

## Refugees from Srilanka

### What is the issue?

\n\n

\n

- Over 1 lakh Sri Lankan Tamil refugees have been living in Tamil Nadu ever since the anti-Tamil pogrom of 1983.

\n

- India and Sri Lanka should take up their repatriation at the earliest.

\n

\n\n

### What are the problems they face?

\n\n

\n

- Recently, media focus has been on the Rohingya refugees in India.

\n

- But the plight of Lankan Tamil refugees, who have been here for nearly 35 years, has gone out of public consciousness.

\n

- The pathetic condition of shelters, restrictions on movement, and limited scope of livelihood opportunities affect the community.

\n

- The refugees also suffer from social and psychological problems as reports of suicides, school dropouts and child marriage show.

\n

- Many middle-aged refugees worry about their children's future, given the fact that 40% of camp refugees are below 18 years.

\n

- Among the Hill country Tamils of central Srilanka (Tea estate Tamils of Indian origin) statelessness is a major problem.

\n

\n\n

### What have been the efforts to repatriate?

\n\n

- \n
- Tamil politicians in Srilanka have been very keen & positively inclined to get these people across the Palk Strait.
- \n
- Also, as 28,500 refugees are said to be stateless, the Sri Lankan government, amended its laws to address this in 2009.
- \n
- Indian government along with United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR) also speeded up repatriation efforts in recent years.
- \n
- Yet, the voluntary reverse flow of refugees hasn't been significant even after the end of the Eelam War in 2009.
- \n
- In the past 8 years, hardly 10% of the refugee population (9,238 people) have gone back.
- \n

\n\n

### **What are the reasons?**

\n\n

- \n
- **Pull Factor** - Over 62 thousand refugees have been receiving various relief measures of the Central and State governments.
- \n
- Notably, Tamil Nadu government recently even announced measures to facilitate the refugees to take up professional courses.
- \n
- Hence, regardless of the quality of housing and jobs, several refugees have experienced an improvement in their lifestyle.
- \n
- Besides, a whole new generation has been raised completely in Tamil Nadu for whom Srilanka has become an alien country.
- \n

\n\n

- \n
- **Push factor** - Many refugees have no hope of a better future in Srilanka.
- \n
- This feeling has strengthened by UNHRC surveys that have found a "lack of livelihood opportunities", for refugee who returned.
- \n
- This situation may not improve in the near future given the state of the Sri Lankan economy.

\n

- Also, hill country refugees are landless and will not be inclined to go back unless provided land.

\n

- They also seem uninterested to work in tea plantations as labourers for meagre wages anymore.

\n

\n\n

### **How does the future look?**

\n\n

\n

- Tamil Nadu holds the distinction of hosting the largest number of refugees in India.

\n

- While repatriation isn't currently a priority for both India and Sri Lanka, it can't be delayed for ever.

\n

- While for India a long-standing problem would be resolved, for Sri Lanka it would be a step towards ethnic reconciliation.

\n

- All concerned governments should come out with a fair package for repatriation, with due consideration for the aspirations of refugees.

\n

- For those who want to stay back, India can consider providing them citizenship, like how Pakistani refugees were given.

\n

\n\n

\n\n

**Source: The Hindu**

\n

