

## Managing Labour and Employment FOR DECENT WORK

### Building a Community of Practice (CoP) on Industrial and Employment Relations (AP-IRNet)

#### Summary

In response to its constituents' request for better sharing of ILO's knowledge resources, the ILO Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific initiated the development of communities of practice, i.e. "interactive networks of committed professionals bound by a common interest" in various subject areas. The first four Communities of Practice – Youth Employment (AP-YouthNet), Green Jobs, and Skills (Skills-AP) – are now operational<sup>1</sup> and accessible at <http://ap-youthnet.ilobkk.or.th/>, <http://greenjobs-ap.ilobkk.or.th/>, <http://skills-ap.ilobkk.or.th/> and <http://apmagnet.ilobkk.or.th/>.

Initial results from these CoPs have been encouraging. They have provided an opportunity for ILO staff and constituents to engage in knowledge-sharing, facilitated debates and discussions on emerging concerns and have reinforced organizational learning, feedback, constituent ownership, and use of ILO's technical resources.

The CoP on Industrial and Employment Relations (**AP-IR Net**) has opened its portal at <http://ap-irnet.ilobkk.or.th> to a number of selected core members of ILO IR specialists from the Asia Pacific region in October 2010. The planned visioning event in April 2011 will introduce the CoP to the wider community of ILO constituents and staff.

#### 1. Background

This initiative is a direct follow-up to the 2006 Asian Regional Meeting and the Asian Forum on Growth, Employment and Decent Work in 2007. At the 2006 Asian Regional Meeting, broad support was expressed by the constituents for the establishment of an Asia-Pacific Knowledge Network on Decent Work. The 2007 Asian Forum noted that ILO needs *"to ensure that tripartite constituents, partners, stakeholders and other significant actors have easy access to the knowledge products, expertise, services and tools they need to effectively contribute to the implementation of the Asian Decent Work Decade"*.

A precursor of the proposed Network is the East Asian IR Net project, which was financially supported by the Government of Japan in 2005-2006. The IR Net aimed to build a web-based knowledge sharing platform where IR related information will be uploaded and regularly updated so that it can serve as *a powerful tool for mutual learning and sharing of unique industrial relations experiences among the participating countries*. [The IR Net aimed at filling this knowledge gap by providing

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<sup>1</sup> AP YouthNet has been operational since 2008, Skills-AP and Green Jobs since 2009, APMagnet since 2010.

social partners and governments in East Asia with authoritative, relevant, up-to-date information on industrial relations developments in the countries of the region, but as this pre-dated the introduction of the CoPs, it does not provide the functions currently deemed necessary, and will therefore be replaced by the new proposed CoP.] The communiqué of 2006 ASEAN Labour Ministers meeting welcomed the development of the IR Net; more recently the ASEAN Senior Labour Officers Meeting as well as a tripartite meeting held **under the ILO Japan ASEAN IR project reiterated the request for a knowledge portal.**

The Regional Office (RO) has carried out a number of initiatives in response to constituents' requests, and has organized learning events, online discussion forums, policy platforms and seminars to facilitate the exchange of experiences. It has developed tools and products tailored to priorities and needs identified by constituents in regional events. Some illustrations of this work were in support of the Asian Decent Work Decade, including an online multimedia resource kit comprising of policy briefs and detailed reference materials on priority themes for the ILO's work in the region; and the establishment of the Asian Decent Work Decade Knowledge Networks on youth employment, skills, green jobs as well as labour migration.

Currently these knowledge networks help connect more than 500 youth employment practitioners and 350 skills, green jobs and labour migration practitioners to collaborate, share and contribute to the knowledge base in their respective areas of work (<http://intranet.ilobkk.or.th/cop/cop/asia-decent-work-decade-knowledge-networks>). Developing the CoP on labour and employment relations would be a logical next step in this process.

The Employment and Industrial Relations Department in ILO Geneva has embarked on a similar effort to create a global platform. Specialists in ILO Bangkok and ILO Geneva are regularly exchanging information to ensure coherence between the two initiatives. These include using common fields and search terms and common overall architecture. The Bangkok office has received strong support from colleagues in HQ, and vice-versa, and this is expected to continue as the CoP evolves. It is expected that all relevant HQ colleagues will become active members of the community.

## **2. ILO's niche and competitive advantage on industrial relations and social dialogue**

The technical subject matters of industrial relations (e.g., conciliation, arbitration, collective bargaining and social dialogue) are areas where ILO lays claim to a high level of expertise, either directly within the organization or through its network of contacts in the region or around the world. This is reflected in the demand for ILO technical advice, training and other forms of support in countries such as China, Vietnam, Cambodia, Indonesia and Nepal. The ILO is one of two international organizations that has signed an MOU with ASEAN that enables us to work at the regional level with member states, and is currently implementing an ASEAN-wide project on industrial relations funded by the government of Japan.

The ILO's tripartite structure is perfectly suited to address matters of relations between workers and employers, or tripartism and dialogue involving government, workers and employers. As constituent members of the organization, workers and employers directly contribute to and benefit from the work of the ILO.

### **3. Needs and Purposes**

Five major purposes have been identified for this CoP

- To encourage information sharing among interested ILO professionals at HQ and in the field
- To create a portal of policy, research, and training resources accessible to ILO staff and outside users
- To facilitate sharing of information and experience
- Promote events and news on labour and employment relations
- Encourage the development of joint initiatives to further regional and multilateral cooperation on labour and employment relations

#### **3.1 Creating one-stop IR and labour law information portal in the region**

Through various meetings, research activities and IR/LL related technical cooperation projects, ILO experts and consultants produce a significant amount of information and analysis on industrial relations and labour law developments in the region. Yet there is no single repository – whether physical or virtual – where ILO staff and constituents can have an easy access to the information and knowledge produced by the ILO. With AP-IR Net, ILO will have a one-stop IR, labour law, and labour administration information portal in the region where all relevant information generated by ILO, its constituents, academics and practitioners will be stored and can be accessed. In this regard, access by external partners with minimal number of click(s) should be aimed at – ideally information should be two or three clicks away.

A common tagging system will allow easy use by ILO HQ and field colleagues.

#### **3.2 Facilitate knowledge and experiences sharing among the community of practices on IR and LL in and outside of the ILO**

Often ILO specialists at the field offices receive requests from tripartite policy-makers and associated research communities regarding comparative information on legal and regulatory frameworks of industrial relations and various aspects of labour laws in other countries. ILO specialists are often requested by constituents to give timely professional advice on labour law and IR reform. One of the functions of this Community of Practice of AP-IR Net under the Asia Pacific Knowledge Network shall be to allow for an exchange of views and experience not only among ILO experts but also national constituents, practitioners and academics. This can take the form of moderated discussions, virtual workshops, and blogs, among others; as has been

tested positively in the AP YouthNet, moderated thematic discussions can provide a valuable contribution to knowledge formation and sharing. Stakeholders may be asked to identify themes of particular interest, and where sufficient common demand exists across countries in Asia, these themes can be subject of further discussion and analysis.

### 3.3 From ad-hoc to systematic information sharing, coordination and research among ILO specialists

In our daily work, ILO specialists in HQ and the field, including project managers and programme officers, from time to time communicate individually with each other to get some information on industrial relations and labour law development in other sub-regions, to seek advice from colleagues on how to address specific technical issues, and to coordinate our approaches and programmes in the region and beyond. This type of communication is usually carried out individually between specialists in an ad hoc manner. By creating the AP-IR Net portal under the Asia Decent Work Decade Knowledge Networks facility, we should be able to – as a first step – create a platform for more systematic information sharing and coordination among ILO specialists, which might enable ILO specialists to share information, institutional memories and know-how in much wider, effective and systematic manner. Through this approach, we can turn individual assets and knowledge into the institutional memories and assets.

At present, research on IR and labour laws is undertaken largely by individual specialists in their efforts to respond to needs of the countries they cover. It is important to address the needs of specific member countries. However there can be significant benefits and synergy effects if research is conducted in planned, coordinated and comparative manner so that ILO can produce and accumulate knowledge for ILO constituents, aligned with the Global Products.

## **4. Target Groups**

There will be three types of users:

- ILO staff. The core users will be in the social dialogue sector of ILO Geneva and the relevant field specialists in the DWT, as well as CTAs and programme officers in various country offices dealing with industrial relations matters. All ILO staff will be able to access the information available on the site.
- Practitioners and policy makers from government, workers and employers. With 33 member States in the region, as well as regional organizations such as ASEAN, the potential tripartite target group is substantial. Careful attention will be paid to reaching out to ILO constituents and stakeholders to make sure they are aware of and benefit from the portal.
- Academics and researchers – Academic expertise on industrial relations is spread unevenly throughout the region. India and Sri Lanka, Korea, Japan, Philippines, Singapore, Australia and New Zealand predominate. The portal will encourage linkages with academics and practitioners in countries where

industrial relations are emerging as important national priorities, and help to build a stronger research and analytical base in the region.

**The CoP will target an initial membership of 85 professionals, consisting of:**

- 15 ILO staff from HQ and field at the management and technical levels responsible for IR projects in Asia and the Pacific;
- 10 ILO country office staff designated to update, monitor and track IR developments of ILO constituents in-country;
- 20 Government policy and/or program officials responsible for IR
- 20 Trade union officials
- 20 Employer Association leaders

The ILO has an internal database of participants to ILO industrial relations training programs and events of the last few years. Over time all of them will be encouraged to join and participate in the AP-IR Net CoP.

While AP-IR Net should be as open as possible to the widest audience of those interested in IR and LL in the longer run, it is recommended that there be a phased approach through:

- Consultation among specialists and CTAs in the region and HQ
- Consultation with a carefully selected group of constituents and other key stakeholders
- Coordination with other regional bodies and/or networks (e.g. ASEAN or host of Asian Congress of International Industrial Relations Association)

## **5. Features**

The CoP will have the three following standard features:

### **(i) News and Events**

- Updated Country Information with IR related data and news reports
- ILO projects in the region
- Calendar of IR/ER related events and Information on Regional Training Activities
- Asia-Pacific cross-country comparisons of labour and employment relations
- Project Reports and New Program Development
- Special Thematic Focus

### **(ii) Community Exchange of Resources: Research, Policy Advice and Tools covering the following Themes:**

- Labour Administration
- Social Dialogue
- Tripartism
- Workplace Cooperation

- Dispute Prevention and Resolution
- Collective Bargaining
- Courts
- Employers Organizations
- Workers Organizations
- Employment Relationship
- Informal Economy
- ASEAN
- Wage Policy
- International Labour Standards

**(iii) Facilitated thematic discussion forums**

The discussion forums will serve as a platform to allow members to harness the existing pool of knowledge and expertise within the community and beyond to discuss and address issues relating to the themes mentioned above. Each discussion forum will be carefully moderated by an expert/champion on the issue and will be opened for a pre-determined number days for commenting by community members. At the end of each discussion, the moderator will consolidate responses and provide a summary of points/conclusions/next steps. During each forum, a dedicated moderator will pose questions to the community to seek their advice, experiences, examples or referrals on the specific topics. Members are asked to respond based on their experience and knowledge during a specified period of time.

After the active moderation of responses, the moderator will provide the entire community with a concise synopsis of the discussion outcomes and next steps. This repository of knowledge and lessons learned during the course of the discussion will be stored on the portal and serve as a great resource for practitioners and experts in making more informed decisions.

**6. Administration, Rights and Funding**

The Industrial Relations Specialist based in Bangkok will be responsible for the overall management of the CoP. HQ and field specialists, as well as relevant TC project staff will also have full administrator rights and will play a major role in data entry, especially with regard to meetings and new ILO publications.

Registered members of the CoP will be given full access to ILO technical resources. They can freely access discussions forms and, subject to prior approval, may be able to upload information about their organizations, events and activities.

The CoP will have minimal core funding support from the ROAP, TC projects will be asked to contribute some resources to ensure the quality of the CoP.

Technical support from ROAP will be required to design and maintain the CoP on the **KSP**.

## 7. Visioning Event

**Thirty five potential members drawn from ILO tripartite constituents will be invited to the visioning workshop planned in 26-28 April 2011.**

### Criteria for selection of participants at the visioning event

- 1) He/she have to be direct responsible for industrial relations and show a strong commitment to the promotion and protection of the rights of migrants
- 2) He/she has to be ready and have knowledge about how to share expertise and information through internet (tech savvy)
- 3) He/she should have good writing skills in English
- 4) He/she should be able to commit time to learning and sharing of information and knowledge as a member of the CoP

## 8. Strategy and Road Map

To make AP-IR Net sustainable, our approach tries to build the CoP Net:

- by relying on the knowledge and information already available and accessible in the region and at headquarters
- by improving co-planning and coordination of research activities between HQ and various field offices
- by starting with carefully selected number of external experts who are already working with ILO experts on a longer time horizon on specific issues (for example, labour code reform in Vietnam)
- by utilizing the technology and formats made available under the AP Knowledge Sharing platform
- by linking to regular budget activities, global products and various IR and LL related TC projects activities

A key part of the strategy will be to get maximum exposure and incentive of the ILO staff and constituents to share their knowledge as well a build on the experience and expertise of others through targeted and strategic endorsement by senior management.

### Timeline

October 2010	AP-IR Net portal went online for ILO staff
December 2010	Internal ILO meeting
January 2011	Development of TOR and list of Core group members
February 2011	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• Send invitation and survey to the core group to attend the Visioning Event</li><li>• Survey among the predicted members finalized</li></ul>

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Survey analyzed and results integrated in the TOR for the visioning event and the road map for the CoP</li> </ul>
April 2011	Visioning event (April 26-28 Bangkok Thailand)
April 2011	The CoP AP-IR Net will be launched
April 2011	The CoP is expected to be fully operational by the Asia Pacific Regional Meeting.