



Australia Awards



Year in Review 2025

Australia Awards
– Sri Lanka



Highlights of 2025

In 2025, Australia Awards continued to support Sri Lanka's development priorities by equipping emerging leaders with the skills, networks and leadership experience to drive meaningful change.

It was a year of growth for Australia Awards, demonstrating Australia's commitment to building human capability in Sri Lanka, with increases in:

- scholars commencing their master's degree-level studies (27, compared to 24 in 2024)
- instances of scholars participating in enrichment opportunities (98, compared to 66 in 2024)
- Sri Lankan participants completing Short Courses (35, compared to 30 in 2024)
- Australian Professional Opportunity (APO) participants (eight, compared to six in 2024).

In total, 113 Australia Awards scholars, fellows, and Short Course and APO participants from Sri Lanka undertook education, training and professional development during 2025.

Twenty-five of these scholars completed their degrees at Australia's world-class universities and returned home as alumni, committed to contributing to Sri Lanka's development.

A comprehensive schedule of enrichment activities, including six flagship Scholars Symposiums, enhanced Sri Lankan scholars' professional capabilities and facilitated networking with senior Australian leaders. Indigenous engagement was an important theme throughout the year's activities, giving

Sri Lankan scholars the chance to learn about the culture, history and achievements of Australia's First Nations people.

As targeted short-term training opportunities to strengthen sector-specific capability and regional collaboration, Australia Awards also supported 35 Sri Lankans to complete five Short Courses and delivered five APOs.

For alumni, Australia Awards provided professional development and networking opportunities in Sri Lanka and regionally. A highlight was the 2025 Regional Alumni Workshop in Colombo, which had the theme 'From inclusion to equity: Development for all'. Eight Sri Lankans joined other alumni from South Asia and Mongolia at the workshop, which launched the Equity for All alumni network. This fourth regional alumni network (alongside the Regional Women in Leadership Network, Male Allies for Gender Equality alumni network, and Champions for the Environment and Climate Action) enabled participants to continue collaborating on equity-focused initiatives for people with disability and from marginalised communities.

Cover image: Australia Awards scholars and alumni from Sri Lanka. From left to right: Dilanka Kumari Wickramasinghe Wickramasinghe Mudiyansele, Ragutharan Sanmukarasa, Kirithika Baherathan and Sreen Hansa Yapa Senevirathna Boralessa.

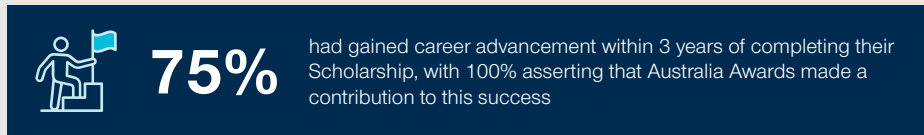
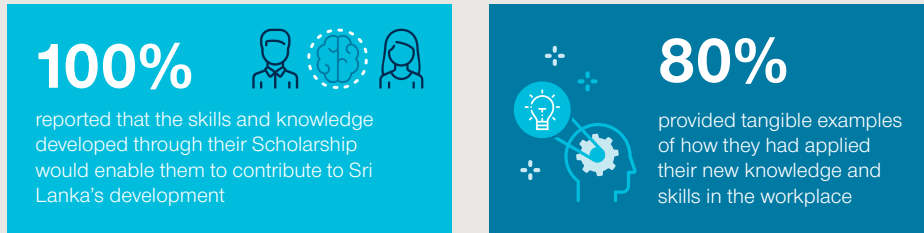
Image: Australia Awards recipients from Sri Lanka. From left to right: Dinusha Karunathilake, Mohamed Safras Mohamed Safwan and Vinogitha Gausigan.



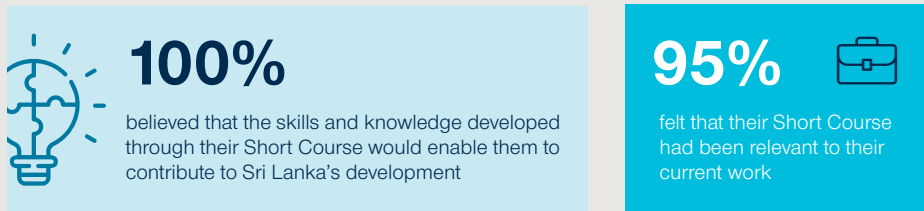
Outcomes at a glance

Outcome: Alumni use their skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to sustainable development

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in Sri Lanka surveyed:

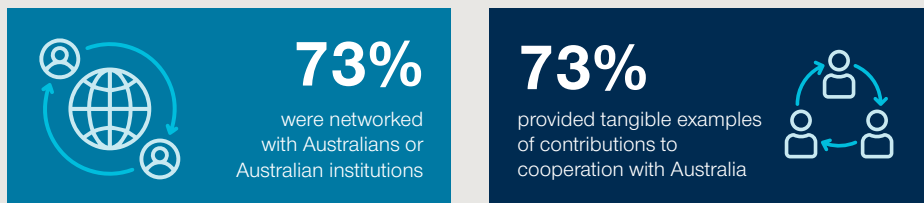


Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni in Sri Lanka surveyed:



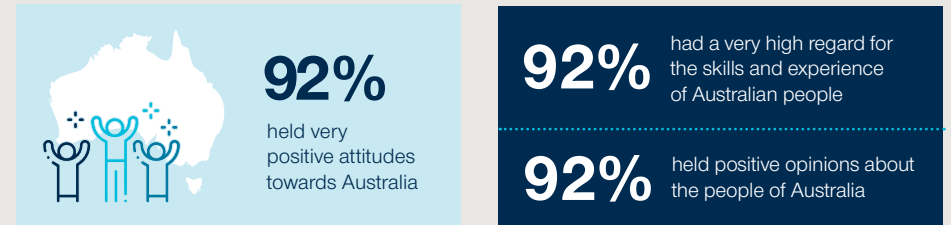
Outcome: Alumni contribute to cooperation between Australia and Sri Lanka

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in Sri Lanka surveyed:



Outcome: Australia is viewed as a valued international partner

Among Australia Awards Scholarships alumni in Sri Lanka surveyed:



Among Australia Awards Short Course alumni in Sri Lanka surveyed:



“For me, the Australia Awards Scholarship was more than a world-class academic opportunity. My experience in Australia was transformative, shaped by learning, linkages and fresh perspective. It enabled me to explore the dimensions of law in the context of development—an imperative for effective policy making and inclusive growth.”

Bhashika Edirisinghe
Master of Law and Development
The University of Melbourne, 2026



Australia Awards Scholarships

In 2025, Australia Awards Scholarship recipients from Sri Lanka achieved strong academic and professional outcomes. During the year, 25 scholars (18 women, 7 men) completed their master’s degrees; all have returned home as alumni and are applying their learning in support of Sri Lanka’s development priorities.

At the other end of their Scholarship journey, 27 scholars from Sri Lanka commenced master’s-level study at Australian universities in 2025. This brought the total number of Sri Lankan scholars studying in Australia in 2025 to 54 (38 women, 16 men).

To complement scholars’ studies and strengthen their leadership capability, Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia offered 23 scholar enrichment opportunities throughout the year, including the flagship Scholars Symposiums (see page 08). Scholars from Sri Lanka participated in these opportunities 98 times, engaging in professional development activities such as grants, internships and online communication training.

Consistent with Australia’s policy priorities, enrichment activities strongly emphasised gender equality, Indigenous engagement and equity for people with disability. Key activities included:

- an International Women’s Day online seminar with Indigenous women’s advocate Vicky Welgraven AM, featuring a presentation by Sri Lankan scholar Jeevani Fernando
- a World Environment Day seminar with Professor Anne Poelina, highlighting the connection

between Indigenous knowledge and environmental management

- *Disability Sector Connect*, a study tour in Adelaide focused on innovation and best practice in disability advocacy and inclusion.

Sri Lankan scholar Mohamed Safras Mohamed Safwan said, “The *Disability Sector Connect* program was an insightful and impactful initiative that broadened my understanding of disability inclusion, equity and advocacy.”

As part of a new initiative, Sri Lankan scholar Kirithikka Baherathan was appointed a Scholar Ambassador in South Australia. In this role, Kirithikka promotes scholar enrichment activities, and acts as a voice for scholars from South Asia and Mongolia studying in Adelaide.

Representing Australia’s continued investment in long-term development outcomes, 28 emerging leaders from Sri Lanka received Scholarships to commence study in Australia in 2026. This cohort included 19 women, one person with disability and eight people from ethnic minority groups, reflecting Australia’s commitment to equal opportunity for all people, regardless of gender, disability status or background.

Scholars engage with Indigenous Australians

In 2025, scholars from Sri Lanka participated in Indigenous engagement activities across Australia and online, alongside other Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia scholars.



Image: Sri Lankan participants in the Brisbane Scholars Symposium with representatives of the Nunukul Yuggera Aboriginal Dance Company (front row). Back row, from left to right: Kargen Rajaratnam, Tharindu Nuwanga Kariyawasam, Al Ameen Sehu Mohamed, Kalukapuge Hansamali Kishara Bandaranayake and Narasinghe Lekamalage Thusitha Dharmapriya Narasinghe.

The flagship Indigenous engagement activity for the year was a four-day First Nations study tour in Ikara-Flinders Ranges National Park, South Australia. Through various sessions, scholars learnt about the relationship that the Adnyamathanha people, the Traditional Owners of the area, have with the environment.

Scholar Jeevani Fernando treasured the experience. “I’m incredibly grateful for the opportunity to connect with Country and gain a deeper understanding of the traditional custodians of the Ikara-Flinders Ranges,” she said.

In Sydney, scholars travelled to Bundeena Royal National Park, on the traditional lands of the Dharawal people, where they heard cultural stories from Richard Campbell, a member of the Yuin Nation. Attendees also had hands-on opportunities to learn boomerang throwing and traditional fire-making techniques.

Scholar Kumuduni Dissanayake said, “I was fascinated to discover similarities between their way of life and that of the Sri Lankan Vedda community, particularly in the tools used for hunting and their deep connection to nature.”

In Adelaide, scholars visited the Living Kurna Cultural Centre and participated in an Aboriginal art class with local Indigenous artist Bryce Cawte, a proud Kurna and Ngarrindjeri man. During the

session, Bryce shared stories of the land, emphasising art’s role in preserving cultural knowledge, strengthening social bonds and expressing connection to Country.

Afterwards, scholar Pavithra Wickramage said, “I felt completely immersed in the artwork during the session.”

Scholars also joined Ronnie Jordan, a Pitta Pitta Wangkamahdla woman, and Coen, a Pitta Pitta Wangkamahdla Muruwari Ngemba man, for an online Aboriginal weaving workshop. Using materials received in advance, scholars followed step-by-step instructions to learn coil weaving and rope making, while Ronnie explained how weaving connects the weaver, their ancestors and the land.

Describing the workshop, scholar Dilini Perera said, “It highlighted how traditional crafting techniques can connect cultures across the world. I was surprised to discover similarities between these methods and the traditional weaving practices from my own country.”

Each of these scholar experiences helped participants gain deeper understanding and appreciation of Indigenous Australians’ culture, history and achievements.

Short-term training

In 2025, Australia Awards delivered short-term training opportunities to 59 Sri Lankans (34 women, 25 men) in priority sectors, including governance, public policy, climate change, gender equality, health and human rights. These Short Courses, Fellowships and Australian Professional Opportunities (APOs) strengthened participants' skills, knowledge and networks to contribute to Sri Lanka's development.



Image: Sri Lankan participants in the Short Course on Executive Leadership with HE Ms Yasoja Kusolini Gunasekera, Sri Lanka's High Commissioner to Australia. From left to right: Prasanjith Wijayathilake, High Commissioner Gunasekera, Maheshika Kodippili and K. J. S Madhawa.

A total of 35 Sri Lankans completed Short Courses designed to build sector-specific capability and foster collaboration, all of which involved learning, networking and site visits in Australia, as follows.

Nineteen professionals from public, private and non-governmental organisations in Sri Lanka completed a Short Course on *Bridging Research to Policy*. Participants developed connections and gained practical experience in research and policy development and implementation.

In addition, 16 participants completed one multi-country Short Course and three Regional Short Courses, enabling engagement with counterparts across the region working in similar fields:

- Three participants completed a multi-country Short Course on *Executive Leadership*, alongside colleagues from Bangladesh and Nepal.
- Five participants in total completed two climate-focused Regional Short Courses, supporting increased capability in responding to climate-related challenges (see page 07).
- Eight participants completed a Regional Short Course on *Women in Executive Leadership Development*, focused on gender equality and women's leadership.

Udara Cumaratunga, a Sri Lankan participant in the latter Short Course, described the

course as “an eye-opening and inspiring experience”. She added, “It offered a valuable opportunity to learn, unlearn, reflect and discover more about my own leadership style.”

Australia Awards also supported Sri Lankan participants to build their knowledge through five APOs:

- The President of the Disability Organizations Joint Front attended the 69th Session of the Commission on the Status of Women.
- Four paramedics from New South Wales provided trainings in acute pre-hospital healthcare to officials representing Sri Lanka's Suwa Seriya ambulance service.
- The Executive Director of the People's Action for Free and Fair Elections attended the Meeting of the Convening Committee and the Implementation Meeting of the Declaration of Principles for International Electoral Observation.
- The President of the Eastern Province Journalist Forum attended the 33rd Annual Human Rights and People's Diplomacy Training Program.
- A scholar attended the Global Leadership Summit, Australian Data Science Network Conference and Dfinity (all in Sydney), and International Data Week (in Brisbane).

Alumni engagement

Australia Awards alumni engagement activities in 2025 focused on supporting professional development, building linkages and increasing knowledge of priority development topics, including gender equality, disability equity and environmental sustainability.

Three hundred participants collectively benefited from alumni engagement activities in Sri Lanka. These activities included:

- a Returning Home for Development workshop and Welcome Home reception for recently returned Scholarship alumni
- a trade fair that gave 11 alumnae from the Short Course on *Women Trading Globally* an opportunity to showcase their products to Regional Alumni Workshop attendees and the general public
- the inaugural Alumni Ideas Hub, a workshop to foster networks and collaboration to help alumni become leaders for change.

Upeka Thilini Mali, a Sri Lankan participant in the Alumni Ideas Hub workshop, said, "It was great to connect with alumni from different private and government entities to explore possible collaborations and multiply the impact."

Alumni from Sri Lanka built linkages with counterparts from South Asia and Mongolia and heard from Australian leaders through regional engagement opportunities, headlined by the Regional Alumni Workshop (see page 08).

Four regional thematic alumni networks (the Regional Women in Leadership Network,

Male Allies for Gender Equality alumni network, Champions for the Environment and Climate Action, and Equity for All alumni network) also provided opportunities for alumni across South Asia and Mongolia to engage on gender equality, disability equity and environmental sustainability.

A total of 22 regional alumni events registered 150 Sri Lankan participants. Activities included:

- a Regional Women in Leadership Network seminar with Australia's Sex Discrimination Commissioner, Dr Anna Cody
- briefings from Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) officials about *Australia's International Disability Equity and Rights Strategy* and *International Gender Equality Strategy*
- a three-part training series for male alumni on creating safe and inclusive workplaces
- an event for the 16 Days of Activism against Gender-Based Violence, at which Dr Madura Thivanka presented a set of commitments drafted by the Male Allies for Gender Equality.

"The Australia Awards Scholarship expanded my understanding of multicultural education and deepened my commitment to integrating technology into teaching. These experiences have not only enriched my perspective as an educator but also continue to guide my professional growth."

Nipuna Bhanuka Wickramage
Master of Education
Flinders University, 2025



Strengthening climate leadership and resilience

Australia Awards is equipping emerging leaders from Sri Lanka with the skills and networks needed to respond to the challenges of a changing climate. Action on climate change is central to Australia's international development priorities, and Australia is committed to improving the capacity of partner governments to manage the impacts of the climate crisis.



Image: Sri Lankan Australia Awards alumna Shehara Stephnie (Master of Environment, the University of Melbourne, 2025), who completed the Climate Literacy training during her time as a scholar.

This commitment to action on climate change was reflected in the delivery of two climate-focused Regional Short Courses in 2025. Three Sri Lankans completed a Regional Short Course on *Integrating Climate Change Adaptation and Disaster Risk Reduction*. Participants explored how stronger policy coherence between disaster risk reduction and climate change adaptation could support sustainable development.

Two Sri Lankans also undertook a Regional Short Course on *Accessing Climate Finance*, which built participants' capability to navigate the complex landscape of climate-related finance, international agreements, green banking and sustainable investing.

These two Regional Short Courses each included two weeks of learning in Australia, enabling participants to network with Australian experts, including at DFAT, the Department of the Treasury, Energy Queensland, the National Adaptation Policy Office and the Clean Investor Group. Participants also visited SolarShare, Australia's largest community-owned solar farm.

Australia Awards also sought to strengthen scholars' ability to respond to climate change more broadly. A highlight was Climate Literacy training facilitated by Edith Cowan University. Over three sessions, nine Sri Lankan scholars joined 21 others from South Asia and Mongolia to explore practical

strategies for reducing emissions, influencing policy, and driving positive change within organisations and the wider community.

Reflecting on the training, Sri Lankan participant Shehara Stephnie said, "Learning about climate change is not a pleasant experience, but the Climate Literacy training helped give me hope, keeping me motivated to push forward on a path towards solutions."

The Champions for the Environment and Climate Action alumni network convened two online events on climate finance attended by Sri Lankan alumni:

- a seminar with Dr Oyun Sanjaasuren, Director of Partnerships and Resource Mobilization at the Green Climate Fund
- a workshop where alumni shared their experiences of accessing climate finance.

Case studies

Scholars strengthen leadership skills at Scholar Symposiums

From October to December 2025, 37 Sri Lankan Australia Awards scholars participated in six Scholars Symposiums across Australia. These events were designed to help scholars develop the skills to be changemakers after completing their Scholarships.

Delivering opening remarks in Adelaide on behalf of the scholars, Lakmini Prabani Perera said, “This journey has been truly lifechanging.”

Each symposium saw a panel of experts speaking about various leadership topics, including the importance of values for leaders, tips for networking and advice on advocating for change.

Melbourne-based scholar Madhumali Sethunga Mudalige Dona said, “The panel discussion was really valuable for us to learn from experts and bridge the knowledge gap.”

Adelaide-based scholar Anushka Welle Kankanamlage said the panel “gave us an idea about what kind of difficulties we would face when we go back and implement our Development Impact and Linkages Plan”.

The first afternoon of each symposium was dedicated to training to help scholars apply what they had heard across the morning. Adelaide-based scholar Dilini Perera said that

this training “transformed my understanding about leadership roles and communication”.

Each symposium concluded with scholars engaging with First Nations Australians. These activities included art lessons from Indigenous teachers and learning to throw a boomerang.

For many attendees, the most valuable aspect of the events was the chance to network with other scholars from across the region. Scholar Nipuna Bhanuka Wickramage described the Adelaide symposium as “an opportunity to meet fellow scholars [and] listen to a panel of a wide range of subject experts”.

Summing up the views of many, Canberra-based scholar Vinogitha Gausigan said, “The Scholars Symposium was valuable because it gave me the chance to learn directly from experts and leaders in various fields.”



Image: Sri Lankan scholar Al Ameen Sehu Mohamed (Master of Economics, the University of Queensland, commenced 2025) at the Brisbane Scholars Symposium.

Alumni unite for equity and development

Eight Sri Lankans were among the 51 Australia Awards alumni from South Asia and Mongolia who attended the 2025 Regional Alumni Workshop in Colombo, Sri Lanka, on 7–9 April, the theme of which was ‘From inclusion to equity: Development for all’.

Participants were selected from over 170 applications based on their advocacy for the rights of people with disability and people from traditionally marginalised communities. Opening the event, HE Mr Paul Stephens, Australia’s then High Commissioner to Sri Lanka, said, “The workshop theme recognises that it is not enough to seek inclusion for people from marginalised communities and people with disability ... rather, we must tackle the unequal power systems and structures that hinder economic growth and human development.”

Malarmathi Gangatharan, Secretary of the Ministry of Rural Development, Social Security and Community Empowerment, welcomed participants, noting the contributions of Australia Awards alumni to Sri Lanka’s development.

Delivering opening remarks on behalf of alumni, Sri Lanka’s Halida Mohamed Mahroof said, “This workshop presents a unique platform for all of us to share our experiences, our successes and the

challenges we continue to face. It is also an opportunity to build collaborations and create lasting partnerships that can drive positive change in our respective countries.”

Rasanjali Pathirage, President of the Disability Organisations Joint Front, Sri Lanka’s peak body for organisations for people with disability, delivered one of the workshop’s three keynote presentations, reflecting on policy reforms achieved with advocacy from Sri Lankans with disability.

The workshop marked ten years since the inaugural Regional Alumni Workshop, also held in Colombo, at which the Women in Leadership Network was launched. The 2025 workshop saw the Equity for All alumni network launched, which will enable alumni to share knowledge and learn together through expert-led discussions, interactive workshops and peer-sharing sessions on key issues relating to disability and marginalised communities.

At the workshop’s conclusion, Sri Lankan alumnus Tuan Rushdi shared his perspective. “The most transformative initiatives don’t come from theory—they come from lived experience,” he said. “Real change begins when we listen to what people actually live through.”

Australia Awards – Sri Lanka forms part of the Australia Awards – South Asia & Mongolia Program and is managed by Palladium on behalf of the Australian Government.

Images in this publication are of Australia Awards recipients, scholars and alumni participating in Program activities.

To learn more about Australia Awards – Sri Lanka, visit: www.australiaawardssrilanka.org