11th Meeting of the OECD Southeast Asian Regional Policy Network on Education and Skills

OECD

11th Meeting of the OECD Southeast Asian Regional Policy Network on Education and Skills

These proceedings summarise the major discussion points from the 11th meeting of the OECD Southeast Asian Regional Policy Network (SEA RPN) on Education and Skills, held virtually on 24 November 2021. Approximately 80 participants from ASEAN, partner countries in Southeast Asia, OECD member countries and international organisations joined the event to discuss recent skills challenges and opportunities in the region.

For any questions about this document, please contact: Samuel Kim, Policy Analyst, OECD Centre for Skills (SKC), at Samuel.KIM@oecd.org; and Kristine Langenbucher, Head of Unit, Local Employment, Skills and Social Innovation (LESI), Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities at Kristine.LANGENBUCHER@oecd.org.

■ Overview of the network

The network aims to foster knowledge exchange in support of national growth and regional integration by encouraging a whole-of-government approach to the design and implementation of skills policies. It builds on the platform of the OECD's Employment and Skills Strategies in Southeast Asia (ESSSA) initiative, which has been networking skills and labour ministries from ASEAN member countries since 2008. With the growing participation by Southeast Asian countries in the OECD's international education surveys (PISA, TALIS and PIAAC), OECD Reviews on Local Job Creation, OECD Reviews on Vocational Education and Training (VET) and the OECD Regional Skills Strategy for Southeast Asia, the Regional Policy Network provides valuable comparative data and analysis to help countries in the region build more effective and efficient education, skills and employment policies.

■ Overview of the 11th meeting

Since the network was established in 2008, annual meetings have been set up to provide a platform for exchange between senior leaders from Southeast Asian countries, OECD countries and international organisations on how to adapt education, skills and employment policies to a rapidly changing environment. Since the last in-person meeting in Vientiane, Lao PDR in 2018, COVID-19 has prevented meetings of the network.

The 11th Meeting, held virtually on 24 November 2021, relaunched the dialogue and peer exchange of the network to discuss lessons learned from the COVID-19 crisis and its impacts on education, skills and employment policies in the longer-term. Key objectives included:

- Strengthening **links between OECD and Southeast Asian countries** to support Southeast Asian education, employment and skills policies;
- Learning from Southeast Asia's education, employment and skills **responses during COVID-19 and strategies for addressing longer-term challenges** resulting from megatrends, such as globalisation, climate change, technological progress and demographic change; and
- Identifying **innovations and best practices**, and **generating input for ongoing OECD work**, including the **OECD Skills Strategy Southeast Asia** Phase II project, which builds on the foundations of the first phase, deepening the analysis of the impact of megatrends (e.g. digitalization, globalization, climate change, migration, demographic change) as well as COVID-19 on the skills needs of the region. This phase also examines countries' performance in greater depth, features international good practices that could be of interest to countries in the region, and provides high-level policy recommendations for the region.

OECD SOUTHEAST ASIA REGIONAL POLICY NETWORK ON EDUCATION AND SKILLS
24 November 2021

Welcome and opening session

Speakers

Mr. Alexander Böhmer
Head of South and
Southeast Asia – OECD

Ms. Mega Irena
Assistant
Director/Head, Labour
and Civil Service
Division – ASEAN

Mr. Alexander Böhmer of the OECD Global Relations Secretariat and Ms. Mega Irena of ASEAN welcomed participants to the event. Around 80 participants represented a wide range of stakeholders from Southeast Asia, including national agencies with responsibilities for skills, education and employment policy, as well as employers, researchers, and international organisations.

The OECD recognises Southeast Asia as one of the most dynamic regions in the world, and has developed a productive and mutually beneficial relationship with partner countries in the region over the past 25 years. In 2008, the Employment and Skills Strategies in Southeast Asia (ESSSA) initiative was established, paving the way for the delivery of numerous reports, surveys and events. Since 2014, the OECD has also been implementing the Southeast Asia Regional Programme (SEARP), under which the activities of the Regional Policy Network for Education and Skills and 12 other work streams are subsumed. The network's activities include past in-person meetings hosted by Southeast Asian governments; reviews on education systems and VET; employment and skills strategies; and the integration of ASEAN countries into the OECD's TALIS, PISA and PIAAC exercises. The 11th meeting of the Regional Policy Network on Education and Skills builds on this long-standing partnership between ASEAN and the OECD, and provided valuable contributions to Phase II of the OECD Skills Strategy project in Southeast Asia (OECD SKC) and the Local Employment and Economic Development Programme (OECD CFE).

The ASEAN Secretariat reaffirmed their partnership with the OECD, highlighting the importance of a collaborative and coordinated approach to strengthening the readiness of the Southeast Asian workforce. In the region, as with the rest of the world, the COVID-19 pandemic has led to tremendous losses in employment, working hours and income, and not all countries were prepared to respond effectively. The world of work and the workplace have been transformed as a result of the crisis, accelerating changes had were already underway due to the impact of ongoing mega-trends, such as an ageing population, globalisation, migration, technological progress and climate change.

ASEAN has put in place various initiatives and strategies to adapt to the various megatrends, recover from the COVID-19 pandemic, and improve regional resilience against future shocks. These include the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework, the ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work, and the establishment of the ASEAN TVET Council. The ASEAN is pursuing these initiatives with the support of partners such as the OECD, who is bringing in expertise on how to improve the responsiveness of training systems to rapidly-evolving labour market needs, promote inclusiveness in skills development and use, and build a culture of lifelong learning in the region.

Setting the context: Skills opportunities and challenges for Southeast Asia in light of megatrends and COVID-19

Speakers

Mr. Andrew Bell
Head, OECD Skills Strategy – OECD Centre for Skills

Ms. Kristine Langenbucher
Head, Employment and Skills Unit – OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities

Mr. Ingo Imhoff
Programme Director, Regional Cooperation in TVET/RECOTVET – Deutsche Gesellschaft für international Zusammenarbeit (GIZ)

In assessing challenges and making full use of opportunities, it is useful to examine the skills landscape in Southeast Asia in relation to ongoing global mega-trends and the COVID-19 pandemic. Phase II of the OECD Skills Strategy in Southeast Asia has produced preliminary insights into the effects of current megatrends (e.g., ageing population, rapid technological change, climate change and migration) on the supply and demand of skills in the region:

- Historically, Southeast Asian countries have benefitted from rapid population growth and a young population, reaping the advantages of a demographic dividend. However, as of 2021, the share of the working-age population has begun to decrease, and the shares of individuals over 65 years of age and of individuals between 0-14 years of age have begun to increase. With population ageing, it is crucial for Southeast Asian countries to equip the current young workforce with the right skills needed to ensure productivity, which will drive the region's growth over the long term.

- Southeast Asian countries are more vulnerable to automation than most OECD counterparts, highlighting the need to ensure that education systems are able to equip the students of today with the skills they need for the new jobs and tasks of tomorrow. Furthermore, what is hidden behind national averages are often significant differences within countries. Opportunities to re- and up-skill are, hence, key to avoiding the displacement of workers and facilitating their successful transition between jobs and sectors.

- Climate change mitigation is a priority for Southeast Asian countries, given the region's vulnerability to extreme weather events. As economies become greener, investment priorities

change, and consumption habits evolve, labour markets will also begin to demand different skills from workers.

- Migration within and outside of ASEAN is significant. In host countries, migrants could contribute to economic growth by increasing the supply of skills, especially if these skills are used fully and effectively. However, emigration of high-skilled workers can translate into lost talent, which may be offset by remittances, which are a significant source of income for many ASEAN countries.

- COVID-19 has changed the world of work, and a significant proportion of the ASEAN workforce could transition to remote work over the next few years. This shift necessitates an increased focus on the development of digital skills and the provision of support systems that would allow workers to make full use of these skills.

These megatrends have contributed to the prevalence of skills mismatches and skills shortages, across Southeast Asia just as in many OECD countries. These mismatches represent an inefficient allocation of human resources and are significant barriers to economic growth. Although the increase in enrolment rates in all levels of education, especially at higher levels, is noteworthy, it is crucial to ensure that graduates are able to find jobs that match their qualifications and their fields of study.

Technical, vocational and educational training (TVET) plays an important role in balancing skills supply and demand, and therefore reducing skills matches, as highlighted by the *Regional Cooperation Programme to improve the training of TVET personnel* (RECOTVET), implemented by GIZ. However, enrolment in TVET in ASEAN countries remains relatively low in comparison to OECD countries, and TVET training outcomes often do not match the skills needs of employers. The COVID-19 pandemic poses additional challenges for the resilience of TVET systems, imposing the requirement to offer new digital TVET training solutions, as well as digital management of systems (e.g. digital marketing, online admissions and record management, collection of fees), which must be supported by access to: broadband; computers, especially by students in rural areas; and access to user-friendly online learning software. However, such transformation also relies on TVET teachers having the skills and competences to deliver such new forms or learning and student take-up.

The OECD's RPN on Education and Skills thereby offers an opportunity for Southeast Asian and OECD countries to engage in peer learning, exchanging information about research findings and best practices on how to upgrade TVET infrastructures, promote teacher training, and adopt new forms of learning. This requires seizing opportunities to build back better, including a strengthened role for Public-Private Partnerships in the delivery of TVET, more systematic upgrading of TVET (eco)systems (including regulation, infrastructure, equipment, teacher training, curricula and didactics), improvements in labour market information and skills forecasting as a basis for reforms and structuring, the quality assurance of (digital) educational resources, and research and mutual exchange on what works when and for whom to support re-and upskilling and life-long learning.

In sum, the influence of these megatrends and of the COVID-19 pandemic underline the need for flexible and adaptable skill systems that are able to respond to changes very rapidly. Discussions among the speakers and the audience identified several ways to achieve this in Southeast Asia, for example by anticipating future skills needs to the extent possible, improving participation in TVET and strengthening linkages between educational institutions and employers.

Links to presentations from the opening session

Skills implications of megatrends from an international and national perspective
Mr. Andrew Bell
Head, OECD Skills Strategy – OECD Centre for Skills

How do skills opportunities and challenges manifest themselves in different local contexts and sectors?
Ms. Kristine Langenbucher
Head, Employment and Skills Unit – OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities

Skills for Southeast Asia: How to address challenges and seize opportunities?
Mr. Ingo Imhoff
Programme Director, Regional Cooperation in TVET/RECOTVET – GIZ

Breakout session 1: **What policies have countries implemented to develop relevant skills over the life course?**

Moderator   **Panelists**

Ms. Marieke Vandeweyer
Head, Vocational Education and Training (VET) – OECD Centre for Skills

Ms. Siripan Choomnoom
Senior Advisor – Vocational Education Commission, Thailand

Ms. Gillian Ong
Manager of Strategic Planning Division – SkillsFuture Singapore

Ms. Laura Pineiro Nogueira
Chief Technical Advisor for TVET/Skills for Tourism Project of LuxDev, Luxembourg

In order to keep pace with megatrends, it is crucial for countries to develop their workforce's skills over the life course. There are three ways by which this could be achieved. Firstly, broadening access to, and ensuring retention in, skills development opportunities for youth and adults remains a fundamental area of intervention. Secondly, there is a need to take into consideration the need to increase the quality of skills development, which could be achieved by supporting the training of teachers and educators, improving digital learning environments, and tracking the progress of individual learners. Thirdly, skills development needs to be remain relevant to the needs of individuals, workplaces and societies. This could be achieved through the promotion of work-based learning, the strengthening of skills validation and certification, as well as the implementation of effective career guidance services.

Thailand, for instance, introduced initiatives to strengthen the technical and vocational education and training (TVET) system. The country is not only making efforts to expand the dual VET system by involving more SMEs, but is also striving to link curricula to occupational skills standards. Moreover, the recognition of prior learning (RPL) in the Thai VET system is considered a key tool in facilitating access. In order to keep the TVET teachers' skills up to date, Thailand encourages them to complete internships in the industry. The country's key priorities for its VET system include the strengthening of work-based learning, the promotion of the involvement of all relevant stakeholders, and efforts to innovate the TVET system as a whole.

Singapore developed SkillsFuture to respond to global megatrends, including technological progress and globalisation, as well as to local contexts such as an ageing population, high educational aspirations, and low interest in and limited opportunities for lifelong learning. In order to enhance individuals' skills development, SkillsFuture has created numerous initiatives, such as a personal learning account, SkillsFuture Credit, which was recently topped up to further promote training, dedicated training and hiring subsidies for mid-career workers, career guidance services, and an online careers information portal. Moreover, SkillsFuture supports enterprises to provide training through multiple means, including a SkillsFuture Enterprise Credit, strategies to encourage knowledge-sharing, efforts to expand and strengthen work-based learning in TVET, and the creation of a National Centre of Excellence for Workplace Learning to support SMEs. In addition, SkillsFuture contributes to the national SGUnited Jobs and Skills Package, which aims to create close to 100,000 opportunities to support jobseekers in response to the pandemic. In 2020, 540,000 individuals and 14,000 enterprises were able to benefit from their support.

In Lao PDR, the Luxembourg Development Cooperation Agency (LuxDev) has been implementing a Skills for Tourism Project in cooperation with the Ministry of Education and Sports. The project aims to promote the sustainable and inclusive growth of the tourism and hospitality sector in Lao PDR, following the COVID-19 pandemic's adverse impacts, including the loss of employment for 30,000 people. Running from January 2020 until mid-2022, the project is shifting the focus of interventions to upskilling and long-term TVET programmes, implementing training on hygiene standards, and moving to an online

learning environment. The project highlights the importance of tailoring interventions to local needs, as countries such as Lao PDR require assistance in providing basic IT infrastructure (e.g. Wi-Fi, media studio, conference equipment, and tablets) and in developing digital skills. Moreover, collaboration and interconnectedness are essential when creating opportunities for skills development and adapting them to change.

Despite the many initiatives undertaken by these countries, challenges remain in terms of skills development in Southeast Asia. One of these concerns the question of how to make TVET a more attractive choice for students and their parents. In response, Thailand has implemented open house programmes to introduce students to TVET, while LuxDev in Lao PDR started a social media campaign targeted at parents, which led to increases in TVET enrolment. Other areas for intervention include making TVET more accessible for adult learners, increasing training participation among lower-skilled adults, rendering the tourism sector more attractive, creating opportunities for re- and up-skilling for workers formerly employed in tourism who are unlikely to return to this sector, and providing training opportunities for those newly joining the sector once it recovers from the effects of COVID-19.

Links to presentations from breakout session 1

Introduction to breakout session 1: Developing relevant skills across the life course
Ms. Marieke Vandeweyer
Head, Vocational Education and Training (VET) – OECD Centre for Skills

The challenges, opportunities and recent initiatives in the Thai VET system
Ms. Siripan Choomnoom
Senior Advisor – Vocational Education Commission, Thailand

The SkillsFuture Movement for Individuals and Enterprises
Ms. Gillian Ong
Manager of Strategic Planning Division – SkillsFuture Singapore

Skills for Tourism Project: Adaptation: education, skills development and employment
Ms. Laura Pineiro Nogueira
Chief Technical Advisor for TVET/Skills for Tourism Project of LuxDev, Luxembourg

---

Breakout session 2: What policies have countries implemented to use skills effectively in work and society?

Moderator

Mr. Andrew Bell
Head, OECD Skills
Strategy – OECD
Centre for Skills

Panelists

Mr. Thomas Mathew
Group CEO –
TalentCorp, Malaysia

Mr. Young Saing Kim
Research Fellow – Korea
Research Institute for
Vocational Education and
Training, Korea

Making full and effective use of skills involves promoting participation in the labour market, reducing skills mismatches, making intensive use of skills at work and in society, and increasing demand for higher-level skills. However, more can be done to make effective use of skills at work and in everyday life in Southeast Asia. Informal employment as a share of total employment remains significantly high at 72%, posing various economic, social and health risks for workers and providing little opportunity for on-the-job training. While labour market participation rates are relatively high across the region, there are significant barriers for disadvantaged groups such as women, youth and migrants. During the COVID-19 pandemic, employment gaps have widened as a result of increases in domestic

work for women and bottlenecks in school-to-work transition for recent graduates and young professionals.

Governments in the region, such as Malaysia, are implementing support measures to promote labour market participation and increase the employability of the workforce. These interventions start even before students leave school and formally enter the labour market. For example, *mynext* is an integrated platform that connects an ecosystem of students, universities and employers. It allows students to not only find structured internship programmes, but also identify deficits in their current skill sets through psychometric profiling exercises on the *mynext* platform. The initiative has been implemented in more than 130 higher education institutions in Malaysia and has helped reduce the gap between the skills sought by employers and the skills that recent graduates possess.

Malaysia is also taking active steps to promote wellbeing in the workplace and to eliminate employment barriers for disadvantaged groups such as women. The Ministry of Human Resources has prioritised flexible working arrangements as a key response to the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as a long-term talent retention tool. This includes flexible or staggered working hours, the option to leave early from work, teleworking and job sharing. These arrangements promote wellbeing in the workplace, but also allow women to overcome barriers to full employment, such as domestic obligations and cultural expectations to prioritise family life. Malaysia's Career Comeback Programme, for example, facilitates the re-entry of women who have been out of the labour market for more than six months and connects them with potential employers.

Korea has taken steps to prepare skills systems, including TVET, for major disruptions in the world of work, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, as well as for long-term structural changes resulting from technological progress. The pandemic has resulted in closures of places of learning and work, and has led to widespread concerns among workers about job security and employment risks. While the shift to online and blended TVET has ensured the continuity of learning and reduced disruptions, many countries in Southeast Asia, such as Myanmar, still lack the necessary infrastructure and hardware needed to access such learning resources. Furthermore, many teachers are unprepared to effectively handle online environments. Responding to these challenges in TVET systems requires skill and foresight among government leaders, particularly in relation to the use of digital and cyber skills that will continue to persist after the pandemic and become even more complex as technology advances.

Going forward, Southeast Asia could benefit from targeted interventions that not only address barriers to the full of use of skills, but also increase the demand for higher-level skills. Most ASEAN countries produce fewer innovative outputs than OECD countries and have relatively low government expenditure on research and development (R&D), with Singapore as an exception. The region also has a lower density of start-ups and new business registrations, with many entrepreneurs, especially women, facing multiple barriers to entry, including lack of financial support. As new sectors emerge and the demand for skills evolves, countries in Southeast Asia could benefit from boosting up- and re-skilling efforts, which would allow workers to quickly move across sectors and adapt to new jobs.

Links to presentations from breakout session 2

Introduction to breakout session 2: Using skills effectively in work and in society
Mr. Andrew Bell
Head, OECD Skills Strategy – OECD Centre for Skills

TalentCorp's Role in Addressing National Talent Needs
Mr. Thomas Mathew
Group CEO – TalentCorp, Malaysia

TVET Policy During COVID-19
Mr. Young Saing Kim
Research Fellow – Korea Research Institute for Vocational Education and Training, Korea

Breakout session 3: **What governance arrangements of the employment and skills system have supported countries' efforts?**

Moderator

Ms. Kristine Langenbucher
Head, Employment and Skills Unit – OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities

Panelists

Ms. Dominique Rubia-Tutay
Assistant Secretary, Employment and General Administration Cluster – Department of Labor and Employment, Philippines

Mr. Muchtar Azis
Director of Competency Standards and Training Programs – Ministry of Manpower, Indonesia

Ms. Katerina Lawler
Assistant Secretary – Department of Education, Skills and Employment, Australia

In order to effectively implement employment, education and skills policies, strong governance arrangements are required to make skills systems responsive rapidly changing labour market demands, including in different local contexts. This requires coordination across different ministries and levels of government, as well as engaging employers, training providers, and adult learners in the design, tailoring and implementation of policies. This process needs to build on integrated information systems and requires financial arrangements that are conducive to supporting life-long learning. Employment, education and skills systems already faced the challenge to respond to megatrends such as globalisation, technological progress, population ageing, migration, climate change. The COVID-19 pandemic introduced further challenges for skills governance systems such as increased demand for certain skills, but at the same time massive losses in formal, non-formal and informal learning. The session discussed countries implementation of recovery strategies and how some measures taken in response to the crisis provide valuable lessons for reforming skills governance systems going forward.

In the Philippines, the National Employment Recovery Strategy (NERS) supported the response through the COVID-19 pandemic. All responsible government ministries, as well as 20 government agencies are involved in its implementation. The NERS is based on four pillars: i) restarting economic activities, ii) restoring business confidence, iii) upgrading & retooling of the workforce and iv) labour market access facilitation.

The National Employment Recovery Strategy (NERS) in the Philippines
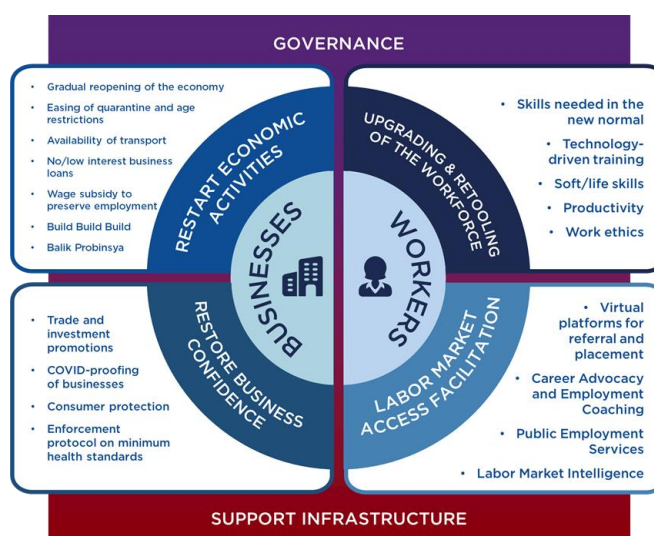
Source: Department of Labor and Employment, Philippines.

The NERS pillar on upgrading & retooling of the workforce builds on the Philippine Qualifications Framework (PQF) and Philippine Skills Framework (PSF). The PQF was put in place already prior the pandemic. It is a quality-assured national system for the development, recognition, and award of qualifications based on standards of knowledge, skills, and values acquired in different ways and methods by learners and workers of the country. The PQF is institutionalised by virtue of a law. The Department of Education, Technical Education and Skills Development Authority, Commission on Higher Education, Professional Regulation Commission and Department of Labor and Employment serve as the implementing arm of the PQF. These agencies also constitute the PQF-National Coordinating Council, together with the economic sector representative and an industry sector representative to harmonize and promote seamless education and training system. In June 2021, the Department of Trade and Industry, together with 10 other national government agencies forged an agreement on the PSF, an initiative towards building the country's human capital through upskilling, reskilling and equipping the workforce with new digital skills to prepare them for the future of work.

Skills development is divided between different levels of government in Indonesia. While supporting local responsiveness, a problem is the lack of resources some local governments face. Qualified instructors are difficult to recruit by local governments, many training facilities are not well equipped and provinces have limited budget. The Ministry of National Development Planning (BAPPENAS), in collaboration with the Ministry of Manpower, the Ministry of Industry and the Ministry of Education and Culture, has therefore set up pilot Skills Development Centres (SDCs). The SDC bring together industry representatives, policy makers, academia, vocational schools and training centres to map local labour market needs, available trainings and vacancies. While initial evaluations are promising, SDCs also face challenges: Local government leaders need to buy in and synchronisation of programmes between regional offices is difficult so there are quality differences in training delivery.

In Australia, agility and responsiveness in the adult learning system have proven to be key during the COVID-19 pandemic. Skills policies are a shared responsibility between national, state and territory government with shared funding. States and territories are responsible for the delivery of skills policies, the national government is responsible for the overarching architecture, while employers have a key role in the development of training programmes. Australia's adult education system faced a number of problems before the COVID-19 pandemic. Stakeholders flagged that training programmes are too complex and bureaucratic to keep up with labour market megatrends such as technological change. With the COVID-19 pandemic, the need for a more agile and responsive system grew. In response to the pandemic, the Australian Government established an Emergency Response Subcommittee under the Australian Industry and Skills Committee, the independent body that oversees industry engagement on training development. The Subcommittee engaged a small group of experts, streamlined the development of education and training programmes and worked more closely with employers, providers and students. This resulted in training programmes being designed and delivered in a matter of weeks instead of months.

Going forward, additional structural reforms are still needed to future-proof the Australian VET system, but the Emergency Reponses provides valuable lessons for those future reforms. The current reform agenda aims to include employers more deeply in the VET system. Under the new system, similar industries will be combined into industry clusters. The key idea behind the smaller number of clusters as compared to individual industries is to foster cooperation between sectors; smaller sectors skills will likely be similar. Skills ministers will continue to set the overarching standards and policies for all industry clusters. However, the industry clusters will have much broader responsibilities than before. They will be responsible for workforce planning through forecasting of skills across different educational pathways, training product development, implementation and monitoring of products. Particular emphasis will be put on working with employers to offer more work placements.

A key element for employees is ensuring that they have information on labour market and training opportunities at their fingertips. This includes information on vacancies, as well as information on education and training programmes. The Philippines recently introduced the public vacancy platform PhilJobNet. Thailand also launched a new online platform, which is both an online vacancy database as well as including information on training/education programmes on one site. Australia's online vacancy platform is called JobActive (powered by JobSearch), while the platform My Skills provides support citizens make choices about training options. A further platform Skills Match supports workers and job seekers match their current skills and experience to new jobs.

Links to presentations from breakout session 3

Introduction to breakout session 3: Governance of skills systems
Ms. Kristine Langenbucher
Head, Employment and Skills Unit – OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities

Closing session

Speakers

Ms. El Iza Mohamedou
Head of the Centre –
OECD Centre
for Skills

Ms. Karen Maguire
Head of Division, Local
Employment, Skills and
Social Innovation Division –
OECD Centre for
Entrepreneurship, SMEs,
Regions and Cities

Several questions and areas for exploration remain, specifically on how to translate the discussions from the 11th meeting of the SEA RPN into comprehensive, well-rounded policies at the country level and ensure their effective implementation on the ground. There is a continued need to build local capacity for the development and the full use of skills in Southeast Asia, in partnership with innovative actors, such as those from the private sector. This process entails tailoring policies according to the specific needs and sectoral specialisations of cities and rural communities in the region. While the discussions of the event centred on digital skills, especially in the context of COVID-19 response and recovery, there remain opportunities to foster other types of skills, such as creativity and entrepreneurial skills, which are important drivers of innovation and growth in the region.

Several activities have been lined up as a follow-up to the event, which form part of the work on the OECD Skills Strategy Project in Southeast Asia (OECD Centre for Skills) and the Local Employment and Economic Development Programme (OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities). As part of OECD Skills Strategy Project in Southeast Asia, a questionnaire will be distributed to relevant ministries and national statistical offices to gather information about the various skills challenges they face, as well as the relevant datasets and policies put in place to address them. The findings of the questionnaire, together with the insights gathered from the SEA RPN event, will be key input to Phase II of the OECD Skills Strategy Project, which will result in the publication of the Skills Strategy for Southeast Asia. The preliminary findings of the report will be presented at the OECD Southeast Asia Regional Programme (SEARP) Ministerial Conference in February 2022 in Seoul, while the final report will be launched in the second quarter of 2022. Moreover, plans are underway to initiate a third phase for the project, which would provide in-depth analyses of the skills performance of individual countries in Southeast Asia.

The next meeting of the SEA RPN is scheduled to take place in the third or fourth quarter of 2022.