

## Cooperation in social security sector strengthened among ASEAN member states

*ASEAN member states discuss good practices and innovative approaches towards strengthening their social security systems and expanding coverage to more people.*

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Luang Prabang, Lao People's Democratic Republic (ILO News) — On 23-24 November, social security institutions from ASEAN member states met in Lao PDR to exchange good practices and explore innovative approaches towards strengthening their systems and expanding social security coverage to more people.

With financial support from the European Union, the ASEAN Social Security Association (ASSA) organised an International Seminar under the theme “Partnering and Mobilising Social Justice for Sustainable Financing of Social Security Systems and towards Universal Social Protection” at their 39th Board Meeting on 23-24 November 2022 in Luang Prabang.

The seminar had three main sub-themes, namely, the role of social security in sustainable development in the post-pandemic world; partnering for social justice to realise the universal right to social security and decent work for all; and sustainable expansion of social security coverage.

Addressing the event, Mr. Padeumphone Sonthany, Vice Minister of Labour and Social Welfare stated in his opening remarks, “The Government of the Lao PDR attaches great importance to social security and encourages and promotes its development in relation to economic growth. Lao PDR will continue implementing relevant ASEAN declarations and the Sustainable Development Goals on social protection, in order to create opportunities for people and ensure they are protected throughout the country. We will also continue exchanging knowledge and experiences with ASEAN countries and worldwide to further develop the existing social security system”.

The event was hosted by the Lao Social Security Organisation and attended by 118 participants from social security institutions of ASEAN member states, ministry officials from Lao PDR, and development partners. The thematic sessions received technical assistance from ILO and Oxfam. Experts from ILO discussed better public finance management towards sustainable systems and lessons from the COVID-19 pandemic, while Oxfam shared its expertise in working at the grassroots level to ensure that informal workers and marginalised groups have access to social security. ILO and Oxfam have frequently partnered to advance social protection and labour rights in Lao PDR, including through an ongoing pilot project in the coffee and tea sectors funded by the EU. Thematic discussions also included a case study by Luxembourg on decentralized funding and partnerships for rural development in Lao PDR.

The seminar provided a solid platform to promote peer-to-peer exchanges at the regional level with government institutions and the civil society. Ms. Celine Peyron-Bista, Chief Technical Advisor on Social Protection at the ILO said, “In post-COVID times, ASEAN member states are at a crossroads. To sustain the economic recovery process, tackle poverty and inequality, prepare for future shocks and transformations, member states should opt for a “high-road” strategy of sustainable investments in social protection based on solidarity, which can ensure that everyone enjoys adequate and comprehensive social protection.”

The International Seminar benefitted from financial support from the European Union, through the Global Programme on “Improving Synergies between Social Protection and Public Finance Management (SP&PFM)”. The Programme supports 24 partner countries to strengthen their social protection systems, through sustainable financing and improved public finance management. In Lao PDR, the Programme cooperates with the Ministry of Labour and Social Welfare to assess the social security scheme's financial sustainability and prepare an evidence-based strategy to expand coverage to informal workers. During the seminar, Ms. Francesca Arato, representative of the EU Delegation to Lao PDR, highlighted the relevance of such a programme that facilitates regional and global sharing and learning. She also raised the

importance of more public investment in social protection, to facilitate faster and inclusive socio-economic recovery, close protection gaps, and enhance resilience against future shocks.

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