



## IPS Helping Sri Lankan migrant workers get better jobs

With its extensive knowledge of labour issues, the *Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka* (IPS) convinced the government that training for migrant workers is key to improving their prospects.

**SETTING THE SCENE** —Migrant workers are a critical source of income for Sri Lanka. Roughly 250,000 workers – just more than 1 percent of the population – leave the country each year to find work in other countries. Their remittances comprise 8 percent of Sri Lanka's gross domestic product and provide the largest and most stable source of foreign capital for the country – far more than official development assistance or foreign direct investment. However, migrant workers confront numerous challenges. Two in three lack the skills for all but the lowest-paying

jobs and they often face deplorable working conditions. Migration can also make family members more vulnerable, especially children who are left temporarily without parents.

**IPS'S ENGAGEMENT IS "GOOD FOR THE MIGRANT WORKERS, AND IT'S GOOD FOR SRI LANKA."**

HIGH-LEVEL SRI LANKAN  
GOVERNMENT STAFFER

In an attempt to balance the potential for labor

migration to contribute to national development with the perils faced by migrants and their families, the government has taken an active role in creating policies to promote foreign employment while protecting its citizens abroad, most notably through its 2008 *National Labor Migration Policy*. In addition, in late 2010 the government established the Ministry for Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare as a distinct agency to focus exclusively on labor migration.

**WHAT IPS DID** —The Institute of Policy Studies of Sri Lanka (IPS) is one of the country's most important sources of policy-oriented research on labor migration. Shortly after the new ministry was established, IPS published a book exploring the impact of labour migration in South Asia. Impressed with IPS' work, the minister asked the Institute to help develop a strategy and action plan for implementing the labour migration policy.

IPS's work focused primarily on the link between migration and development, though it also



provided input on governance of the migration process and protection of migrant workers and their families. In particular, IPS was instrumental in helping the government understand the importance of training workers to meet the demand in key markets offering higher pay and better working conditions.

**THE OUTCOME** —As a direct result of IPS' contributions, the Ministry for Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare expanded vocational training for migrant workers and dedicated additional funding to keep these training programs

running. While the broader impacts of the program on Sri Lankan society remain to be seen, using a conservative estimate, more than 95,000 workers are expected to improve their skills in the next five years, contributing an estimated \$USD 21 million more in remittances as a result.

IPS has gone on to conduct supporting research for the Ministry on numerous topics, including in other aspects of labor migration, and was asked by the government to join an expert group set up to conceptualize a public migration research institute.

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For more information on IPS and its work on labour migration and other issues, visit <http://www.ips.lk/>

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