



**Statement by H.E. Ravinatha Aryasinha**  
**Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Sri Lanka**  
**Briefing on Migration and Health**  
**19<sup>th</sup> April 2013**

Director General,

Excellencies,

and colleagues,

Good morning, It's an honour for me to share with you Sri Lanka's experiences and perspectives on migration health and related challenges, including key areas of our National Migration Health Policy.

With nearly 1.7 million Sri Lankans working abroad, and foreign employment impacting nearly 23% of our population, the migration discourse has long been of utmost importance to Sri Lanka. Sri Lankans from even the remotest areas of the island have taken to migration abroad and thus, remittances of migrant workers have become a driving force on poverty alleviation and rural development. In keeping with the Government's vision for economic development, the health sector's major role is to ensure the healthy state of the population, and this includes our migrant population.

The Government has readily recognized that migrants and their families left behind in Sri Lanka are vulnerable to migration related health challenges. Joint initiatives between the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), the Ministry of Health and IOM, have been established to ensure that the health-abuse of migrants is effectively addressed. In this regard, it's noteworthy to mention the joint training programme by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment and IOM, designed to train SLBFE officers on how to respond and counsel affected migrants.

With regard to the 2008 World Health Assembly resolution on health of migrants, I would like to quote the Director General's report to the 101<sup>st</sup> session of the IOM Council this year, when he pointed out that 'migrants equal access to health is beneficial to migrants and host communities alike, from a human rights, public health and development perspective'. Sri Lanka understands this equation full well, which is why as you may recall, we presented, at the 64th WHA, our progress report on the resolution, becoming the first WHO Member state to take such an initiative.

But the country hasn't stopped there. Sri Lanka understands that this is a continuous cycle, with more work remaining to be done. With the support of IOM, the country has embarked on an evidence based approach to identify the public health challenges, as well as options and suitable strategic interventions regarding migrant health. The process has adopted a multi stakeholder engagement with the Ministry of Health in the forefront, and the inclusion of key Government Ministries, including Labour, Defense, Justice, Foreign Employment Promotion and Welfare, Finance, External Affairs, Social Services, Economic Development and Board of Investment, Child Development and Women's Affairs, Public Administration and Home Affairs, Education and Higher Education. other Government Institutes such as the Department of Immigration, the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment, non governmental organizations, UN agencies , civil society organizations, and the academic circle have also been included in this process.

An initial rapid situation analysis led to the identification of gaps in evidence and the same multi-sector agencies were involved in commissioning several national research studies relevant to inbound, outbound, internal migrants and also families left behind. The evidence was used in reaching consensus on the health issues that needed policy intervention. A series of technical consultations among the multi sectoral agencies has resulted in developing a Migration Health Policy for Sri Lanka. The draft policy was launched by the Hon. Minister of Health in 2012. Thereafter it has been discussed in several public forums and was available for public comment. The policy has now been translated into the national languages and is to be formalized through its submission to the Cabinet of Ministers for final approval.

The Vision of the National Migration Health Policy is to safeguard health of all categories of migrants throughout the migration cycle, in order to contribute to the development goals of the country.

The policy, apart from its dynamic multi-sectoral approach, further encompasses certain key features with regard to out-bound, inbound and internal migrants, however given the lack of time, I find it would not be possible for me to go through all of these aspects, but I will make available to the Secretariat a few annexes which informs, in point form, what these key features are.

In conclusion, allow me to thank the organizers for providing me with this opportunity to share our national experience, and for providing a forum to discuss this extremely significant issue, considering that the 2015 post development agenda is upon us.

Sri Lanka has long recognized access to health as a right critical for development, and access to essential preventive and public health services for all migrants, regardless of status or origin, has always been on par with this understanding. We will continue to address migration health challenges nationally, and of course we look forward to further collaborations and joint initiatives with the IOM as means of developing this area further.

Thank you.

## **Annexes**

**The policy mission is stated as being implemented through a coordinated multi sectoral, multi agency approach and is guided by the need;**

1. to enhance the benefits of outbound, internal and in bound migration on the economy and society by promoting the beneficial aspects of migration and minimizing the negative health impacts.
2. to integrate migrant health care into development, public health care and social welfare goals of Sri Lanka.
3. to work towards the fulfillment and protection of human rights in the process of migration.

**The key features of National Migration Policy of Sri Lanka with relevance to the out bound migration and their families left behind can be highlighted as follows;**

- Develop a code of conduct for recruitment agencies to ensure that departing migrants have access to migrant friendly health assessments and pre-departure health related information.
- Develop and implement a comprehensive and standardized migrant-friendly Health Assessment for out bound migrant populations of Sri Lankan origin at the pre-departure stage that ensures the dignity and protection of these migrants. The Health Assessment for out bound Sri Lankan migrants at the pre-departure stage will provide continuity of care through access to the State health care system.
- Ensure health protection for Sri Lankan migrant workers by entering into bilateral agreements and memoranda of understanding with countries that employ Sri Lankan migrant workers.
- Offer voluntary Health Assessments for returnee migrants in order for them to be effectively reintegrated into the national health care system, which includes the State and private health care network.
- Adopt and implement a coordinated community response that will ensure availability of mental and physical health services and social welfare support to migrant workers and families left behind.

- Develop and implement a coordinated plan to address the welfare needs of single parent families where the single parent migrates for employment.
- Ensure that vulnerable children of migrant workers are included in child welfare and Protection plans for vulnerable children implemented by various State institutions.
- Develop and implement a system of information creation and dissemination among migrants and their families left behind to raise awareness on special situations such as health emergencies and death of a migrant worker.

**The key features of National Migration Policy of Sri Lanka with relevance to in bound migrants are as follows;**

- Health care access to in bound migrant populations including non citizens employed in Sri Lanka without posing a burden to the State sector health system in Sri Lanka and through public and private partnership.
- Provide access to primary health care services, including occupational health and safety to all in bound migrant workers through fee levying services by the State sector health services and private sector health services.
- strengthen and implement a monitoring, assessment and surveillance systems of all in bound migrants prior to the arrival or soon after the arrival to the country to address diseases of public health importance to Sri Lanka. This shall include a formal Health Assessment for long stay visa applicants to Sri Lanka to ensure the protection of the health status of such visa holders and to identify and address conditions of public health concern in order to mitigate the impact of migrants' disease burden on national health and social services.

**The key features of National Migration Policy of Sri Lanka with relevance to internal migrants are as follows;**

- A National Programme that addresses specific nutritional issues and needs of vulnerable internal migrant populations.
- Improve access to primary health care to all internal migrant populations, in partnership with private sector health service providers.

- Identify psychosocial and mental health needs of all migrant populations and improve access to health services through a National Programme.
- Improve accessibility to health information for internal migrant populations through special and strategic awareness raising programmes and develop the knowledge, attitudes and practices of health care providers through comprehensive basic and in-service training programmes.