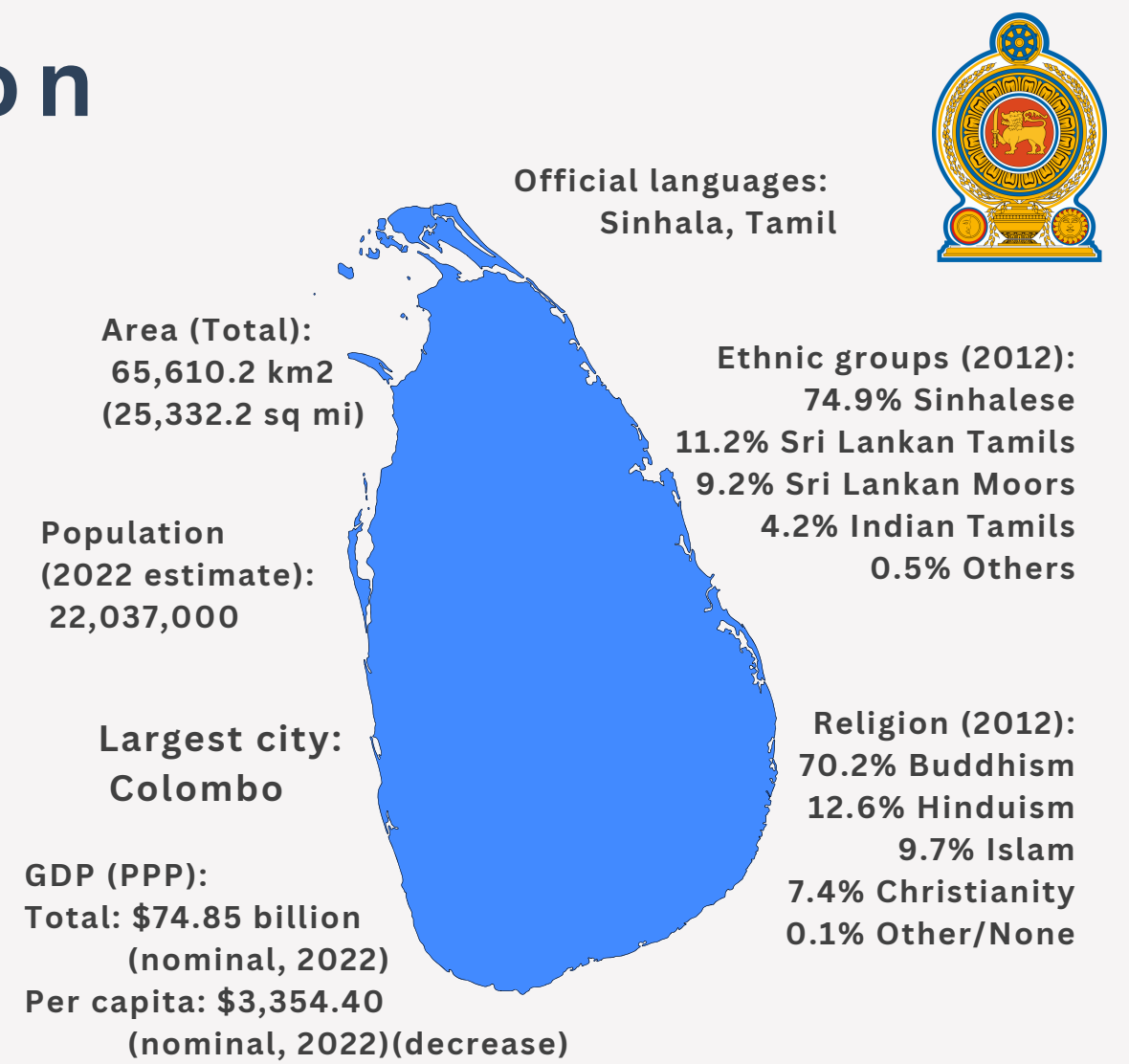


Child Protection for Children with Disabilities in Sri Lanka

Policy Recommendation Summary 2023

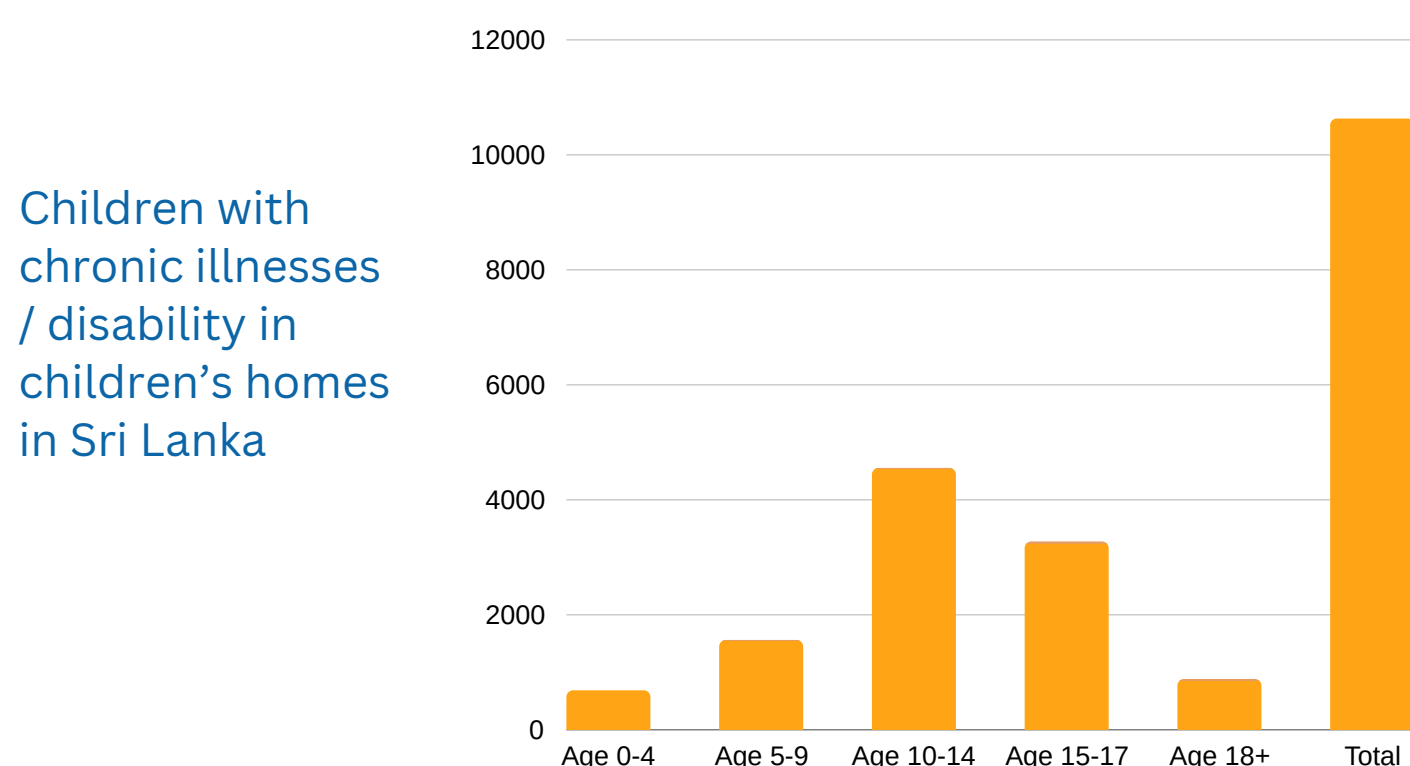
Towards Inclusive Child Protection

This document presents the outcomes of an informative assessment and stakeholder interviews focused on the rights of children with disabilities (CWD) within Sri Lanka's child protection system. The primary objective is to provide evidence-based recommendations to align the child protection system with the United Nations Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD). The recommendations emphasize the practical implementation of a more robust framework, enhanced coordination, collaboration, and national marketing to bolster the protection and inclusion of CWD.



Context

Sri Lanka's child protection system is administered by the Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment. The nation ratified the United Nations Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) in 1991, committing to comprehensive measures for child protection, as outlined in Article 19. The Protection of the Rights of Persons with Disabilities Act, No. 28 of 1996, safeguards and promotes the rights of all persons with disabilities (PWD). Sri Lanka also ratified the CRPD in 2016, assuming obligations, including those outlined in Article 7 concerning the rights of children with disabilities (CWD).



* Census of Children in Child Care Institutions 2019

Background

The project utilized a multi-method approach, involving secondary data analysis and 11 virtual expert interviews. Secondary analysis assessed challenges in Sri Lanka's child protection system and disability inclusion, comparing CRPD alignment in various countries. A review of 242 sources pinpointed key policy areas for enhancement. Thematic analysis, conducted using Excel coding, ensured data accuracy.

Findings

Areas of opportunity to enhance wellbeing for CWD

- Increase access and availability of services
- Greater coordination between service providers
- Increase awareness
- Collect and disseminate reliable and current data
- Create robust framework for legislation
- Address stigma and discrimination

These recommendations offer immediate, budget-conscious actions within limited resources while maintaining a focus on viable strategies.

Collaboration and Governance among Ministries and Agencies

- Establish a digital platform for real-time collaboration among liaison officials from diverse ministries and agencies, create an Inter-Ministerial Committee, and form a National Council for CWD.
- These steps will ensure coordinated efforts, resource sharing, and transparent implementation across ministries and agencies, addressing diverse CWD issues.

First Steps: Enlist university students or central government officials to map existing working groups.
Cost: No additional cost (repurpose existing budgets).
Time: One year to make recommendations, 6 months to reform suggested group(s).

Strategies for Partnerships, Advocacy, and Campaigning

- Establish government-led partnerships with disability-focused NGOs, form a national CWD advisory board, organize community events and awareness campaigns, collaborate with influencers, and build international partnerships for technical expertise and resources.

First Steps: Conduct a thorough mapping of disability-focused NGOs and relevant ministries.
Cost: None additional cost within the MWCASE (budgets and human resources can be re-allocated).
Time: Approximately 4 to 6 months.

More Robust Legal Frameworks

- Enhance CWD's rights through legal amendments, expedited legal procedures, and penalties for discrimination or abuse.
- Implement an accessible online abuse reporting portal, inclusive town hall meetings, and a multilingual guide to CWD's legal rights, fostering inclusivity and a robust legal framework.

First Steps: Review all current policies to align with the CRPD.
Cost: No additional cost (budgets and resources can be re-allocated).
Time: Up to 6 months to review existing policies.

Paradigm Shift from Charity to a Human Rights-Based Approach

- Develop media guidelines for respectful representation of CWD, initiate an online drive for inclusive spaces, and embed disability awareness in teacher training and school curricula to nurture inclusive classrooms.

First Steps: Develop a comprehensive set of media guidelines.
Cost: No additional cost within the MWCASE (budgets and human resources can be re-allocated).
Time: Approximately 2 to 3 months to develop guidelines.

Data Collection, Research, and Monitoring

- Collaborate with academic institutions for CWD research and create a database compiling disaggregated data on CWD.
- Mandate regular assessments of CWD inclusion and progress across sectors, ensuring transparency and evidence-based policy formulation.

First Steps: Reach out to academic institutions, research organizations, and disability-focused NGOs to establish partnerships.
Cost: No additional cost (budgets and resources can be re-allocated).
Time: Approximately 2 to 3 months to establish collaborative partnerships.

Legal Literacy and CWD Rights Education

- Incorporate CWD's human rights education for legal professionals and vocational programs, develop community workshops and a mobile legal clinic, and create online content to explain essential legal rights of CWD.

First Steps: Assess gaps in legal literacy and disability rights education.
Cost: No additional cost within the MWCASE (budgets and human resources can be re-allocated).
Time: Up to 1 to 2 months to establish contact and arrange meetings.

Fostering Professional Support and Resources for CWD

- Create training and certification initiatives for healthcare professionals and educators, implement a mentorship program, establish regional resource centers, and develop an online resource for parents, caregivers, and teachers of CWD.

First Steps: Collaborate with experts to design a specialized training curriculum.

Cost: No additional cost within the MWCASE (budgets and human resources can be re-allocated).

Time: 6 to 8 months for curriculum development and initial preparations.

Measures to Alleviate Vulnerabilities

- Establish neighborhood support networks, partner with architectural firms to promote universal design principles, and collaborate with local governments to develop inclusive communities for CWD.

First Steps: Engage local community leaders, disability advocates, and relevant organizations.

Cost: No additional cost within the MWCASE (budgets and human resources can be re-allocated).

Time: 2 to 3 months, accounting for planning meetings and compiling feedback.

Conclusion

This study emphasizes the need for a more inclusive child protection system in Sri Lanka, aligning with the CRPD and promoting the rights of children with disabilities. The provided recommendations and implementation strategies offer a practical and budget-sensitive path toward achieving this goal. By taking these steps, Sri Lanka can move towards a more compassionate and equitable society where all children, including those with disabilities, can thrive harmoniously. The ultimate aim is the holistic development and safeguarding of all children's rights, catalyzing a transformation across the societal structure.

Big Picture for Next Step

Present the information to the Ministry of Women, Child Affairs and Social Empowerment Government of Sri Lanka and offer:



1. Technical coaching and assistance
2. Continued data collection/ research
3. Strategic planning and implementation support

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