

The quest for

meaning at work

2024 Southeast Asia Survey Report



2,023

respondents

98%

of Southeast Asians are seeking a sense of purpose in their careers.

53%

are considering a career transition

by



Editorial.

Understanding the Southeast Asian workforce's pursuit of purpose is essential for transitioning to a regional economy that is both fair and sustainable.

Southeast Asia shows rapid economic evolution, maintaining its status as one of the fastest-growing regions globally for nearly a decade. This dynamic economic landscape is energized by a youthful workforce, with the World Bank¹ estimating that out of approximately 350.5 million workers in ASEAN, 60% are under the age of 30. Yet, this economic vibrancy is shadowed by sustainability challenges: according to the International Energy Agency,² current growth model forecasts a 35% increase in CO2 emissions by 2030, highlighting an urgent need for sustainable economic reform.

Among growing climate awareness, Southeast Asian governments are recognizing the imminent risks to their economies. Without intervention, the Asian Development Bank³ warns that climate repercussions could contract the region's economy by up to 11% by the century's end. Consequently, sustainability is ascending the corporate agenda, catalyzing a surge in demand for green skills and jobs.

This shift is not just institutional but deeply personal.

As societies navigate the ramifications of climate change and economic disparity, individuals are increasingly seeking roles that transcend traditional financial incentives, aligning personal values with professional endeavors.

In response to these evolving dynamics, Jobs_that_makesense Asia and Manpower have embarked on a pioneering survey to decode the quest for purpose at work, particularly in the Southeast Asian context. This collaborative research initiative emerges in a landscape where the narrative of meaningful work, especially post-COVID and among Generation Z, has proliferated yet remains inadequately explored through empirical studies. Our survey aims to carve out a region-specific understanding of what constitutes meaningful work, delving into the personal and societal drives steering individuals towards purpose-driven careers.

Spanning Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand, this comprehensive survey endeavors to chart the contours of the region's professional aspirations. It seeks to unearth the underlying expectations of the Southeast Asian workforce and provide actionable insights for employers to align more closely with the emerging paradigm of purpose-driven employment.

This study marks a significant step in dissecting the intricate relationship between individual aspirations and regional economic imperatives, setting the stage for a more inclusive and sustainable economic model.

1 [The Asean Post](#)

2 [IEA Southeast Asia Energy Outlook 2022](#)

3 [The Asian Development Bank](#)

Executive summary

In the Jobs_that_makesense Asia - Manpower's The Quest for Meaning at Work Survey (Southeast Asia), **2,023 respondents across Singapore, Malaysia, the Philippines, Indonesia, Vietnam, and Thailand** – including employees, students, and job-seekers were invited to share their perspectives on meaningful work. They provided insights into their definitions of purposeful employment, the motivations and challenges they face in seeking more meaningful roles, and their expectations from companies to enhance their sense of purpose at work.

In 3 points, our key findings

- 1** Across the region, **98%** of survey participants **express the importance of finding a sense of meaning** in their professional endeavors. Of those, **72%** emphasize that finding meaning in their jobs is an essential part of their definition of a successful career.
- 2** **More than half of the respondents** expect their companies to take a leading role in promoting sustainability initiatives. They also advocate for the creation of more positions dedicated to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) responsibilities and the provision of learning programs for employees that focus on societal impact and sustainability.

- 3** The significance of a company's reputation, particularly in social responsibility, has become a critical factor for job seekers. In fact, **77% of respondents indicate that a company's reputation** in these areas significantly contribute to their decision to pursue employment with them.



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DECIPHERING PURPOSE IN THE REGIONAL WORKFORCE

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Purposeful work

THE ESSENCE OF MEANINGFUL WORK FOR THE SOUTHEAST ASIAN WORKFORCE CAN BE DISTILLED INTO FOUR KEY COMPONENTS



1

Personal Fulfillment

Individuals are in pursuit of roles that not only meet their career aspirations but also resonate with their core values and passions.

2

Work-Life Harmony

The ability to maintain a healthy balance between work commitments and personal life is crucial for overall well-being and happiness.

3

Positive Social Impact

A significant emphasis is placed on work that contributes to societal betterment, tackles social issues, and fosters community improvement.

4

Community and Belonging

A sense of belonging and mutual respect within a supportive and collaborative work environment is highly valued.

86%

of respondents believe that all kinds of groups – from charities and community organizations to governments and businesses – have the potential to significantly benefit the planet. However, 46% underscore the necessity for businesses to demonstrate genuine action and adherence to their environmental and social commitments. Essentially, while recognizing the capacity of all organizations to contribute to societal improvement, there's a particular emphasis on the need for corporations to transparently and authentically engage with their sustainability and societal strategies.

TREND #1



*Motivations and Expectations Behind the
Regional Workforce's Pursuit of Purpose*

Seeking purpose: bridging personal fulfillment with social altruism

The factors that significantly influence job-seeking professionals when looking for a job can be categorized into two primary levels:

Job fulfillment & personal stability

Work-Life Balance

For **one out of three people**, maintaining a positive work-life balance is becoming increasingly important for professional fulfillment.

Salary and Job Stability

Almost half of the participants (45%) identify salary and financial stability as their top priorities.

Career Advancement and Personal Growth:

27% of the respondents place a high value on learning, finding profound significance in their work with each new method and technique they acquire for their professional toolkit



Significantly, the pursuit of a high salary is not driven by the quest for material wealth but rather by the aim to provide comfort and security for one's family.



My father tirelessly worked to ensure my sisters and I could pursue university education and elevate ourselves to middle-class status. Inspired by their sacrifices, I am equally committed to supporting the economic stability and prosperity of my family and future generations, mirroring the dedication my parents showed me.

Yulfitri, Indonesia

Impact and organizational contribution

On a collective level, a deeply ingrained sense of duty to make a societal contribution and to participate in the organization's development is a pivotal factor in the job search process.

Seeking influence in the workplace and decision-making:

Professionals increasingly desire roles that offer them a voice in company decisions, especially concerning the company's Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) initiatives.

Opportunity for societal impact:

The workforce in Southeast Asia recognizes that their jobs offer the chance to positively influence society. This awareness is increasingly guiding their search decisions.

Contribution to the organization's mission

Enhancing the organization's mission: Opportunities to engage in strategic planning and contribute to solving challenges.

Opportunity for environmental impact:

The workforce in Southeast Asia recognizes that their jobs offer the chance to positively influence the environment.

Note: The aspirations of working for a well-known company, assuming a managerial role, or holding a high position rank lower in our survey respondents' views of professional success than intrinsic values and personal fulfillment.

33%

28%

20%

18%



77%

of respondents indicate that a company's reputation for social responsibility influences their decision to pursue employment with them.



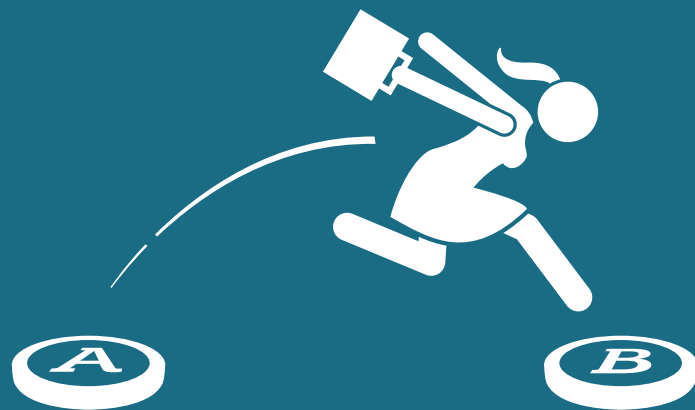
Why is environmental impact the last top consideration in job searches?



Insights collected during qualitative interviews

Southeast Asians recognize the critical importance of environmental change through personal experiences with typhoons, floods, and droughts. However, given the region's relatively recent economic growth, they also believe that community economic development, labor conditions improvements, and addressing social inequality issues are equally important and environmental improvements should progress in tandem with social change.

TREND #2



*Career Transitions as a Path to Deeper
Meaning for SEA Professionals*



Career transition: a strategic approach to enhancing professional quest for purpose

53%

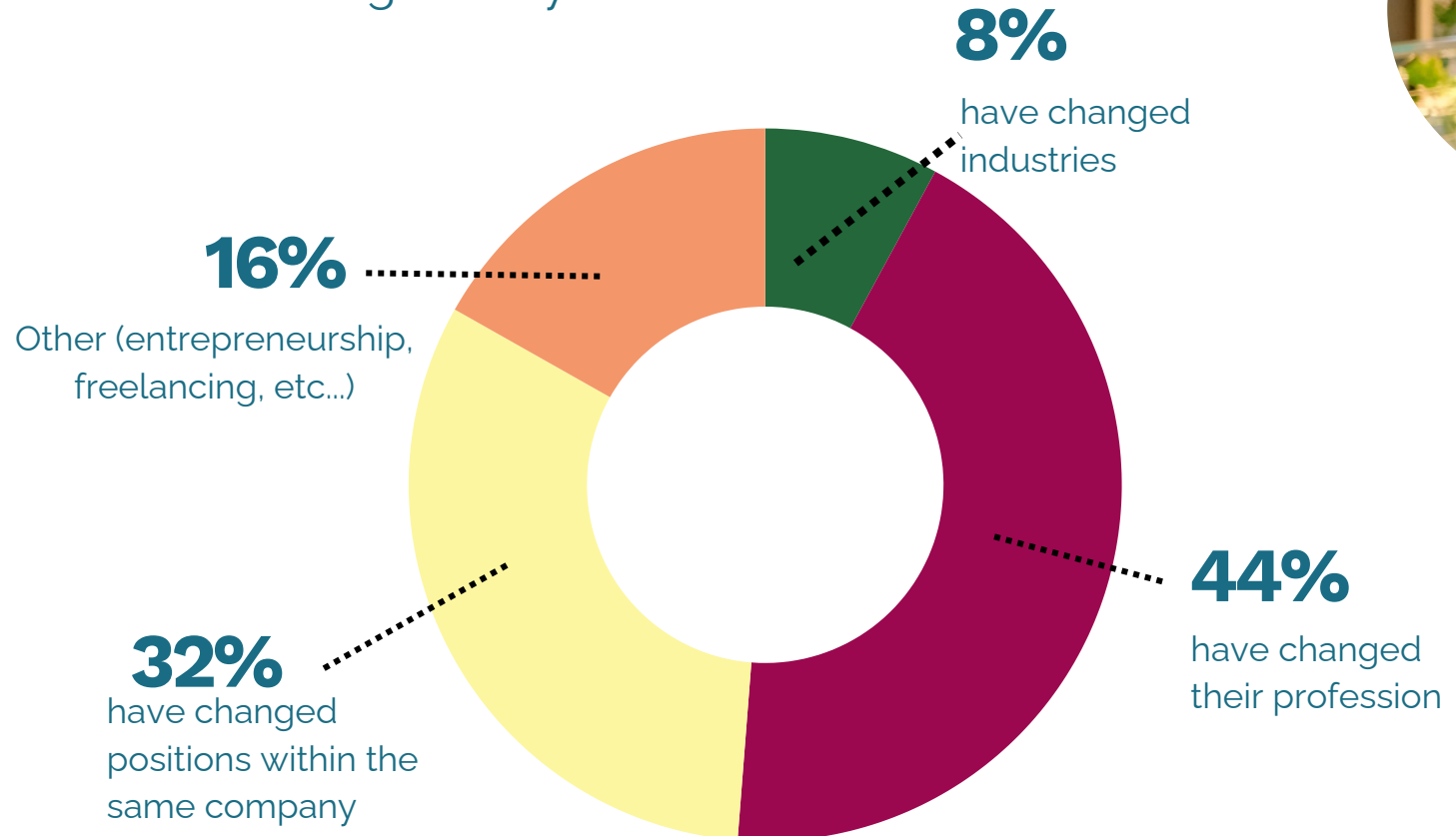
of respondents are considering a career transition.

17%

have undertaken a professional transition.



Career transition: diverse trajectories



For those who have gone through a career transition, what changes did you make?



84%

of individuals who have gone through a career transition believe it has positively impacted their well-being and life satisfaction.

-  Individuals who have started their own businesses, taken up freelancing, or pursued other independent career paths.
-  Participants who have transitioned to different roles or responsibilities but remained within the same organization.

-  Individuals who have switched to a completely different type of job or career field.
-  Respondents who have moved their career to a different industry but may have retained a similar role or function.

TREND #3



*Navigating Obstacles and Challenges in
the Quest for Meaningful Work*

The pursuit of purpose is constrained by the scarcity of job openings and the resources accessible to the workforce.

The barriers to initiating a career transition towards more meaningful work include:

- 1** Limited availability of green and socially-driven job opportunities **37%**
- 2** Balancing personal responsibilities with professional aspirations **20%**
- 3** Lack of skills and experience **15%**
- 4** Lack of information and exposure to the green-impact sector **14%**
- 5** Fear of change and family expectations **14%**



Insights collected during qualitative interviews:

- Interviewees not currently employed in the green-impact sector reported a lack of exposure to the sustainability and impact industries during their education, leading to limited awareness of the career opportunities within this sector.
- Jobs in the green and social sectors are often seen as non-traditional paths, making it challenging for many professionals to pursue their career goals due to family and societal expectations.
- The combination of societal factors mentioned above and a skills gap for accessing purpose-driven roles contributes to the perception that such career transitions are complex.

TREND #4



*Regional Workforce's Expectations of
Their Companies*



KEY ACTIONS TO FOSTER A SENSE OF PURPOSE IN THE WORKPLACE

74% of respondents **believe that companies should improve working conditions**, including offering flexible hours, comprehensive health insurance, and equal pay.

72% of them agree that **companies should actively promote Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) to address social inequalities**.

57% are **calling for learning programs that focus on societal impact and sustainability**.

53% of respondents express **a desire for the creation of more roles dedicated to Environmental, Social, and Governance (ESG) responsibilities**.

45% of respondents **want their companies to take a leading role in advancing sustainability initiatives** by spearheading environmental causes.

74%

72%

56%

52%

44%

Nurturing Employee Purpose: how can companies embed greater meaning into work?

Similarly to the articulation of their quest for a greater purpose in their work at the beginning of the report, respondents expect from their companies and employers, to balance improvements in **workplace conditions** with a **commitment to broader societal well-being**.

Our respondents shared their pronounced need for a better integration of solidarity and community values within the workplace, establishing just and equitable conditions that enable organizations to authentically embody their external promises.

For instance, our interviewees shared a range of experiences: some reported working six-day weeks, others described working in environments where trust is lacking and initiative-taking is discouraged, while yet others voiced a desire for more empathetic and empowering management styles.

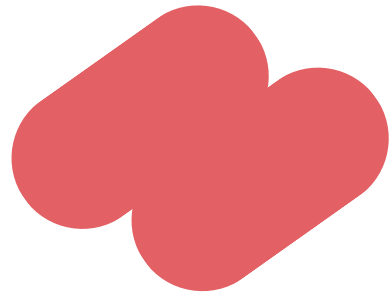
Others noted that although their organizations advocate for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion (DEI) in society, there is room for enhancing the development and execution of internal processes to truly realize these principles.

In regards to external social and environmental impact of their organizations, respondents expressed a desire for companies not just to initiate standalone projects but to lead in social and environmental advocacy by engaging employees directly in the business's transformative journey. This includes providing educational opportunities and creating pathways to roles that ensure long-term, sustainable change.

SURVEY OVERVIEW



Methodology and Participants



PROFILE OF RESPONDENTS



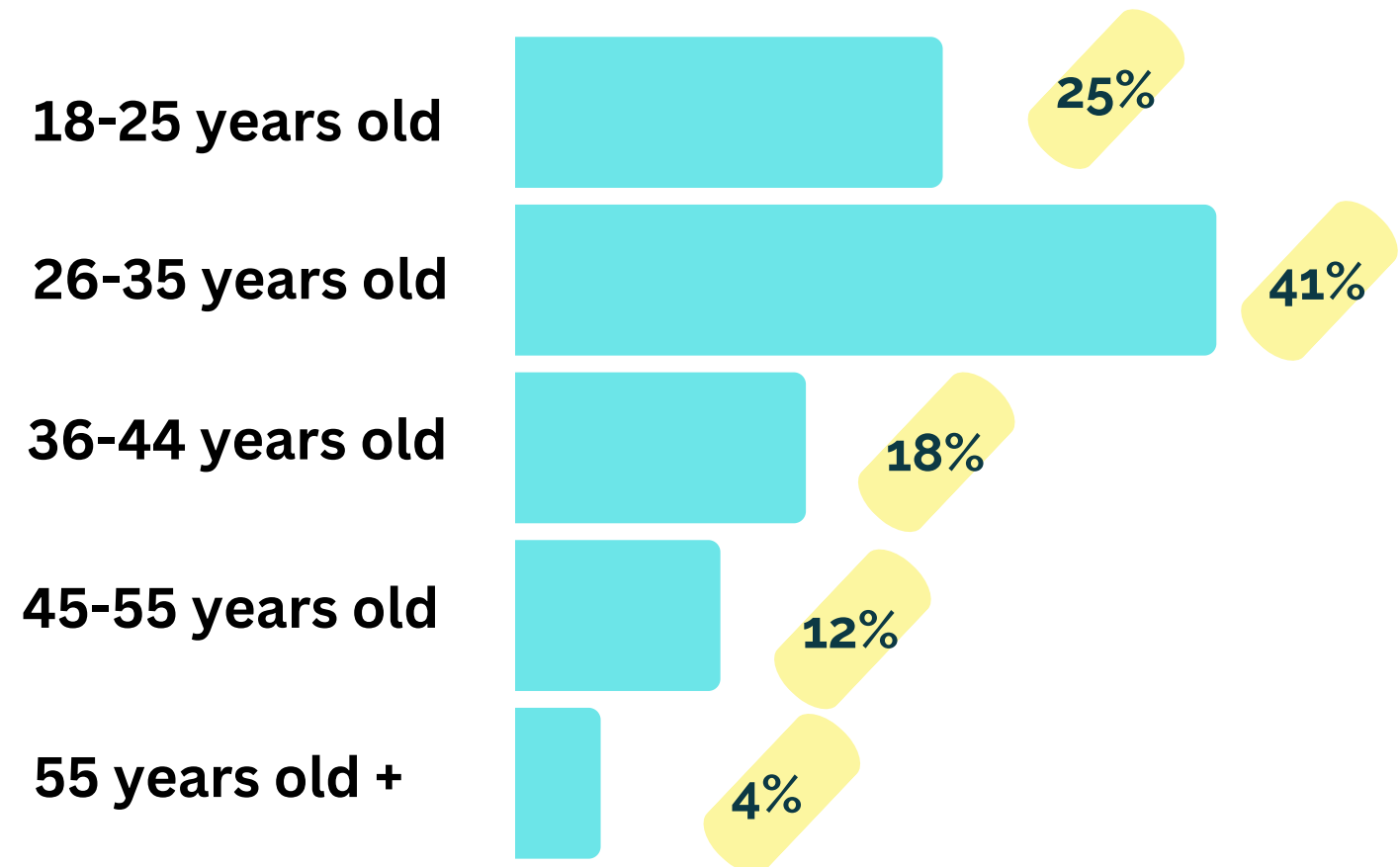
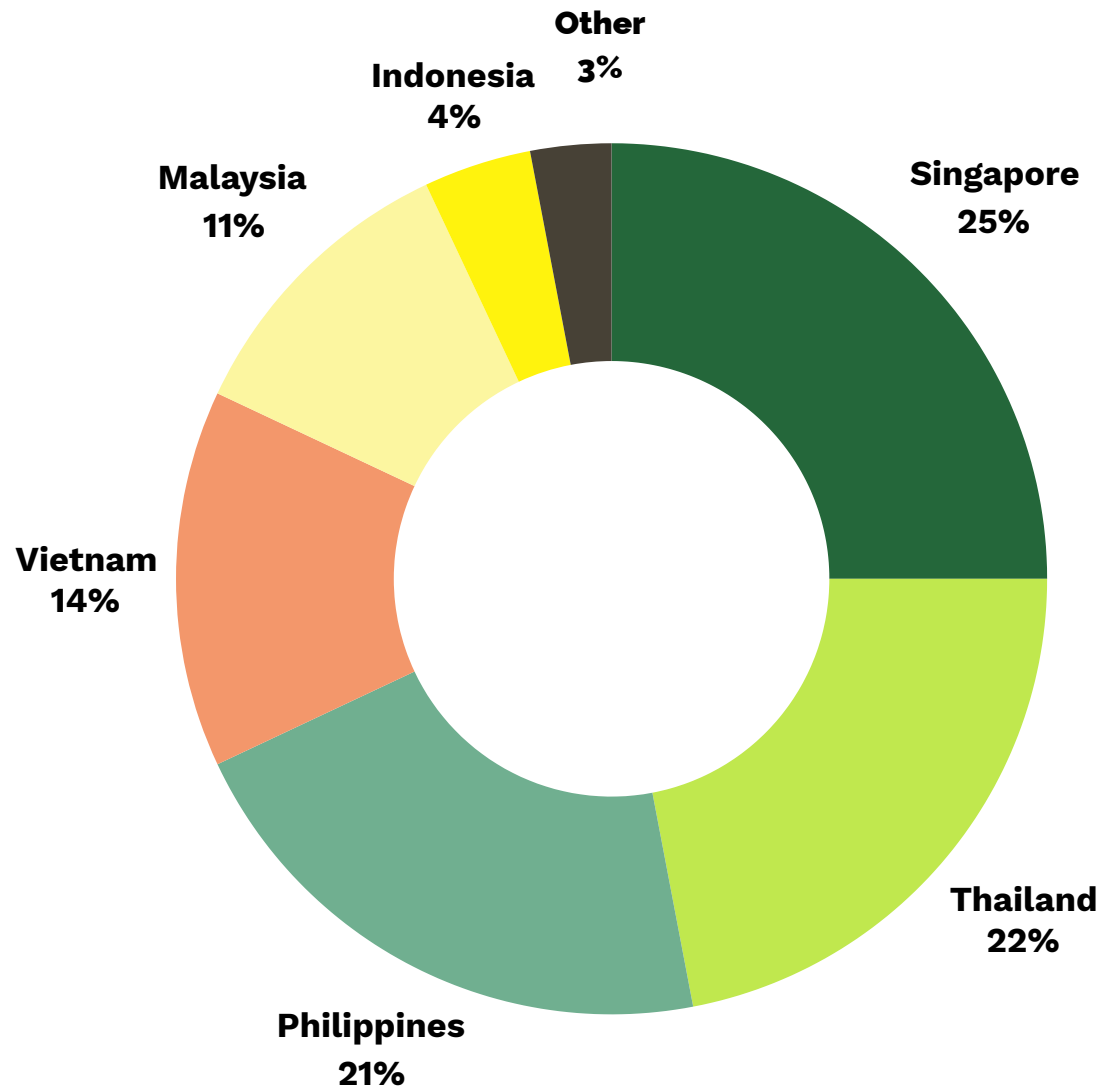
59% of respondents are **women**.



Over half of the respondents fall within the age range of **26 to 44 years old**.



83% are active on the job market (employees, entrepreneurs, job-seekers) and 17% are students.



WHO ARE WE?



Jobs_that_makesense Asia is the Southeast Asian branch of Jobs_that_makesense, a platform dedicated to fostering careers that contribute to societal and environmental advancement. Established in 2020, Jobs_that_makesense provides a comprehensive resource, including a job board, media coverage, and a curriculum board. These tools facilitate access to information and career opportunities in the green and social sectors across France and Southeast Asia.

For more information about Jobs_that_makesense Asia, visit www.jobsthatmakesense.asia



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