

Big tech firms pledge training for workers in Southeast Asia

November 19 2018, by Kaweewit Kaewjinda

Microsoft, Google and other major technology companies have promised to help provide training in digital skills for around 20 million people in Southeast Asia by 2020 to make sure the region's burgeoning working-age population is a fit for the future job market. Up to 28 million full-time jobs are subject to being displaced, according to a new estimate.

The World Economic Forum think tank announced Monday its "ASEAN Digital Skills Vision 2020" initiative to improve the technological capacity of the 10-member Association of Southeast Asian Nations with training, funds for scholarships, internships and shaping the curricula of technology and computing courses, among other measures. The forum is best known for its annual meetings in Davos, Switzerland, of top business and political leaders.

Southeast Asia is seeking to increase the digital skills of its workers as the shift to greater use of robots and other automation threatens to rob those without technological savvy of opportunities for employment, even in manufacturing and service industries.

Other companies pledging training include Cisco, Grab, Lazada, Sea Group and Tokopedia. Google leads the pack, with a pledge to train 3 million small-to-medium-size enterprise employees across ASEAN.

Ministers from countries such as Indonesia, Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam also pledged to join the initiative, Justin Wood, the forum's

Asia Pacific head, said at a news conference.

Wood said there are lots of exciting developments in Southeast Asia surrounding the digital field—such as emerging e-commerce markets and rising internet penetration—which point to a "vibrant economy emerging," but the level of skills among workers in the digital field "is not as good as it needs to be to capture this digital opportunity."

Naveen Menon, president for ASEAN of Cisco Systems, said the company's research has shown that the increased adoption of technology could displace up to 28 million jobs in the region by 2020, which would potentially require employees to be reskilled. He said Cisco has committed to work with the World Economic Forum's initiative "in the areas of reskilling, curriculum, training and development, and influencing regulatory policy."

In September, the World Economic Forum issued a report, based on a survey of executives representing 15 million employees in 20 economies, saying that more than half of all workplace tasks will be carried out by machines by 2025.

It estimated that by 2022, roughly 75 million jobs worldwide will be lost, but that could be more than offset by the creation of 133 million new [jobs](#). A major challenge will be training and re-[training](#) employees for that new world of work.

Other challenges for employers include enabling remote work, building safety nets to protect workers, and providing reskilling for employees, the forum said.

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