



Managing Landslide Risk and Planned Relocation in Kegalle District, Sri Lanka

Climate Mobility Context

Sri Lanka is highly vulnerable to climate-related disasters, particularly landslides caused by heavy rainfall and changing weather patterns, exacerbated by deforestation and improper land use. Around 20% of the country's land is susceptible to landslides, especially in central and hilly districts like Kegalle ([SLYCAN Trust & NBRO, 2023](#); [Chinthaka et al., 2023](#)). Disasters regularly lead to loss of lives, displacement, destruction of houses and infrastructure, disrupted livelihoods, and long-term (non-)economic losses, placing significant pressure on municipalities and local authorities.

Kegalle's vulnerability became evident during Cyclone Ditwah, which made landfall on 28th November 2025 and triggered heavy rainfall, flooding, and landslides. Post-cyclone, initial large-scale collective sheltering evolved into dispersed and protracted displacement patterns, as damaged roads and ongoing hazard exposure hindered safe returns. Until April 2026, between 8,033 and 36,060 individuals within Kegalle District remained displaced ([IOM, 2026a](#); [DMC, 2026](#)). These prolonged displacement patterns and uncertainties regarding their scope create additional challenges for local authorities to support displaced populations and their recovery.



Approach

Reduction of landslide risk and vulnerability: Cyclone Ditwah highlighted the vulnerability of many settlements in Sri Lanka. Between 2019 and 2025, the National Building Research Organisation (NBRO), now the National Building Research Institute (NBRI), implemented the Reduction of Landslide Vulnerability by Mitigation Measures Project (RLVMMP), with 16 measures in Kegalle District ([AIIB, n.d.](#); [NBRO, 2025](#)). Furthermore, the National Disaster Relief Services Centre (NDRSC) is implementing the Resettlement of Displaced People Due to Landslide Threats and Landslides project (2017-2028), which aims to provide 15,025 disaster-resilient housing units for families in high-risk areas (824 in Kegalle District) ([NDRSC, 2021](#); [MFPED, 2025](#)).

Resettlement programme: NBRO produced maps classifying areas by risk level to support in-situ adaptation in lower-risk areas while facilitating resettlement out of high-risk areas. The Government of Sri Lanka identified safer land for relocating families in Kegalle and provided monetary support to those affected ([CFE-DM, 2024](#)). Households receive cash grants in instalments to build their own houses, conditional on complying with prescribed standards. When renovation of a partially damaged house is not possible, LKR 5 million (USD 15,000) may be granted to beneficiaries ([NBRO, 2026](#)).

Community awareness in disaster-prone areas: Launched in 2023, the Community Awareness and Preparedness on Disaster Management programme aims to provide information about potential hazards to the population in local settlements. In the first year, 16 trainings and awareness creation programmes reached a total of 3,000 public officials and community members ([DMC, 2023](#)).

Impact to Date

As of April 2026, the government provided LKR 2 million (USD 6,000) per household to 36 families with fully or partially destroyed houses ([SLSC Sector Sri Lanka, 2026](#)). Nationwide, the inhabitants of around 25,000 houses likely need relocation out of high-risk "red zones" declared post-disaster ([DMC/NPD, 2026](#)). This highlights the need for well-planned and equitable relocation and restoration of safe living conditions.

However, resettled community members fear the potential loss of passive income, increased expenses for food and transportation, reduced access to clean water, limited work opportunities, and difficulties accessing education, healthcare, or religious places. Limited resources and availability of safe land continue to pose challenges to addressing these concerns.

Funding

The RLVMP project was funded by the Government of Sri Lanka and the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB), with a budget of USD 101.3 million for mitigation actions in 128 sites ([NBRO, 2025](#)). The Resettlement of Displaced People Due to Landslide Threats and Landslides project had a domestic budget of LKR 500 million for 2025 (USD 1.5 million), with LKR 1 billion (USD 3 million), LKR 2.8 billion (USD 8.5 million), and LKR 2 billion (USD 6 million) allocated for 2026-2028 respectively ([MFPED, 2025a](#); [MFPED, 2026](#)). The World Food Programme (WFP) provided LKR 3.5 million (USD 11,500) for the Community Awareness and Preparedness on Disaster Management programme ([DMC, 2023](#)).

“During Cyclone Ditwah, 1,200 landslides were recorded, affecting 20 of the 25 districts of Sri Lanka, and displacing thousands of people. The ongoing resettlement programme by the government is gradually relocating thousands of families that live in high-risk areas, expected to be completed in 2 years, and applying the “Build-Back-Better” approach to improve the resilience of infrastructure (guaranteeing safer households), following appropriate land development and offering resettlement alternatives to families needing to relocate due to house damage or living in high-risk areas”.

Chinthaka Rathnasiri

Director of Human Settlement, Planning and Training Division (HSPTD), National Building Research Institute (NBRI), Sri Lanka

Learnings

Displacement and return in Kegalle District are shaped by environmental risk, livelihood pressures, infrastructure damage, and institutional factors creating intersectional vulnerabilities. Even as internally displaced persons (IDPs) resume daily life, they navigate displacement, constrained return, and continued exposure to multidimensional risks driven by structural constraints, like housing damage, tenure insecurity, and continued environmental conditions ([IOM, 2026a](#)). Comprehensive relocation efforts must thus also address the structural and environmental conditions that have created vulnerability in the first place.

Health and nutrition conditions remain fragile in most affected districts. Displacement increases disease risks, worsens sanitation quality, lowers dietary quality, and restricts access to care. In Kegalle District, damaged facilities, long travel distances, and inadequate WASH (water, sanitation and hygiene) services exacerbate vulnerabilities ([UN Sri Lanka, 2026](#)). Access to sanitation and healthcare, food and nutritional security, as well as their connection to agricultural livelihoods and home gardens, must therefore be included in broader risk management and resettlement frameworks.

Scaling up shelter repair and transitional housing remains essential for settlements with partially damaged structures, alongside long-term support for livelihood recovery ([IOM, 2026a](#)). Clearly communicating new ministerial decrees and cabinet decisions post-emergency events also remains crucial, as unclarities remain regarding eligibility and support amounts for affected households and individuals ([SLSC Sector Sri Lanka, 2026](#)).

This case study was presented as part of the South-South-Dialogue Series organised by the GIZ Global Programme on Human Mobility, in the Context of Climate Change and facilitated by Clima Trust (formerly SLYCAN Trust). If you want to learn more about HMCCC please check [here](#).

For specific questions and further inquiry on the case study, please contact chinthaka_rathnasiri@yahoo.com

Imprint

Published by: Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH
Registered offices: Bonn and Eschborn
Friedrich-Ebert-Allee 32 + 36 53113 Bonn, Germany
T +49 61 96 79-0, F +49 61 96 79-11 15
E info@giz.de, I www.giz.de
Bonn, 2026

Global Programme: Human Mobility in the Context of Climate Change
Head of Programme: Björn Euler
Case Study: Chinthaka Rathnasiri
Author: Clima Trust
Editors: Amina Schild, Clara Engelsleben
Design and layout: Clara Engelsleben
Photo Credits: Clima Trust



implemented by:

giz Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) GmbH