

UK approaches to improving tourism sector skills in Sri Lanka



Summary

People 1st International was engaged by the British Council to provide professional insight and technical expertise to institutions of the Government of Sri Lanka (GoSL) engaged in the tourism sector. This intervention supported GoSL to uplift the existing sector skills council for hospitality and tourism, improve standards and governance and help to change the public's perception of the sector.

Background

The tragic events of the bombings in Colombo in April 2019 and the impact of the pandemic created huge challenges for the supply of staff within the tourism sector in Sri Lanka. These challenges included employees leaving the industry, underemployment, the collapse of small to medium sized enterprises and the tourism sector in general becoming less attractive as a career choice. Negative cultural and traditional perceptions about the sector further limited the sector's ability to secure an adequate workforce, keeping women away from the industry and triggering gaps in skills enhancement in the current workforce.

The aim of this project funded by the British Council was to help tackle these challenges by establishing the foundations for an effective skills system for the visitor economy in Sri Lanka.

Our solutions

To improve skills standards and transform public perceptions of the industry, we carried out a series of interventions to strengthen the Industry Sector Skills Councils (ISSCs) and support the Sector Skills Organisation for Tourism and Hospitality in Sri Lanka (SSO):

- Research and mapping to review the sector, practices, skills needs and gap analysis and international benchmarking through desk-based activities and focus groups discussions
- Knowledge sharing workshops on international best practices on sector skills council governance and roles, labour market intelligence, employer engagement
- Capacity building through training on occupational standards, labour market information research and analysis and sector skills approaches



Outcome and impact

Through the support provided to the Sector Skills Organisation for Tourism and Hospitality, we:



Identified the skills needs of tourism and hospitality



Drafted a Road Map and operational action Plan for the SSC



Developed an introductory toolkit of training based on international best practice and adapted for Sri Lanka, aligned with national policy on TVET.

As a result, this has helped to prioritise the strategic implementation of the SSO Action Plan in alignment with national policy, focusing on initiatives that uplift Sri Lanka's Tourism and Hospitality sector for sustained growth and a skilled workforce.

The series of recommendations we developed has also outlined the critical steps to prepare the sector for future readiness and to support Sri Lanka's tourism industry as it rebuilds beyond Covid-19, highlighting the immediate solutions to target the gap between current provision and future skills needs (in line with GoSL strategies and SSO development) to enable industry to reopen safely.

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