

A Study on Sri Lankan Labour Migration to South Korea

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Abstract

For decades, the stereotypical Sri Lankan migrant worker has been a low-wage female domestic servant in Saudi Arabia or Lebanon. But the stereotype no longer represents the reality: since the late 1990's nearly half of the migrant workforce has been male and many migrants are opting for new destinations in Europe and Asia rather than the Middle East. Even well developed countries such as USA and Italy own very less percentage from total migration. The special point is that there is a rapid increase of labour migration to South Korea. Especially people between twenties and thirties are trying to succeed their Korean dream more than migrating to other countries. In 2016, 6629 Sri Lankans have officially gone to work in South Korea, a country with a stable exchange rate and better monetary policy than Sri Lanka and about 26 000 Sri Lankans are in higher-paying jobs in South Korea. Sri Lankans are going to work in Korea in droves, despite labour shortages at home due to low wages and to overcome unemployment. The main question that this research seeks to address is even though there are a number of job opportunities in the Middle East, why most of people exceedingly try to migrate to South Korea. The main purposes of this study are to investigate main reasons and hidden factors for the massive flow of Sri Lankan labour migration to South Korea, to examine the trends, patterns and scales of labour migration to South Korea, to investigate different living conditions of migrant workers before departure and after migration and to examine experiences and difficulties faced by migrant workers in the destination country. This study relies on a mix method by using both primary data and secondary data. Information was collected by interviewing officials and migrants, distributing a questionnaire and referring various literature on labour migration. The research concludes that youth unemployment in Sri Lanka is clearly a pressing issue which pushes them towards other destinations. The majority of those seeking work in Korea were in the 25-30 and also the 20-24 age category. Low income/low wages in Sri Lanka and satisfactory salaries in South Korea are the main reasons cited by the youth for seeking foreign employment in South Korea.

Key words: labour migration; migrant workers; Sri Lanka; trends; South Korea; EPS system; unskilled migrants

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