Sharing of Good Practices on Fair and Ethical Recruitment: An ASEAN Employers' Perspective (June 25, 2025)

As the ASEAN Confederation of Employers (ACE), we recognize our unique responsibility to bridge the perspectives of both labour-sending and labour-receiving countries. Promoting fair and ethical recruitment is not only a matter of compliance—it is fundamental to building trust, business sustainability, and social cohesion.

From an ASEAN employers' perspective, we propose the following pragmatic and balanced approach:

1. Mutual Responsibility and Shared Standards: Fair recruitment should be a joint commitment by all stakeholders. Sending countries should regulate and monitor pre-departure processes, while receiving countries must uphold decent working conditions and enforce labour rights.

2. Recruitment Cost Sharing Based on Context and Capacity: While the principle of employer-paid recruitment costs is globally endorsed, we must acknowledge that in many ASEAN countries—especially where SMEs dominate—employers may not be in a position to absorb all recruitment-related expenses. A flexible approach should be considered, such as fronting the costs and recovering them in line with national laws and mutual agreements with workers. This must be done transparently, with workers' informed consent, and within a rights-based framework.

3. Transparent and Accessible Information: Workers must receive clear, pre-departure information and contracts in a language they understand. This empowers workers to make informed decisions and prevents abuse.

4. Stronger Oversight of Recruitment Agencies: Governments must ensure that only ethical, licensed agencies are allowed to operate. Cross-border information-sharing is essential to eliminate rogue recruiters.

5. Tripartite Dialogue and Fair Grievance Systems: Fair recruitment can only be sustained through ongoing social dialogue among employers, workers, and governments. Accessible, fair, and prompt grievance mechanisms are crucial for both prevention and remedy.

Fair recruitment must be both principled and practical. For ASEAN, where labour mobility is deeply intertwined with economic development, we must strike a balance—protecting workers' rights while ensuring that employers, especially smaller businesses, can continue to operate competitively and responsibly.

ACE remains committed to advancing this balanced agenda and working closely with all partners to promote a fair and future-ready labour market in ASEAN.