

SUMMARY DOCUMENT

22 November 2023 | Virtual

**13th Meeting of the OECD Southeast Asian Regional Policy Network
on Education and Skills**

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These proceedings summarise the major discussion points from the 13th meeting of the OECD Southeast Asian Regional Policy Network (SEA RPN) on Education and Skills, held virtually on 22 November 2023. 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.

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■ 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 [OECD National Skill Strategies](#), as well as with the recent completion of 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 13th 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. After a break due to the COVID-19 pandemic, the meetings of the network restarted in 2021 in a virtual format, with a focus on skills opportunities and challenges for Southeast Asia in light of megatrends and COVID-19: Find 2021 meeting summary [here](#) and the 2022 meeting summary [here](#).

The 13th Meeting, held virtually on 22 November 2023, focused on the topic of “Skills for the green and digital transitions” – recognising that these transitions are rapidly reshaping societies and economies, with major consequences for the skills that people need to develop. Key objectives of the event included:

- Strengthening the cooperation between the OECD and Southeast Asia to develop skills that support a shift towards greener growth and sustainable development.
- Discussing the effects of the rapid rise of Artificial Intelligence (AI) on education and skills systems.
- Proposing skill strategies for countries to further strengthen the digital skills of its people.



Welcome and opening session

Speakers



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



Ms. Rodora Turalde Babaran,
Director of Human Development
at ASEAN

Mr. Alexander Böhmer of the OECD Global Relations Secretariat and Ms. Rodora Turalde Babaran of ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department of the ASEAN Secretariat opened the 13th meeting. Participants included 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 understand Southeast Asia as an active, dynamic and important region for global cooperation. Over the past 25 years, the OECD has built strong relationships with countries in the region, cultivating many mutual interests. An important example is the the Employment and Skills Strategies in Southeast Asia (ESSSA) initiative which was founded in 2008. This led to the creation of many reports, surveys, and events. The initiative involved meetings hosted by Southeast Asian governments, assessments of education and vocational training, and discussions on employment and skills strategies. ASEAN countries were also included in the OECD's TALIS, PISA, and PIAAC activities. Developing skills in Southeast Asia is crucial for attracting foreign investments, especially in sectors facing challenges from digital and green changes. This has been highlighted in various meetings between Southeast Asia and the OECD. Within ASEAN, focusing on developing skills in rural areas is a top priority.

Addressing skills for the digital and green transition in Southeast Asia is both significant and timely. A key issue to discuss is the issue of reshaping education to prepare students for a greener labour market. This event is underlying the shared effort of OECD and ASEAN for building a robust knowledge base and discussing experience and expertise for a sustainable economic model in the future. Recently, the commitment has led to the adoption of the ASEAN declaration on the digital transformation of education systems. This significant achievement will shape the trajectory of the education systems in the region, together with the vision outlined in the ASEAN Education Committee 2025, and the ASEAN Digital

Masterplan 2025. The combined declaration and policy will support the efforts to better prepare the region's future workforce with the right skills and knowledge for the future. These efforts are also articulated in the ASEAN Declaration for Human Resource Development for the changing world of work. Based on the declaration, the ASEAN council has adopted a roadmap to increase the resilience and adaptability of students to disruptive technological changes. Going forward it will be important to recognise the interconnectedness between government policy, a sustainable future economy, and digital and green skills.

Keynote presentation on key findings from the “OECD Skills Outlook 2023: Skills for a Resilient Green and Digital Transition”

Speaker



**Ms. Francesca
Borgonovi**

Lead Skills Analysis team,
Centre for Skills, OECD

Ms. Francesca Borgonovi, who is leading the Skills Analysis team of the OECD Centre for Skills presented key findings of the “OECD Skills Outlook 2023: Skills for a Resilient Green and Digital Transition”. This edition of the Skills Outlook highlights that skills policies will help to ensure that people develop diverse skillsets that will be key to build a resilient green and digital transition.

To start, learning environments will need to be adjusted and people will need to develop a range of skills and attitudes that will help them adapt to new environmental conditions. Extreme heat and air pollution will have an impact on skills acquisition across the life course. For example, air pollution can contribute to reduced school attendance due to impaired health (e.g. asthma) and lower cognitive ability and performance on high-stakes exams. Extreme heat can also result in lower willingness to engage in cognitive activities, as well as reduced work attendance and increased breaks by working adults. Countries should adapt learning environments accordingly and support individuals where possible.

Countries should ensure that achieving ambitious climate objectives does not lead to labour market vulnerability. Promoting a just and inclusive green transition means putting in place strategies to support workers whose employment opportunities will be most affected. Upskilling and reskilling efforts can help them find employment in sectors and occupations for which new opportunities are arising, along with social assistance and other active labour market policies to support the most affected individuals and communities. People will also need to develop more diverse skills set in response to the green transition, with a more important role for skills such as: i) ‘working alongside people’ (e.g. assisting and caring for others, communicating with others, and taking initiative); ii) ‘working alongside technology’ (e.g. software development, analysing data and information), and iii) ‘skills needed across occupations and industries’ (e.g. making decisions and solving problems, dependability, achievement and effort). In this context, VET will play an important role, since VET traditionally prepared people for middle-skill jobs that are likely to be affected by the green transition. VET should focus on the development of skills that match new technologies and ways of production, and it should train both young people and up- or re-skill adults.

Preparing people for the green transition will require strengthening their environmental sustainability competence. Investing in youth is key to achieving green objectives in the long term, by equipping them with the skills and the will to protect the environment both at work and in everyday life. To this end, education systems should equip all young people with an understanding of science and scientific phenomena that will allow them to make informed decisions. At the same time, having the skill to act is not sufficient and needs to be accompanied by efforts to ensure young people develop the attitudes and motivation to act for environmental sustainability.

With the rapid rise of AI, it will be important to identify emerging skills needs to more effectively operate in information-rich societies and work alongside emerging generative AI systems. OECD data shows that not all young people have a strong knowledge of the scientific process, and not all students have been taught strategies to detect whether information online is subjective or biased. Furthermore, many young people have insufficient levels of text comprehension skills but are overconfident in their abilities. It is a particular challenge that especially disadvantaged students do not always have an opportunity to develop these skills that are needed to operate in information-rich societies.

AI professionals will also need to develop a wider set of skills and attitudes that will allow them to develop ethical and trustworthy AI systems. The demand for individuals with the skills to develop, modify and adapt AI systems has increased in recent years, and interestingly, the employers seeking AI talent generally ask for much more than AI-related skills. In addition to technical skills (e.g. computer science, Python), online vacancies for AI professionals also indicate the need for communication, leadership and problem-solving skills, among others. Responding to this demand, countries will need to equip AI professionals with these diverse skills sets and ensure that they develop AI systems in ways that promote social well-being.

Countries should also promote health literacy to protect communities from infodemics. OECD research shows that there are large differences within and across countries concerning different health literacy tasks, such as judging advantages/disadvantages of different treatment options, understanding information about recommended health screening or examinations, and more. However, there is clear evidence that health literacy matters. For instance, health literacy is associated with healthier lifestyles, such as engaging in physical activities.

Finally, supporting language learning will help to facilitate interlinguistic communication in the digital age. In order to make the most of information, one has to understand it in the language in which it is produced and exchanged. Although AI machine translation technologies are developing very rapidly, they have still not substituted language skills in communication. English is the most widely used language worldwide, especially in scientific exchanges and online, and as a result, English language skills are highly demanded in labour markets across the world. Across the OECD, 1 in 3 of all online vacancies either explicitly or implicitly required applicants to have at least some knowledge of English. Young people are increasingly building their language skills from a young age. However, large disparities in levels of language learning exist not only across countries, but also within them. In particular, in secondary school young people attending vocational programmes are considerably less likely to have the opportunity to engage in language learning in class.

Links to presentations from the opening session

Skills for the Green and Digital Transition

Ms. Francesca Borgonovi
Lead Skills Analysis team, Centre for Skills, OECD

Panel discussion: Reflecting on findings from the Skills Outlook 2023 and discuss the latest skills policy developments in Southeast Asia

Panellists



Ms. Soon Joo Gog
Chief Skills Officer,
SkillsFuture
Singapore



Mr. Damian Oliver
Assistant Secretary
Workforce Futures at
Jobs and Skills Australia



Mr. Young Saing Kim
Research Fellow, Korea
Research Institute for
Vocational Education &
Training (KRIVET)



Mr. Alexander Tsironis
Education Specialist,
Asian Development Bank

The panel discussion critically examined two pivotal issues within the context of the green and digital transition. As countries navigate this transformative era, the first part delved into the strategic approach for equipping individuals with the necessary skills. The second part turns the spotlight on policy recommendations for governments, urging a careful balance between the development of specific green skills and broader skill enhancement.

The exploration of workforce preparation challenges for the green and digital transition revealed a prominent issue, the absence of a clear definition for green jobs. This lack of clarity, which was highlighted in a recent report by the Asian Development Bank on “Preparing the Workforce for the Low-Carbon Economy: A Closer Look at Green Jobs and Green Skills”, poses difficulties in anticipating the skills essential for a low carbon economy. The speakers underscored the imperative for detailed green skills forecasts to provide a more transparent framework for education systems.

Effectively supporting workers to develop the right skills for the green and digital transition will be a major challenge for countries in Southeast Asia. Speakers drew attention to the diverse skills profiles required across different jobs undergoing the green transition, emphasising the need for tailored preparation strategies. Australia, shed light on the intricacies of developing and utilising new and existing skills, particularly for workers with extensive formal training histories, a point that was also raised in the study “Clean Energy Generation: workforce needs for a net zero economy” by Jobs and Skills Australia. The cost and information barriers that prevent workers from participating in training should also be effectively addressed, for instance with subsidies and career coaches.

The difficulty of motivating SMEs to participate in training courses was discussed by speakers. The Singaporean approach, involving large corporations in training SMEs present in their supply chain and offering substantial subsidies for skill courses, emerged as a notable strategy. The discussion also delved into breaking down information barriers for businesses and ensuring a sufficient number of trainers for individuals to acquire the necessary skills.

Another challenge encompassed the responsiveness of the education supply side to rapidly evolving industrial needs. In Southeast Asia, discussions unveiled challenges stemming from a misalignment between slow industrialisation and outdated education systems. Notable hurdles included insufficient knowledge and a perceived resource drain for the green transition in developing countries. Speakers underscored the importance of updating curricula and adapting qualifications to a changing context. Modular learning and Massive Open Online Courses (MOOCs) will also help to make training more accessible for workers and more responsive to changing skills needs. The importance of technical and vocational education and training (TVET), with its close links to the labour market, and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses were also highlighted by speakers.

In terms of policy advice, the panel underscored the significance of partnerships, both between developed and developing countries and between the public and private sectors. They cautioned against excessive focus on specific green skills at the expense of broader skill development. More broad

and transferable skills are often mentioned as essential in a new greener economy. A key recommendation emphasised aligning business initiatives with skills transition, prioritising support for the business transformation before facilitating the skills transition. Furthermore, the necessity for collaboration between industries and educational institutions to ensure holistic workforce development was highlighted. For instance, Sectoral Skills Councils could play an important role in ensuring a coordinated approach in the sectors most affected by the green and digital transition. The discussion concluded with a plea for international assistance in initiating skills development for the green transition, with organisations like the OECD potentially playing a pivotal role.

Presentations on recent OECD research concerning green and digital skills



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



Mr. Andrew Bell
Head, OECD Skills Strategies, and Deputy Head OECD Centre for Skills

The CFE LEED programme recently published the report “Job Creation and Local Economic Development 2023: Bridging the Great Green Divide”, which maps the effects of the green transition in regional labour markets. The report is divided in four parts, covering methodology, main findings, relevant lessons from other similar transitions, and policy recommendations and best practice examples. The study elaborates significantly on the different ways of defining green jobs and argues why taking a bottom-up task-based approach might be the most feasible for research and mapping purposes. The study finds that 18% of jobs in the OECD have a significant share of green tasks in 2022, this is up from 16% in 2012. It is also observed that within countries, the number of green jobs can differ significantly from sometimes less than 10% in certain regions, whilst other regions have more than 30% green jobs. Further the report finds that the demand for green skills is increasing as many green policies are being rolled out. Women are underrepresented in green-task jobs, holding only 28% of the green-task jobs. In contrast, men make up most workers in polluting jobs more than 80% which are the jobs most at risk of disappearing. Many different examples of green jobs and, green up-skilling can be found. All highlight other different aspects of importance regarding a successful green strategy. Copenhagen tries to achieve a long-term widely shared strategy developed in collaboration with a range of local and regional actors. This strategy also aims to tackle gender issues and support businesses to reskill their staff. In New York City workforce development support targets especially individuals from underserved communities.

The OECD Skills Strategy team has been promoting a strategic and comprehensive approach to strengthening national and regional skills systems in the context of the green and digital transitions. The process of developing a resilient skills system for the green and digital transition is not without challenges. Based on 10 years' experience working with countries on building more effective skills systems, the OECD Skills Strategy team identified four key challenges that countries face: i) policy priorities are often changing in countries, which can undermine commitment to the skills agenda as well as continuity in policy making; ii) countries typically have numerous areas for improvement but limited resources; iii) many government ministries and agencies have skills-relevant responsibilities, but they often have diverging priorities; and vi) stakeholders (e.g. training providers, employers) also have an important role to play in ensuring that people develop the rights skills and are use them fully and effectively in workplaces and society, but their views are often overlooked.

Addressing these challenges requires a strategic and comprehensive approach to skills policies such as a National Skills Strategy. A National Skills Strategy benefits countries and their people by: establishing a common vision for leveraging skills to achieve economic and societal ambitions, identifying skills policy priorities, developing policy recommendations for improving skills outcomes and strengthening skills systems, and fostering a whole-of-government and whole-of-society collaboration on, and commitment to, skills policy reform. Since 2015, the OECD has actively supported 25 economies to develop National Skills Strategies. These projects are based on the OECD Skills Strategy framework, promote a whole-of-government and whole-of-society approach, and cover a wide range of topics related to the development, use and governance of skills. In 2023, the “OECD Skills Strategy for Southeast Asia: Skills for Post-COVID Recovery and Growth” was published, which applied this approach at the regional level. The OECD now aims to apply the framework at the national level to provide deeper analysis and more tailored advice for improving skills outcomes and strengthening skills systems in Southeast Asia countries and has, in 2023, launched a National Skills Strategy Project in Thailand.

Links to presentations from OECD research

Findings from “Job Creation and Local Economic Development 2023: Bridging the Great Green Divide”

Ms. Kristine Langenbucher

Head, Employment and Skills Unit – OECD Centre for Entrepreneurship, SMEs, Regions and Cities

OECD Skills Strategies and the green and digital transitions

Mr. Andrew Bell

Head of Unit, OECD Skills Strategies, OECD Centre for Skills

Closing session

Speaker



Ms. El Iza Mohamedou

Head of the OECD
Centre for Skills

Ms. El Iza Mohamedou, Head of the OECD Centre for Skills provided closing remarks at the 13th Meeting Southeast Asia Regional Policy Network on Education and Skills. She highlighted the important role of the Network in supporting collaboration between the OECD and countries in Southeast Asia, including by providing a unique platform for exchange and peer-learning. The publication of the “OECD Skills Strategy for Southeast Asia: Skills for Post-COVID Recovery and Growth” in April 2023 has contributed to renewed momentum for collaboration on education and skills in Southeast Asia, and the OECD hopes that the report helped to place skills more prominently on national policy agendas.

The topic of the 13th Meeting – “Skills for the green and digital transitions” – is especially important for Southeast Asia. Countries in the region are particularly exposed to the impact of megatrends, while many countries in the region already face significant skills challenges. Only with the right set of skills policies, countries will be able to benefit from the new opportunities that the future may bring. The OECD hopes that discussions and presentations in the meeting provided interesting policy lessons for the representatives from Southeast Asia. The next virtual meeting of the SEA RPN is scheduled to take place in the fourth quarter of 2024.

