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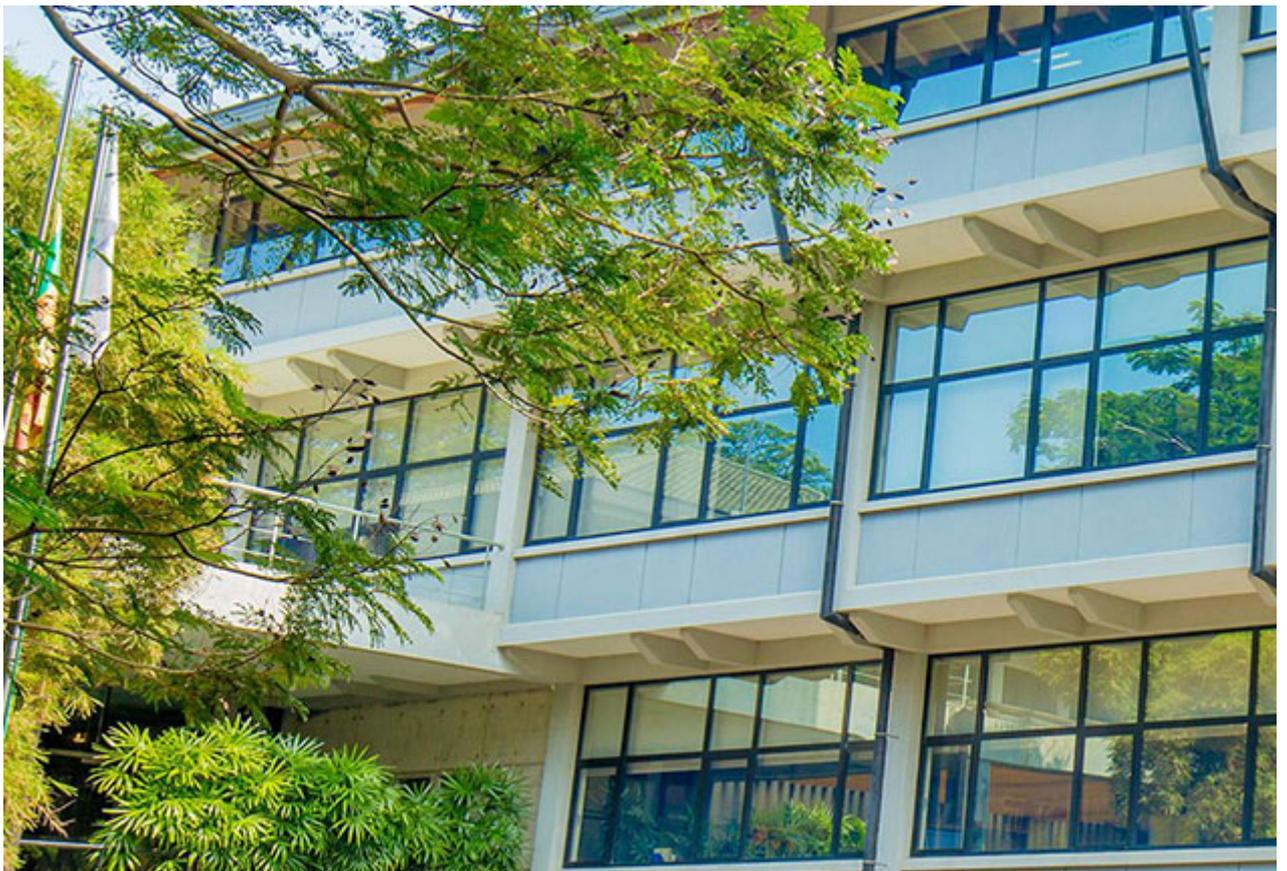


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*BUSINESS*

# IPS makes its proposals for Budget

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Ahead of the presentation of the National Budget for 2022, the Institute of Policy Sri Lanka (IPS) outlines some policy areas of concern and puts forward proposals t considered for inclusion in the forthcoming Budget.



Please note that this is Part-1 of IPS proposals for the Budget on health, education resources, women, vocational training, persons with disabilities and migration.



## Health Improving child nutrition



An IPS study on child malnutrition reveals that the ‘life cycle effect’ is one of the main contributors to the high prevalence of child malnutrition, especially among the poor. The study shows that dietary issues are caused by food insecurity and the lack of awareness about proper nutrition among the poor. Among the country’s several nutritional programmes, the Maternal and Child Health (MCH) supplementation programme by the Family Health (FHB) is one of the most beneficial, as it covers the entire life course interventions recommended by the World Health Organization (WHO). However, this is the programme with the least resources at present.

The country’s annual public investment on key nutrition-specific interventions is approximately Rs. 15 billion. Of this, 40% is absorbed by the school meal programme, 37% by the pregnant mother’s food allowance programme (37%) and the Thriposha programme (16%). The FHB medicine and supplements in the MCH programme accounted for

### Recommendation

Streamline existing nutrition programmes to focus on the most effective ones to improve nutrition outcomes. Expand budgetary allocations for the MCH programme and provide targeted benefits to the most vulnerable in other nutrition programmes. There is a possibility to gain some fiscal space by changing the supplementary feeding programme (Thriposha) from pregnant and lactating women, to target pregnant women at risk rather than all. The pregnant mother’s food allowance programme should be targeted in deprived regions.

### Reducing smoking prevalence

Although smoking rates have come down considerably over time, still more than 10% of males are smokers, and smoking remains a significant health threat killing more than 10,000 Sri Lankans, annually. Recent studies show that smoking is currently prevalent among selected population groups. Thus, there is a need to target specific groups (e.g., construction workers, drivers, youth groups those who are not in schools or any other educational institutions) to reduce smoking prevalence.

### Recommendation

Launch targetted programmes to build awareness on the benefits of smoking cessation; provide cessation support to existing smokers. Existing programmes can be realigned on high prevalence groups, so they do not impose an additional burden on government expenditure. But such programmes will help to reduce the tobacco smoking prevalence, reduced tobacco smoking-related illnesses, deaths, and the burden of cost.

### Education Improving access to quality early childhood education

Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) sector is one of the most important sectors in education, providing a solid foundation for a child's education trajectory. However, ECCE education in the country is low. In 2019, only 55.6% of 3 to 5-year-olds were in preschool education in the country. Further, there are large inequities in access to education with access lower in rural and estate sectors and among poorer households. The presence in this sector in the provision of core as well as support services, such as curriculum development and teacher training, is inadequate.

### Recommendation

Allocate public funds to implement ECCE policies that have been developed to improve access to the ECCE sector for low-income households, and to align ECCE education with national education. Government involvement is important in improving access to children from privileged backgrounds, through the provision of scholarships, or by setting up ECCE centres where there is low supply of ECCE centres. The functioning of ECCE should be monitored to improve quality.

### Human Resources Development Improving access to quality vocational training

Scientific breakthroughs in a spectrum of fields, such as genetics, artificial intelligence, nanotechnology, and 3D printing, are feeding into innovations that redefine how we work, and interact with each other. These innovations are constantly creating and transforming production processes and revolutionising the operations of a large spectrum of industries. These transformations are also restructuring labour markets and affecting labour markets in multiple ways. With the growing demand for high skilled workers, tertiary level education and Training (TVET) institutions in improving access to TVET is limited due to resource constraints, teacher shortages and governance issues.

### Recommendation

Streamline the public sector provision of TVET education. Money saved from this to provide eligible candidates financial support to participate in the most effective programmes (public, private or joint) in the trades of their choice. Partnerships with private sector and industry training can alleviate problems of lack of access to high equipment. Invest in public sector capacity for provision of support services to the as monitoring and evaluation, curriculum development, and the quality assurance institutions to improve the efficiency of the sector.

#### Women Increasing female labour force participation (FLFP)

Labour market data show that more women have become economically inactive due to COVID-19, lowering the already FLFP rate. As the COVID-19 related restrictions are relaxed, there will be more opportunities for women to participate in the labour market.

#### Recommendation

Provide training and job matching programmes to facilitate skills acquisition and employability, especially for women. Online training programmes can be facilitated in industries with labour shortages, with possible job opportunities for those successfully trained. These programmes can be coordinated by the institutions under the purview of the Tertiary and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector.

#### Persons with Disabilities Ensuring financial security of persons with disabilities (P

The cash assistance programme to assist PWDs implemented by the National Secretariat for Persons with Disabilities (NSPD) covers only a fraction of PWDs from low-income households. As of May 2020, the disability assistance programme covered 72,000 persons while 37,492 persons were in the waitlist. Moreover, another 14,149 PWDs were identified during the first wave of the pandemic by the rural committees set up at the divisional level, and they are eligible for the cash assistance.

#### Recommendation

Assist all PWDs, especially those from low-income households to ensure their economic and financial security. Extending benefits to current waitlisted persons alone will require an additional budget allocation of around Rs 2,250 million in 2022 while extending it to those identified by the rural committees too (subject to a re-assessment of their eligibility) will require a further allocation of around Rs 849 million.

#### Migration Increasing reintegration support for returning migrant workers

Available estimates indicate that by early January 2021, a total of 128,470 Sri Lankans were expected to return, while only 60,470 or 47% had been repatriated. IPS pointed out that “such low capacity to repatriate and delays in repatriation is the first indication of weakness in Lanka’s preparedness for the return and reintegration of migrant workers in a crisis. Limited social and psychosocial return and reintegration support for returnees restrict the ability of a returned migrant worker to reintegrate with his family and community and contribute to the economy. Reintegration issues experienced during the pandemic were amplified by the low base level of return and reintegration support service structures that were operational in Lanka before the pandemic.

### Recommendation

Implement the existing policy on ‘Return and Reintegration’ introduced in 2015. The key to the successful implementation aspect of this policy is integrating reintegration support policies with the mandates of the relevant ministries and providing necessary budgetary allocation for the same. This will result in faster and more successful reintegration of returnees to their families, communities and the economy.

### Addressing gaps in recruitment sector for foreign employment

Given that the number of migrant workers has reduced drastically during the pandemic, concerted efforts will need to be made to facilitate foreign employment, when the situation improves. Findings from a study conducted by IPS shows several areas to focus on. Improving business practices of recruitment agents would be beneficial for promoting foreign employment. The absence of an effective international marketing strategy to promote Lankan migrant workers to foreign employers have led to the recruitment agents managing recruitments by resorting to unfair competitive behaviour with agents from other countries of origin. This leads to additional costs for the agent which is likely to be passed on to potential migrant workers seeking employment.

### Recommendation

Establish a centralised and effective international marketing strategy to promote Lankan migrant workers from Sri Lanka. This should be coordinated by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and State Ministry of Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare, with necessary resources and budgetary allocations. The above proposal will improve the efficiency of recruitment and will also indirectly contribute to increasing remittances.

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