

# **National Policy for Older Persons in Sri Lanka (2025-2035)**

DRAFT

## Preamble

Sri Lanka is experiencing a profound demographic transformation, marked by a rapidly ageing population. Ageing is an inevitable phenomenon that brings physical, mental and social changes in adults. In Sri Lanka, an older person is defined as anyone completed 60 years of age. This demographic shift presents both significant challenges and opportunities for the nation's social, economic, and health systems. Recognising the invaluable contributions of older persons to families, communities, and national development, it is imperative to ensure their rights, dignity and well-being are safeguarded.

The National Policy for Elders affirms the Government of Sri Lanka's commitment to creating an inclusive, supportive, and age-friendly society. It is guided by global frameworks such as the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (2002), UN Decade of Healthy Ageing (2021-2030) and the Protection of the Rights of Elders Act No. 9 of 2000 of Sri Lanka and its amendments. This policy provides a comprehensive framework to address the multifaceted needs of older persons, promote healthy and active ageing, and foster intergenerational solidarity. Through coordinated, evidence-based, and rights-centred approaches, the policy aims to empower older persons to live with independence, security, and respect.

By embracing this policy, Sri Lanka pledges to build a sustainable future where all generations thrive in mutual respect and shared responsibility.

## **1.0 Need for a National Policy for Older Persons**

Sri Lanka urgently requires a comprehensive national policy for older persons to address the complex challenges posed by its rapidly ageing population. As one of the fastest-ageing countries in South Asia, Sri Lanka is undergoing a significant demographic transition characterised by declining fertility rates and increased life expectancy. According to the Department of Census and Statistics (2012; 2024), the proportion of the population aged 60 and above doubled from 6.6 per cent in 1981 to 12.4 per cent in 2012 and 18.2 per cent in 2024.

This demographic shift has profound implications across health, social and economic spheres. The old-age dependency ratio is rising steadily, increasing pressure on both traditional family-based support systems and state-run elderly services. High levels of out-migration, particularly among the working-age population, have further weakened extended family networks that have historically supported older persons. As a result, many older individuals are left behind with limited care and social contact. Additionally, the feminisation of ageing where women constitute an increasing share of the population of older persons adds further complexity. Older women are more vulnerable to poverty, social isolation, and health-related challenges due to longer life expectancy, lower lifetime earnings and restricted access to financial security.

While ageing is a natural biological process, its social, health and economic consequences require deliberate and proactive policy responses. Without adequate planning, the rising prevalence of age-related health conditions, increasing financial insecurity and the risk of social exclusion could significantly undermine the well-being of Sri Lanka's older population. Furthermore, the sustainability of existing pension system is in question, posing further challenges to social protection and national stability.

Population ageing presents significant opportunities that must be strategically harnessed. Older persons are active contributors to society, not only through caregiving, volunteering and community engagement, but also by bringing knowledge, skills and life experience which support innovation, mentorship and workforce resilience. A significant proportion of older persons remain economically productive beyond the traditional retirement age, particularly when supported through enabling environments.

A well-formulated national policy for older persons can provide a critical framework for addressing these multifaceted issues. It should promote active and healthy ageing, ensure equitable access to quality eldercare and reinforce social safety nets, including pensions and community-based services. Equally, the policy must recognise and strengthen the capabilities and social participation of older persons as vital assets to national development. Furthermore, the policy should enable older persons to remain productive and socially engaged through flexible employment options, re-skilling programmes and volunteer opportunities that support their continued participation in the labour force.

Importantly, such a policy is essential to uphold intergenerational equity, fostering mutual respect and support between younger and older generations. By planning strategically, Sri Lanka can mitigate the adverse effects of population ageing while harnessing emerging opportunities in healthcare, eldercare and age-inclusive services. Thus, a national policy for older persons is not merely a matter of care, but also a strategic imperative for preserving Sri Lanka's social cohesion, economic sustainability and long-term national well-being.

## 2.0 Vision

To ensure that older persons in Sri Lanka live with dignity, independence, and security, with equitable access to health care, income and social protection, and meaningful opportunities for participation in family and community life.

## 3.0 Mission

- (a) To establish inclusive, rights-based systems that support the health, security, care, and participation of older persons, enabling them to lead active, dignified lives and contribute meaningfully to family and community.
- (b) To empower all individuals - regardless of gender or background - to prepare for ageing with confidence by promoting healthy lifestyles, financial security and a positive, life-course approach to ageing.

## 4.0 Guiding Principles

The development and implementation of this National Policy for Older Persons are anchored in a set of core guiding principles that reflect Sri Lanka's commitment to upholding the rights, dignity and well-being of its ageing population. These principles provide the ethical and strategic foundation for policy actions, ensuring that responses to population ageing are inclusive, equitable and sustainable.

They are aligned with key international frameworks, including the United Nations Principles for Older Persons, the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA) and the upcoming UN Convention on the Rights of Older Persons, which serve as foundational guidelines for creating effective and rights-based policies for older persons. These global commitments emphasize independence, participation, care, self-fulfilment and dignity for the older persons.

By adhering to these guiding principles, this policy aims to foster an environment where older persons in Sri Lanka can lead secure, dignified and fulfilling lives while contributing meaningfully to family, community, and national development.

### 1. **Human Rights and Dignity**

Recognise older persons in Sri Lanka as equal and dignified members of society, entitled to autonomy, protection and meaningful participation, in accordance with national laws and international human rights obligations. All forms of age-based discrimination shall be eliminated to ensure equal treatment and opportunities.

### 2. **Life-Course Perspective and Intergenerational Solidarity**

Promote a holistic understanding of ageing as part of the broader human life cycle and encourage mutual respect, cooperation and shared responsibility between generations.

### 3. **Equity, Inclusion and Respect for Diversity**

Ensure equitable access to opportunities and services for older persons - regardless of gender, location, ability, ethnicity or socio-economic status - while respecting the cultural, religious, linguistic and personal diversity of the ageing population.

### 4. **Protection, Empowerment and Autonomy of Vulnerable Groups**

Prioritise the protection and empowerment of older persons facing multiple disadvantages, including elderly women, persons with disabilities, those without family support and individuals in extreme poverty. Policies shall support autonomy and self-determination, enabling older persons to make informed choices about their lives.

## **5. Participation and Active Engagement**

Value and facilitate the continued participation of older persons in social, economic, cultural and civic life. Their voices should be actively included in policy development, planning and implementation processes.

## **6. Sustainability, Coordination and Shared Responsibility**

Promote sustainable and community-based care models through coordinated efforts among government sectors, civil society, families and the private sector. Policies should remain adaptable to demographic and social changes over time.

## **7. Accessibility and Holistic Support**

Ensure that services, facilities, environments and information are physically, economically and socially accessible to older persons, including those with disabilities. A holistic approach shall address not only health but also social inclusion, emotional well-being and financial security.

## **8. Evidence-Based and Responsive Policy**

Use reliable data, research and best practices to inform decision-making, ensuring policies are responsive to current realities and capable of evolving with future challenges.

## **5.0 Policy Objectives**

This National Policy for older persons articulates the Government of Sri Lanka's commitment to safeguarding the dignity, rights and well-being of older persons. This policy adopts a holistic, life-course and rights-based approach to address the evolving needs of Sri Lanka's ageing population, aligning with national development goals and complementing related policies and strategies.

The following policy objectives are designed to provide clear direction for action, facilitate coordination among stakeholders and enable effective monitoring and evaluation:

### **1. Uphold and Protect the Rights of Older Persons**

Ensure equal rights and non-discrimination for older individuals, in accordance with national laws and international commitments, including the UN Principles for Older Persons and the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing (MIPAA).

### **2. Promote Age-Friendly and Accessible Environments**

Foster inclusive physical and social environments that enable older persons to live safely, independently and with dignity, including age-friendly infrastructure, housing and transportation.

### **3. Enhance Health Care and Well-being**

Strengthen access to comprehensive, affordable and quality health services for older persons, including health promotion, disease prevention, geriatric care, mental health services, end-of-life care, palliative care and rehabilitative support.

### **4. Support Economic Security and Livelihoods**

Ensure income security for older persons through strengthened and sustainable pension schemes, social protection measures and opportunities for continued engagement in the workforce or alternative livelihoods.

## 5. **Ensure Social Inclusion and Participation**

Promote the active engagement of older persons in family, community, cultural and civic life, with a particular focus on reducing isolation and supporting intergenerational solidarity.

## 6. **Strengthen Long-Term, Intermediate, Palliative and Respite Care Services**

Expand and improve both formal and informal care systems, including community-based, institutional and home-based services while enhancing support for caregivers and ensuring access to empathetic intermediate, long-term and respite care.

## 7. **Foster Coordination and Integration through a Life-Course Approach**

Promote inter-sectoral collaboration and integrate ageing into broader national development planning, using a life-course perspective that emphasises preparedness for healthy and secure ageing.

## 8. **Enhance Evidence-Based Decision-Making and Accountability**

Establish robust systems for data collection, research, monitoring and evaluation to guide policy implementation, assess outcomes and ensure transparency, sustainability and continuous improvement.

# 6.0 Core Policy Areas

## 6.1 Rights and Protection of Older Persons

Older population in Sri Lanka must be assured full protection of their rights and freedoms, safeguarding their dignity, autonomy and safety within society. This includes protection against any forms of abuse, violence, discrimination, neglect and degrading treatment in public and private life, with a particular focus on vulnerable groups such as older women and older persons with disabilities.

### *Major Strategic Directions*

- **Legal Framework:**

Amend and introduce legislation to strengthen legal safeguards upholding the dignity and safety of older persons at times when they may be at their most vulnerable. Improve practices and procedures for vigorous enforcement of legislations that protect older persons from abuse, neglect, violence and exploitation; convenient access to legal services and redress. This includes recognising emerging forms of harm, such as technology-facilitated violence, online scams, digital harassment and financial exploitation.

Enact and rigorously enforce legislation to protect the assets of older persons.

Introduce specific procedures and guidelines to ensure the effective investigation and prosecution of crimes targeting older persons.

- **Culture, Attitude and Participation:** Foster socio-cultural sensitivity, respect for older persons' participation and be free from elder abuse, actively combat ageism and societal misconceptions about ageing.
- **Equity in Services:** Guarantee equitable access to protection and support services for older persons, regardless of demographic and socio-economic status and/ or geographic location.
- **Laws and Regulations Implementation:** Enhance older persons' community and service provider awareness, advocacy and enforcement mechanisms to uphold elder rights legislation effectively.

- **Policy making of the Government:** The Government shall consider the protection of older persons, focusing on their health, social care and safety when making policy decisions and new initiatives.

## 6.2 Health and Well-being

Promoting the health and well-being of older persons is essential to maintaining their quality of life, independence and active participation in society. This requires accessible, affordable and comprehensive health services tailored to the diverse physical, mental and social needs of older persons. Emphasis must be placed on the prevention and management of chronic diseases, mental health promotion, sexual and reproductive health and empathetic caregiver support.

### *Major Strategic Directions*

- **Healthcare Access and Quality:** Ensure older persons have equitable access to comprehensive healthcare services across all levels, encompassing curative, preventive, rehabilitative, palliative and end-of-life care. Strengthen primary healthcare and long-term care systems to deliver quality, elder-friendly services. Intermediate care to be promoted with care pathways, standardised assessment tools, establishing Multi-Disiplinary Teams, rehabilitative services, counselling, public awareness and family/community-based care. Building workforce capacity, training and ensuring access, equity and affordability need to be supported in promoting intermediate care.
- **Healthy Ageing Initiatives:** Implement advocacy, awareness and capacity-building programmes that promote healthy lifestyles and mental well-being throughout the life course. Support caregivers and encourage active ageing to reduce the burden of age-related health challenges.
- **Disease Prevention and Management:** Prioritise the prevention, timely treatment and rehabilitation of both communicable and non-communicable diseases affecting older persons, through measures such as appropriate vaccination campaigns and community-based interventions.
- **Technology and Innovation:** Leverage telemedicine, artificial intelligence and other innovative technologies to enhance the accessibility, efficiency and quality of health service delivery for older persons.
- **Treatment Accessibility:** Guarantee affordable, timely and equitable access to appropriate investigations, treatments and therapies across all approved pluralistic medical systems in the country, including Western medicine as well as traditional and complementary modalities.

## 6.3 Financial Security

Economic stability is essential for older persons to live with dignity, independence and security. This requires robust pension systems, opportunities for continued economic participation and targeted financial support for vulnerable older persons.

### *Major Strategic Directions*

- **Pension Reform:** Ensure the sustainability and adequacy of universal pension coverage systems through reforms and innovative models aimed at reducing income disparities among older persons.
- **Employment and Livelihood Support:** Promote flexible work arrangements, part-time job opportunities and skills development programmes to support the continuous economic engagement of older persons, including providing market opportunities for their products.
- **Financial Incentives:** Provide senior-specific financial benefits such as tax relief, preferential interest rates on savings, loan facilities to initiate livelihoods, cash assistance for low-income older persons and access to insurance schemes to enhance economic security.

- **Financial Literacy:** Provide information on savings, income and expenditure management, prioritisation of expenses and digital literacy for effective financial management.

#### 6.4 Social Protection, Engagement and Inclusion

Social inclusion and active engagement are vital for enhancing the quality of life, mental well-being and community integration of older persons. Policies must foster environments where older persons can participate fully in social, cultural and civic life, reducing isolation and promoting a sense of belonging. Lifelong learning and access to assistive services are important to support their autonomy and ongoing contribution to society.

##### *Major Strategic Directions*

- **Roles and responsibilities of older persons:** Encourage older persons to actively contribute to their families, communities and society by sharing their knowledge and experience, participating in social and volunteer activities and supporting intergenerational solidarity, thereby strengthening social cohesion, reinforcing community resilience and enabling them to remain valued and active members of society.
- **Community-Based Programmes:** Design and implement programs that encourage social participation, volunteerism and peer support among older persons. These initiatives help reduce social isolation, build supportive networks and strengthen intergenerational solidarity within communities.
- **Intergenerational Relationships:** Promote and support activities and policies that foster mutual respect, understanding and cooperation between younger and older generations. Such programmes help bridge generational gaps and reinforce family and community ties, including the application of the life course approach to enhance positive attitudes and behaviours.
- **Community Engagement Infrastructure:** Invest in establishing and sustaining day centres, day care centres and senior citizen committees as vital spaces for social interaction and support. Ensure these facilities and programmes are managed with equitable access and regularly monitored and evaluated to meet diverse elder needs.
- **Lifelong Learning:** Expand opportunities for older persons to engage in formal and informal education, recreational activities and skills development, particularly access to open universities and other educational institutions. Digital skills need to be enhanced to enable them to navigate technology confidently, access information and services, connect with others and participate in civic and community life, ensuring that learning opportunities are accessible, age-friendly and available in multiple languages and formats.
- **Social Assistance Services:** Develop and maintain accessible helplines, caregiver support programmes and home assistance services to aid older persons who require help. Ensure affordability and availability of assistive devices and technologies, alongside social subsidies and safety nets to support independent living and wellbeing.

#### 6.5 Long-Term Care and Support Services

Comprehensive and quality long-term care services are critically needed to meet the diverse requirements of older persons who require ongoing assistance with daily living activities. This includes a continuum of care options ranging from home-based care to institutional facilities, ensuring that older persons receive appropriate support in a safe and dignified environment.



### *Major Strategic Directions*

- **Long-Term Care Standards:** Develop, implement and enforce robust registration systems, guidelines and quality standards for all eldercare services, including residential care institutions, community-based care and home care providers. This ensures consistent, safe, empathetic and person-centred care across all settings. Both public and private sector long-term care facilities and support services are monitored and regulated by the National Secretariat for Elders through the guidance of the National Council for Elders.
- **Caregiver Capacity Building and support:** Address the shortage of trained caregivers by implementing short-term and mid-term training. Establish accredited training programmes to equip both professional caregivers and family members with the skills needed to provide high-quality care. Provide caregivers with financial assistance, respite care options and emotional support to prevent burnout and improve care outcomes. Strengthen existing accredited training centres with regular monitoring and evaluation to maintain standards and expand capacity to meet growing demand.
- **Build and Regulate the Long-term Care Workforce:** Regular assessment of the long-term care workforce and supply at the national and regional levels. Develop forecasting models for future workforce needs and strengthen strategies for the recruitment and retention of trained personnel.
- **Affordable and Equitable Access to Long Term Care:** Long-term care packages for low-income and vulnerable older persons, and long-term care insurance systems are to be strengthened with broader coverage for older persons. Initiate technology to enhance care delivery, especially in the provision of home-based care.

### **6.6 Age-Friendly Environments**

Creating environments that support the safety, independence and active participation of older persons is fundamental to their well-being and quality of life. Age-friendly environments consider physical, social and service-related factors to enable older persons to live comfortably within their communities.

### *Major Strategic Directions*

- **Accessible Living Spaces:** Promote affordable, safe and accessible housing solutions that incorporate age-friendly design principles, enabling older persons to live independently and with dignity.
- **Residential Care Regulations:** Develop and enforce quality standards and regulations for long-term care facilities, including residential care and nursing homes, to ensure safe, humane and responsive care environments.
- **Public Infrastructure and Transportation:** Enhance the accessibility, safety and inclusiveness of public spaces, transportation systems, sidewalks, parks and urban infrastructure. Improve age-friendly public transport options to facilitate mobility and social participation for older persons, ensuring travelling safely and conveniently.

### **6.7 Emergency Preparedness**

Older persons often face heightened vulnerabilities during emergencies and disasters, requiring specific attention to their needs in all phases of preparedness, response and recovery.

### *Major Strategic Directions*

- **Emergency Response Systems:** Develop and implement emergency protocols tailored to the needs of older persons in natural and man-made disasters, including provisions for first aid and rapid assistance, based on disaggregated data.
- **Inclusive Disaster Planning:** Ensure that disaster risk reduction and crisis management plans comprehensively incorporate the needs and voices of older persons, addressing challenges related to climate change, pandemics and economic crises.
- **Specialised Health and Social Services:** Guarantee the availability and continuity of essential health and social support services for older persons during emergencies, including access to medication, mobility aids and psychosocial support.

## **6.8 Implementation Framework**

Successful implementation of the National Policy for Older Persons requires well-coordinated efforts, adequate resources and data-driven decision-making to ensure impactful and sustainable outcomes.

### *Major Strategic Directions*

- **Intersectoral Coordination:** Strengthen collaboration and communication across government agencies, non-governmental organisations, the private sector and community groups to ensure a unified and effective approach to ageing policy.
- **Workforce: Strengthening the workforce to implement National Policy for Older Persons.**
- **Public-Private Partnerships:** Promote partnerships between public entities and private stakeholders to optimise resource utilisation, technical expertise and service delivery.
- **Budgeting and Resource Mobilisation:** Allocate sufficient and sustained funding aligned with the priorities of the policy, while exploring innovative financing mechanisms to support ageing initiatives.
- **Evidence-Based Approaches:** Improve data collection systems, build research capacity and establish a centralised national repository on ageing to inform policy development, programme planning and monitoring.

## **6.9 Monitoring and Evaluation**

Continuous monitoring and evaluation are vital to ensure the relevance, effectiveness and responsiveness of the policy to the evolving needs of older persons.

### *Major Strategic Directions*

- **Multisectoral Monitoring:** Develop comprehensive monitoring frameworks and outcome indicators across sectors to track progress and impact.
- **Independent Oversight:** Establish an autonomous body, supported by political leadership, to lead regular evaluations and ensure accountability.
- **Periodic Reviews:** Conduct systematic and timely assessments to identify gaps and inform policy adjustments and improvements.

## 6.10 Advocacy, Awareness and Communication

Building societal understanding and positive attitudes towards ageing supports the inclusion and well-being of older persons.

### *Major Strategic Directions*

- **Public Awareness Campaigns:** Launch campaigns to promote respect, challenge ageism and provide accurate information about ageing and rights of older persons.
- **Community Engagement:** Empower older persons to actively participate in advocacy and decision-making processes.
- **Media and Communication:** Utilise diverse media platforms to disseminate information on elder rights, available services and healthy ageing practices.
- **Capacity Building:** Provide training for service providers, community leaders and stakeholders on ageing-related issues and inclusive practices.