



Diversity and inclusion in hiring:

Building a business for all



Diversity, Inclusion and Belonging (DI&B) have gained increasing attention from businesses in recent years, and for good reason. Without an inclusive working environment, many companies may find it difficult to attract a diverse range of talent. Companies might have begun to realise that broadening their recruitment processes to target a wider range of candidates can bring new talents, experiences and outlooks that help businesses develop and progress.

It is perhaps well established that a diverse workforce is a happier one. Not only this, but they're often more profitable, innovative and forward-thinking, and have higher retention rates. According to a 2020 report conducted by the Boston Consulting Group, Southeast Asia is known for being one of the world's most ethnically diverse regions, with more than 1,000 dialects and languages spoken, and 100 ethnic groups across 655 million people (and growing).¹ But what many companies in the region still may need to address is the working potential of such a diverse workforce, as it is common to have staff from relatively similar backgrounds, especially among leadership teams. Companies that fail to invest time and money in diversity and inclusion policies and inclusive hiring procedures are often failing to recruit diverse employees and may be missing out on the skills that such workers can offer.²

¹ Matt Krentz, Elliot Vaughn, Jaime Ruiz-Cabrero, Mariam Jaafar, and Colin Teo, [The Diversity Dividend in Southeast Asia](#) (Boston Consulting Group), April 2020.

² Ibid.

Creating a diverse workforce isn't just about hiring procedures—it's also about getting a comprehensive understanding of what staff are looking for from their employers, and recognising the challenges that under-represented individuals might face in the world of work. According to a 2019 survey of more than 6,100 workers across Singapore, Malaysia, Indonesia, Vietnam and the Philippines, progress is clearly being made, with diversity and inclusion representatives being hired, and new diversity initiatives launched.³ 58% of Southeast Asian companies now have some form of diversity and inclusion initiative or program in place, although this is far below the global average, which is 96%.⁴

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Employees often have higher expectations in terms of where they choose to work, and how they are treated by their employer. Under-represented groups such as women, LGBTQA+, ethnic minorities and disabled people want a fair and equal hiring process, and to be treated without bias in their roles, so their contributions can be recognised fairly.⁵ If these criteria aren't met, 57% of all those surveyed said that they would consider leaving their current employer for a more inclusive one. The cost of replacing such workers is close to \$25 billion annually.⁶

The great news is that diversity and inclusion policies are gradually getting to the top of many employers' priority lists. In this guide, we'll explore the current state of DI&B practices in organisations across Singapore and Southeast Asia, and examine actions that can help build an employer brand and hiring practices that resonate with a diverse range of candidates from all backgrounds. We'll uncover what some candidates indicate they want from their employers, and discuss how Indeed can help you connect with the full spectrum of workers.

³ Matt Krentz, Justin Dean, Jennifer Garcia-Alonso, Miki Tsusaka, and Elliot Vaughn, [Fixing the Flawed Approach to Diversity](#), January 2019.

⁴ Ibid.

⁵ Ibid.

⁶ Ibid.

Age, generational differences and diversity in organisations.

Many Asian countries and economies are facing an ageing population. In countries such as Singapore, South Korea, Taiwan, Japan and mainland China, the working-age population peaked back in 2015, but it is believed it will again accelerate at a very fast rate between now and 2050.⁷ By 2050, the numbers of elderly people in these countries is predicted to be around 27% of their populations, placing greater pressure on public funding and GDP as more people require savings to help fund their retirement and standards of living.⁸ If you examine Southeast Asian economies, while some like Taiwan, South Korea and Singapore are more prepared for these changes, other countries like Thailand are less so. China may also be in a more vulnerable position as its population ages, and a reduction in available workers pushes up wage costs to employers, having an effect on economic growth.⁹ In essence, companies in these countries should consider finding a way to continue to employ older and more elderly people should they choose to still work, or give them the means to retire and live on a healthy income.



⁷ Alicia García-Herrero, [Asia's Workforce Is Rapidly Aging — And Many Countries Are Not Ready](#), December 2020

⁸ Ibid.

⁹ Ibid.

The ageing workforce in Singapore.

The Singapore government accepts that it is important to help keep older workers within the work sector for longer, and in 2005 established the Tripartite Committee on Employability of Older Workers to aim to keep workers in employment beyond the retirement age of 62. It was also established to help change perceptions, assumptions and biases towards older workers. The Tripartite Committee released reports that introduced re-hiring legislation, which required all companies in Singapore as of January 2012 to re-hire more workers up to the age of 67. A scheme was also implemented to financially help companies make any adjustments required to the working environment to support older people and welcome more mature workers into jobs.¹⁰ This progress has continued, and as of 1st July 2022, Singapore's retirement age will be increased to 65, and the re-employment age to 68.¹¹

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While Singapore's Retirement Age Act might allow employers to reduce an older worker's wages by up to 10% when they reach the age of 60, companies will have to ensure that this is based on other factors besides age – such as reductions in productivity, performance, or changes in responsibility. Attracting and retaining older employees could therefore be critical for employers to stay in a competitive place within their industry. Companies may want to consider responding to their countries' changing demographics, and help older workers thrive in their positions to create a more inclusive environment.

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The drive for change and purpose among Gen Z and Millennial workers.

According to a study of 1,200 workers, 32% of baby boomers (with birth dates between 1946-1964), and Gen X (born between 1965 and 1980), consider Gen Z (1997-2012) the most challenging and intimidating generation to work with, because of their aspirations and values, and how they perceive work.¹² These aspirations include a perceived lack of compromise on their personal values, and prioritising personal ambitions and goals over those of a company, which can be a challenge for employers, and fellow workers.¹³

Research based on 32,000 Gen Z employee responses from more than 350 companies in the Singapore region, has confirmed that one of the most important priorities for Gen Z workers is working for a diverse and inclusive employer.¹⁴ Another priority is fair pay, with just 69% of Gen Z workers feeling that they are paid fairly for their work. This is especially in the case of workers employed in the hospitality sectors, and other industries that rely on tips.¹⁵ Like Millennials (1981-1996), Gen Z workers also want a sense of purpose in the roles they have and want to feel valued. Compared to other generations, Gen Z employees scored their employers 8 points lower on how much their work has meaning.¹⁶ In the hiring process, employers may want to emphasise the importance of communication on every level, with transparent leadership that values all staff, and demonstrating interest in workers' opinions and ideas. Younger workers also may want to see the change and difference they make to a company, with clear goals at work that closely align with their values. In the hiring process, job descriptions should go beyond a list of duties, and detail the value of a role.¹⁷

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¹² Arina Sofia, [Millennials & Gen Z vs Gen X & Baby Boomers: how different generations in Singapore view their career prospects](https://www.humanresourcesonline.net), humanresourcesonline.net

¹³ Ibid.

¹⁴ Claire Hastwell, [What Gen Z Wants from Employers in 2021](https://www.greatplacetowork.com), greatplacetowork.com, November 2021

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Coann Laboratoria, [Gen Z: How to attract the next generation of employees](https://www.greatplacetowork.com), January 2022

Since the Covid-19 pandemic, workers' attitudes towards companies have changed. We're now witnessing potential employees carefully checking as to whether an employer is a correct fit for them before accepting a job, as if the interview process has been turned on its head.¹⁸ The pandemic has given many generations of people time to think about how they want to work. The concept of fixed hours, and only working in an office, are often considered outdated notions.¹⁹ Millennials and Gen Z workers typically want more flexibility in their hours, and to have more control in terms of how much they can potentially earn (for instance, having the freedom to earn extra income at the weekends via freelance work).²⁰ As a result, to attract talent across a range of ages and from all walks of life, employers should offer roles that achieve a good work-life balance, fair wages, and flexibility for workers who have other commitments outside of work, such as parents who need to provide childcare.



¹⁸ Justin Ong Guang-Xi, [The Big Read: Understanding why millennials and Gen Zers feel the way they do about work](https://www.channelnewsasia.com), channelnewsasia.com

¹⁹ Ibid.

²⁰ Ibid.



Ageism, training and career development.

Companies may want to consider to tackling ageist behaviours in their hiring system, and in the workplace, including:

- Paying an older person less than a younger person
- Managing workers differently based on their age
- Not employing someone because their age doesn't fit a company's perceived 'youthful' image

It is often argued that in Asian countries, because older people are more respected in society, they have less of a challenge finding a job than people in the West. However, these traditional ways of thinking are gradually disappearing, with older and ageing people sometimes seen as less economically productive. Older workers can be just as productive as younger workers, so companies in the Southeast Asia region may want to start helping to break stereotypes, and move towards a performance-related pay scale, rather than salaries that are based purely on length of service (as is the case in Japan and Singapore). Contract terms and conditions need to be renegotiated as employees get older, but still remain flexible, so that employees of all ages are fairly paid for the work they do.

Offering adult learning and training development opportunities (both in the hiring process and for current employees), can also help ensure that workers of all ages have the opportunities to advance their career and have access to up-skilling initiatives. According to an issues paper created for the 2021 OECD Southeast Asia Regional Forum, lack of interest in adult learning and further training is highest in Japan (88%), followed by Singapore (76%), and South Korea (71%).²¹ Employers should consider devoting more investment into promoting the importance and benefits of adult learning, providing personalised advice and guidance services so that workers of all ages feel empowered to make the most of their skill set and career. This can be through workshops, career guidance websites, one-to-one check-ins, and links to other public employment and learning services.

On job descriptions, employers might try to entice new talent to their organisations by promoting flexible learning opportunities for new joiners to develop their careers. One of the main reasons older adults do not invest time in training is because of a lack of motivation, time constraints, and family-related commitments. To overcome this, employers should offer flexible learning and training programmes that can be attended remotely, or can fit around working schedules in the office. Giving all workers opportunities to develop their skills helps to overcome career and confidence barriers, and generally helps improve inclusiveness in a workforce.²²

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In the Southeast Asian region, around 70% of older adults require paid employment support.²³ In Japan for example, older workers often wish to keep working to maintain a good standard of living, and because they are aware of societal norms and older workers staying in the workforce for as long as possible. In countries such as Thailand and Vietnam, there are national plans in place to delay the retirement age to keep older adults in the workforce longer, helping them to achieve better financial security.²⁴ The need to continue working at and beyond retirement age is something all employers across all regions may want to address and produce initiatives to support.

²¹ OECD Southeast Asia Regional Forum, *Adapting to Changing Skill Needs in Southeast Asia*, May 2021

²² Ibid.

²³ Age-Friendly Environments in ASEAN Plus Three: Case Studies from Japan, Malaysia, Myanmar, Vietnam, and Thailand, *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health*, June 2020

²⁴ Ibid.

Gender, diversity and women at work.

While women in Southeast Asian countries generally have good access to jobs, they still have to overcome more obstacles than men when trying to reach leadership positions in their careers, as many typically have to balance their careers with childcare and household responsibilities. In the World Bank's 2021 report entitled 'Women, Business and the Law, East Asia and the Pacific', the East Asia and Pacific region has obtained the third highest levels of progress in terms of promoting gender equality in work.²⁵ These reforms should continue, and be supported by employers in the region, as all 25 East Asian and Pacific countries still possess laws that affect economic and career opportunities for women.²⁶

Female empowerment is now heading to the top of many companies' agendas in terms of diversity, inclusion and culture building

According to thedrum.com, women lead the workforce in Southeast Asia, and the region employs more women than the global average. Salaries and benefits, however, are falling behind those of working men, and more needs to be done to promote diversity and inclusion in HR practices. Negative gender roles and objectification are still ongoing problems for marketing in Southeast Asian countries, with 44% of advertising narratives being spoken from a male point of view.²⁷ That said, female empowerment is now heading to the top of many companies' agendas in terms of diversity, inclusion and positive culture building within organisations.²⁸ So progress is slowly being made, but more needs to be done. Of the 56 corporations identified by Equileap in terms of gender equality progress, only two had a board of directors that was gender balanced, and only two had equal salary packages.²⁹ In order to attract and retain female workers, workplaces should consider being more inclusive on gender, and proactive in their diversity initiatives.³⁰

²⁵ World Bank, [Women, Business and the Law 2022](#), March 2021

²⁶ Ibid.

²⁷ Shawn Lim, [Brands in South East Asia do not ask for diverse and inclusive ads, agencies reveal](#), thedrum.com, October 2021

²⁸ Ibid.

²⁹ Karen Fifer, Stephen McAlinden, Harry O'Neill, Gauri Padmanabhan, [Diverse region, inclusive workforces: Asia Pacific diversity and inclusion survey](#), 2019

³⁰ Ibid.

Diversity and engagement levels in corporations across Southeast Asia varies greatly by country, but overall progress is generally being made. Many companies are choosing to adhere to a number of practices in accordance with laws, but little research currently exists that indicates how valuable these steps are to women. What we do know however is that while local authority and governmental bodies have been taking the lead in increasing gender diversity, some private sector companies have been slow in doing the same.³¹ In less developed countries such as Malaysia and Indonesia, women are just as keen to progress their careers to the next stage as they are in more developed countries like Singapore. Companies in these countries may want to focus on creating environments where women feel they can actively apply for roles, women's opinions are heard, female role models can be seen, and where actions speak louder than policy wording.³²

Eliminating gender bias in the hiring process.

Hiring more women and improving gender diversity in organisations isn't just as simple however as actively hiring more female candidates. Companies should act to eliminate gender bias in the job interview process. This includes ensuring that the interviewing panel is diverse, and from under-represented groups, creating a diverse candidate list, monitoring and acting on bias, ensuring consistency in the evaluation and selection process, and looking to hire candidates based on how closely they align with a company's values, rather than approval ratings. Although there is some focus on making workplaces gender-equal, there are indications that more progress is required to promote women in diversity and inclusion programmes in the Southeast Asia region. Companies' gender inclusion programmes should tackle a number of issues – including cultural norms and expectations of women in society, workplace dress codes, leadership and career progression, as well as sexism and misogyny.

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How can South East Asian companies improve diversity?

Depending on the country, different parts of the Asia-Pacific region will have different societal conditions with regard to race, religion and socio-economic status that will have an impact on diversity and inclusion initiatives. Attitudes towards minority groups also vary by country and region, which may also make it more difficult for businesses to implement cross-regional diversity programmes. But, there are several steps every company can consider taking to build a diverse working environment for all staff members, including, for example:

1. Tie DI&B initiatives into business goals.

Employers can consider using data and measuring processes to see how diversity and inclusion can improve and tie in with overall business strategies. A combination of surveys, analytics tools and KPIs can be used to monitor the success of diversity policies and procedures, and adjustments can be made to achieve better performance.

2. Improve staff training on how bias negatively impacts company culture.

Creating an inclusive working culture might start with all staff being aware of unconscious and conscious bias. Coaching and mentoring workshops, mandatory work-based training and D&I-based campaigns can all help raise awareness of the issue. This helps to ensure that a diversity strategy is being implemented at every level of a business, supported by the right training and tools.

3. Implement a DI&B strategy that is led from the top.

It's a common misconception that DI&B is merely the responsibility of a company's HR department. According to a report on Asia-Pacific diversity,³³ DI&B initiatives are more successful when led from the very top, when C-suite executives take ownership and responsibility for them, and lead from the front to inspire other colleagues.

4. Retain employees.

Companies might consider creating ways to incentivise employees to stay in their positions and create high retention numbers. They can also identify points in workers' careers at which they are most likely to leave the organisation, and look into reasons behind their resignations. Retention strategies might then be adopted to prevent this from happening. Retention strategies may include mental health support, parental leave, sabbatical leave, flexible and remote working offerings, and opportunities for career progression and development.

5. Recruit a diverse network of employees.

Creating a diverse and inclusive company starts right at the job description. Companies may want to work to attract people of all ages for leadership roles, and they can create peer roles that other workers can identify with. Getting involved in campaigns and events that also champion diversity and equality will help to raise societal issues, and create awareness of a corporation's commitment to DI&B.



How Indeed is championing diversity.

Although it originally began life as a search engine back in 2004, Indeed is now one of the most popular job-seeking platforms in the world, with more than 13,300 employees. Indeed understands that people are always at the heart of every organisation, which is why we take steps to help companies find talent from all walks of life.

If you're hoping to reach a new audience of active job seekers wanting companies that champion diversity, then claiming your company pages on Indeed and Glassdoor can instantly provide you with unparalleled new reach. Indeed's data shows that job seekers who visit company pages are on average 2.7X more likely to apply.³⁴ You also have the opportunity to showcase your hiring experience and tell candidates what they might expect from your culture. 52% of employees/job seekers say company ratings and reviews from employees is among the most helpful information when deciding if a job opportunity or company is a good fit for them.³⁵

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Indeed Company Pages offer businesses a single location from which they can promote their culture, highlight their successes, and share stories about their employees. A clear process might not only attract a more diverse pool of candidates to your roles, but limit the chances of applicants growing disgruntled with their progress. Bias is a great threat to diversity and the hiring process, and implementing diverse hiring procedures is paramount for companies to overcome this problem. With Indeed's platform and features like online skills assessments, potential bias is removed from the recruitment process, so that companies only hire a candidate based on their skills and experience alone, while actively attracting talent that helps an organisation achieve a culture of belonging and inclusivity.

Conclusion.

While incredible progress has been made to increase fairness and equality in businesses across south-east Asia, there's still plenty more organisations can do to improve their diversity & inclusion practices. By following the guidance in this paper and recognising the differing needs of various generations, genders and groups, you can help ensure your hiring practices resonate with candidates from a broad range of backgrounds. Indeed is here to help you on this journey with unparalleled reach and a suite of tools designed to help you connect with your ideal candidates.



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About Indeed

Indeed is the #1 job site in the world³⁶ and allows jobseekers to search millions of jobs on the web or mobile in over 60 countries and 28 languages. Over 250 million unique visitors each month search for jobs³⁷, post CV's and research companies on Indeed.

See how Indeed can help you hire

sg.indeed.com/hire

³⁶ ComScore, Total Visits, 2021

³⁷ Google Analytics, Unique Visitors, March 2021