

From Foreign Labour Dependency to Sustainable Workforce Localisation: A Structured Integrative Review and Six-Pillar Framework for the Maldives Tourism Industry

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ABSTRACT

Foreign workers account for a substantial share of employment in Maldivian tourist resorts, yet the share of posts held by citizens cannot, by itself, indicate whether the domestic workforce is developing lasting occupational capability. This integrative review examines how the sector might distinguish continuing skills shortages from potentially remediable dependence on overseas recruitment. A bounded, purposive synthesis draws on identified Maldivian tourism studies, selected comparative research, established organisational and labour-market theories, and dated official statistics and policy publications. Rather than claiming exhaustive retrieval or formal thematic-frequency analysis, the article differentiates source-based observations from interpretive relationships. Four complementary perspectives- human capital, resource dependence, institutional theory and labour-market segmentation- inform a six-pillar framework comprising workforce planning, skills development, employer readiness, employment attractiveness, inclusive participation and responsible foreign labour management. The framework treats job quality and access as continuing conditions of recruitment and retention, while international recruitment can preserve service continuity during appropriately planned domestic skills development. Coordination, digital capability, mentoring and succession operate across the pillars rather than as terminal stages. The review further specifies four testable relational propositions and an iterative implementation cycle, with indicators covering occupational entry, competence, retention, progression, succession, fair treatment and quality-adjusted productivity. The model is a conceptual diagnostic tool, not an evaluated intervention; its proposed relationships require evidence from workers, employers and institutions across different resort and island contexts.

Keywords: workforce localisation; foreign labour dependency; Maldives tourism; human capital; employment quality; migrant labour; resort workforce

INTRODUCTION

The Maldives relies on a geographically dispersed tourism industry that combines labour-intensive guest services with technical, operational and managerial work. Resort location matters: employees may need to relocate, remain on a resort island for extended periods or travel between islands to reach work. Together with a relatively small domestic labour market, these conditions affect employers' ability to recruit and retain Maldivian workers across occupations. Earlier studies identify expatriate recruitment, skill and experience gaps, employment practices and the organisation of resort work as connected rather than isolated challenges (Shakeela & Cooper, 2009; Najeeb & Barrett, 2019; Shiyar et al., 2023).

The Maldives Bureau of Statistics estimated that there were 55,874 employees in tourist resorts in 2022, of whom approximately 59% were foreign nationals and 41% were Maldivians. Women accounted for approximately 11% of this estimated resort workforce; Maldivian women represented approximately 2% of the total (Maldives Bureau of Statistics [MBS], 2024a). These figures were extrapolated to the resort population based on responses from 61 operating resorts, rather than a complete employee census. They describe estimated resort employment in 2022, not employment across all tourism activities or subsequent years. A separate World Bank assessment published in April 2025 states that approximately one-third of resort-island employees were Maldivian; because the source populations and methods differ, the figures should not be interpreted as a measured trend without reconciliation (World Bank, 2025).

Increasing tourism can provide a reason to study both the composition and the size of labour demand. The Maldives Monetary Authority estimates that about 2.25 million tourists will visit in 2025, an increase of 9.8% over 2024 (Maldives Monetary Authority [MMA], 2026). Arrivals do not necessarily result in equivalent growth in employment: resort occupancy, length of stay, service design, and productivity affect staffing levels. More detailed evidence than the aggregate arrivals and nationality figures is required for workforce planning.

Maldivian research has already described human resource pressure, education–employment mismatches, and different employer reactions to regulation and localisation proposals (Shakeela & Cooper, 2009; Shakeela et al., 2012; Najeeb & Barrett, 2019; Shiyar et al., 2023). The missing conceptual task is to show how these mechanisms interact. A local technical shortfall affects whether a job is unattractive, whether there is no recognised route to it, and whether employers can promote those who complete training. Similarly, overseas recruitment can fill an empty specialism while, without transfer, repeated filling of the same vacancy leaves the local stock untouched. A checklist of interventions cannot separate these cases.

The article defines sustainable workforce localisation as a staged capability-formation process through which Maldivians can access relevant tourism occupations, become competent, remain in appropriate employment, and advance to skilled and leadership roles, while employers maintain service standards and fair conditions for international recruits. It does not presume that removing foreign workers is possible or that it is the only measure of success. It seeks to connect levels of explanation and to fix the relationships, trade-offs, and indicators whose consistency this definition can support.

Three research questions guide the synthesis: (RQ1) Which structural, human capital, organisational, and institutional conditions sustain foreign labour dependency in Maldivian tourism? (RQ2) How might these conditions interact to influence domestic entry, retention and occupational progression while international recruitment remains available for genuine shortages? (RQ3) How can these mechanisms be expressed as a context-sensitive conceptual framework and an evaluable sequence for future research?

Concepts and Theoretical Foundations

Dependency and Two Meanings of Localisation

Foreign labour dependency is a continued reliance on international recruitment to meet staffing or competency requirements. Its significance depends on occupation, location, the duration of a shortage and the realistic opportunities to develop domestic supply. Hiring an overseas engineer to cover an intermittent specialist requirement is analytically different from repeatedly replacing front-line employees whose departures stem from remediable conditions. Neither the number of foreign workers nor a nationality-based share identifies the cause of a shortage. Worker mobility must also be examined as a social sustainability issue: migrant employees are rights-bearing participants in the industry, not merely units that can be substituted without consequence (Salazar, 2022).

Numerical localisation records the proportion or number of jobs held by citizens. Such information is necessary for monitoring participation but does not establish whether locally employed workers are acquiring scarce skills, remaining in post or entering positions formerly dependent on external expertise. Capability-based localisation therefore also considers demonstrated competence, retention, occupational progression and succession. These dimensions provide a means to examine development without assuming that a single nationality ratio should apply to every resort or occupation (Shiyar et al., 2023).

Complementary Theoretical Mechanisms

Human Capital Theory links education, training and experience to the development of productive competencies (Becker, 1964). It explains why linking practical learning with an employer could reduce some skill gaps, but it does not, on its own, explain whether graduates take available jobs or remain employed. Labour-market segmentation and occupational-choice approaches focus on wage, status, location, schedule and mobility costs that determine who enters which occupations (Doeringer & Piore, 1971). Their interaction is that the value of training for localisation in the workforce can depend, in part, on the conditions of the jobs the training prepares workers for.

Resource Dependence Theory explains why employers acquire scarce capabilities from a labour market where they cannot be secured locally (Pfeffer & Salancik, 1978), and overseas recruitment may sustain continuity, as the same employer can shape subsequent external dependence through decisions about mentoring, promotion, and succession. Institutional Theory explains that regulation, professional pressure and education-sector arrangements alter what an employer is incentivised to do, without specifying that it actually does it (DiMaggio & Powell, 1983). Najeeb and Barrett's (2019) study of seven Maldivian resorts found different managerial responses to employment regulation, including decoupling between the requirement and the practice observed in the workplace, so compliance on paper should not be treated as proof of local capability.

The four perspectives address parts of the process. The first explains competence formation; the second explains why workers enter and remain in a particular occupation; the third explains why firms recruit externally; and the

recruit externally; and the fourth explains why institutional arrangements affect the first two. Their combined implication is conditional, not deterministic. Additional training may yield little additional retention when working conditions are unattractive; better working conditions may not compensate for years of missing specialist experience; and numerical localisation requirements may not produce competence where the organisation is underdeveloped. Table 1 makes the distinction explicit.

Table 1. Theoretical perspectives and their specific explanatory roles

Perspective	Mechanism in the present framework	What it does not establish
Human capital	Competency pathways and supervised experience increase potential domestic occupational supply.	Training alone produces entry, retention or succession.
Labour-market segmentation and occupational choice	Job quality, mobility, status and alternative employment conditions affect access to occupations.	Workers of any nationality have fixed preferences or work traits.
Resource dependence	External recruitment supplies skills or staffing where a reliable domestic supply is absent.	Every instance of foreign recruitment is avoidable or harmful.
Institutional theory	Formal rules, coordination, and professional norms influence employers' strategies and practices.	Numerical compliance necessarily reflects capability formation.

Review Design and Analytical Boundaries

A Bounded Integrative Synthesis

The article develops a bounded, non-systematic integrative synthesis of identified Maldivian studies, selected comparative research, foundational theory and official sources, supplemented by targeted checks of institutional publications and publisher metadata relevant to its central claims. This design is appropriate for connecting different forms of evidence and developing a conceptual explanation rather than estimating an average effect or claiming exhaustive literature coverage (Snyder, 2019; Torraco, 2005). The corpus centres on Maldivian resort employment and localisation studies, then uses comparative tourism and workforce-localisation research to examine mechanisms that might transfer across settings. Foundational theory and official publications provide explanatory and contextual material, respectively.

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Source identification was purposive and anchored in the available bibliography rather than a documented database-wide search. The available research record does not contain a reproducible database search log, a record of all excluded papers or an independent coding archive. Accordingly, the article does not report screening counts, inter-coder reliability, formal quality scores or claims of comprehensiveness. Publisher and official-source checks help establish that key cited works and contextual statistics are traceable; a DOI is not treated as proof of research quality. The approach is best described as critical conceptual integration of a selected corpus, with interpretive limits stated throughout.

Evidence appraisal and interpretive procedure

Sources were considered according to their relevance and inferential scope. The MBS resort-employment estimates and MMA arrival series provide dated descriptive context. Maldivian case and sector studies illuminate observed practices or reported barriers within their respective samples, but do not establish nationwide causal effects. Comparative research contributes plausible organisational or employment mechanisms, with transferability examined rather than assumed. Foundational theories explain possible relationships but are not empirical evidence that a proposed intervention works in the Maldives.

The synthesis uses four interpretive operations. First, source claims are grouped by the level at which constraints operate: structural demand and island geography; competencies; employer systems; employment conditions; access and participation; and responsible external recruitment. Second, contrasting observations are retained where they expose an important boundary, notably genuine specialist shortages versus avoidable repeated external hiring, and additional training versus weak retention. Third, the four theoretical perspectives are used to propose relationships among these groups. Fourth, those relationships are expressed as a non-additive six-pillar model with suggested indicators, rival explanations and opportunities for future testing. These are transparent steps for organising the selected evidence, not a claim that a previously unrecorded formal thematic coding exercise was performed. Table 2 records how the evidence is used. The distinction between documented observation and author-developed proposition is retained in the evidence synthesis, framework and discussion.

Table 2. Source contribution and limits of inference

Evidence class	Contribution	Transfer or inference boundary
Maldivian resort research	Reported staffing, skills, education and employer responses within the sampled contexts.	Does not represent every resort, island or occupational segment.
Official labour and tourism records	Dated descriptive estimates, arrival observations and development priorities.	Different populations, years, and methodologies do not represent a unified trend.
Comparative tourism and localisation studies	Mechanisms related to job quality, HR development, and the sustainability of migrant labour.	Transfer requires an explicit rationale for Maldivian occupation and island selection.
Foundational theory	Concepts used to connect labour supply, organisational choices and institutional responses.	Generates relationships for investigation; does not estimate intervention effects.

Evidence synthesis: Six interacting conditions**Structural demand, geography and workforce planning**

A national employment share obscures shortages that differ by occupation and location. The resort model separates many workplaces from residential islands and can impose relocation, accommodation and family-contact costs on employees. Shakeela and Cooper (2009) describe this small-island human-resource context; Shiyar et al. (2023) document resort managers' accounts of recruitment difficulties, local skill and experience gaps and the need for coordinated development. MBS (2024b) provides a wider employment context but should not be read as an occupation-level vacancy forecast for resorts.

These observations motivate three planning categories rather than a single numerical target. Some positions may have an adequate potential pool of qualified Maldivians but experience recruitment or retention barriers. Other posts may be developable locally within a defined period of supervised experience. Specialist or intermittent roles may continue to require international recruitment. This classification is proposed here as a diagnostic device: its categories have not been validated against a national inventory of Maldivian resort vacancies. Its credibility depends on comparable data concerning occupation, location, competence, vacancy duration and turnover.

Skills development and work-based learning

Competence is not training attended to. Shakeela et al. (2012) show that tourism education increases employability, but not always the type of employability that is local. Resort managers who were interviewed by Shiyar et al. (2023) identified gaps in qualifications and experience when explaining internships and graduate-development programmes. The relevant comparison is therefore between course provision, supervised placement and the competencies used by employers in promotion, not between the number of people who complete programmes.

A proposed pathway connects occupation-specific demand to practical competency standards, accessible education or TVET, supervised workplace assessment and responsibility. Facilities maintenance, revenue management, and technology-enabled operations may have different development horizons by specialisation. International evidence on the digitalisation of tourism shows that new technology can alter the mix of skills but cannot predict whether foreign recruitment in the Maldives will be reduced as a result (OECD, 2026).

Employer readiness and the development–retention relationship

A larger pool of trained workers may therefore have limited effect when employers cannot translate placement into a credible career. Employer readiness in the current system is transparent recruitment, effective onboarding, effective supervision, structured mentoring, competency assessment and fair progression and succession capacity. Najeib and Barrett (2019) demonstrate why compliance cannot be taken as evidence of effective HR practice, and Shiyar et al. (2023) identify industry engagement in local workforce development.

The possible reinforcement connection between development and retention is an interpretation, not a measured effect, in the current review. In cases where turnover is high, employers may be unwilling to invest more in training; poor training and limited progression can also make retention harder. Darwish et al. (2023) present comparative evidence on HRM in localisation within multinational enterprises in Saudi Arabia. The context and organisational population of the article are not the same as those of Maldivian resorts. The article uses the study to inspire a local test mechanism and not to forecast its size.

Employment Attractiveness and Occupational Progression

Training cannot replace every feature of work that determines whether people accept jobs and stay employed: pay, rosters, accommodation, safe travel, contact with family, treatment at work, the occupational standing and visible promotion that work offers. Robinson et al. (2019) review tourism employment precarity, and Plaikner et al. (2023) look at employer branding and employee recruitment and retention in Austrian family tourism companies. Both support attention to employment conditions and employer practices, and neither provides an estimate of their effects in Maldivian resorts.

The distinction between entry, retention and progression is analytically consequential. A placement scheme could raise the number of Maldivian recruits while leaving reliance on overseas technical or supervisory staff unchanged. Proposed indicators therefore distinguish recruitment offers and acceptance from retention at six or twelve months, attainment of relevant competencies, internal promotions and succession readiness. Variation by job and resort location should be examined before attributing observed patterns to worker nationality or assumed commitment.

Inclusive Participation Across Gender, Age And Island Communities

The estimated share of Maldivian women in resort employment, approximately 2% of the total estimated resort workforce in 2022, justifies examining barriers to access without identifying their causes from the statistic alone (MBS, 2024a). The World Bank (2023) documents broader disparities in human capital and labour markets in the Maldives. In comparative tourism research, Hutchings et al. (2020) identify horizontal and vertical segregation of women's employment across 21 APEC economies. These sources motivate investigation of safe mobility, accommodation, care responsibilities, recruitment access, workplace conditions and progression; their respective populations must remain distinct.

Inclusive participation is a continuing condition, not a phase that follows training or employer readiness. Transport support or safe accommodation may influence whether a candidate accepts a placement; accessible recruitment and suitable schedules may determine who reaches training; transparent promotion may affect long-term progression. Proposed measures should disaggregate applications, selection, placement, retention and advancement by gender, age, island and occupation wherever ethical and feasible. Hybrid arrangements may be suitable for some digital or administrative roles, but cannot be generalised to on-site guest or facilities work.

Responsible Foreign Labour Management And Coordination

International recruitment may be needed where a resort has a documented capability gap or variable demand, while recurrent external recruitment may continue where viable domestic development routes were never established. Salazar (2022) situates tourism labour mobility within a social-sustainability question, and migrant-worker conditions and rights therefore enter the framework rather than the coda. Responsible management involves fair recruitment and employment, defensible evidence of shortage, worker protection, and (where the role is realistically localisable) the transfer of specialist knowledge.

Responsibility is not limited to a single employer. The Maldives Fifth Tourism Master Plan 2023-2027 outlines sector development priorities; the publication of a policy does not constitute evidence that workforce measures have been undertaken or assessed (Ministry of Tourism, 2023). Labour intelligence, educational capacity, resort placement, migration arrangements and outcome monitoring are owned by different institutions. Alignment is described as a cross-cutting enabling condition. Where it is absent, providers may graduate workers for vacancies employers are not filling, and resorts may continue overseas recruitment for posts for which there is no local development plan.

Interdependent Six-Pillar Framework**Architecture And Proposed Pathways**

Figure 1 presents six pillars as interdependent mechanisms rather than as six consecutive stages. Occupation- and island-specific intelligence (Pillar 1) informs the priorities of competency development (Pillar 2) and employers' workforce and mentoring capacity (Pillar 3). Skills and organisational arrangements develop together: training should prepare for actual vacancies and resorts should have supervisors who can turn training into competent work. Employment attractiveness (Pillar 4) and inclusive participation (Pillar 5) shape access, entry and retention through this chain rather than following it. Responsible foreign labour management (Pillar 6) runs alongside the chain, maintaining continuity in genuine shortages and, where possible, supporting the planned transfer of scarce expertise.

Institutional coordination, digital capability, mentoring and leadership succession affect multiple pillars at once. Outcomes such as local entry, retention, competency attainment, promotion, succession and quality-adjusted productivity inform the workforce intelligence for the next decision. No arrow is a statistically estimated causal chain. The figure is a story of relationships to be tested.

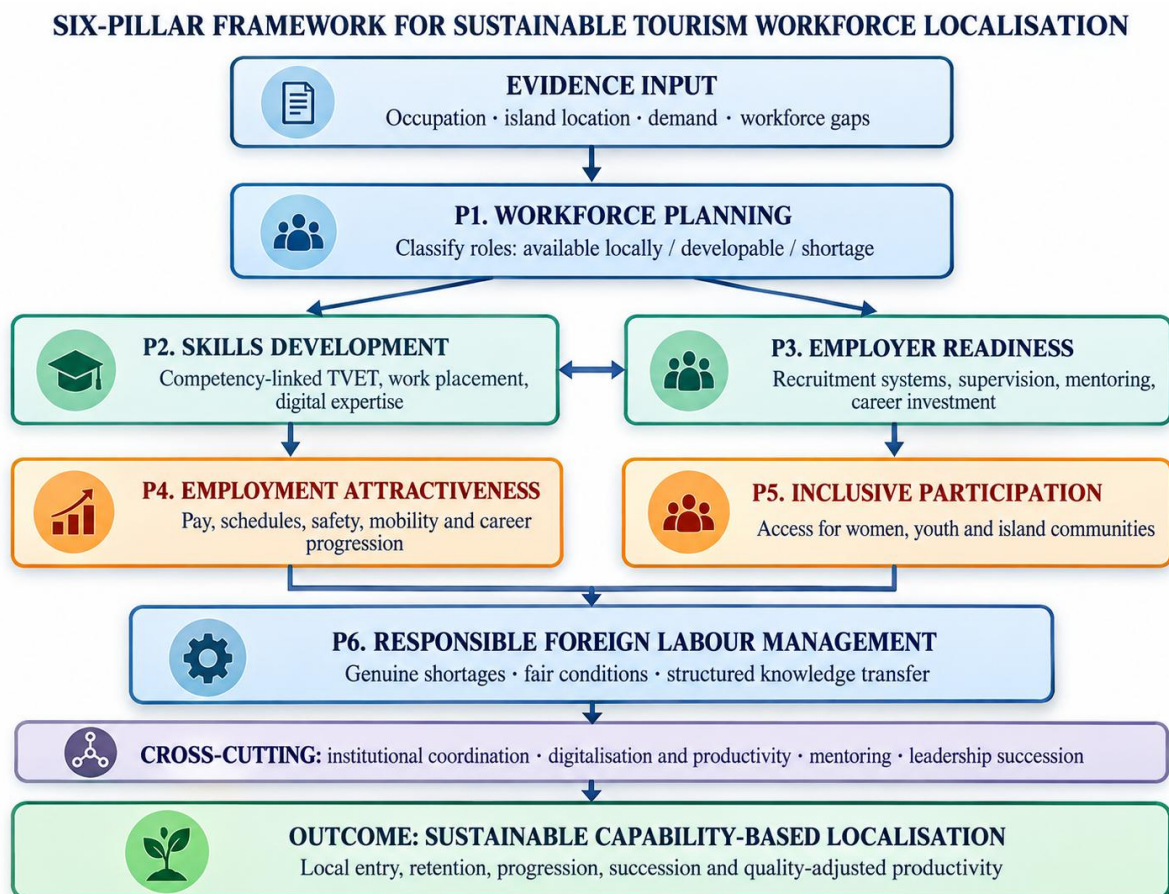


Figure 1. Interdependent six-pillar framework for capability-based workforce localisation. The six pillars appear as concurrent domains, not sequential steps; solid arrows denote selected planning and coordination links, while dashed arrows mark ongoing enabling conditions. Pillar numbers label domains, not statistical hypotheses. The model has not been empirically validated.

Relational Propositions and Possible Counterexamples

Four relational propositions make the framework assessable while avoiding confusion between pillar labels and formal hypothesis identifiers, as mentioned in Table 3. They express theoretical expectations rather than findings. The statements deliberately identify counterexamples because pathways may differ between resorts with distinct skill needs, access conditions and workforce systems.

RP1 (planning alignment): More detailed, regularly updated occupation- and island-level workforce intelligence is expected to improve the alignment of training provision, recruitment priorities and documented continuing shortages, provided employers and training institutions use the information. The proposition may fail where demand changes quickly, or information is unavailable, unreliable or not acted upon.

RP2 (capability conversion): Competency development is expected to be more strongly associated with sustained local retention and occupational progression, in which employer mentoring, supervisory capacity, and employment conditions support the transition from learning to a career. A rival explanation is that specialist demand, earnings alternatives, or geographic mobility constraints remain binding even as training and employer practices improve.

RP3 (inclusive access): Removal of demonstrable barriers to mobility, safety, accommodation, scheduling, and progression is expected to increase the effective local applicant pool and support retention among affected groups. Variation in job preferences, occupational requirements and care responsibilities could limit this association or produce different outcomes across subgroups.

RP4 (parallel external capability): Where continuing international recruitment addresses verified shortages and is accompanied by fair conditions and feasible knowledge-transfer arrangements, it may preserve service continuity while supporting domestic succession in selected roles. The effect may be absent for permanently scarce or intermittent specialist tasks, or where mentoring is nominal, and successor competence is not assessed.

Table 3. Relational propositions, indicative evidence and rival explanations

Relation	Potential evidence for future assessment	Rival explanation or limit
RP1: planning and alignment	Occupation-specific vacancy data, training intake, placement and revised shortage classifications.	Forecasts unused, quickly outdated or unsupported by feasible programmes.
RP2: development × employer conditions × job quality	Competence at entry, mentoring intensity, accommodation and scheduling, 6–12-month retention, promotion.	Specialist shortages or external alternatives limit retention despite improvement.
RP3: inclusion and access	Application-to-offer and offer-to-acceptance rates, transport/support uptake, retention by subgroup.	Unaddressed barriers or job-specific preferences explain limited uptake.
RP4: fair external recruitment and transfer	Documented shortages, worker-protection practices, transfer milestones, and local successor assessment.	Transfer is infeasible for intermittent specialities or unsupported by genuine mentoring.

Discussion: Explanatory Contribution And Competing Interpretations

Why More Local Hiring Need Not Mean Less Dependence

The framework's contribution is to separate changes in nationality shares from changes in the domestic labour force's capacity to supply critical occupations over time. Human capital investment can increase the available pool of applicants, but staffing decisions still depend on job conditions, managerial capacity, and the timing of labour demand. Resource dependence can explain why employers continue to hire internationally while local capabilities are developed. Institutional analysis can explain why targets can be satisfied without any real mentoring or promotion. The combination, therefore, anticipates when entry-level localisation and continued specialist dependence can occur simultaneously, rather than as two opposing outcomes.

A further distinction relates to the avoidability of dependence. A genuine specialist shortage can support continued overseas recruitment without implying weak local commitment. Repeated overseas recruitment of an occupation with available local candidates but poor retention raises a different explanation. Vacancy duration, the competence of available candidates, terms of employment, and the realistic time required to develop a successor are evidence relevant to distinguishing between the two. The framework does not assume that one explanation always predominates.

Complementarity, Bottlenecks and Sequencing Without A Fixed Ladder

They are proposed complements; no resort will have the same bottleneck. A remote property with specialist maintenance, defensible shortage evidence, transferred technical training, and a responsible outside expert might be the constraint holding back the visitor today. The same resort may have applicants among the Maldivian staff whom it loses due to poor scheduling, accommodation, or progression; in such cases, a training program produces another graduate and does not clear the retention constraint. The reason these cases make this statement is that it is a diagnostic framework, not an equal-weight checklist.

These cases also explain why Figure 1 does not depict attractiveness and inclusion as corrective measures deployed late in the process. Job quality affects which workers reach a course or placement and whether they stay long enough to gain experience. Inclusive arrangements widen the available pool before the training decision is made. Employer capacity and training provision move in the same direction, and fair international recruitment can coexist with both. An empirical application should establish which binding constraint applies to each group and whether altering it alters the subsequent outcomes.

Technology, Productivity and Changing Skill Dependencies

Digital systems might improve vacancy intelligence, support training simulations, streamline suitable administrative work or enable workforce analytics. The OECD (2026) discusses international opportunities and adjustment costs associated with digitalisation and artificial intelligence in tourism. This evidence does not show that adopting technology will reduce the Maldives' foreign labour share. Automation may remove some repetitive tasks while creating demand for specialised digital, engineering or cybersecurity skills that are initially scarce in the domestic market.

Accordingly, productivity belongs in the framework as a quality-adjusted outcome and a cross-cutting consideration, not as evidence that fewer employees automatically indicate success. Future assessment should consider service outputs, labour inputs and maintained service quality, alongside the distribution of transformed jobs. Technology supports capability-based localisation only to the extent that Maldivian workers can access and progress into the relevant emerging roles.

Social Sustainability and Credible Succession

Capability-based localisation also applies to Maldivian applicants and employees, and it treats migrant staff fairly; a process that increases nationality-based headcounts while reducing employment conditions would not close the wider sustainable-workforce case. The low estimated share of Maldivian women in resort employment in 2022 can be used to probe participation, not as evidence of a single cause. Nationality alone cannot establish commitment to work or turnover.

Knowledge transfer is a potential mechanism for connecting responsible overseas recruitment with capability formation at home. A specialist post can be filled by an international candidate, and a suitably supported Maldivian employee can acquire competence through mentoring and assessed responsibility. The option would have a cost and would not be available to every occupation; its success would be measured by evidence of successor competence and retention, not by the foreign worker's departure as the objective.

An evaluable talent-development cycle

The framework can describe a five-stage, iterative cycle of talent development. It is offered as an implementation analysis choice and is not presented as a programme currently operating in the Maldives or as a legal duty that currently exists. It is designed to convert the six-pillar diagnosis into repeatable decisions and records. Stage 1 produces comparable occupation-, island- and resort-level demand and workforce indicators. Stage 2 categorises roles as immediately accessible, developable within a realistic horizon or as continuing shortage. Stage 3 aligns training, employer development, accessible recruitment and overseas expertise arrangements. Stage 4 observes placement, employment quality, competency attainment, retention and advancement. Stage 5 reviews results and modifies the next planning period.

For the cycle to be informative, the indicators must be kept distinct, as shown in Table 4. Greater local recruitment does not replace the evidence of retention, and higher training completion does not prove technical competence. The reports should present occupational entry, six- and twelve-month retention, internal promotion, and specialist succession, as well as service quality and the fair treatment of migrant workers. A dashboard can present measures by occupation and resort location and need not convert the outcomes into a single, unvalidated composite score.

Table 4. Proposed cycle, participating organisations and evaluable outcomes

Stage	Illustrative participants and activity	Evidence to examine
1. Diagnose	Relevant statistical agencies, industry organisations, resort employers: assess demand by location and occupation.	Vacancy duration, worker mix, skills, mobility, turnover and harmonised definitions.
2. Prioritise	Employers, education providers and relevant authorities: classify shortage horizons and constraints.	Documented immediate/developable/continuing-shortage decisions; review dates.
3. Develop	TVET/higher education, employers, worker representatives: combine training, placements and feasible access measures.	Observed competency standards, training access, mentoring provision and fair work safeguards.
4. Place and progress	Resort HR and supervisors with education partners: assess transitions into sustained careers.	Offer acceptance, completed placement, six/twelve-month retention, promotion and succession readiness.
5. Reassess	Public–industry coordination with independent evaluation, where feasible: update the diagnosis.	Service quality, productivity, fair treatment of migrants, inclusion outcomes, and changing demand.

8. Limitations and future research

The source base is purposive and bounded. It brings together kinds of evidence without establishing database coverage, a reproducible screening denominator or numerical theme frequency. The 2022 resort statistics are derived from survey respondents and projected to the resort population; subsequent labour-market statements are based on a different frame. Maldivian studies differ in their samples and focus; comparative research examines institutional and employment settings that are not interchangeable. The six-pillar architecture and four relational propositions are not tested and must not be presented as established intervention effects.

Such studies could compare resorts that differ in location, size, occupational mix, and workforce practices to test whether the distinctions are salient to members as well as managers. A qualitative account could explain why a Maldivian accepts or rejects a post, whether the conditions allow continued engagement and how expatriate mentoring is joint work. An occupation-level panel could trace the same graduate through placement, competence assessment, retention and promotion. Where the programmes are introduced, a clear baseline period and comparison sites would separate the intervention from visitor or broader economic movements.

A multi-level approach may be the right one because decisions, employer practices, island access, and institutions sit at different levels. Studies of digitalisation should also address whether the technology eases avoidable staffing pressure or creates new shortages in specialised functions. Fair treatment and the protection of locally and internationally recruited workers should be part of the ethical assessment, not nationality alone.

9. Conclusion

Foreign labour dependence in the Maldives tourism sector cannot be assessed purely from the share of non-citizen jobs. Geography, occupation, competency development, employer practices, employment conditions, and coordination all determine whether Maldivians can enter, stay, and advance in tourism work. Some skills and places will continue to rely on international recruitment. The analytical issue is where recurring dependence reflects a scarcity and where an accessible job and credible domestic development could remove a shortage.

The proposed six-pillar framework connects occupation-based intelligence to skills and employer capability and treats job attractiveness, inclusive participation and responsible external recruitment as concurrent conditions. Its contribution is conditional, in that it separates headcount change from demonstrable competence, retention, succession, and maintained service quality, and the accompanying talent-development cycle provides a language for future measurement. Workers, employers and institutional evidence from resort and island settings are required before its mechanisms or practical effects can be established.

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