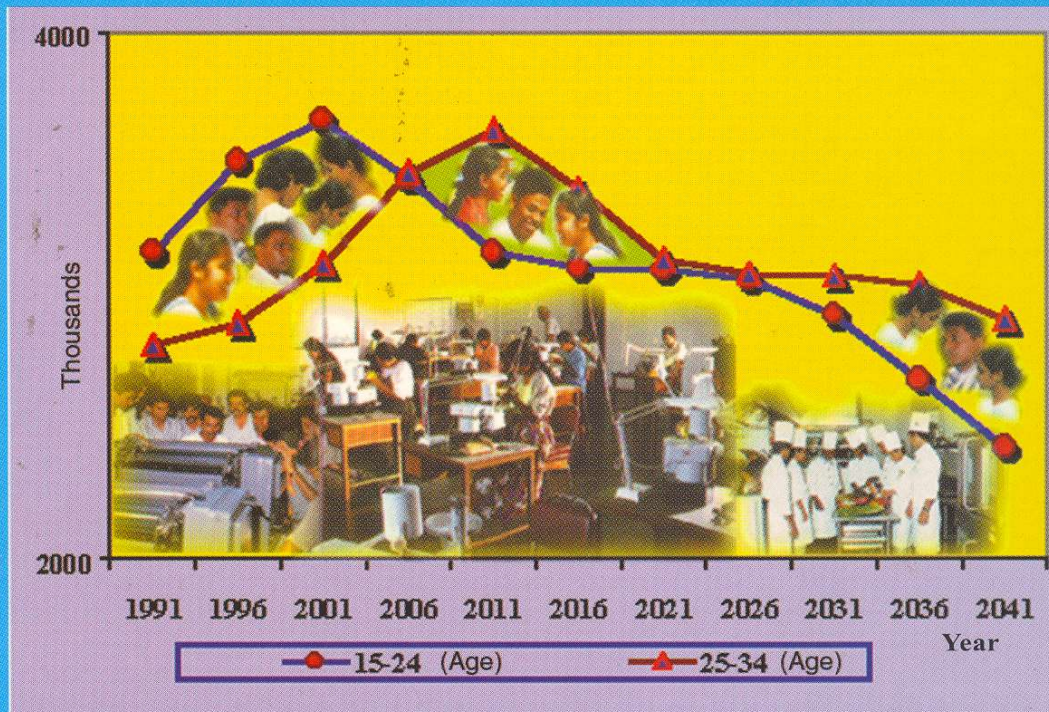


# POPULATION CHANGE AND SUPPLY OF LABOUR IN SRI LANKA

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# **Population Change and Supply of Labour in Sri Lanka**

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# Population Change and Supply of Labour in Sri Lanka

## 1. Population of Sri Lanka

### 1.1 Population Size and Growth

Although there is evidence that Sri Lanka was inhabited since pre-historic times it is believed that the advent of Vijaya, a Bengali Prince with his seven hundred followers, in 540 B.C., laid the foundation of the present population of the country. There is no evidence of censuses having been taken during the time of the Sinhalese Kings. However it may be correct to surmise that population counts would have been taken from time to time as the construction of large irrigation work and maintaining armies for war would not have been possible without records of manpower available for these purposes. According to information available the Dutch who ruled the country for more than a century had taken a census in Sri Lanka for the first time in 1789. In that census the population enumerated was 817,000 in the maritime areas under Dutch control. However, it is generally accepted that the population of Sri Lanka was in the region of 1.2 million at that time.

Scientific census taking commenced in Sri Lanka only in 1871 with the first decennial census, which was followed by censuses of population every tenth year up to and including 1931, and then 1946, 1953, 1963, 1971 and 1981. Sri Lanka's population has grown almost eight times since the first national census of 1871, which recorded only 2.4 million people (Table 1). The first doubling of the population took place in 54 years between 1871 and 1925. It doubled again in 35 years between 1925 and 1960. This doubling within a short period resulted a relatively high rate of population growth, as high as 2.8 per cent per annum during the period 1946–1953. However, after 1953, population growth started to decline. By which year could we expect to have a population of 19.2 million in Sri Lanka, that is, exactly double the size reported in 1960? Demographic estimates suggest that the size of the population could reach 19.2 million by the year 2001, a doubling in 41 years. No doubling is expected after the year 2001. The expected size and growth of Sri Lanka's population in the future are presented below in the section on population projections.

The growth of Sri Lankan population during the 20<sup>th</sup> century has not been uniform. Until 1946 the average annual inter-censal rate of growth never exceeded 2 per cent (Table 1). However, post-war years reveal a sudden spurt in the rate of growth. The rate shot up to 2.8 per cent in the period 1946–53, and remained more or less the same during the period 1953–63. However, after 1963 there was a clear decline in the rate of growth while at present it stands at only 1.1 per cent.

Even though the present rate of population growth is low Sri Lanka still adds more than 200,000 people to its population annually. The country covering a land area of 65,610 square kilometers, Sri Lanka ranks as one of the most densely populated countries in the Asian region with more than 300 persons per square kilometer by the turn of the century (Table 1).