

This month's highlights:

- IPS In-house Seminar on the Economic Crisis, Soaring Food Prices, and Nutritional Wellbeing: Options for Safety Net Interventions in Sri Lanka.
- UNESCAP publication on 'Shaping the Future of Regional Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific' with contributions from IPS Research Fellow Dr Ganga Tilakaratna.
- TE Blog on the issues faced by students due to COVID-19 and the economic crisis in Sri Lanka.
- 'Inside IPS' segment featuring IPS Research Assistant Suresh Ranasinghe discusses teleworking in Sri Lanka and the viability of continuing telework post-COVID-19.
- Latest videos from IPS.

We hope you find this issue informative and welcome your feedback.

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In-house Seminar



Sri Lanka is facing the worst economic crisis since its independence in 1948. The macroeconomic conditions of the country, which have been deteriorating over time, have hit rock bottom accentuated by the aftermath of the COVID-19 pandemic. To respond to the crisis, the government of Sri Lanka declared a soft default on its debt services in April 2022 and requested a bailout from the International Monetary Fund (IMF). The economic crisis and the associated food price inflation have pushed a large segment of the Sri Lankan population into serious food and nutrition insecurity.

In this policy seminar, the speakers present a broad set of food and nutrition security challenges arising from the ongoing economic crisis, discuss potential options for redesigning nutrition-oriented social safety nets, and discuss select lessons from implementing similar interventions in other developing countries.

[See more >>>](#)

External Publication



Dr Ganga Tilakaratna, Research Fellow and Head of Poverty and Social Welfare Policy Research at the IPS has penned a chapter on social protection for a publication released to mark the 75th anniversary of the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP). In the book entitled Shaping the Future of Regional Cooperation in Asia and the Pacific, experts from the region and beyond offer their takes on how member states can build back better from the COVID-19 pandemic and foster a greener, healthier and more sustainable Asia-Pacific.

Dr Tilakaratna asserts that a key impediment to broadening social protection is adequate financing. Addressing this requires recognising social protection as an integral part of the country's development plan and increasing budgetary allocations to social protection, which depends on political will and commitment.

[See more >>>](#)

Blog

Private Tutoring Amidst Sri Lanka's Economic Crisis: Issues Faced by Students

By Usha Perera

Sri Lanka's education sector, still reeling from the effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, now faces acute challenges due to the current political and economic crises. The sudden imposition of curfews and the lack of transportation have resulted in school closures and students being deprived of structured and systematic in-school education. In Sri Lanka, closing schools for just one day causes a loss of 25 million learning hours and 1.4 million teaching hours. Alongside this, private tutoring has gained a greater importance. This blog discusses the issues faced mainly by Ordinary Level (O/L) and Advanced Level (A/L) students in attending tuition classes based on an IPS study. The study findings are derived from a sample of about 340 students, and 16 teachers and tutors across Sri Lanka.



[See more >>>](#)

Inside IPS

Special interview featuring:

Suresh Ranasinghe

Research Assistant with research interests in health, education, and labour policy

Q: Tell us about yourself and your role at IPS:

I work on health, education, and labour policy at IPS. I hold a BA (Hons.) in Economics from the University of Colombo and an LLB from the Open University of Sri Lanka. I am also currently doing my legal apprenticeship having completed the final Attorneys-at-Law examination at the Sri Lanka Law College and will take oaths as an Attorney in July this year.

Q: In your opinion, what are the main steps that need to be taken to create an environment suitable for productive teleworking in Sri Lanka?

One of the major barriers to implementing teleworking in Sri Lanka is the lack of sufficient regulations and legislation relating to telework practices. For instance, primary legislation that provides a legal framework for work and remuneration such as the Shop and Office Act No. 19 of 1954 and the Wages Boards Ordinance No. 27 of 1941 do not provide any facilitation for telework. Thus, it is vital to reform the existing laws to facilitate such practices.

Q: What are you currently researching at IPS?

I am engaged in three research projects. One project is on female access to decent work, which focuses on identifying context-specific barriers to female labour force participation in Sri Lanka and proposing measures to increase women's access to decent work. The second is a study on health financing in Sri Lanka, focusing on the budgeting and financing of noncommunicable diseases in Sri Lanka. The third project is on food environment mapping which examines how COVID-19 has impacted dietary patterns and the retail food environment in underserved settlements in the Colombo district.

The ability to telework also varies across different industry groups and occupations based on the nature of each occupation. As such, it is important to introduce slightly different regulations and facilities based on the characteristics of occupations/sectors. Furthermore, the telework approach should be implemented in such a way that ensures employees' well-being and continued productivity. Attention should be paid to employees' working time, performance management, digitalisation, communication, occupational safety, health, and work-life balance.

Q: As a researcher engaged in labour policy, do you see the new model of teleworking (i.e working from home) due to COVID-19 continuing even in a post-pandemic Sri Lanka?

Teleworking was a necessary practice for many firms and sectors during the lockdown period. Although this practice is not a novel concept in sectors such as IT, financial services, etc., most other sectors associated with WFH during this period. We can now see that WFH generates benefits for both employers and employees. Telework practices can be used as a policy tool to address problems relating to female employment including pregnant employees and employees with care responsibilities.

Q: What do you enjoy most in your work?

As a Research Assistant, I discover and learn something new every day and it paves the way to build a better version of myself. The ability to influence the policy-making process through evidence-based research is undoubtedly satisfying as well.

Q: Apart from your current field of research, what are your other pursuits?

I do a bit of voluntary teaching underprivileged kids. I also keep close contact with a few local groups that are working on educational development in rural and estate areas.

Q: What other disciplines would you like to work on, given the opportunity?

I have a keen interest in learning about the economic analysis of law, and where we can apply economic theory to the analysis of law.

Q: What are some of the challenging aspects of working as a researcher?

Collecting information from some organisations can be quite onerous. It can take a long time, and we have to follow a detailed procedure to collect data. Some institutions are reluctant to give information to researchers as they think it will be misused.

Q: What is the one book on an aspiring economist

'Small is Beautiful: Economics as if People Mattered' by Economist Ernst F. Schumacher. This book presents economics in a humane, ethical, and easy-to-understand manner. It emphasises how the global economy is unsustainable and how quickly we use our natural resources. Furthermore, the author explains how little consideration was given to pollution until it was too late, which is why I believe this book is more relevant today than it was at the time of publication.

Featured Videos

Dr Dushni Weerakoon | The Economics and Politics of Sri Lanka's Crisis | Monash CDES Webinar



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Dr Manoj Thibbotuwawa | Food Security in Sri Lanka | Mawatha | NewsFirst



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