

SRI LANKA

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SUBMISSION TO THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE ELIMINATION OF DISCRIMINATION AGAINST WOMEN

86TH PRE-SESSIONAL WORKING GROUP, 27 FEBRUARY- 3 MARCH 2023, LIST OF ISSUES

Amnesty International would like to bring to your attention a recent report we published on the human rights impacts of Sri Lanka's economic crisis in advance of the adoption of the List of Issues at the 86th session by the UN Committee on the Elimination of Discrimination against Women. [Sri Lanka: "We are near total breakdown": Protecting the rights to health, food and social security in Sri Lanka's economic crisis](#)¹, documents how the crisis has had a catastrophic impact on economic and social rights. There have been serious shortages in food, fuel, medicines, and other essential items. As of June 2022, an estimated 11% of households reported their income had stopped and 62% of households said their income reduced; and as of July, food inflation reached 90.9% on a yearly basis.

This report reflects many of the human rights challenges women and girls in Sri Lanka are facing in the context of the economic crisis today, as illustrated below. This is not an exhaustive list of issues relevant to gender-based discrimination in Sri Lanka, and we will make more detailed submissions in advance of the review.

ECONOMIC CRISIS IMPACTS WOMEN'S RIGHTS

The crisis has had severe impacts on economic and social rights, including the rights to health, food, and social security. There is concern that historically marginalized groups, including women, would experience the impact of the economic crisis in specific and compounded ways. UNFPA have already noted the high risk of death for pregnant women and girls in active labour due to limited transport to health facilities; the unavailability of life-saving sexual and reproductive health services, such as clinical management of rape services; and additional barriers in accessing services targeting gender-based violence, such as case management, security and legal and justice services.² Similarly, the crisis has led to difficulties accessing adequate and nutritious food. An OCHA assessment in July 2022 found that "4.9 million people from low-income and food-insecure households required food assistance, including 238,000 pregnant and lactating women".³

SOCIAL PROTECTION

There are several government-run schemes and programmes in Sri Lanka that provide different types of social protection. However, there are some key, long-standing limitations to these programmes, particularly the *Samurdhi* programme, that have been further exposed by the current crisis. These include lack of sufficient funding, inadequacy of the level of benefits, poor targeting, and the exclusion of a large proportion of people due to administrative inadequacies. Many social support programs run by the government have also been disrupted as a result of the crisis, making it harder for people to cope. For example, the *Thripasha* programme, which provides nutritional support including for young children and pregnant and lactating women, has been severely impacted.⁴

¹ Amnesty International, *Sri Lanka: "We are near total breakdown": Protecting the rights to health, food and social security in Sri Lanka's economic crisis* (ASA 37/6052/2022), 4 October 2022, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/asa37/6052/2022/en/>

² UN News, "Sri Lanka's economic crisis pushes health system to brink of collapse", 17 August 2022, news.un.org/en/story/2022/08/1124842; UNFPA, *Upholding the Dignity and Building Resilience of Women and Girls: UNFPA's Response to the Economic Crisis*, p. 4.

³ OCHA ROAP, "Sri Lanka multi-dimensional crisis situation report 1 - As of 15 July 2022", available at reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/sri-lanka-multi-dimensional-crisis-situation-report-no-1-15-july-2022, p. 4.

⁴ According to WFP, the *Thripasha* programme "was paused in late 2021 due to budgetary constraints". WFP, "Sri Lanka: Situation Report", 29 July 2022, available at reliefweb.int/report/sri-lanka/wfp-sri-lanka-situation-report-29-july-2022

RECOMMENDATIONS

In this context, Amnesty International has made a comprehensive set of recommendations in the context of the ongoing crisis to all relevant actors. The full list appears at the end of the report; and some key recommendations include:

1. Urgently assess the impacts of the economic crisis on the ability of people in Sri Lanka to access adequate food, nutrition and healthcare among other essential services. The assessment should include groups at risk of adverse impact, including women and girls. Care should be taken to assess and address the particular impact of the economic crisis on people who may experience adverse impact through multiple and intersecting identities including gender.
2. Work with partners to regularly monitor and collect data on people's evolving health status and access to health services, including both mental and physical health. Where possible, these data should be disaggregated by gender, age, race, disability status, socio-economic status, caste, health status, and location.
3. Reform existing social assistance programmes in a manner that offers comprehensive social protection coverage and moves away from narrowly targeting particular groups. Increase expenditure on social assistance programmes to respond to the growing need for support, and ensure allocations are sufficient to ensure the right to an adequate standard of living for everyone, including groups that may be feeling specific and compounded impacts of the economic crisis, such as women and girls.
4. Avoid harmful austerity measures.