

ASSESSING THE SKILLS DEMAND FOR THE HOSPITALITY INDUSTRY IN THE NORTH AND THE EAST IN SRI LANKA

Ekanayake.E.M.S.M¹ & Sasitharan.S²

ABSTRACT

The tourism industry is one of the most emerging sectors in Sri Lanka economy. By naming it as one of the six major hubs under the recent policy framework it has been focused to make Sri Lanka the foremost leisure destination in the South Asian region. The recent trend of Sri Lanka labour market highlights that the hotel industry nourished by the tourism sector has considerably high demand in the local labour market. But the industry is facing problem with finding qualified staff for the industry. Having this situation in mind, the study was conducted to assess the needs for qualified staff for the hospitality industry and supporting possibilities in the North and East in Sri Lanka. The objective of this study is to identify the skills and knowledge needed to be able to find employment in the hospitality sector. Total sample of the survey is 50 by covering both provinces. Face to face interviews were conducted based on structured questionnaire in order to gather primary data of the research while Secondary data was gathered through the relevant data sources. Key findings of the research elaborate that the skilled level manpower has high demand within the industry. Moreover, the social stigma is one of the main barriers, especially to have access to the industry in North and East. Lack of English language capacity is seen as a major challenge and equally urgent to address is the lack of soft skills and social skills. By the supply side, vocational training should not stand-alone for skills development and it's needed to be linked with the industry demands.

Keywords: *Employment, Hospitality, North and East, Skills, Tourism*

1. INTRODUCTION

The tourism sector has been identified as a priority industry that is capable of making an above average contribution towards the economy in the overall Sri Lanka national plan, and as a driver with significant potential for inclusive growth, particularly if supported by an effective skills development system. It has been ranked as a 'high priority' industry as it has the capability to boost the

economy through mass scale employment creation through both large corporations and SMEs (the latter in both the formal and informal economies), foreign exchange earning capacity, strong sectoral linkages (particularly with agricultural production), regional and rural development and the ability to bring about ethnic harmony among the communities through the interactions brought about by tourism related activities.

¹emsm60@gmail.com, ²sasitharan2007@gmail.com