

Accelerating South-South Cooperation towards decent work and common development in 2030

An inclusive approach to development remains key for post-COVID19 economic uncertainty in South-East Asia. The ILO ProSSCE-ASEAN project is actively working with partners in the region to support the Global Development Initiative and achieve decent work for all.

Five years after the COVID-19 pandemic disrupted economies globally, the world is reminded today of the urgent need for strong partnerships to revive the development agenda and secure a shared future of prosperity for all.

The global health crisis reversed South-East Asia's economic and development progress and [brought 4.7 million people into extreme poverty](#). In 2020, [the region experienced a sharp economic contraction of employment of 4 million people](#) at the height of the pandemic.

Despite the region's strong recovery from the pandemic with a [GDP growth of 4.6 per cent in 2024](#), millions of workers are still left behind. Many countries in the region continue to face challenges such as high youth unemployment, informal employment and lack of access to decent jobs for groups in vulnerable situations.

The latest [Asia and the Pacific SDG Progress Report 2025 : engaging communities to close the evidence gap](#) reiterates that to achieve full employment and decent work in South-East Asia under SDG8, progress needs to be accelerated. Collaboration and exchange of good practices among countries facing similar labour market issues can bring about inclusive employment and just transitions to green economies in the region.

The Global Development Initiative proposed in 2021 by the President of the People's Republic of China, Xi Jinping, and supported by over 100 countries, aims to realize these goals and become a major driver of the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, particularly for countries in the Global South. As the largest developing country in the world, China has been a long-term partner of fellow developing countries on the path to common sustainable development in areas such as poverty alleviation, digital economy, and green development.

Thanks to good-neighbourly relations between China and South-East Asia to champion mutually beneficial cooperation, this important global initiative is actively being implemented in the region.



Government representatives and civil society actors exchange views on disability inclusion in public employment services. ©Tarinee Youkhaw/ILO

The International Labour Organization, in partnership with the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of China (MOHRSS), is spearheading efforts to promote human-centred development in the world of work.

Through a South-South and Triangular cooperation approach, countries in South-East Asia and China regularly convene to share good practices and lessons learned in navigating the complex labour market landscape. The ultimate objectives are to ensure inclusive employment, public employment services and entrepreneurship development. It is through sustained collaboration with governments, workers' and employers' organizations and civil society actors in the region that lasting impact is possible.

Fostering knowledge sharing among nearly 800 policymakers and social partners

Knowledge exchange and collaboration among countries experiencing labour market shifts are fundamental to inclusive and sustainable development in the region. [The ILO Promoting the global development initiative with a focus on South-South cooperation in employment in ASEAN \(ILO ProSSCE-ASEAN\) project](#), in partnership with MOHRSS, has been facilitating South-South peer-learning between South-East Asia and China through regional policy dialogues, study visits, and workshops, benefitting nearly 800 policymakers and social partners across the region so far.

These initiatives enable countries to learn from one another on effective approaches to

formulating comprehensive employment policy, delivering public employment services, and providing entrepreneurship support.



Employment services counsellors from across ASEAN visit the PERKESO Rehabilitation Centre in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia to observe programmes that help Malaysians build back better. ©PERKESO

“Through ILO ProSSCE-ASEAN activities, PERKESO has benefited from regional collaboration, particularly in enhancing our Active Labour Market Policies and Public Employment Services Initiatives. Study visits and policy dialogues provided practical insights into digital integration and public-private partnerships. These experiences reinforced our focus on evidence-based policymaking and personalized employment services. Moving forward, these practices support Malaysia’s economic growth by improving workforce readiness, reducing unemployment, and ensuring inclusive, sustainable development aligned with national goals such as the Twelfth Malaysia Plan and Shared Prosperity Vision 2030,” said **PERKESO’s Group Chief Executive Officer, Dato' Sri Dr. Mohammed Azman bin Aziz Mohammed.**



The ILO ProSSCE-ASEAN project brought together representatives from the government, workers' and employers' organizations to Bangkok, Thailand to discuss opportunities and challenges of the growing digital economy to employment. ©Tarinee Youkhaw/ILO

Connecting nearly 150,000 young people and marginalized groups to high-quality jobs



The ILO continues to support the organization of career fairs in Cambodia at national and provincial levels to increase access to decent employment opportunities for all. ©Tarinee Youkhaw/ILO

From the peak of the pandemic to the region's resilient journey during the economic recovery, vulnerable populations such as youth, women and persons with disabilities continue to be hit the hardest. In 2025, only 42.38 per cent of working-age youth and 54.96 per cent of working-age women in South-East Asia are projected to be employed or actively looking for employment. To provide inclusive access to decent employment opportunities in

Cambodia, the ILO ProSSCE-ASEAN project has partnered with the Ministry of Labour and Vocational Training and civil society organizations such as the Cambodia Team for Education Program Organization (CTEP) and l'Ecole d'Hotellerie et de Tourisme Paul Dubrule since 2023 to connect nearly 150,000 young jobseekers as well as those from marginalized groups with high-quality jobs.

“As the country was just beginning to reopen for tourists, many employees could not get back into the job market. I feel so blessed that I got an opportunity to work in the hotel industry while many hotels, restaurants, and other businesses were still struggling with the economic crisis. For me, the career fair provided an opportunity to connect with the professional industry to learn about the job market, and also to know about what employers are looking for and also information about labour before entering the job market,” **said Ly Ly, a student who found employment after attending a career fair in Siem Reap, Cambodia.**



Ly Ly(left), a young jobseeker who found employment after attending a career fair in Siem Reap, Cambodia, now works at the Sofitel Angkor Phokeethra Golf & Spa Resort © Ly Ly

Strengthening capacity of more than 3,000 public employment services counsellors to promote inclusive and gender-responsive labour market programmes

South-East Asia is a diverse region comprising countries with unique labour market needs. At the country level, the ILO ProSSCE-ASEAN project has tailored its initiatives to meet the specific demands of each country to ultimately ensure that partners have the capacity to design and implement inclusive and gender-responsive labour market programmes.

In Indonesia, the ILO, in collaboration with the Secretariat of the Directorate General of Manpower Placement Development and Employment Opportunity Expansion of the Ministry of Manpower (SETDITJEN BINAPENTA KEMNAKER), rolled out a four-tiered training programme, combining technical knowledge and practical guidance on counselling techniques to enhance effective job matching and build capacity of public employment counsellors across Indonesia. As of 2025, more than 3,000 government staff received trainings, including on specialized topics such as disability inclusion and labour migration.

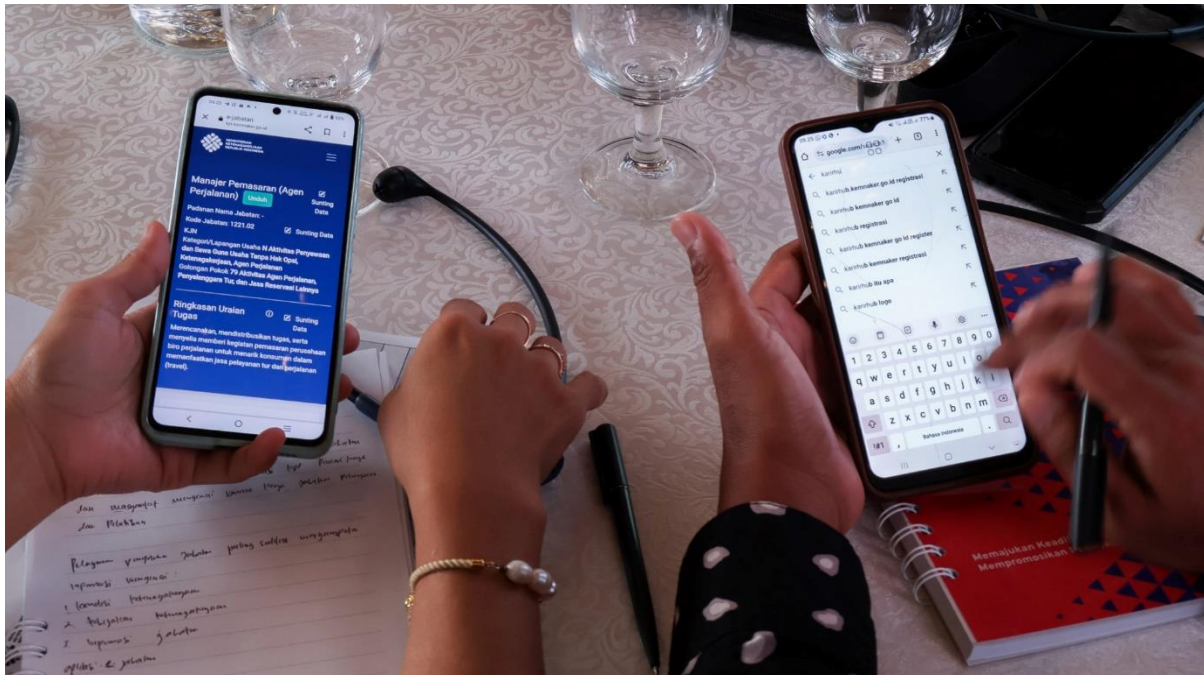
This signature four-tiered training for public employment services counsellors will be adapted and rolled out in other South-East Asian countries following the success of the pilot programme in Indonesia.



Public employment counsellors from BINAPENTA Kemnaker applies employment counselling techniques from the four-tiered training in a simulation. ©Tarinee Youkhaw/ILO

“The implementation of a structured, 4-tiered training program for employment counsellors plays a significant role in enhancing the quality and consistency of our employment services,” said **BINAPENTA’s Director General Darmawansyah, ST.M. Si.** “Each tier consisting of Self-Training, In-Person Training, Roll-Out Training, and Workshops contributes to establishing fundamental competencies, developing practical counselling skills, scaling consistency and quality across regions, and improving the capacity of counsellors at different stages, ultimately leading to a more effective, inclusive, and supportive employment services for jobseekers. Therefore, better quality jobseeking and counselling experiences are expected. Capacity building for counsellors to progressive levels ensures that jobseekers are more well-informed and receive consistent support throughout their employment journey. As a result, the model contributes to improved employment outcomes, greater inclusivity, and higher satisfaction among jobseekers,” he

added.



Training participants explore ways to support jobseekers in their job search through digital tools including BINAPENTA Kemnaker's online job portal, Karirhub. ©Tarinee Youkhaw/ILO

Looking into the future, these sustained commitments to achieving common development through a human-centred approach in the region not only contributes to the Global Development Initiative but also the ASEAN Economic Community Strategic Plan 2026–2030, paving the way for inclusive and just transitions in the world of work for all.

About the ILO ProSSCE-ASEAN project

The “Promoting the Global Development Initiative with a Focus on South-South Cooperation in Employment in ASEAN” project (ProSSCE-ASEAN), carried out in partnership with and funded by the Ministry of Human Resources and Social Security of the People’s Republic of China (MOHRSS), leverages knowledge generation and sharing, policy dialogue and capacity development to support policymakers in addressing labour market issues in Southeast Asia and promoting employment policies and opportunities for decent work. The project facilitates the sharing of good practices and lessons learned between South-East Asian countries and China through a regional knowledge sharing network to promote productive employment and decent work for all.

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