

Breaking Barriers, Building Futures:
ASEAN Regional Dialogue on
Young People's Skills, Employability and Transition to Decent Work in ASEAN

17-18 October 2023
ASEAN Secretariat, Jakarta, Indonesia and Virtual

JOINT RECOMMENDATION

The ASEAN Secretariat, International Labour Organization (ILO), and United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) in collaboration with United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), United Nations Educational Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO) and UN Women organised the ASEAN Regional Dialogue on Young People's Skills, Employability and Transition to Decent Work in ASEAN: Breaking Barriers, Building Futures at the ASEAN Secretariat in Jakarta, Indonesia, and virtually on 17 – 18 October 2023. The event was endorsed by the ASEAN Senior Official Meeting on Youth (SOMY).

The Dialogue was attended by representatives of the SOMY, the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education (SOM-ED), the Senior Labour Officials Meeting (SLOM) and their respective Timor-Leste counterparts, employers' and workers' organisations, private sector, UN agencies, development partners, young people and civil society representatives, young entrepreneurs, and other stakeholders.

The Regional Dialogue served as a cross-sectoral, intergenerational, and multi-stakeholder knowledge exchange platform with young people's learning and skills, employability and transition to decent work in ASEAN, including pathways for green and digital skills and jobs, and bridging gender gaps¹.

The Regional Dialogue focused on four thematic areas: Inclusive, future-ready education systems; Skills development and employability; Youth employment and labour market transitions for a human-centred recovery; and Entrepreneurship. Three cross-cutting themes were mainstreamed across all thematic areas: gender equality, green and digital skills and jobs.

In order to ensure a broad range of young people's voices informed the recommendations of the Regional Dialogue, a Pulse Check was launched in September 2023. A total of 18,776 young people (69% girls) responded from across ASEAN and Timor-Leste. The results highlighted that a high proportion of respondents consider lack of quality education and skills development as the main factor that impacts youth employment in their country, followed by the economic conditions and job availability. In addition, many young respondents stated they felt the most important factor for them to access decent work is having 21st Century Skills. In

¹ Noting the 2022 ASEAN Leaders' Statement on the Application of Timor-Leste for ASEAN Membership, Timor-Leste was invited to participate in the regional dialogue.

the area of employment, a large proportion of respondents believe that the factors that concern them about their future of work and job aspirations the most is occupational safety and health and rights (including mental health) and followed by technological changes to jobs. Many young people think that the most influential factor in their decision to accept a job offer is the opportunity for growth and advancement, followed by the sense of purpose and impact. Finally, the results showed that young women are more likely to be concerned by gender equality and non-discrimination as the factor that impacts their prospects in the world of employment and career ambitions than young men.

Through inclusive dialogue that takes an intergenerational and integrated lifecycle approach that supports young people as they transition from education and training to navigate the world of work, the Regional Dialogue highlighted the importance of providing flexible, inclusive alternative learning opportunities for out-of-school adolescents and youth as well as opportunities for lifelong learning, re-skilling and upskilling, green and digital skills and jobs in both education systems and labour markets, national strategies for youth employment and integrated labour market support services and access to productive employment and decent work, as well as tackling key gender barriers faced by adolescent girls and young women.

Discussions sought to generate recommendations that support the operationalisation of the vision and areas of action identified by key ASEAN documents including, but not limited to, the *ASEAN Leaders' Statement on the Year of ASEAN Youth to Strengthen The Role of Youth in ASEAN Community-Building*, the *ASEAN Declaration on Promoting Competitiveness, Resilience and Agility of Workers for the Future of Work* and its Guidance document as well as the *ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work* and its Roadmap and the *ASEAN Declaration on Promoting Green Jobs for Equity and Inclusive Growth of ASEAN Community*, informed by the *ASEAN Youth Development Index Report (YDI) 2022*.

The Regional Dialogue exchanged views and agreed to recommend the following cross-sectoral actions to promote learning, skills development and employability of the young people of ASEAN and their transition to decent work:

1. Enable a regular intergenerational exchange of lessons, challenges, and good practices relevant to adolescents' and young people's learning and skilling, employability, engagement, and transition to decent work across ASEAN. Such exchanges should incorporate a disability inclusive and gender-responsive approach that highlights the different needs and potential contributions of young people in these areas.
2. Promote a cross-sectoral agenda on young people's learning and skilling, employability, and transition to decent work in ASEAN involving relevant sectoral bodies, governments, employers' and workers' organisations, youth organisations, development partners, private sector, civil society and UN agencies to enable meaningful progress on these issues.
3. Enable meaningful young people participation to the shared agenda for informing policies and shaping solutions to challenges being faced.

Inclusive, future-ready education systems

1. Create a strong inclusive education system, that meets the needs of diverse groups of adolescents and young people, and an enabling ecosystem that supports lifelong learning and responsiveness to green and digital economies and ensure a safe school environment for young people to participate in education.
2. Put in place institutionalised alternative learning systems (ALS) and strengthen inclusive alternative learning pathways to enable adolescents and young people who never enrolled or dropped out of formal education to participate in education and skills development opportunities which lead to recognised learning outcomes that enable further learning, entrepreneurship or productive employment. These pathways should allow customised learning to meet unique needs and capabilities and can facilitate their transition to decent work.
3. Invest in young people's skills and promote their active participation to bridge education and work gap to enable them to thrive in the evolving job markets including the green and digital economies.
4. Nurture adaptability and resilience, including by preparing young people with digital, green and 21st Century Skills in addition to foundational literacy and numeracy skills, in alignment with the forthcoming ASEAN Community Vision 2045.
5. Encourage the incorporation and/or revision of climate change curricula, including disaster risk reduction, tailoring it to the country-specific context of ASEAN Member States (AMS).

Young people's voices on inclusive, future ready education systems:

1. Involve young people in programme design and management and decision-making process.
2. Develop effective outreach strategies as well as work around changing the perception of alternative learning programmes as being "second class".
3. Explore the potentials of technology, including AI, in assisting young people in learning, identifying skillsets and job seeking.
4. Alleviate barriers to effective implementation of STEAM (Science, Technology, Engineering, Arts, and Mathematics) in early childhood and compulsory education, including the cost of equipment and inadequate training for educators, and foster strategies that work for both teachers and students, with a focus on girls, disability and other vulnerable groups.

Skills development and employability

1. Equip young people, particularly young women and girls, in the ASEAN region with lifelong learning opportunities and skills that are vital in the rapidly changing world of work, including but not limited to green, digital, STEAM, and 21st Century Skills. Expand and promote access to work-based learning opportunities for young people, including through quality apprenticeships, traineeships and other opportunities, to facilitate the transition to decent work.
2. Advance personal and professional development of young women and girls in the ASEAN region while considering their experiences, unique challenges and specific needs.
3. Enhance responsiveness of youth, labour, and education policies to technological advancements, and enable institutional frameworks to effectively engage youth and respond to their changing skills needs. Strengthen support targeting digital skills development under a lifelong learning approach with a focus on underserved young people, rural communities, and bridging the gender divide.
4. Encourage investments that can enable affordable and widespread access to digital tools and resources, particularly to underserved young people.
5. Drive a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies by identifying skills requirements for climate change adaptation, disaster risk reduction and green transition, reviewing competency standards and qualifications, enhancing curricula and assessment methods with content relevant to green jobs, as well as designing and delivering trainings that are aimed at developing skills for a transition to a green and carbon-neutral economy in collaboration with local stakeholders. Ensure policy coherence between economic and employment policies with skills development policies towards a green economy.
6. Transform education and training systems, including but not limited to the Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) sector, to prepare young people's skills to be adaptive to climate change, disaster risk reduction, and green transition. Integrate gender equality, disability and social inclusion measures in education and trainings to ensure that all young people can benefit from these transitions. Strengthen capacity building through teacher and trainer development in the area of green skills and jobs.
7. Sensitise and collaborate with employers to ensure that greening of the TVET sector is responsive to the skills demanded in the labour market for green jobs. Strengthen partnership with the employers and business membership organisations to effectively anticipate and align green skills with the TVET sector.
8. Support integrated education, training, mentorships and employment systems that assess emerging skills needs to remain responsive to labour market demands.

Young people's voices on skills development and employability:

1. Meaningfully engage young people, especially girls and vulnerable groups, in designing policies and programmes that will address their specific barriers and challenges to access skills building programmes and transition to productive employment. A girl-focused approach, including social and gender barriers, is particularly needed in STEAM and other male-dominated sectors.
2. Engage young people meaningfully to contribute to a just transition.
3. Mobilise resources, skills and decision-making platforms for young people to participate in environmental preservation.
4. Foster public-private partnerships that can offer practical solutions for green jobs and skills. They can bring innovation and cutting-edge technology to environmental challenges and create employment opportunities for young people.
5. Call for a multi stakeholder approach/ public-private partnership on upskilling and reskilling efforts for and with young people.

Youth employment and labour market transitions for a human-centred recovery

1. Invest in decent job creation for young people and prepare a future-ready workforce to drive sustainable and inclusive development in the region, as envisioned in the ASEAN Declaration on Promoting Competitiveness, Resilience, and Agility of Workers for the Future of Work.
2. Enhance the design and effective implementation of comprehensive, inclusive, and gender-responsive youth employment strategies, either standalone or as part of broader national employment policies in ASEAN towards youth-responsive policymaking for decent work.
3. Ensure that both demand and supply-side considerations are incorporated in youth employment strategies to help create decent jobs for youth, including through investments and job creation initiatives in the green and digital economies. Integrate youth and gender-responsive dimensions in broader macroeconomic and sectoral policies and improve youth employability through a lifecycle approach, building on multi-stakeholder collaboration, coordination, and robust social dialogue mechanisms. Foster policy coherence through design and operationalisation of integrated strategies for decent job creation, social protection and a just transition for young people.
4. Support progress towards the shared vision among AMS to have an articulated national policy framework and/or action plan on human resource development, as outlined in the ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work.

5. Improve the effectiveness of public employment services (PES) to support the labour market transitions of young people in AMS—aligned with the vision set forth in the ASEAN Declaration on Promoting Competitiveness, Resilience, and Agility of Workers for the Future of Work—to foster better labour market outcomes for young people, especially young women, and to equip them with information on the pre-employment process and their rights at work including, but not limited to, wages, occupational safety and health, social protection, freedom of association, and collective bargaining.² This calls for targeted, need-adapted, and inclusive delivery of employment services through multi-channel approaches, including by leveraging inclusive technological tools towards such efforts, and linked to adaptive active labour market programmes. Increase awareness among young people, including jobseekers, on their labour rights in the world of work.
6. Promote greater integration of digital technologies—guided by a tailored technology adoption strategy, dedicated mandates and budgeting, and enhanced institutional capacities based on PES in different AMS’ own capabilities and priorities—to enhance labour market information for more effective youth employment policy making and programme development; and PES efficiency and service delivery in a cost-effective manner.
7. Enhance technical infrastructure and institutional reforms of PES agencies to strengthen collaboration within and across government entities and other stakeholders, facilitate organisational change, and enhance staff training to maximise the benefits of digitalisation.

Young people’s voices on youth employment and labour market transitions for a human-centred recovery:

1. Address the impact on mental health around developing skills, gaining employability, and charting a course to decent work, such as stress and anxiety associated with job insecurity and precarious working conditions. Improve occupational safety and health mechanisms for safer and healthier workplace environments, with support from employers.
2. Increase disaggregated data availability at the national level to facilitate smooth school-to-work transition.
3. Acknowledge that access to mental health services is important to support youth in securing jobs and surviving in the world of work.

Entrepreneurship

1. Underscore that young people in ASEAN are important drivers of innovation and partners in sustainable economic growth. While entrepreneurship can provide an

² The Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare of Lao PDR has reservations on the provision of “freedom of association” and “collective bargaining” in this paragraph, as conveyed after the ASEAN Regional Dialogue on Young People’s Skills, Employability and Transition to Decent Work in ASEAN.

avenue for them to chart their paths to productive self-employment and job creation, young entrepreneurs—especially women and girls—face multi-dimensional barriers. Incorporate gender-responsive and disability inclusive approach in initiatives promoting entrepreneurship.

2. Underline the crucial importance of supporting women and youth in the context of Human Capital Development in entrepreneurship—in line with the ASEAN Strategic Action Plan for Small and Medium Enterprise (SME) Development 2016-2025.
3. Promote knowledge exchange and strengthen inclusive entrepreneurship ecosystems in ASEAN for young people. This includes equipping them, especially young women and young people from other underrepresented groups, with essential green, digital, and entrepreneurial skills and mentorship, facilitating access to finance and markets, and developing an enabling environment that encourages formalised entrepreneurship and gender-responsive and disability-inclusive business practices, towards ASEAN Community Vision 2045 in order to build a resilient, innovative, dynamic, and people-centred ASEAN that is able to anticipate opportunities and address emerging and future challenges³.
4. Incentivise and encourage entrepreneurship support organisations (ESOs) to offer programming that takes a Leave No One Behind (LNOB) approach, engaging marginalised rights-holders like young women, persons with disabilities, rural communities, indigenous youth and other underrepresented groups.

Young people's voices on entrepreneurship:

1. Recognise that young people are not a monolithic group. Consider intersecting identities and lived experiences when designing and implementing entrepreneurship programming to ensure outreach and tailored programming for historically underserved groups.
2. Implement the principle of “Nothing about us without us”: Foster continuous dialogue and partnerships with young people as equal partners, not beneficiaries, to co-create programmes and an enabling policy environment to enhance effective implementation of inclusive entrepreneurship initiatives and bridge policy to practice.
3. Promote capacity and skills building opportunities, including both hard and soft skills development, combined with mentorship in diverse sectors.
4. Offer grant- or investment-readiness support along with blended finance solutions, including through public-private partnerships, to provide capital needed to embark on an entrepreneurial journey.

Intergenerational collaboration and cross-cutting issues

³ Chairman's Statement of the 43rd ASEAN Summit

1. Enable cross-sector collaboration and intergenerational dialogue as an essential strategy to enhance young people's employability and transition to decent work, including entrepreneurship, and foster innovation while also recognising that young people constitute a heterogeneous group with different needs, identities and priorities.
2. Empower young people to become agents of change. Young people should have a meaningful role in policy and decision-making.
3. Adopt multi-stakeholder approaches to invest in decent job creation, design and operationalise national youth employment strategies, provide integrated labour market support services and demand-driven skills development in collaboration with governments, employers' and workers' organisations, education and training institutions, private sector, young people and civil society representatives and other stakeholders.
4. Call for productive partnerships among diverse stakeholders that includes private sector, and young people themselves to support women and girls, underrepresented and the most vulnerable groups, in developing relevant skills to eliminate multidimensional barriers.
5. Encourage dialogue to advance a digital economy framework agreement (DEFA) for an endorsement by all AMS with inclusion of relevant stakeholders, including young people and the private sector.
