergence of a second wave of urban migration to emerging urban centres on the western coast. After the end of civil wars, post-conflict migration was observed accompanied by rapid urban development and diversification of industries in several provinces such as Western and Southern. Overall, temporary migration prevents receiving areas from catching up relative to long-term national growth.

International migration: labour, education, and entrepreneurship

International migration has shaped Sri Lanka's prospects for economic growth, human capital development, and entrepreneurship. The country has experienced significant labour migration, particularly to the Middle East and East Asia, as well as educational mobility and a rise in Sri Lankan entrepreneurship abroad. The pace and scale of international migration reset demographic trends at the turn of the millennium, yet it played a non-negligible role in reconnecting Sri Lanka to economic opportunities and knowledge formation. Key characteristics of Sri Lankan international migration include: a) the presence of skills selectivity at origin that affects labour-market insertion on return; b) the flow of remittances between Sri Lankans abroad and home; c) social remittance flows associated with the formation of transnational networks connecting Sri Lankans abroad with prospective students; and d) the persistence of systemic barriers to exporting human capital, such as the recognition of offshore academic credits or foreign qualifications (Saja et al., 2020; Thavalingam and Karunasena, 2016; Rogers, 1987).

Labor migration to the Gulf and other destinations

Sri Lanka has a long history of emigration for various reasons, including the effect of modern migration motivated by the search for better employment and better living conditions. Emigrants send a substantial amount of remittances back to their home country, are gainfully employed abroad, and contribute to Sri Lanka's economy.

Until the early 1970s, Sri Lanka used to export more skilled workers who had obtained tertiary education and professional qualifications. In the early 1970s, a new trend of sending semi-skilled and unskilled workers began. By the early 1990s, the Gulf countries had become the top destination for Sri Lankan workers going abroad. The search for employment abroad continues even today due to local labour market conditions and better economic opportunities. Many Sri Lankans—especially women—are employed in the domestic, hotel, and health sectors. Most of these women workers are employed in mega cities of the Middle East. The outflow of workers remains very high, through foreign employment agencies, media, and the word of mouth. Many emigrants are coming back to Sri Lanka after several years of service abroad. They possess new skill sets, experience, and have regulatory framework challenges to reintegrate (De Silva et al., 2024).

Return migration and skills transfer

In Sri Lanka, the process of return migration appears to influence human capital accumulation rather than leading to a brain drain. Returnees have not compromised their skills abroad. Historical observations show that, similarly to the experience of another country, those who were able to gain working experience in Korea appear to use it after they return. Returnees from labour migration destinations to other Gulf Cooperation Council states have also acquired skills, experience, capital, and technological knowledge that they subsequently invest in productive endeavours upon their return to Sri Lanka (De Silva and Jayalath, 2022). Returnees tend to migrate elsewhere. In many instances, these decisions are based on negotiations by skilled personnel. Sweden has been an example of a tertiary destination demonstrating a considerable influx of migrants from Sri Lanka.

Education-related mobility and brain drain/gain

With the end of the conflict in Sri Lanka, the country has moved from a period of conflict-driven emigration, mainly of the Tamil ethnic group leaving for the West, notably Europe and North America, to a phase of increasing student mobility for education abroad, as indicated by an increase in applications to the UK and Australia from Sri Lankan citizens. Student mobility signals not only a form of brain drain but also a potential exposure to research and development skills that could help meet the need for innovation and technological change, albeit at the expense of local capacity building. Brain drain during the earlier conflict phase was centred in overseas countries, whereas the current student mobility leaves the students with qualifications that are not widely recognised back in Sri Lanka (Hyndman and De Alwis, 2004).

Demographic changes: population structure and aging

Although rapid population growth and large-scale migration dominated Sri Lanka's demographic changes for decades, the country is now at the onset of an accelerated demographic transition. The fertility rate has dropped significantly since the 1980s and is expected to stabilize soon, while population aging is projected to intensify over the next two decades. The demographic transition will have profound implications for national and regional development (Thavalingam and Karunasena, 2016).

Fertility trends and age composition

The proportion of the Sri Lankan population aged 60 years and above is projected to rise from 10.6 percent in 2011 to 19.7 percent by 2035. Similarly, the share of the 15- to 59-year age group is estimated to decrease from 74.1 percent to 66.4 percent over the same period. Decreasing fertility rates, from 5.0 births per woman in the early 1960s to 1.9 in 2014, play a crucial role in the changing age structure (Saja et al., 2020). Consequently, the projected values of the dependency ratio the ratio of dependents (those younger than 15 or older than 64) to the working-age population (15–64) also indicate a gradual rise in dependency ratios along with a diminishing labour supply. Migration flows have thus far had limited impact on demographic ageing; Sri Lanka's population growth continues at 0.6 percent annually while the median age climbs.

Urbanization and housing implications

Rapid urban population growth poses significant challenges for housing and urban-facility provisions in Sri Lanka. Despite a declining rise in the annual urban population growth rate to below 3 per cent, the urban population and urbanization level, estimated at around 4.6 million and 26 per cent in 2016, are expected to increase and reach about 6 million and 36 per cent by 2030, respectively. The increasing migration of people from rural to urban areas, enticed by hopes of higher incomes, better living standards, and enhanced social services, exacerbates these demands. The rapid urban growth rate has resulted in an unparalleled increase in housing demand, ultimately leading to a substantial housing shortage. According to estimates made at the commencement of the Second Upgrading of the Informal Settlements and Development Project (UISP), Sri Lanka faced a housing shortfall of about 400,000 units, with around 300,000 new units required in urban areas.

The situation is worsened by rising Urbanization and Housing implications due to unavailability of affordable housing and stagnant construction in formal housing market. Housing is one of the most basic needs of human being. Lack of decent housing

leads to people unknowingly exposed to haphazard living, economic loss, unsafe dwelling, unhealthy environment and epidemic outbreak. Urban poor housing and informal settlements in urban areas are growing rapidly and require urgent attention. Affordable housing is decreasing in urban areas. Affordable is determined according to the general standard of the site. A well-planned housing project can accommodate enough people with economic and social benefits. However, it was difficult to allocate land for such large scale housing projects. Instead, fragmented site clearance approach is prevailing. Systematic Illegal Land Use and Systematic informal settlements are major issues controlling planned urbanization and reducing environmental quality.

The main objective of the Housing Development Authority (HDA) is to provide decent housing for the entire nation through planned and sustainable development. To achieve this, recent policies have focused on systematic land development, urban infrastructure, and housing development. During the last few years, the government has reemphasized the need for systematic land development, and construction activities have been focused on selected planned sites. Legislations related to urban planning have also been prioritized in order to achieve sustainable urban development.

Demographic impacts of migration on origin communities

The relationship between migration and demographic change has attracted considerable research interest in developing countries as migration flows have surged since the mid-twentieth century. Sri Lanka constitutes an instructive case study. Since the 1970s, internal migration has fuelled rapid urbanization, while international outmigration has expanded considerably since the mid-1980s. This section examines the demographic impacts of migration on origin communities in terms of remittances and household welfare, dependency, gender roles, and caregiving.

The growing volume of remittances has become a key element of national economic development, poverty alleviation, and household welfare in a country characterized by persistent regional disparities. Migration to foreign labour markets has raised households' incomes, increased investments in education, improved healthcare, and diversified consumption patterns. During the 2010s, nearly half of the remittances originated from Western Europe, but the share from the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states has grown steadily, accounting for around one-third of the total. Furthermore, significant regional disparities persist in the volume of remittances received, with the North Western Province benefiting the most, and the Western, Central, and Southern Provinces remaining among the lowest recipients.

Research indicates a sharp decrease in the participation of the head of the household in economic activities post-migration in a country characterized by high youth unemployment. The considerable amounts of remittances sent have led to a significant alteration of the gender roles and family structure. Females are increasingly engaged as the head of the household. The breakdown of families due to migration has led to considerable shifts in the nature and content of work, impacting the ability of family members to care for children and elderly citizens. Remittances have influenced overall time use in Sri Lanka to a greater extent than in other countries, even coupled with the sharp decline in the economic participation of the household head.

Remittances and household welfare

Remittances from international migration can significantly impact household welfare through income augmentation and local economic stimulation. Such financial flows often enhance living standards, education access, and healthcare coverage. Understanding migration and remittance patterns is key to assessing their influence on household well-being. Migration stands out as a vital livelihood strategy in Sri Lanka and a significant contributor to household welfare in terms of remittances. Migrant workers earn foreign currencies, particularly the US dollar, which support not only their families but also other households, and bolster local economies. The International Organization for Migration designated migration as the primary livelihood strategy for approximately 33% of Sri Lankan households. Approximately 5 million Sri Lankans have migrated across borders. The migration of Sri Lankans from 1960–2008 amounted to around 2 million personnel in Sri Lanka. The significance of remittances also varies with destination countries and migration types; foreign employment opportunities in the Middle East, for instance, generate substantially higher remittance inflows than, for example, education-related migration to Western countries.

Dependency, gender roles, and caregiving

Variations in time use among male and female migrants are examined. In particular, the intensity of care obligations and the amount of time invested in household tasks differ across gender and migration status. While the overall increase in gender parity is noteworthy, the involvement of male household members in collaborative routines has not paralleled the growth in female employment outside the home. The operating hours of employed women have indeed risen, yet the time they are able to spend with children has declined on account of longer work hours. The out-migration of mothers to foreign lands translates into the gradual emergence of a pattern wherein the children become the contingent caregivers of the family.

Policy responses and development implications

The migration patterns of Sri Lanka, a developing country in the South Asian region, are complex owing to prevalent demographic changes and large-scale internal migration in conjunction with international migration. The liberalization of the economy in the late 1970s resulted in a large-scale international migration movement of unskilled and semi-skilled workers, mainly to the Middle East. In an environment of strong economic, educational and infrastructural push factors, internal migration entered a new phase of acceleration. In post-conflict years, migration complemented stabilization efforts, but continued to respond strongly to chronic disparities; the conflict itself became a factor in regional push dynamics.

Tracing historical developments in Sri Lankan migration, three significant phases can be delineated: pre-colonial and colonial migration, independence-to-liberalization and post-liberalization. Economic and geographical factors influenced early migration patterns, whereas liberalization and civil disturbance influenced migration after independence. Trends in migration responses require investigation into macroeconomic dynamics, conflict-impacted regions, and inter-urban relations within the context of a number of South East and South Asian countries. Distinctive push factors affecting resource endowment, settlement patterns, occupational structures, population densities, housing amenities, education and health impeded the recovery of affected districts.

Migration governance and labour market integration

The Sri Lankan migration process is inextricably linked with the liberalization of the labour market and the need for an effective medium to implement Government regulations and obligations. Although Sri Lanka had continued to face many gradual and steady transformations in the labour market even prior to liberalization of the economy in 1977, the externally induced structural change thus far initiated in the country has been so far-reaching and profound that it has led to the establishment of an entirely different labour market. Sri Lanka offers a range of labour migration programs, and therefore foreign employment is governed by an elaborate set of regulations the laws of a sample of Sri Lankan district on labour migration the Madampitiya, or National Labor Migration Policy, in Sri Lanka. As outlined in the Sri Lanka Labor Migration Policy, the main objectives of the National Labor Migration Policy are to Prevent Trafficking in Persons (TIP) and Forced Labor and Promotion and Protection of Rights and Welfare of Sri Lankan Migrant Workers, Safe Migration and Skill Development Programs, Collect and Disseminate Migration Information, Strengthen and Upgrade the Government Department of Migrant Workers, Implement Bilateral Labor Agreements and Multi-lateral Understanding on Labor Migration, Build Relationships with Stakeholders on Labor Migration Issues, Policy, Strategy and Action Plan Align with the National and Global Policy of Social Protection Initiatives, and Regional Coordination on Labor Migration Policies, among others. The variables of administrative, legislative and other governance and policy regimes confer Sri Lanka with the distinction of being among the foremost countries in South Asia to introduce a labour migration law, the Emigration Ordinance of 1920.

Urban planning and regional development

Since independence in 1948, Sri Lanka has witnessed wide-ranging internal migration and likely significant emigration. Data constraints inhibit a full analysis of the migration process and its demographic consequences. Preliminary examination indicates that much of the external migration comprises labour and educational migration, supplemented by professional migration and entrepreneurship. Low return rates characterize labour migration to the Middle East, especially among unskilled workers. Rough estimates indicate that over a million Sri Lankans have participated in external migration movements, for various durations. The volume of remittances received appears to far outweigh the economic contribution of returnees. Categorizing Sri Lanka as a lower-middle-income country, conventional wisdom predicates that even the large outflow of labour force participants induced by the civil conflict should not lead to a sustained decline in economic growth. Accumulating knowledge and skills in the destination country can exceed losses from a decreasing workforce. Despite these transfers, labour migration nevertheless aggravates domestic talent shortages in pockets of high demand.

Social protection and demographic resilience

For Sri Lanka's elderly population, widowed migrants and families with both parents abroad often fall outside of pension schemes and social safety nets. These types of households exhibit a higher proportion of the elderly population, about 15 percent in such districts compared to the national average of 6 percent. This vulnerability, outlined above, defines young adult migration patterns that arise from the need for remittances

and an environment where families remain more reliant on investments in education to access jobs abroad. Resilience to migration away from predominantly young workforces remains limited. Education-related outflows to countries such as Australia, Canada, Germany, New Zealand, or the UK remain high. During post-conflict periods, recovery has been linked to lower young adult outflows and halted progress in human capital. Employment and access to skills-matching services abroad have led to high female participation in direct health and care precursor pathways during and beyond tertiary education.

Due to the high frequency of migration-related studies, Sri Lanka offers several sources of data. The Census and Statistics Department disseminate the most comprehensive annual migration data, derived from census data, surveys, and administrative records. Although these datasets are valuable, they have shortcomings in coverage, consistency, and accuracy. Critical information remains blank, while the use of estimation methods leads to dubious statistics. Furthermore, since the surveys used for estimation have been conducted at irregular intervals, projections made for longer time spans have questionable value.

By promoting long-term cohesion among population transitions, migration has a significant impact on development processes in Sri Lanka. Accordingly, robust temporal perspectives and multi-scale insights are essential for analysing trends, policy effects, and consequences in this area. Efforts to track national shifts have been stymied by contradictory definitions and segmentation between internal and external forms. To formalise the analysis, empirical data, predominantly from applied research but also encompassing secondary sources, have been organised around a concise timeline that indicates the policy context and the pressure of migration on demographic dynamics and urbanisation. The dominant forms of circulation are assessed, accompanied by a description of the key flows and the most relevant characteristics.

Case studies: selected districts and districts-level contrasts

Contrasts in migration and other socio-economic indicators exist across Sri Lanka's fifteen districts. This section compares Ampara, Trincomalee, and Kurunegala districts along several dimensions. Each district has experienced distinct migration, urbanization, and demographic patterns due to a combination of economic specialization, regional and ethnic conflict, and educational investment. Transition matrices capture the relative importance of internal and international migration, yielding glocalization estimates that refer to aggregate migration within alternative administrative units. Differences in migration status among the three districts are evident across several categories, notably based on educational attainment. Ampara has developed as a migratory transit hub pointing to the influence of the destination on the characteristics of migrants. Demographically, Ampara exhibits the most favourable dependency ratio profile, while Kurunegala reflects ongoing youthful, rural-urban internal migration.

Sri Lanka's fifteen districts present diverse migration patterns and socio-economic indicators. Three districts Ampara, Trincomalee, and Kurunegala serve as case studies highlighting the effects of regional specialization, conflict, and educational investment on migration and demographic change. Trincomalee has experienced limited internal migration, despite the creation of urban and intermediary concentric zones, indicating the role of demand-driven push factors. According to the 2001 census, Trincomalee had the lowest level of labour migration to Colombo. Ampara, in contrast, has developed into a migratory transit hub, falling well short of qualifying as a destination class urban

centre. Sectoral composition analysis suggests that disaster-related macro-economic developments in coastal fishing, coupled with media coverage of the region in central Colombo, moulded people's perceptions and influenced migration behaviour. Two alternative geographical administrative units are considered: districts and provinces. Evaluation of migration patterns at district-level therefore provides a basis for glocalization mapping under defined historical timeframes, measuring migration flows between tracts rather than cumulative totals across the entire period. It becomes possible to evaluate whether the direction of migration occurs towards or away from a particular zone, in relation to levels recorded before and after tsunami intervention.

Conclusion

As migration patterns have changed, Sri Lanka has experienced significant demographic shifts, and certain developments diverged from the global experience. Migration is typically expected to contribute to economic growth and development by efficiently matching skills with labour-market needs, but this assumption does not uniformly hold in Sri Lanka. The 2001 census recorded over 1.7 million Sri Lankans living abroad, representing 10.5 percent of the total population. Instead of enhancing profitability for the economy, labour migration has largely been associated with low-priced unskilled/middle-skilled jobs, usually in the Middle East. Nevertheless, outflows of skilled people remain, although Sri Lanka has encountered a gradual income outflow from returning expatriate workers, whether skilled or unskilled, sought by neighbouring competitor countries.

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Conflict of interest

The authors confirm that there is no conflict of interest involve with any parties in this research study.

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