



# IMPACT

Together for a brighter future for the Youth of Sri Lanka

VOLUME 03. ISSUE 4

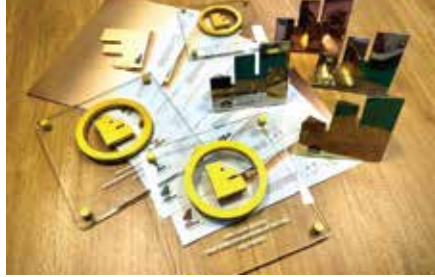
## USAID's YouLead receives top industry accolades for impactful youth outreach.



The entire Ata Pass team on stage

YouLead was crowned Brand of the Year and Marketer of the Year at the internally recognized Effie Awards 2023, competing against the rest of the country's established and well-funded commercial brands. This is an unprecedented achievement for a non-profit, social impact enterprise. These accolades are a result of YouLead's 'Ata Pass' campaign, an innovative digital approach using storytelling to encourage youth to take a more active role in their own education and career choices. 'Ata Pass' was recognized for its effectiveness with a gold award in the Data-Driven Marketing category, Silver in Non-Profit/Pro-Bono, Silver in Social Good Non-Profit and Bronze in Youth Marketing by the Sri Lanka edition of Effie Worldwide. Made possible with funding from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), Ata Pass was designed to channel the raw energy of youth awakened by the country's recent socio-economic upheaval productively into change-from-within, through standardized career guidance, provided completely free of charge.

Ata Pass is an empathy driven social media drama series powered by contextual youth insights and social listening to resonate with current youth sentiment, including the overwhelming preference to migrate for work. It aimed to overcome historical apathy, address misconceptions regarding education and careers, encourage youth



The YouLead awards haul.

to harness the window of change and empower them with the right tools and resources to take action. This ten-part drama deployed on Facebook, Youtube and TikTok received more than 6 million views and high engagement, predominantly among youth aged 18-35 years. A special version of the drama was also recreated on a popular online gaming platform in a first for Sri Lanka and live streamed by eight popular gaming influencers to reach a growing online gaming audience that was not accessible through regular social media. These streamed videos exceeded 100,000 views in 24 hours with the videos of the 2 most popular streamers trending at #5 and #8 among all game stream videos in the country.

A parallel remarketing campaign targeted at all youth who viewed the drama used its preconditioning to deliver direct access to YouLead's custom call center for career guidance subscription. The campaign achieved over 5 million impressions and generated 16,123 unique leads, of which almost 40% were from the Tamil community. The call center managed by volunteer youth from the Sasnaka Sansada Foundation and the Fordyce Youth Club in Hatton, then turned those youth leads into career guidance appointments. This was a pilot that broke new ground in digital outreach, successfully demonstrating that future defining tools such as Career Guidance can be made freely available to

all youth across Sri Lanka. The Ata Pass idea was conceptualized by Audacity and the campaign was implemented together with ADA Sri Lanka, K&D Media and Isobar Sri Lanka.

It is estimated that youth unemployment stands at 24 percent currently with 300,000 individuals seeking to migrate in 2023 alone. USAID is working to narrow the gap between job demand and the skilled labor supply by encouraging youth to get the skills needed to succeed. Innovative outreach efforts such as Ata Pass are engaging the evolving youth of Sri Lanka on their own terms, with professional guidance and up to date information to make more empowering, future-ready choices in their education and careers.

Total reach

 **6,947,512**

Total video views

 **6,011,247**

Total engagement

 **131,074**

Youth contacting the call center

 **16,123**

Career Guidance appointments

 **7175**

# More than 6,000 migrant workers empowered to make better employment choices.



Young **Sinthuja Sathasivam**, a student from Vavuniya who yearns to work in a foreign country discovered the skilled migration path to her dream through OGC.

*She explained, “In our community, we only know two options for people to migrate. One is to marry someone in a foreign country and the other is illegal migration. After this guidance I realized there is another secure way to achieve my dream - through skills. Many of my friends have migrated to foreign countries selling their family homes and land. They wasted a lot of money and returned. That’s because they didn’t have a proper idea about their career path. I wish they had the opportunity to receive this guidance.”*

Aspiring migrant workers are now beginning to reap the benefits of the Occupational Career Guidance (OCG) ecosystem, set in motion by the Skilled and Resilient Migrant Workers (SRMW) project funded by Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC). SRMW developed the curriculum and provided training to development officers, career guidance officers and district partners in the priority districts of Kurunegala, Puttalam, Anuradhapura, Kandy and Vavuniya. 6,205 women and men have received OCG to date through the deployment of trained counsellors at SRMW-enabled career fairs and via guidance sessions at vocational training centres, divisional secretariats and centres run by the Samurdhi Poverty Agency.

Migration for employment spiked in the past year with 311,000 Sri Lankans seeking employment overseas in 2022. This puts a spotlight on the need to support low-skilled and unskilled workers who are particularly vulnerable to exploitation and facing more negative experiences while abroad. Skilled migrants report fewer incidents of abuse and higher job satisfaction. They also often return with skills that make them valuable in the Sri Lankan job market. However, most young people are unaware of the facilities available that can help them migrate as skilled workers and do not know how to match skills with available foreign employment opportunities. OCG helps those dreaming of international work opportunities make better informed decisions regarding skilled jobs and helps them figure out how to get the right skills and qualifications for eligibility.

The career guidance session enabled Sinthuja to make an informed decision on her education. “I am interested in ICT and my plan is to start an ICT course.” she said, once she discovered ICT is a more viable pathway for skilled migration than other courses she has taken.



**Mohammed Razan** who is following an Automobile Mechanic course at the Puttalam DTET was introduced for the first time to the ‘Skills Passport’ system through OGC. The Skills Passport is an existing and little-known system that helps job seekers build a portfolio of skills and qualifications, backed by references.

*“Now I am aware of the ‘Skills Passport’. I plan to complete my Automobile Mechanic NVQ level 3 and then move on to complete levels 4 and 5 so that I can get my Skills Passport and migrate to Japan.” said Razan with newfound confidence about his future.*

These two young people say they will also recommend OGC to their friends, as they now understand the value of high-quality Occupational Career Guidance for successful migration. Such word-of-mouth recommendations will go a long way in changing the approach to migration among rural communities.

As the SRMW project continues to expand OCG services and access across its priority districts with the help of its public sector stakeholders and district partners, many more young people hoping for a better future through foreign employment will have the opportunity to receive much needed guidance to set them on the path to skilled migration.



# Regional CSOs empowered to help returning migrant workers start up their own businesses.

Most Sri Lankans migrating for employment, pursue low-skilled occupations and find it challenging to reintegrate productively into their communities back in Sri Lanka. Some succeed in saving a portion of their hard-earned money with the intention of starting their own micro business. However, many of those businesses that do materialise, fail due to the lack of knowledge and skills in entrepreneurship among returned migrants.



CSO training session in progress



***“The training was extremely useful. We work with returned migrants who often have dreams of starting small businesses.” said Mahinda from the Social Advancement for Family Empowerment (SAFE Foundation), the partner CSO in the Anuradhapura district.***



***“I am now able to provide conceptual and practical guidance to start micro and small businesses to identify new business opportunities and to revive failed businesses.” said Thiwanka Dassanayake from the Center for Human Rights and Community Development (CHRCD), the partner CSO from the Kurunegala district.***



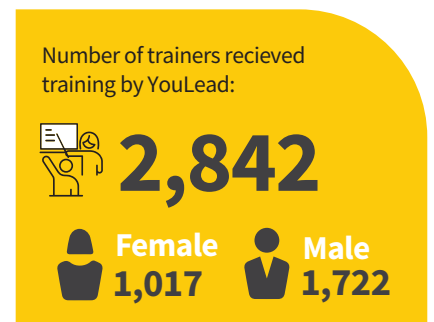
***“I now have the skill to help new businesses and existing businesses and to also train new trainers.” said Nilushi Priyangika from the Samadana Organization, the partner CSO in Kandy district.***

There are Civil Service Organizations (CSOs) working in regions with high densities of migrant workers, but they do not have the skills and knowledge to provide guidance on entrepreneurship.

The Swiss-funded Safe and Resilient Migrant Workers (SRMW) project, a cost-shared activity under the USAID funded YouLead program, addressed these challenges by first customizing YouLead’s existing entrepreneurship curriculum. It was redesigned to help identify skills and knowledge gaps of returnees and focus on concepts such as investment planning, innovation, creativity, business model development, financial structures and business development.

The program then enlisted local CSOs and enhanced their capacity to deliver the curriculum, with the aim of long-term sustainability of the program. Twenty-six selected candidates from partner CSOs in five districts, received specialized training and were empowered with the skills to provide ongoing guidance and advice during the critical first years of a new enterprise. Five of these candidates who successfully completed the program were handpicked to receive further upskilling to become master trainers. The successful completion of this training is expected to significantly enhance the effectiveness of the CSOs in supporting returnee migrants who already own, or aspire to own, their own businesses.

With this latest capacity-building initiative, SRMW has effectively empowered a network of CSOs to reach for higher rates of business startups, survival and success, among returnee migrant workers. Their ability to continuously provide entrepreneurship skills and guidance is expected to play a vital role in easing the challenge of economic reintegration and the emergence of resilient micro-entrepreneurs.



# New training program from national institute focuses on health and safety for small tourism enterprises.

Sri Lanka is optimistic about the current tourism revival momentum and service providers in the industry are gearing up to take advantage of rebounding demand, after consecutive years of business challenges and low-level activity. While health and safety focused on communicable diseases as a priority during the pandemic, SME tourism providers were largely left out of those efforts and little attention was paid to food-borne illnesses and personal safety—two issues arguably more likely to tarnish Sri Lanka’s reputation than COVID19. The Tourism Resilience Project (TRP), funded by the Delegation of the European Union (EU) to Sri Lanka and the Maldives, with additional support from the US Agency for International Development (USAID), initiated a sustainable partnership with the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) to tailor make a tourism sector health and safety program for SME tourism providers for the first time. The training was piloted with SMEs in the highland areas of the Central and Uva provinces where EU and USAID are also collaborating on the development of a rural hiking trail that is helping to develop many new food and accommodation providers.

***“This is a very valuable training. We feel tourists will increase from December. Then the training will be useful for us because the guests will feel safer when we have everything properly set up, such as fire extinguishers and first aid facilities in case of emergencies and high cleanliness standards. We were conscious of these before, but now everything is up to the standards prescribed by the program.” - Mr. P. M. Pradeep Sanjewa, the proprietor of the No Name Hostel and Café in Ella.***

Following the success of the pilot, NIOSH, which primarily focuses on occupational health and safety training for large companies, has pledged to continue training small tourism enterprises and

will make it a permanent part of its offering. “NIOSH recognizes the health and safety risks inherent in any small business that interacts directly with tourists.” noted Dr. Champika Amarasinghe, Director General, NIOSH. “As such, NIOSH intends to make this training a part of our formal program. We believe it is important for both the safety of travellers and the reputation of Sri Lanka to improve health and safety protocols in the tourism industry.”

***“The certificate is recognized. We can display it for customers to see. That is good for our business.” - Geethan Shalindha Kuruppuarachchi, proprietor of Little Folly, a six-room bungalow hotel in Ella.***

***“This is very valuable for us, because we commenced business recently and except for the manager, all other staff members are also new to the industry, so they have had no previous training. The training will help the business because customers will be reassured that we maintain a high standard of cleanliness and safety and will spread the word on Facebook and Google Reviews.” - Ms. Puwaneswary Balasathiesh, the proprietor of the five-room, five-employee, Tearamb Holiday Bungalow (Pvt) Ltd. in Ramboda.***

Launched in March 2023, the TRP-NIOSH health and safety training has benefited seventy tourism enterprises in the Central and Uva provinces to date. For many of the employees of these beneficiary MSMEs, this is their first exposure to standardized training in hospitality. Providing National Safety and Health Management System compliant certification in the areas of general safety, food safety, fire safety, electrical safety, first aid and awareness and prevention of abuse and harassment, this training enables MSMEs to ensure a safe, healthy and friendly environment for both tourists and employees within their business premises.

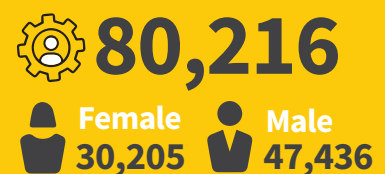
The training has had enthusiastic participation and the feedback has been overwhelmingly positive.

***“Compared to last year, this year the business has already improved. We expect a good December season. So we have to also improve our standards. Good hygiene, cleanliness and safety, these are very important, especially for a hotel. So this training will help to grow our business.” - Mr. Anandan, Manager of Escape to Blackwood, a six-bedroom bungalow in Haputale.***

***“Previously, businesses in this area had access to only government training on health and safety, but it was just a general awareness and not done at our premises or specific to our needs. With this training, they came to our premises and did a complete inspection.” - Samitha Umesh Amarasinghe, proprietor of The Lettuce and Cabbage Cafe Restaurant in Haputale town.***

Following the training, all participating MSMEs and their staff have made health and safety a top priority in their premises. They are also actively recommending the program to their peer tourism enterprises. TRP places a high priority on ensuring communities and businesses that are new to tourism or are recovering from the pandemic and economic crisis, have the opportunity to acquire relevant skills to realize their full potential.

Number of individuals who completed project workforce development programs:



# USAID provides a vital business growth springboard for young entrepreneurs.

While a vibrant SME sector is essential to Sri Lanka’s growth and development, entrepreneurship is not considered to be a particularly meaningful or promising career path, especially for young Sri Lankans. Enterprises started by youth under 35 in Sri Lanka was estimated to be only about four percent of all startups, pre-pandemic. To inspire and encourage a mass audience of young people to think about starting their own businesses, last year USAID’s youth employment and entrepreneurship project YouLead, teamed up with TV Derana and a Jordanian NGO, to launch Derana Startup 2021. A unique entrepreneurship reality TV show aimed at empowering 30 talented young entrepreneurs selected from thousands of entrants, to develop their fledgling businesses through mentoring from experts in relevant fields. Since the successful completion of Derana Startup2021, many of those contestants have taken huge leaps forward and are beginning to make their mark in the marketplace.



One such success story comes from **Ushan Chaminda**, the winner of Derana Startup2021. He is the founder of Gavesha Labs based in Colombo, an edtech startup.

*He says, “My vision is to empower STEAM education in Sri Lanka through technology and reduce barriers for children to access tech-based education. Winning Derana Startup2021 was a pivotal moment in my journey. That experience expanded my thinking and opened many new opportunities for Gavesha Labs.”*

Through Ushan’s leadership, Gavesha Labs has recently attracted funding from JohnKeellsX startup accelerator, for product development that includes the first ever Sri Lankan made minicomputer, with basic AI assistance to help children embrace technology. Gavesha Labs also collaborates with UNICEF on the ‘Gavesha Mini Lab’ which promotes climate education among young children and is currently being piloted in Nuwara Eliya.

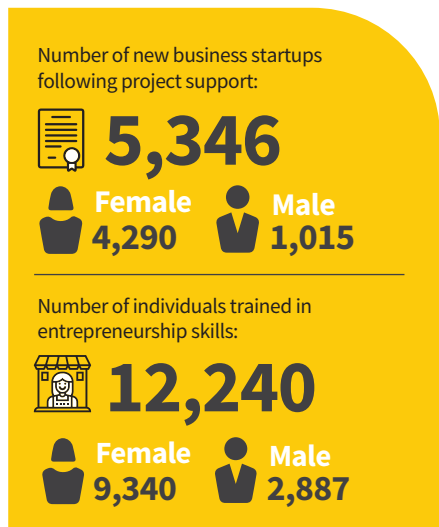


**Rishan Dulanjana**, another Derana Startup2021 contestant, is the founder of Jack Fruit Ceylon in Galle. His business manufactures a variety of innovative Jackfruit seed-based value-added products for both the local and international markets. The supply chain has also created vital new livelihood opportunities for over 400 Jackfruit vendors across the country. On 15th August 2023, Rishan was recognized for

his growing entrepreneurial prowess with the ‘Young Startup of the Year’ award and Gold award for ‘Best Innovation to Commercialization’ at the Sri Lanka Institute of Marketing SME Development Awards (SMEDA).

*“At Derana Startup2021, I was introduced to my mentor Mrs. Janaki Kathriarachchi. We still connect regularly and that interaction has been a huge source of empowerment for me as we raised the standards of our business, which included gaining ISO certification. Winning the recent awards was a proud moment of recognition of our efforts and I am glad she was at my side to celebrate it.” says Rishan.*

At a time when the Sri Lankan economy badly needs an infusion of new enterprises creating economic growth and employment opportunities, Ushan and Rishan are trailblazers. They demonstrate the achievement potential of Sri Lankan youth entrepreneurs when they have the right support of springboard tools and resources to launch them to growth velocity.



### Who we are

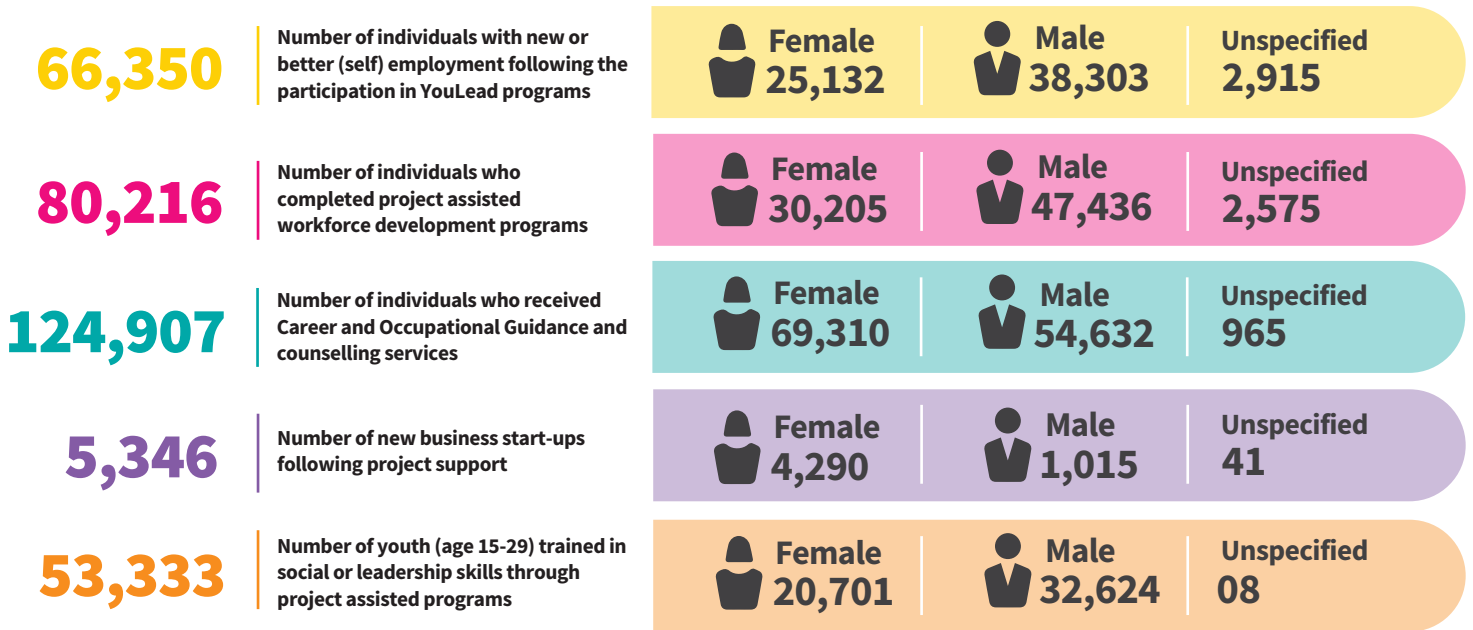
YouLead is a 7-year project funded by the **United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the European Union (EU) and the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation (SDC)**. Its aim is to improve technical and vocational education, create a more skilled workforce and link youth to more productive careers by supporting and strengthening students, teachers and institutions. It encourages entrepreneurship by giving young people the skills needed to run their own enterprises and improve their access to mentoring and financing.

### How to reach us

Together, we can do more, so we welcome mutually beneficial collaborations with private, public and development sector organizations and individuals.

**For inquiries, please contact Vindya: vsilva@youlead.com**

### Our Community Impact



**3,184**

Number of career/ occupational guidance practitioners trained to deliver better services

**2,842**

Number of trainers receiving training by YouLead

**96**

Number of technical curricula developed or improved

