In a time of significant transition in Sri Lanka, IOM Sri Lanka’s extensive local knowledge and relationships, resources and capacities continue to develop and be built upon, and be used to support current and new partnerships and programming in the areas of social cohesion and reconciliation.
IOM’s approach to social cohesion and reconciliation in Sri Lanka advances the implementation of the Peacebuilding Priority Plan, which supports the efforts of the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) to advance its peace consolidation process. It also supports three major GoSL undertakings: 1) Sri Lanka’s implementation of the UN Human Rights Council Resolution which GoSL subscribed to in September 2015; 2) Sri Lanka’s National Policy on Durable Solutions for Conflict-Affected Displacement approved by Cabinet in 2016, and; 3) GoSL’s overall National Policy on Reconciliation introduced in 2017.

IOM is part of the UN System in Sri Lanka and has formally become a UN-related Organization at the UN General Assembly in September 2016. As such, IOM is signatory to the 2018-2022 United Nations Sustainable Development Framework (UNSF) adopted in August 2017. Its social cohesion and reconciliation work is therefore reflected within the UNSDF Driver 2: strengthened, innovative public institutions and engagement towards lasting peace. Furthermore, IOM’s initiatives in the field of social cohesion and reconciliation contribute to the 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda and in particular to SDG 16: “Peace, Justice and Strong Institutions”.

CONTEXT
IOM’s work on social cohesion aims to contribute to building a Sri Lankan society which works towards the well-being of all its members, fights exclusion and marginalisation, creates a sense of belonging, promotes trust, and offers its members the opportunity of upward social mobility. IOM’s social cohesion activities are designed to promote four core values: social inclusion, social capital, social mobility, and social change.

IOM’s work on reconciliation embraces Sri Lanka’s own view of the term, as a process through which Sri Lankan society moves from a divided past to a shared future by “winning the hearts and minds of people”. For this process to occur, profound changes at the individual, relational, co-existential and structural levels are required to rebuild relationships damaged by armed conflict, not only among various groups in society, but also between people and the state.

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The Conceptual Framework illustrates how IOM’s social cohesion and reconciliation initiatives are distinct in nature but complementary in the actions and changes they promote. It also shows the interconnectedness between respective expected outcomes as they contribute towards sustaining peace.

1President Maithripala Sirisena’s Address to the Nation at the 67th Independence Day ceremony, 2015.
IOM Sri Lanka’s Experience in Social Cohesion & Reconciliation

As reconciliation looks both backward, in dealing with the past by addressing the underlying causes of conflict, and forward, while attempting to move a more cohesive society to new directions, IOM pays specific consideration to societal actors who have a stake in the process without necessarily enjoying strong agency (e.g. conflict victims, marginalized youth, ex-combatants, displaced people, returning refugees, war widows, single heads of households, etc.). In doing so, IOM targets its intervention to meet the evolving demands and needs of Sri Lanka government and society while ensuring vulnerable groups under IOM’s mandate are empowered to play a greater role in the national reconciliation process.

Support to Former Combatants

The successful reintegration of former combatants is recognized as a key factor in sustained peace-building, addressing the need for immediate security and longer-term recovery in the transition from conflict to peace. In different stages over a decade, between 2004 and 2013 IOM supported nearly 9,000 former combatants to transition to civilian life through reintegration support ranging from health services, psychosocial assistance, livelihoods assistance, vocational training and skills development.

Resettlement Assistance to Internally Displaced People

Since the end of the conflict, IOM has worked towards the formulation and implementation of recovery and transition programmes to enable former conflict-affected and resettled communities to move from the emergency relief stage to early recovery, and later towards mid to long-term stabilization and enhancement of community resilience through livelihood support and capacity development. Between 2006 and 2015, these initiatives focused on the most vulnerable groups within the targeted communities, reaching nearly 75,000 people, as a means to enhance access to services and resources, and ultimately, to promote their empowerment and inclusion in the social and economic life of their communities.

IOM’s Social Cohesion & Reconciliation Activity Timeline

- Reintegration of ex-combatants (pilot)
  - Direct beneficiaries: 626
  - 2003

- Reintegration of Refugees from India
  - Direct beneficiaries: 22,288
  - Total beneficiaries: 136,543
  - 2004 - 2007

- IDPs Resettlement Assistance (excluding crisis response phase)
  - Direct beneficiaries: 40,823
  - Total beneficiaries: 75,000
  - 2006 - 2015

- Reintegration of ex-combatants
  - Direct beneficiaries: 8629
  - Total beneficiaries: 11,750
  - 2009 - 2013
Youth Empowerment

Youth are of particular importance within a community, due to their unique vulnerabilities and capacity, yet they are often excluded from decision-making processes. In 2012-2013 IOM has contributed to improved social cohesion through youth development programmes by mobilizing over a thousand youth from the most conflict-affected districts of Kilinochchi and Mullaitivu in a series of sport and cultural events designed to foster a greater understanding among youths of different backgrounds, thus contributing towards the broader reconciliation process. Since 2012, IOM has been conducting career guidance and on-the-job training for thousands of disadvantaged youth to increase their employability and self-employment chances.

Youth have unique vulnerabilities and capacities that need to be considered to improve social cohesion

Social cohesion is an integral feature of IOM’s support to resettled communities and refugee returnees

Refugee Return and Reintegration

Between 2004 and 2009, and again, between 2014 and 2016, IOM assisted a total of nearly 5,000 refugee returnees to reintegrate from Tamil Nadu, India, back to their communities of origin in Sri Lanka, after years of protracted displacement, alongside indirect support to over 100,000 beneficiaries from the host communities. Throughout its individual and community reintegration support, IOM facilitated dialogue building between Community Based Organizations (CBOs) and refugee returnees, promoted returnees’ membership into existing community structures, conducted peace education and conflict resolution workshops for youth, CBO members and female headed households, and held awareness raising activities around mental health and psychosocial well-being, amongst other support services.

Reconciliation Initiatives

Direct beneficiaries: 1949
Total beneficiaries: 30,000

Technical Assistance on Reparations

Direct beneficiaries: 3320
Total beneficiaries: 4000

Reintegration of Refugees from India

Direct beneficiaries: 4000
Total beneficiaries: 30,000

Support to advance peacebuilding

Direct beneficiaries: 3000
Total beneficiaries: 3500

2012 - 2013
2016 - 2018
2017 - 2019
2017 - 2019
IOM’s Ongoing Work in Social Cohesion & Reconciliation

Support to Set Up a Reparations System
The signing and the co-sponsoring of the UN Human Rights Council Resolution on 29 September 2015 presented a watershed moment in the Sri Lankan post-conflict history and signified the commitment by the Government of Sri Lanka (GOSL) to furthering the peace consolidation and reconciliation agenda in the country. Addressing the 30th Human Rights Council, the Sri Lankan Government laid out the four pillars of the national reconciliation framework: Truth Seeking, Right to Justice, Right to Reparations and Guarantee for Non-Repetition. IOM’s ongoing work is focused on the Right to Reparations and aims to contribute to the establishment of a credible, feasible and inclusive reparation mechanism in support of the GOSL’s broader efforts in promoting reconciliation, accountability and human rights in Sri Lanka. Interventions to promote truth, justice, reparations and guarantees of non-recurrence are generally designed with a preventive perspective and by adopting a transformative approach, with an eye to systemic structural deficiencies as the root causes that enabled conflict, violations and abuses in the first place.

To achieve this objective, IOM’s provision of technical assistance is expected to produce two critical outcomes: 1) Strengthening the capacity of the national institutions to design and implement a reparation mechanism, and; 2) Enhancing the capacity of victim groups and affected communities to participate in the reparation process. The project is implemented in partnership with the Secretariat for Coordination of Reconciliation Mechanisms (SCRM), relevant governmental bodies, ministries and institutions, the United Nations, and civil society. Project implementation modalities are determined by consensus among the national stakeholders and participants in the transitional justice process.

Independent Commissions & Democratic Governance
The institution of independent oversight commissions paves the way for greater accountability and public trust in the peacebuilding and related reform processes. In particular, the re-establishment of a credible and independent National Police Commission (NPC) has created a window of opportunity for making the NPC a community-centric institution that promotes equal access to justice. IOM is currently providing dedicated technical assistance to strengthening the exercise of powers and functions of the NPC through support for the introduction of fully functioning digitalized Public Complaint Management System (PCMS), designed to secure greater trust and confidence in the national police force. The IOM’s intervention builds upon IOM’s past support to the NPC in the development of an ICT roadmap in which the proposed PCMS has identified as a priority intervention. It enables NPC to record accurately and respond visibly to public concerns while increasing accessibility of vulnerable groups to NPC services. The NPC’s nine provincial offices will be linked to a centralized system, thereby facilitating officials to monitor progress across the NPC provincial network.

Victim’s Access to Psychosocial Support
As reconciliation mechanisms are designed and instituted by the GoSL, systems are to be in place for victims to access psychosocial support thereby enabling them not only to heal and recover from the trauma suffered but also to build their agency to participate in the transitional justice process. IOM is in the process of developing a Victim Case Management Protocol as a mechanism to facilitate seamless, victim friendly and confidential referral and support mechanisms for all victims in need of psychosocial support.
The Victim Case Management Protocol will represent the link between transitional justice and regular institutions, with a focus on reparations, as the IOM’s focus area is at this juncture. IOM will work with relevant line ministries, the various reconciliation mechanisms where in place, CSOs and victim associations as required to accomplish this task.

IOM’s Next Steps in Social Cohesion & Reconciliation

Subject to the successful mobilization of the required financial resources from interested Donors and ad-hoc funding mechanisms where they exist, IOM has prioritized its strategic intervention in a number of key sectors. These prioritized actions revolve around expected results as guided by IOM’s Social Cohesion and Reconciliation Conceptual Framework

Support to Operationalize the Office of Reparations

IOM will support the Government in the operationalization of the Reparations Office, soon after the passing of the reparations legislation in Parliament, by provision of technical advice in addressing a number of technical issues which are relevant for the feasibility and efficiency of the reparations programme. These include but are not limited to: a) How to organize a reparations process for a massive number of claims; b) How to inform potential beneficiaries about their eligibility and the process itself; c) How to organize the intake and registration of claims and ensure these are processed within a reasonable timeframe, and; d) What type of resources are needed to be in place at the various levels. Technical advice on the establishment of the Reparations Office will be complemented by related capacity building and training for members and officials of the Office, following due appointment/recruitment processes. IOM will further support the Office of Missing Persons (OMP) in developing a referral mechanism with the Office of Reparations as mandated by the OMP legislation to ensure there are clear standard operating procedures in place.

Symbolic Reparations

Symbolic reparations such as apologies, memorials, and commemorations can be just as beneficial, healing, and meaningful as material reparations, if implemented in a conflict-sensitive and context-specific manner. To complement IOM’s work on supporting the establishment of an administrative reparations programme, IOM will work with its local partners through the disbursement of small grants to CSOs to conduct a mapping of existing events and spaces created for memorialization in the island as the basis for the Reparations Office to draw from and align with, in designing its symbolic reparations framework, to the extend this will be pursued by the GoSL.
Facilitated Dialogue on Land and Property Restitution
Following the convening by IOM and SCRM of a technical workshop in February 2018 with the objective of developing a context specific roadmap for a land/property restitution or compensation model for use by the Government, IOM will continue to facilitate, if requested by the Government, dialogue among SCRM, land mediation boards and other relevant institutions in addressing key elements of the roadmap at the central and local levels through a combination of technical advice and awareness raising around the following: a) Conceptual and practical links between land and property restitution/compensation, transitional justice and durable solutions for displaced populations; b) International standards and best practice; c) Legal framework and institutional models; d) Mechanisms and processes; e) Restitution models: restitution, compensation, alternative land allocation, hybrid models, innovative solutions, and; f) Resources, outreach, public relations and managing expectations.

Continued Support to Independent Commissions
Recognizing the need to improve the reporting and data analysis capacity of the National Police Commission and streamline the communication between the NPC, Police and other relevant stakeholders, IOM alongside the implementation of a Public Complaint Management System is currently in the process of preparing a high level system requirement specifications for two other units of the NPC: 1) Establishment and Disciplinary Division (EDD) responsible, amongst other duties, for disciplinary controls, and; 2) Policy, Legal and Appeals Division (PLAD), responsible for policy formulation, implementation and coordination pertaining to issues relevant to public–police relations and dispute settlement between the State, and the police personnel and the liaison with international agencies through the Ministry of Foreign affairs. IOM’s extended support to NPC envisages the introduction of similar automated information systems to strengthen service delivery and further boost public confidence in the NPC.

Tailored Assistance to Former Combatants
IOM will profile and screen former combatants and their families based on IOM’s current database and additional information available with the Ministry of Resettlement. Following the screening and selection of beneficiaries based on clearly established vulnerability criteria, IOM will develop a three-pronged approach to reintegration by offering the following pathways and options: 1) market driven job based skills development through career guidance and trainings; 2) job placements and self-employment through referrals to private sector and business counselling, and; 3) livelihood assistance through cash or in kind support.

Women Empowerment
Worst affected by the conflict, women are also heavily committed to seek avenues to prevent the recurrence of violence. With a view to enabling women to play a leading role in peace building and reconciliation processes, IOM will foster mutual understanding, trust and socio-economic ties through sustained dialogue on peace-building and conflict transformation for women entrepreneurs, economic exchange programs, by facilitating north-south business networking, and through the promotion of ‘markets for peace’ as a powerful symbol of inter-ethnic business bonds.
Youth Engagement
Representing about a third of the total population of Sri Lanka, youth is one of the most affected groups in post-conflict Sri Lanka, struggling with issues such as employment and their exclusion from reconciliation and social integration processes and their exposure to polarization and extreme ideologies. IOM will seek to enable the active participation of youth in social, economic and political processes by promoting equal access to employment and civic engagement opportunities through a series of mutually reinforcing activities which include multi-ethnic career guidance programs, North-South job driven vocational training, conflict transformation and peace building workshops for youth leaders and facilitation of youth reconciliation fora, and reconciliation through sports events and tournaments.

Psychosocial Support and Referral
IOM will introduce non-clinical trauma awareness and psychosocial support and referral for conflict-associated groups through the mobilization of community-based structures and mechanisms with a view to contribute to community healing efforts as well as to the prevention of reoccurring conflict violence and extremism, thereby enhancing community resilience to ongoing and future stressors.

Enhanced Dialogue with Civil Society
There is currently a window of opportunity for traditional and newly emerging civil society actors, including the media, to contribute to peace processes by addressing ethnic divides and public opinion through education and awareness-raising programs, cross-ethnic dialogue, advocacy work, informal diplomacy, and reconstruction and development. Civil society requires support to increase its capacity to participate in the reconciliation process through enhanced dialogue and capacity building. Community-based organizations are in need of training on peace building and conflict transformation as well as on sector-specific skills such as journalism. IOM will train formal and non-formal leaders of various CBOs on peacebuilding and conflict transformation, conduct professional training for aspiring journalists from civil society groups, and will promote community healing through the literary arts by supporting emerging writers and artists to create or restart literature societies.
IOM’s Global Footprint

Guided by its Transition and Recovery Division, under the Department of Emergencies and Operations at Headquarters (HQ), IOM applies resilience, peacebuilding and stabilization approaches to resolve migration crises and assists governments, communities and vulnerable populations to cope with migration-related and forced displacement pressures around the world. By looking at underlying causes of vulnerability, risk, and fragility, IOM builds on humanitarian responses to address socioeconomic, peace, security and development challenges found in natural, man-made and protracted crises.

Developing strategies to better bridge the gap between humanitarian aid and development action, IOM promotes sustainable transitions from relief to recovery and development. IOM also assesses and addresses drivers of migration and root causes of complex migration crises, promotes human mobility as a means to reduce vulnerability and to progressively resolve displacement situations, and invests in conflict analysis, stabilization and development-oriented solutions. As part of its transition and recovery portfolio, IOM works on elections support, early recovery, durable solutions, prevention of violent extremism, and disarmament, demobilization and reintegration operations.

The challenges of migration in the twenty-first century increasingly demand actions by IOM beyond its traditional services. As more and more governments are called upon to return and/or compensate persons dispersed worldwide who have suffered displacement, dispossession, persecution or other forms of personal harm under former regimes, IOM is being requested to assist through its global expertise.

As new migration-related scenarios evolve reflecting contemporary political realities, governments expect IOM to offer more tailored variations of its traditional services. Through the Land, Property and Reparations (LPR) Division at its headquarters, IOM missions around the globe receive guidance, training and oversight for the provision of policy advice, technical assistance, capacity-building, and operational support to Member States in crisis and post-crisis context in relation to reparations and other transitional justice measures to victims of systemic and widespread human rights violations, resolution of land disputes, conflict prevention, peacemaking and peacebuilding.

IOM has been responsible for the implementation of two of the largest reparations programmes in history (the German Forced Labor Programme and the Holocaust Assets Victims Programme) covering more than 300,000 claims in more than 40 different countries between 2000 and 2006. Having retained in-house expertise, IOM provides technical support to the reparations programmes in Colombia, Sierra Leone, Nepal, Philippines, Libya, Bosnia and Herzegovina and other countries. In addition to reparations for human rights violations, IOM is also providing support to governments and partners responsible for restitution of land and property rights violations in Colombia, Iraq, Yemen, Nepal, Philippines, South Sudan and other countries.
The challenges of complex migration crises in the twenty-first century increasingly demand actions by IOM beyond its traditional services.

Past and Current Donors to IOM’s Social Cohesion and Reconciliation initiatives:

- Australian AID
- USAID
- Government of the Netherlands
- From the People of Japan
- United Nations Peacebuilding
- Foreign & Commonwealth Office