

# ILO/IOE/SNEF REGIONAL FORUM ON EBMOs: DELIVERING VALUE IN THE SHIFTING WORLD

## 5 December 2022, Singapore

### Background

Before 2020 business was already experiencing the transformative effects of major global trends. Data from various sources suggested that regardless of sector, size and location, business models have been adapting to the impact of globalization, technological advances, demographic trends, sustainability pressures and skills shortages.

The 2019 findings of the [joint ACTEMP/IOE research on Changing Business and Opportunities for EBMOs](#), based on an in-depth literature review and enterprise survey, found that technology was the main driving force behind changing business models. Automation and particularly digitalization were changing how and where the business operates, how it manages people, what skills it requires and how it needs to think and plan for growth. Many developing economies emerged as hubs for capital, innovation and talent, taking opportunities from an increasingly interconnected world and integrating global markets.

Sustainability has become a core business strategy signalling its place as a responsible actor and a way to mitigate the social and environmental risks. Inevitable demographic shifts require businesses to adapt not only to the multigenerational workforce but to the changing needs of the diverse consumer groups. Companies must be prepared for the impact of ageing trends in some regions and youth dividends in others on the workforce, consumers and stakeholders. Skills shortages are felt across regions and sectors and were critical for companies. The research has shown that businesses need to adopt a 360° view of the internal and external environment and keep up with the speed, breadth and depth of change to maintain growth and competitiveness. The finding of the survey demonstrated that companies were optimistic about the role of business organizations. Their active role in shaping the business environment to help companies navigate the constantly changing landscape, foresee trends, manage risks and work with governments and other stakeholders to find solutions was seen as particularly valuable.

At the beginning of 2020, the global outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic shifted the anticipated trajectory of these trends, impacting people, businesses and economies in significant and unforeseen ways. Not only has it exposed the global economy's fault lines, tested the institutions' strength, and forced the reshaping of work and business models, the pandemic has radically changed the outlook for the foreseeable future. Acceleration of technology uptake and disruption to the global supply chains induced critical changes that in a more stable environment would have taken years, if not decades. With the lasting effects of the hybrid or flexible working methods, the rethinking of quality and nature of jobs, the new premium on work organization, safety and health and the spotlight on wellbeing, the major impact of the pandemic is felt at the workplace. With many industries experiencing fundamental changes, skills shifts and shortages have acquired new urgency.

Three years since the COVID-19 outbreak hit the world, the economic effect of the pandemic is still strongly felt across regions and countries. While many countries are easing travel restrictions and resuming economic activities, Asia is far from a full and sustainable recovery. In terms of macroeconomic prospects, in July 2022, the Asian Development Bank (ADB) lowered its economic growth forecast for developing Asia and the Pacific to 4.6% this year due to slower growth of China, monetary tightening in advanced economies, and fallout from the continued Russian invasion of Ukraine.<sup>1</sup> In the Middle East and Central Asia the IMF projects 4.8% growth in 2022, declining to 3.5% in 2023.<sup>2</sup>

Growing geopolitical and trade tensions in Asia Pacific, world-wide impacts of Russia's invasion of Ukraine, and developments in Myanmar are adding new complexity to recovery, hiking up the commodity and energy prices, changing the global political landscape and raising major issues for businesses, including the stability of markets, the resilience of supply chains and challenges of operating in a volatile political environment. The medium-term outlook shows a serious risk of fragmentation of the global economy into geopolitical blocks with distinct technology and financial standards.

### **Purpose and objectives:**

Against this background, ILO ACT/EMP, IOE and SNEF are holding a Regional Forum of EBMOs in Asia, Pacific and Arab states to discuss strategic business issues, dominating trends, opportunities and strategies to lead and serve business in the shifting world.

The Forum will provide a platform for EBMOs to share their perspectives on the post-pandemic environment and pressing new challenges for business leaders created by the recent disruptions. Sharing their experiences and lessons learnt during the pandemic and exchanging ideas and innovations would help take stock of developments and stimulate thinking on how EBMOs can add value to members and society at large as well as inform Government policy at a time of exponential change

The deliberations will build on the outcomes of the series of virtual meetings held by the ILO and IOE throughout 2022, focusing on strategic management, policy influence and service function of the EBMOs needed to support members in the increasingly uncertain environment. These meetings synthesized several conclusions demonstrating EBMOs' strategies, resilience and agility in response to the crisis. Digitalization of EBMOs has been particularly notable, with many organizations developing or upgrading their digital resources to maintain relevance in the post-pandemic environment. A positive role played by business provided an opportunity for many EBMOs to enhance their value proposition, policy agenda and service offer to reflect social issues that emerged from the crisis.

To stimulate a forward-looking and relevant discussion, the Forum is designed to bring out these key issues for business and EBMOs, taking into account regional, subregional and

---

<sup>1</sup> <https://www.adb.org/news/developing-asia-economic-outlook-lowered-prc-growth-slows>

<sup>2</sup> [World Economic Outlook Update, July 2022: Gloomy and More Uncertain \(imf.org\)](#)

country differences to the extent possible. The Forum will offer a unique opportunity as follows:

- To discuss the shifting business environment that impacts companies and EBMOs;
- To reflect on advancing EBMOs' value proposition, influence, membership, sustainability and resilience;
- To discuss organizational and strategic priorities and digital transformation to make EBMOs in the region fit for new challenges;
- To provide insights into the EBMOs' current agenda and priorities to feed into the future programmes and action;
- To offer a platform to the EBMOs in Asia, the Pacific and the Arab States to share their views and experiences on the current and future challenges facing business and EBMOs with their peers;
- To stimulate a flow of ideas, innovative thinking and exchange of knowledge on proven and new ways of delivering value and expanding membership base, including those outside of EBMOs traditional scope;
- To provide clear takeaways for action.

### **Participants**

The Forum will bring together the following participants:

- Employer delegates of the 17th APRM from the Arab States and Asia Pacific regions participating in person;
- Nominated participants from EBMOs in two regions participating in person or virtually;
- Invited speakers and panellists;
- ILO, IOE and SNEF staff.

### **Structure**

The Forum will be organized around four main segments and themes.

1. Setting the scene: Social and economic outlook for the foreseeable future: macroeconomic trends shaping the regions and productivity challenges.

This session will provide a briefing on the current social and economic outlook as well as productivity trends and challenges from the labour market perspective in two regions as a backdrop to the meeting.

2. Session I: Trends shaping business environment: mid and long-term view

This session is designed to discuss and seek participants' perspective on the key trends and risks shaping business based on their analysis and membership experience. The last few years demonstrated that the interconnectedness of global economy and the acceleration of global trends increasingly impact businesses, regardless of size, sector and location. Technological advances, climate change, geopolitical instabilities, fragility of supply chains, skills and sustainability pressures are reshaping conditions for business. EBMOs need to be at the vanguard of the developments affecting

business environment and members' needs and priorities to be able to influence the policy, manage diverse membership and deliver bespoke solutions. This session will address the following questions:

- What are the key trends and risks shaping business today?
- What are the key drivers of change for business in the post-pandemic environment?
- How is the shifting environment changing the demands on EBMOs' policy and service offer? Which lessons learnt from the pandemic can help EBMOs build more resilient, agile, and valuable organizations?
- How does the emerging global debate on rethinking development agenda resonate with businesses and EBMOs in the Arab States and in the Asia Pacific? What can EBMOs do to promote sustainable development, stability, resilience, inclusion and manage the risks?

### 3. Session II: The Next New normal for the workplace

This session is designed to bring out the new workplace features that are forming in a post-pandemic environment. Today the workplace looks very different from three years ago. The pandemic fundamentally changed where, when and how people work. The effects of the global experiment of mass transition to teleworking during the pandemic demonstrated the need for a new management paradigm, greater flexibility and changing skills requirements. These demands are likely to stay, requiring reconsideration of workspace, wellbeing and occupational health and safety in the workplace.

- What does the workplace today look like? What are its key features? What are the traditional assumptions about enterprises and workplaces that are no longer relevant?
- What makes companies attractive to talent today? What is the role of diversity and inclusion?
- How has the value and meaning of flexibility changed post-pandemic and what can companies do to maximize it for greater competitiveness? How can employers manage productivity and flexibility for growth?
- What do EBMOs already do or need to do differently to help companies manage in the new normal workplace?

### 4. Session III: Putting digitalization at the service of EBMOs

This session is designed to discuss the opportunities and challenges for EBMOs presented by digitalization. While digital technology can enable EBMOs to become more agile and member oriented, investment in people and business processes are key to successful digital transformation at the organizational level. During the pandemic many organizations swiftly adopted digital working methods, tools and technologies to remain operational during the lockdowns. EBMOs need to make strategic decisions to maintain sustainability and impact of this new or enhanced capacity. The role of data as a strategic asset for core functions is yet to be fully embraced by many EBMOs. The session will discuss the following questions:

- How can digital technology be harnessed to better deliver the core value proposition?
- Why are people and business processes more determinant of success in digitalization than digital technology?
- Why data is a strategic asset for EBMOs?
- What needs to change for EBMOs to be able to fulfil their untapped potential using technology?
- A digital EBMO – could it ever exist?

#### 5. IOE session: Entrepreneurship & Business Heroes: How to build the Right Narrative

Vibrant small and medium-sized businesses are an essential part of every economy. According to some estimates, they make up over 99% of the total number of businesses worldwide.

SMEs are created and run by men and women who risk their futures on an idea they are passionate about or a vision they want to achieve. They understand that the success of their business depends upon the quality of their ideas, the humanity with which they guide their team, and the humility they bring to the challenge of creating something new.

This session focuses on how to tell the stories of the silent heroes from the small and medium business world. Too often, the stories of the leaders of small and medium businesses are not widely known or understood. The purpose is to train EBMOs to show the human side of running a business globally. We will discuss the importance of sharing individual stories of employers and learn what drives them, how they overcome obstacles, navigate the highs and lows of owning a business and the personal sacrifices they make on the road to success.

**ILO/IOE/SNEF Regional EBMO Forum**  
**DELIVERING VALUE IN THE SHIFTING WORLD**  
**5 December 2022, Singapore**

Time	Agenda
<b>09:00-09:30</b>	<p><b>Opening remarks</b></p> <p>Mr Hiroyuki Matsui, IOE Vice-President for Asia, Pacific and Arab States Ms Deborah France-Massin, Director, Bureau for Employers' Activities, ILO Mr Roberto Suarez, Secretary-General, IOE Dr Robert Yap, President, SNEF</p>
<b>09:30-10:00</b>	<p><b>Setting the scene:</b></p> <p>Social and economic outlook for the foreseeable future: macroeconomic trends shaping the regions and productivity challenges. <i>Mr Martin Lemoine, Officer-in-Charge, Singapore Office Asian Development Bank</i> <i>Dr Abdul Azeez Erumban, Professor, University of Groningen</i></p>
<b>10:00-10:40</b>	<p><b>Coffee break and group photo</b></p>
<b>10:40-11:30</b>	<p><b>Session 1.</b> Trends shaping business environment <i>Mr Tom Hadley, HadleysComments</i> <i>Mr Anushka Wijesinha, Co-founder, Centre for Smart Future</i> <i>Ms Sonya JANAH, Bahrain Chamber of Commerce and Industry (BCCI)</i> <i>Mr Greg Chen, Employers' Association of Indonesia (APINDO)</i></p>
<b>11:30-12:30</b>	<p><b>Session 2.</b> The Next Normal for the Workplace <i>Mr Gerard Seng, Executive Director of BDO Singapore</i> <i>Ms Susan Cheong, Head, Talent Acquisition &amp; Talent Management Group and SG HR Head, DBS Bank</i> <i>Mr Vajira ELLEPOLA, Director General, Employers' Federation of Ceylon (EFC)</i> <i>Mr Stephen Yee, Deputy Executive Director, Singapore National Employers Federation (SNEF)</i></p>
<b>12:30-14:00</b>	<p><b>Lunch</b></p>
<b>14:00-15:00</b>	<p><b>Session 3.</b> Putting digitalization at the service of the EBMOs <i>Mr Thomas Yeo, CET Global, Managing Director</i> <i>Dr Deborah Soule</i> <i>Mr Jose Roland Moya, Director General, Employers Confederation of the Philippines (ECOP)</i> <i>Dr. Alfadhal Al Hinai, CEO, Oman Chamber of Commerce and Industry (OCCI)</i> <i>Mr Hobart Aleksandar VAAI, CEO, Samoa Chamber (SCCI)</i></p>
<b>15:00-15:30</b>	<p><b>Coffee break</b></p>
<b>15:30-16:30</b>	<p><b>Session 4.</b> IOE - Entrepreneurship &amp; Business Heroes: How to build the Right Narrative</p>
<b>16:30-16:40</b>	<p><b>Closing remarks</b></p>
<b>19:00-20:30</b>	<p><b>Cocktail hosted by the IOE</b></p>

