

## Shelter, Land and Site Coordination Sector (SLSC) - *Advocacy Key messages*

Cyclone Ditwah affected 2.2 million people across all 25 districts of Sri Lanka, with 1.2 million people identified in need and 658,000 targeted under the Humanitarian Priorities Plan (December 2025–April 2026). The cyclone destroyed 5,336 houses and partially damaged 85,683. At peak, 990 safety centres hosted more than 233,000 displaced individuals. Although large-scale displacement has decreased, structural housing damage, landslide risks, recurrent flooding and economic fragility continue to shape uneven return trajectories.

This note presents district-level evidence from Badulla, Batticaloa, Jaffna, Kandy and Puttalam, drawing on [DTM assessments](#) on both returns and displacement trends and the [Safety Centre Needs Assessment](#) (27 January–10 February 2026), which covered 80 safety centres across six districts.

### Conditions in Safety Centres

At the time of assessment, 45 centres remained operational hosting 4,729 individuals against a capacity of 5,602. Women and girls represented 48 % of residents, and 57 % of sites hosted persons with disabilities. While 93 % of sites were government-managed, only 44 % had a 24/7 focal point presence.

Many centres -mainly schools, religious buildings or administrative facilities- are not suited for prolonged stays. Key gaps include overcrowding, lack of partitions and limited privacy, increasing protection risks. Sanitation conditions have deteriorated, with insufficient accessibility and inadequate bathing facilities. Drainage issues and stagnant water elevate health risks, while essential non-food items remain insufficient or worn out.

The closure of 35 safety centres did not systematically align with shelter repair support or safety verification. As a result, some households returned to damaged or high-risk environments, increasing the likelihood of reversible returns.



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### Displacement, Returns and Barriers

Displacement patterns vary across districts. In Badulla, returns are constrained by landslide risks and housing instability. In Kandy, where approximately 8500 people remain displaced, structural damage and hazard exposure continue to limit safe reintegration, with some returns driven by economic pressure rather than safety. The number of displaced population are still extremely high in the Kegalle district and in Nuwara Elya, and living conditions are worsening while new spontaneous tented settlements in new locations appear.

In Jaffna, return rates are high, but localized displacement persists due to flooding, drainage issues, and service gaps. In Batticaloa, formal returns have occurred, yet housing damage and financial constraints affect recovery stability. In Puttalam, displacement remains linked to flood exposure, housing damage and livelihood disruption.

### Long-Term Stabilization Needs

Recovery needs differ by context. In Badulla and Kandy, relocation planning, transitional shelter and structural reinforcement are priorities, along with advocating for durable solutions. In Jaffna, drainage and WASH rehabilitation are critical. In Batticaloa and Puttalam, flood mitigation, shelter repair and livelihood support are required. Across all districts, shelter repair, information on eligibility and legal documentation, as well as livelihood assistance remain the most consistent priorities.

## Call to Action

### for donors, GoSL authorities and partner organisations

1. The response must shift from short-term displacement management towards a **structured and risk-informed transition to durable solutions**. Thousands of affected people remain in safety centres not designed for prolonged stays, while others have returned to unsafe or unstable conditions. Supporting coordinated transition pathways -combining safe return, rental assistance, and community-based transitional solutions- is essential to prevent protracted and cyclical displacement, in line with the broader recovery objectives outlined in the Humanitarian Priorities Plan.
2. At the same time, **minimum habitability and protection standards in safety centres must be ensured** while transition solutions are scaled up. Targeted investments in site-level improvements -including privacy, lighting, accessible WASH facilities, and referral systems- are critical to restore dignified living conditions and reduce protection and public health risks.
3. **Site management must be reinforced through stronger leadership and systematic accompaniment by national and local authorities**. This includes ensuring consistent presence, clear roles and responsibilities, and strengthened coordination at site level to improve service delivery, accountability, and oversight in safety centres and transitional sites.
4. **Advance planning and information-sharing on safety centre closures should be strengthened** to ensure that humanitarian partners have sufficient lead time to support affected households. Timely communication on planned site closures is essential to enable Shelter, Land and Site Coordination (SLSC) partners to work with communities in identifying and facilitating appropriate housing solutions, thereby reducing the risk of premature or unsupported returns. In parallel, **referral systems must be strengthened and operationalised** to ensure timely access to protection, health, and social services, particularly for women, children, and persons with disabilities.
5. **Specific attention should be given to safety centres hosted in schools operating under dual-use arrangements**, where facilities function as schools during the day and collective shelters at night. In these contexts, displaced households should be prioritised for timely transition to alternative accommodation solutions to safeguard both **children's right to education** and **access to safe, adequate, and dignified living conditions** for those currently residing in these spaces. Coordinated planning between education, shelter, and local authorities is essential to minimise disruption to learning while ensuring that no household remains in inadequate or transitional arrangements longer than necessary.
6. **Short-term rental assistance should be designed to ensure sustainability and protection outcomes**. One-off or one-month rental support, if not accompanied by follow-up, risks leaving displaced households unable to maintain accommodation and may lead to renewed displacement. To be effective, rental assistance should be complemented by **monitoring of Housing, Land and Property (HLP) conditions**, extended duration where needed, or a clear **exit strategy** that enables households to progressively assume rental costs until they can safely return or access a durable solution.
7. Beyond displacement, a significant proportion of affected households remain in **damaged or structurally compromised homes**, facing heightened exposure to future shocks. Accelerating community and **owner-driven housing assistance**, with the GoSL grant schemes, and scaling up shelter **repair assistance**, combined with technical guidance and legal/social assistance, is essential to stabilise housing conditions and reduce the risk of secondary displacement.
8. Ensuring that return and recovery processes are sustainable requires **accelerated hazard verification and risk-informed decision-making**. Strengthening technical capacity and coordination for landslide and flood

risk assessments will enable timely and safe decisions on return, relocation, or reconstruction, reducing uncertainty and delays.

9. At the same time, **systemic barriers to accessing assistance must be addressed**, particularly those related to **land tenure**. Promoting flexible and inclusive eligibility criteria is essential to ensure that vulnerable households are not excluded from recovery support due to documentation constraints.
10. For households unable to safely return, **site-based relocation solutions must be prioritised**, including the identification and development of safe, serviced land with access to livelihoods and basic services. This requires coordinated planning and sustained investment to ensure that relocation is viable, dignified, and sustainable.
11. Across all interventions, **shelter and housing responses must be systematically integrated with site planning and basic infrastructure**. Addressing gaps in drainage, sanitation, accessibility, and lighting is critical to reducing health and protection risks and ensuring that shelter assistance translates into safe living environments.
12. Finally, **community engagement and accountability must be strengthened** throughout the response. Clear, transparent, and **multilingual communication**, alongside accessible feedback and **grievance mechanisms**, is essential to ensure that affected populations can make informed decisions regarding return, repair, or relocation, and actively participate in shaping their recovery pathways.



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