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DEveloping, testing and
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Report on the study visit to Sri Lanka

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1. Introduction

Between 26 and 29 January 2026, a study visit was organised in Sri Lanka within the framework of the MICROIDEA Project. The visit aimed to engage with national stakeholders involved in skills development, labour mobility, and vocational education.

The main objective was to present the MICROIDEA methodology and explore opportunities for cooperation in skills certification through the ISO/IEC 17024 standard. The project seeks to support low- and medium-qualified individuals by strengthening skills recognition and improving access to international labour markets.

During the mission, partners had meetings with representatives of ministries, vocational training institutions, labour unions, recruitment agencies, and sectoral organisations. These meetings provided an opportunity to analyse the national skills ecosystem and assess the potential for implementing MICROIDEA pilot activities in Sri Lanka.



1.1 Objectives of the Study Visit

The study visit aimed at:

- presenting the MICROIDEA project methodology and tools to key stakeholders in Sri Lanka
- analysing the national framework for skills development and labour migration
- identifying opportunities for cooperation with national institutions and training providers
- exploring the potential implementation of pilot activities in Sri Lanka
- strengthening cooperation between European partners and Sri Lankan stakeholders in the field of skills certification and labour mobility.

2. Meetings with Stakeholders

The study visit took place between 26 and 29 January 2026 in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

The programme included meetings with:

- Trade Union FTZ & GSEU
- Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC)
- Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism & Hotel Management (SLITHM)
- Ministry of Labour
- representatives of recruitment agencies

The visit also included sectoral field visits to better understand the economic context and labour market structure of Sri Lanka.

2.1 Meeting with Trade Union FTZ & GSEU

The first meeting took place on 27 January with representatives of the Free Trade Zones & General Services Employees Union (FTZ & GSEU). Discussions were held with Mr. Anton Marcus, Executive Committee Member and Co-Chair of the Industrial Sri Lanka Council.

The union, which represents approximately 20,000 members, played a significant role in facilitating contacts for the visit. It maintains close cooperation with the Danish trade union 3F, which participates in the MICROIDEA project as an associated partner.

During the meeting, participants discussed the evolution of labour migration in Sri Lanka and its importance for the national economy. Labour migration represents a key economic pillar for the country, generating significant foreign currency inflows and employment opportunities.

Sri Lanka has a population of approximately 21 million. The country gained independence in 1948, marking the beginning of its organised migration history. Since 2010, migration flows have been characterised by skills diversification, crisis-driven migration following 2022, and increasing risks of forced labour and protection gaps.

Labour migration constitutes a central pillar of:

- the country's economic stability,
- foreign currency inflows,
- and job creation.

It is estimated that 2–3 million Sri Lankan citizens live and work abroad as temporary or permanent migrants. In 2024, a record 312,000 workers departed for employment abroad (59% men and 41% women).

The main destination countries include:

- Middle Eastern countries (Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, Qatar),
- and East Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea.

Remittances from migrant workers reached approximately USD 8 billion in 2025, corresponding to 8–9% of national GDP. Labour migration contributes significantly to reducing domestic unemployment—particularly among young people and low- to medium-skilled workers—while also supporting household income, education, and health.

Challenges and Institutional Framework

Key challenges identified include:

- protection of migrant workers,
- abusive practices in recruitment procedures,
- gender-related risks for women migrants,
- skills loss and difficulties in reintegration after return.

Governance of labour migration in Sri Lanka is implemented through:

- the Ministry of Labour,
- the Ministry of Foreign Affairs,
- the Ministry of Foreign Employment (Migration),
- and the Ministry of Tourism.

A significant role is played by the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment (SLBFE), which operates approximately 30 decentralised branches and training centres across the country, in cooperation with labour attachés at embassies and regional development officers.

Role of the Sri Lanka Bureau of Foreign Employment & Skills Recognition System

Beyond its decentralised district-level branches, SLBFE plays a significant role in coordinating and supervising recruitment agencies active in overseas employment.

Sri Lanka has concluded bilateral labour cooperation agreements with key destination countries, particularly in the Middle East and East Asia. These agreements define in detail:

- migration procedures,
- requested occupational profiles,
- required skills and qualifications of workers.

Host countries specify their labour needs and required skills. Within this framework, Sri Lankan authorities—primarily SLBFE—undertake the training and certification of interested workers, ensuring that they are adequately prepared prior to departure.

Skills Recognition System

At national level, Sri Lanka operates an organised skills recognition system through the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Framework, a standardised national certification system with levels from Level 1 to Level 7.

The NVQ framework:

- recognises formal and, in some cases, non-formal skills,
- serves as a key reference for skills required for overseas employment.

In parallel, the Recognition of Prior Learning (RPL) process is applied, which:

- assesses existing professional experience and informal skills,
- enables experienced workers to obtain NVQ certification,
- is particularly important for migrant workers without formal qualifications or official diplomas.

Pre-Departure Preparation & Alignment with Host Countries

As part of pre-departure preparation, prospective migrant workers participate in:

- upgrading of professional skills by specialisation,
- language training and cultural orientation,
- training on occupational safety issues,
- information sessions on labour rights and obligations.

Skills recognition is further aligned with bilateral labour agreements through:

- partial recognition of NVQ and RPL certifications in selected host countries,
- ongoing negotiations for Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs).

Labour Demand Sectors & Labour Market

Based on information collected during the meetings, labour demand from third countries differs as follows:

- demand from China, India, and Arab countries is mainly concentrated in construction,
- demand from Bangladesh is mainly concentrated in agriculture.

Overall unemployment in Sri Lanka is approximately 6%. However, among the 20–50 age group, unemployment rises to around 25%, with higher rates among women, highlighting significant social and labour challenges.

SLBFE supervises more than 1,000 employment and recruitment agencies, while approximately 1,500 training institutes operate nationwide, of which 750 are public, and 750 are private.



2.2 Meeting with Tertiary & Vocational Education Commission (TVEC)

A meeting was held with the Tertiary & Vocational Education Commission (TVEC), the national authority responsible for vocational education and training in Sri Lanka, operating under the Ministry of Education, Higher Education and Vocational Education.

Discussions were held with Mr Manjula Vidanapathirana, Director of the Registration, Accreditation & Quality Management Systems Division. The meeting highlighted strong convergence with the objectives of the MICROIDEA Project. It is noted that only 5% of the population is illiterate, indicating a solid foundation for skills development.

Interest in Expanding Skills Development & Migration Pathways

TVEC expressed strong interest in further developing beneficiaries' skills, not only within existing bilateral labour migration agreements, but also with the aim of expanding professional opportunities towards other countries, including Europe.

In this context, the MICROIDEA Project was presented in detail, with reference to:

- project objectives,
- methodology,
- tools developed,
- skills certification through ISO 17024, with emphasis on micro-credentials and occupation-specific professional skills.

This approach was assessed as particularly attractive, as it complements the existing NVQ/RPL system by offering enhanced international recognition.

Agreement on Pilot Cooperation

A pilot cooperation was agreed with the following key characteristics:

- Selection of 25 beneficiaries in the tourism/food services sector, specifically waiter/service staff, seeking to upgrade qualifications for labour migration.
- Selection of 2–3 trainers, who will:
 - be trained by the MICROIDEA consortium,
 - become familiar with the project's tools, procedures, and methodology,
 - support the training of the selected beneficiaries.

Beneficiaries will be trained in parallel with participants in MICROIDEA project pilots in Spain, Greece, and Cyprus.

At the end of the pilot period (September–October), participants will be able to take part in the ISO 17024 certification process, aiming to obtain internationally recognised skills certification.

Next Steps & Expansion of Cooperation

A workshop to be held at the end of March was agreed, with participation from:

- the MICROIDEA consortium,
- representatives of TVEC.

The workshop will focus on detailed planning, coordination, and organisation of the pilot implementation and will form the basis for a first structured cooperation.



2.3 Meeting with ALFEA- Recruitment Agencies

A meeting was organised with representatives of ALFEA, which operates as a job agency and as a representative body of private labour migration agencies. The meeting included 6–7 Managing Directors of recruitment agencies, including Hairens Manpower LTD and NS Lanka Foreign Employment.

The labour migration process under existing bilateral agreements was presented in detail. In presenting the MICROIDEA Project—particularly skills certification through ISO 17024 and the link to micro-credentials—it was noted that, although certifications exist for certain occupations and countries, there is no horizontally recognised, internationally valid certification, especially for workers migrating to Europe.

This creates a gap in both employability and worker protection. Following the presentation of the agreement with TVEC, recruitment agencies expressed strong interest in participating in the pilot, proposing candidates and cooperating with public authorities, particularly for individuals preparing for imminent migration.

Conclusions & Framework Agreement

It was jointly agreed that the MICROIDEA Project—particularly its ISO 17024-based certification approach:

- addresses existing certification gaps,
- complements national NVQ and RPL systems,
- provides an internationally recognisable certification tool for workers targeting labour markets beyond bilateral agreements.

This was considered highly relevant by recruitment agencies and in the context of labour mobility towards Europe.



2.4 Visit to the Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism & Hotel Management (SLITHM)

A visit was organised to the Sri Lanka Institute of Tourism and Hotel Management (SLITHM), which operates under the supervision of the Ministry of Tourism. SLITHM is the country's main national education and training organisation in the fields of tourism and hotel management, providing education at all levels and covering all occupations within the tourism sector.

During the visit, an extensive and highly productive meeting was held with the Director of the Schools, Ms W. Nirmalie B. Mendis, who presented in detail:

- the overall activities and mandate of the institution,
- the structure of its study programmes,
- as well as the progression logic across the various levels of education.



SLITHM provides training programmes covering all occupations in the tourism industry and operates a structured education system combining theoretical learning with practical training.

Structure of Study Programmes

The educational design of SLITHM is based on successive training levels, combining theoretical education with mandatory practical training.

1. Foundation Level (Craft / Foundation Courses)

The first level targets newcomers to the tourism and hospitality sector (beginners).

- Duration: 3 months

- Objective: Acquisition of basic knowledge and skills for entry-level employment
 - Fields of study:
 - Hotel Reception (Front Office)
 - Restaurant & Bar Service
 - Hotel Housekeeping
 - Professional Cookery
 - Minimum entry requirements: No prior experience or specialised education required.
- The programme is designed to fully prepare trainees for entry into the tourism labour market.

2. Certification Level

The next level leads to a Diploma in Hotel and Catering Operations.

- Duration: 5 months
- Entry requirements:
 - completion of secondary education, or
 - successful completion of the Foundation/Craft Course
- Fields of study:
 - Front Office
 - Food & Beverage Services
 - Hotel Housekeeping
 - Professional Cookery

3. Intermediate Level

- Duration: 6 months
- Areas of specialisation:
 - Front Office Operations
 - Hotel Housekeeping
 - Food & Beverage Operations
 - Professional Cookery

This level aims to deepen skills and prepare learners for positions with increased responsibility.

4. Advanced Level

- Duration: 3 months
- Leads to: Four-Year Diploma in Hotel & Catering Operations
- Areas of specialisation:
 - Professional Cookery
 - Food & Beverage Operations
 - Accommodation Operations

5. Higher Level (Postgraduate-type Programme)

SLITHM also offers an advanced level of studies, operating in a manner comparable to a postgraduate programme, addressed to professionals with substantial experience in the sector.

Observations Related to the MICROIDEA Project

During the meeting, it became clear that:

- SLITHM operates a structured, multi-level education and training system,
- places strong emphasis on practical training and employability,
- and functions as a key supplier of human resources for both the domestic labour market and international workforce mobility.

Its educational model demonstrates strong potential for linkage with ISO 17024–type skills certification, particularly at the level of micro-credentials, making it highly relevant to the objectives of the MICROIDEA Project.

2.5 Meeting with the Ministry of Labour

The final meeting took place at the Ministry of Labour with the Secretary General, Mr S.M. Piyatissa, as well as senior officials and advisors.



The MICROIDEA project and its tools were presented, with emphasis on:

- skills analysis,
- labour market intelligence,
- and certification of professional competencies.

The Ministry clarified that education and training policies are mainly under the responsibility of the Ministry of Education and Vocational Training. However, the Ministry of Labour plays an important role through public employment services and career counselling services.

Need for Skills Analysis & Use of Tools

Despite these institutional limitations, strong interest was expressed by the Ministry in:

- analysing skills demanded by third countries,
- comparing these requirements with the existing skills of the domestic workforce.

In this context, the role of the MICROIDEA IT tools was presented.

Specifically:

- the job-postings analysis platform was demonstrated, which processes labour market data and extracts skills demanded by employers.

The platform is already operational with online data from Greece, Cyprus, and Italy, and can provide a continuous overview of skills requirements in these labour markets.

The Ministry noted that, to date, similar data are sourced through the International Labour Organization (ILO), with which it maintains a close and long-standing cooperation.

CV Analysis Tool & Skills Matching

In addition, the MICROIDEA CV analysis tool was presented, which:

- aggregates CVs of beneficiaries, workers, and unemployed individuals,
- extracts structured information from CVs,
- converts experience and qualifications into structured skills,
- and performs matching against skill requirements derived from job-postings analysis.

The tool is capable of:

- proposing suitable professional pathways for beneficiaries,
- documenting skill gaps,
- supporting targeted training and upskilling interventions.

General Assessment

The meeting with the Ministry of Labour confirmed that, although the Ministry's role is primarily advisory and supportive with regard to the domestic labour market, MICROIDEA tools can operate in a complementary manner by contributing to:

- skills needs analysis,
- employment policy design,
- bridging information between the domestic workforce and international labour markets.

These tools were seen as useful instruments for supporting employment policy and understanding international labour market demands.

3. Sectoral Visits and Economic Context

In addition to institutional meetings, several field visits were conducted across sectors including tourism, agriculture, manufacturing, and traditional crafts.

These visits provided valuable insights into the local economy and labour market conditions.

These areas were visited to gain familiarity with the local economy and labour market, to understand the working conditions and skills of the workforce, and to observe how Sri Lanka is expanding its economy through tourism, agriculture, and traditional crafts, while also appreciating the country's rich civilizational and religious history and its influence on societal and economic development. Sri Lanka's economy has been in a period of recovery and structural adjustment following the severe

financial crisis of 2022–23, with overall GDP growth rebounding strongly in recent years and continuing into 2025, driven by industry, services, and agriculture.

Services, including tourism, contribute the largest share of economic activity and employment, while agriculture and industry remain key sources of livelihoods — with one quarter of the workforce engaged in both farming and industrial activities, and nearly half in services. At the same time, tourism remains an important foreign-exchange earner and a focal point of economic strategy, with government targets to increase international arrivals and diversify tourism offerings, and international institutions supporting job creation and private sector growth to address projected labour-market challenges. Both traditional sectors like tea, rice and craft production and emerging segments such as sustainable tourism illustrate the country’s multifaceted economic base and its efforts to create resilient employment opportunities across regions and communities.

These sectors demonstrate the diversity of the Sri Lankan economy and its efforts to create sustainable employment opportunities.

4. Key Outcomes of the Visit

The study visit produced several concrete outcomes:

- establishment of cooperation with TVEC for a pilot training and certification activity
- agreement on the participation of approximately 25 beneficiaries and 2–3 trainers in the pilot phase
- strong interest from recruitment agencies in supporting the pilot and identifying potential participants
- increased awareness among national stakeholders regarding the MICROIDEA certification model and its potential benefits
- identification of opportunities to integrate MICROIDEA tools into labour market analysis activities

5. Strategic Impact and Final Assessment

The study visit to Sri Lanka provided valuable insights into the country’s skills development system, labour migration framework, and institutional landscape related to vocational education and workforce mobility. The meetings with national authorities, training institutions, labour organisations, and recruitment agencies confirmed that Sri Lanka has a structured yet fragmented ecosystem for skills development and labour migration.

Sri Lanka has developed strong institutional mechanisms for vocational training and certification, including the National Vocational Qualification (NVQ) Framework and the Recognition of Prior

Learning (RPL) system. These systems support the development and recognition of professional skills and contribute to workforce preparation for international employment. At the same time, the study visit revealed that the recognition of qualifications remains largely national in scope, with limited international portability of skills.

This situation creates significant challenges for workers seeking employment opportunities beyond the countries covered by existing bilateral labour agreements. Access to European labour markets often requires additional forms of skills recognition that are not currently available within the national system.

Within this context, the MICROIDEA Project offers a complementary approach by introducing internationally recognised certification based on the ISO/IEC 17024 standard. This approach can strengthen the international recognition of professional skills and support workers in accessing broader labour market opportunities.

The visit also demonstrated strong interest among stakeholders in innovative tools and methodologies for analysing labour market needs and aligning training programmes with real labour demand. The digital tools developed within the MICROIDEA Project, including the job-postings analysis platform and the CV analysis and skills matching system, were recognised as useful instruments for supporting evidence-based decision making and improving the alignment between skills supply and labour market demand.

Another important outcome of the visit was the establishment of initial cooperation with the Tertiary and Vocational Education Commission (TVEC) and other stakeholders for the implementation of a pilot training and certification activity in the tourism and hospitality sector. The planned pilot, involving trainees and trainers in Sri Lanka alongside participants in Greece, Spain and Cyprus, represents a concrete step toward testing the MICROIDEA methodology in a third-country context.

More broadly, the study visit confirmed the potential of the MICROIDEA approach to function as a bridge between national training systems, labour market intelligence tools, and internationally recognised certification frameworks. By strengthening the link between skills development and labour market needs, the project can contribute to improved employability, better protection for migrant workers, and more transparent recruitment practices.

In the longer term, the cooperation established during the visit could support the development of new pathways for skills recognition and labour mobility between Europe and third countries. The pilot activities in Sri Lanka may therefore serve as a model for future cooperation initiatives aiming to improve the international portability of skills and promote fair and sustainable labour mobility.

6. Strategic Value of the MICROIDEA Project and Expected Impact

The MICROIDEA Project is strategically positioned as a bridge between:

- national skills systems (NVQ, RPL),
- international labour markets,
- and globally recognised certification frameworks (ISO/IEC 17024).

Its approach offers:

- International portability of skills, particularly through micro-credentials, enabling workers to access new labour markets beyond existing bilateral agreements.
- Evidence-based analysis of skills gaps, through IT tools that process both job postings and beneficiaries' CVs.
- Enhanced employability and worker protection, as skills certification reduces precarity and abusive recruitment practices.
- Complementarity with national institutions, without replacing them, while strengthening the international dimension of their role.

At strategic level, the pilot implementation of the MICROIDEA Project in Sri Lanka is expected to:

- establish a good practice model for third countries with high levels of labour migration,
- strengthen Europe–third country linkages in skills development and employment,
- improve targeted training aligned with real labour market needs,
- lay the foundations for future mutual recognition agreements for skills and qualifications.

The cooperation achieved with national authorities, education and training institutions, and recruitment agencies demonstrates that the MICROIDEA Project has the potential to evolve from a pilot initiative into a sustainable strategic policy intervention in the field of international labour mobility.

7. Annexes

7.1 Annex 1. Study Visit Agenda

You can find the Study Visit Agenda on the dedicated page on [MICROIDEA's website](#).



7.2 Annex 2. Booklet

A booklet was created, including all relevant information about the project and its results. You can find it [here](#).




7.3 Annex 3. Dedicated subpage on the project's website

A dedicated subpage was created on the project's website with all the information of the study visit in Sri Lanka. You can visit it [here](#).



MICRO IDEA

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Study Visit to Sri Lanka

Between 28 and 29 January a study visit to Sri Lanka was carried out within the framework of the MICRO IDEA Project. The purpose of the visit was to build knowledge with key national stakeholders within the field of skills development of low and medium-skilled individuals, with the ultimate objective of supporting skills certification through the HRD E-Track initiative, which constitutes a core pillar of the Sustainable Program being the main strategy towards such:

- industry
- public and private organisations,
- universities and training centres,
- representatives of professional associations/associations,
- migration and labour recruitment agencies.

The objective of these meetings was to present the MICRO IDEA Project, its methodology and the skills being developed, and to highlight the benefits that may result for the organisations involved through the various components of the project approach.

A. Meeting with Trade Union FTZ & GSEU

The first meeting was held on Tuesday 28 January with the Trade Union FTZ & GSEU (Free Trade Zones & General Services Employees Union). This meeting was held with the Indian Mission, Economic Consulate General and Co-Chair of the National Sri Lanka Chamber. This trade union played a crucial role in organising the visit, as it maintains close cooperation with HRD (one of the largest labour unions in Sri Lanka), which participates in the Sustainable Program as an associated partner. The main objective of the visit was to present the project to the target audience.

Brief Overview of Labour Migration in Sri Lanka

Sri Lanka has a population of approximately 21 million. The country's general immigration in 1948, marking the beginning of its regional migration history. Since 2010, migration flows have been dominated by skills-based labour, with labour migration following 2002, and increasing rates of formal labour and production gaps.

Labour migration contributes a significant part of





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