

20 LAB Members Embarked on an Overseas Engagement and Learning Journey to Vietnam



Introduction

The future of work is increasingly shaped by driving forces like artificial intelligence (AI), sustainability imperatives, demographic shifts, geoeconomic fragmentation, and regional competition. These forces are creating new opportunities, reshaping job roles, skills requirements, employment models, and worker expectations.

Given these developments, the NTUC Labour Alliance co-laB (LAB) embarked on a four-day, three-night Overseas Engagement and Learning Journey to Vietnam from 11 to 14 May 2026. The 20-member delegation brought together senior academics, researchers, practitioners, and Labour Movement (LM) stakeholders from NUS, NTU, SMU, SUTD, SIT, SUSS, and NIE, including former Head of Civil Service and Emeritus Professor Lim Siong Guan. The programme aimed to deepen LAB's understanding of how workforce transformation, skills development, industrial upgrading, sustainability transitions, and labour representation are unfolding within a rapidly evolving regional economy, while generating insights relevant to Singapore's future workforce agenda.

The visit was also intended to strengthen LAB's role as a platform for foresight and cross-disciplinary learning. By bringing together different perspectives across research, policy, industry, and worker representation, the programme created space for LAB members to examine regional developments and consider how these may shape Singapore's future workforce agenda.

NTUC LAB's visit was intentionally planned around the 30th anniversary of the Vietnam–Singapore Industrial Park (VSIP) model, a long-standing platform for Singapore–Vietnam industrial cooperation, allowing NTUC LAB members to observe Singapore–Vietnam cooperation at a pivotal point as both countries deepen collaboration in green growth, advanced manufacturing, innovation, and talent development.

To maximise these learning opportunities, the programme was carefully curated around the VSIP ecosystem. Rather than a standalone study visit, the programme was sequenced to give LAB members access to different nodes of the ecosystem, spanning industry, academia, labour, and Singapore-Vietnam institutional linkages. Through engagements with VSIP, LEGO Manufacturing Vietnam (LMV), Eastern International University (EIU), the SMU Overseas Centre Ho Chi Minh City (SMU OCHCMC), and the Ho Chi Minh City Federation of Labour, the delegation was able to examine how regional economic transformation is shaped by the intersection of industrial development, workforce planning, skills development and labour representation.

The delegation engaged senior leaders across government, industry, labour, and academia, including Singapore Consul-General to Ho Chi Minh City Mr Pang Te Cheng, Deputy General Director of VSIP Joint Venture Sean Lim, LMV Senior Vice President of Asia Operations and General Manager Jesper Hassellund Mikkelsen, Vice Chairman of the Ho Chi Minh City Federation of Labour Mr Pham Trong Nhan, and representatives from leading Vietnamese universities, including vice presidents, deans, and heads of international relations. This breadth of access added depth to the learning journey by allowing LAB members to understand how senior stakeholders across the ecosystem frame workforce, productivity, and skills priorities.

In Binh Duong, the delegation examined how the VSIP ecosystem integrates industrial development, infrastructure, talent development, innovation, and community planning to support long-term economic growth. Central to this industrial park model is Becamex IDC Corporation, a state-owned enterprise that drives the region's industrial and urban development. Within VSIP's wider ecosystem, EIU plays an important supporting role by aligning education, applied research, and workforce development with industry needs, helping to develop and channel talent into VSIP and its network of industries.

As investment, technology, talent, and industrial upgrading become more regionalised, Singapore workers' access to better jobs, stronger skills, and improved wage outcomes will depend on domestic labour market conditions, and how well Singapore anticipates and responds to developments across ASEAN.

The central question for the learning journey was how regional developments can sharpen NTUC's understanding of workforce transformation, help LAB members surface forward-looking insights, and support the LM's efforts to secure better jobs, better wages, and fair transitions for Singapore workers.

Insight 1: Workforce Competitiveness Is Becoming Ecosystem-Based



A key observation by LAB members was that workforce competitiveness is increasingly shaped by ecosystems.

Across engagements with LMV, VSIP, and EIU, Singapore–Vietnam partnership illustrated how industrial growth could be supported through an integrated ecosystem bringing together manufacturing, education, workforce development, infrastructure, logistics, sustainability, local talent pipelines, urban planning, healthcare, housing, telecommunications, and innovation.

LAB members noted that LEGO’s approach to workforce development served as a useful reference point to think about workforce planning more holistically. From building talent pipelines with local educational institutions to supporting workers’ practical and longer-term needs, including relocation, transport, and career progression. This suggested that effective workforce development requires firms to consider workers’ skills and whether the surrounding ecosystem enables them to access, sustain, and progress in good jobs.

At LMV Vietnam in Binh Duong, investments in automation, digitalisation, and sustainability were accompanied by efforts to build workforce capabilities and talent pipelines. Technological adoption appeared to be reshaping roles and creating demand for higher-value technical, operational, and supervisory competencies. The factory aimed to run on 100% renewable energy.

Mr Benny Choong, LEGO Head of Finance Asia Manufacturing, shared how LMV’s workforce considerations are increasingly embedded within broader business and supply-chain strategies. He explained that LEGO’s site selection process considered

land, infrastructure, utilities, and the quality of the surrounding industrial ecosystem, including developer professionalism, existing manufacturing capabilities, proximity to major urban and logistics nodes, sustainability readiness, workforce availability, and the presence of supporting partners. This was reflected in LEGO's location within VSIP III, where industrial infrastructure is linked to logistics, renewable energy, talent development, business services, and wider urban amenities. For labour stakeholders, this is significant because higher-value jobs need to be deliberately created and fostered through such supporting ecosystems.

The VSIP ecosystem further demonstrated how industrial development is increasingly integrated with wider work-live-learn infrastructure. Industrial parks must be linked to transport corridors, seaports, airports, logistics warehouses, healthcare facilities, telecommunications infrastructure, education institutions, urban amenities, and innovation centres. This creates conditions for firms to invest and for workers to live, work, learn, and adapt as industries transform. The visit also highlighted the value of sustained strategic investment, where long-term industrial planning helps create the conditions for infrastructure, firms, talent pipelines, and regional opportunities to develop together.

Transport connectivity was a key part of this ecosystem. Under the BOT (Build-Operate-Transfer) scheme, transport infrastructure has been developed to link industrial parks to seaports and airports through strategic corridors such as Ring Roads 3, 4, and 5, the Ho Chi Minh City–Chon Thanh Expressway, National Highway 13, and the Tan Van–My Phuoc–Bau Bang Expressway. This connectivity directly shapes workforce transformation because logistics access, industrial location, and labour market access are interdependent.

Participants attributed Vietnam's competitive advantage to its relatively young workforce, workers' sense of urgency to learn, ambition, positive work attitudes, openness to change, and growing investments in education and training. This prompted reflection on how workforce competitiveness can be shaped by aspiration, mindset, and social conditions that encourage people to seize new opportunities.

EIU provided a useful example of how educational institutions can be more closely aligned with industrial development. Its role in supporting a high-quality workforce to the surrounding industrial ecosystem and ensure the talent pipeline needs of VSIP illustrated the strategic importance of education planning that is closely linked to

Why This Matters for NTUC and Singapore Workers

Better jobs and better wages do not emerge from training alone. They depend on whether transformation is planned in ways that connect productivity growth, job redesign, skills development, and wage progression.

As Singapore companies adopt AI, automation, sustainability practices, and new operating models, NTUC's role is to ensure that worker outcomes are built into transformation plans from the start. This means moving upstream with companies, unions, training partners, and tripartite stakeholders, so that workers are prepared for new opportunities before job changes become urgent.

For Singapore workers, skills upgrading must be linked to real jobs, clearer progression pathways, and shared gains from transformation. A future-ready workforce agenda should ensure that workers can access better roles, sustain career transitions, and benefit from productivity-led growth.

current and anticipated industry demand. For Singapore, this offers a useful reference point for us to consider as we continue to develop our Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) system, workforce transformation, and closer alignment between tertiary institutions, training providers, employers, and unions.

Insight 2: The Skills Challenge Is Becoming a Pathway Challenge



The future skills challenge is increasingly about whether workers can access and benefit from pathways into emerging economic opportunities. Engagements with EIU and VSIP demonstrated how educational institutions were working with industry partners to align curricula, training pathways, and workforce development initiatives with economic priorities and employer needs. Skills development formed part of a broader economic development strategy.

This was particularly evident in the relationship between Becamex and EIU. Becamex's role as an industrial and urban developer provides the wider economic platform: attracting firms, developing industrial infrastructure, and building the surrounding business and community environment. Mr Kieu Manh Kha, Director of ASPIRE and the Office of International Affairs, and Deputy Director of the R&D Institute at Becamex EIU, explained that EIU functions as a talent and innovation node within this platform, helping to connect students, faculty, enterprises, and community partners through applied learning, research, industry projects, internships, and technology transfer.

The deliberate alignment between educational institutions and industrial development was observed, with EIU's role within the broader Becamex and VSIP ecosystem, illustrating how workforce planning, industry needs, and regional development can be linked in an integrated manner. Talent pipelines were developed alongside economic growth plans to anticipate future labour demand.

EIU is embedded within industrial development strategy. Its industry engagement spans advanced manufacturing, automation, logistics, digital technology, healthcare, hospitality, finance, and professional services. This gives students and workers

exposure to employers, workplace problems, applied projects, and emerging skill demands.

EIU is positioned as an institution focused on building linkages with businesses and leading universities, developing high-quality human resources to meet workforce needs, adapting to evolving industry demands, and driving regional growth. This reflects a deliberate effort to connect education, industry demand, and regional development.

The Becamex–EIU innovation ecosystem demonstrated how formal degree programmes can be strengthened through applied learning and industry engagement. Facilities and platforms include the Sembcorp–EIU Center for Sustainable Solutions, Industry 4.0 Innovation Center (IIC), and Advanced Manufacturing Center (AMC) provide practical exposure to workplace challenges and opportunities to develop emerging skills through applied projects and problem-solving.

The wider Becamex ecosystem also showed how skills development can sit alongside urban planning, healthcare, telecommunications, logistics, research and development, innovation infrastructure, and business incubation. Workers do not experience skills systems in isolation, but through access to employers, information, credentials, mobility, and real job opportunities.

The delegation identified three requirements of an effective skills ecosystem: clear communication of skills demand, accessible pathways for different worker segments, and recognition of skills acquired through work, short courses and informal learning. These are common challenges across economies seeking to help workers identify valuable skills, acquire them and translate them into better employment outcomes.

Why This Matters for NTUC and Singapore Workers

For Singapore workers, the deeper risk lies in career pathway uncertainty: not knowing which skills matter, whether training will lead to better jobs, or whether employers will recognise newly acquired capabilities.

This reinforces the importance of linking Continuing Education and Training (CET), job redesign, career guidance, skills recognition, and wage progression more tightly. For mature workers or workers in transition, this could include a series of work-based projects that help them build industry-relevant skills while testing new pathways. Workers are more likely to take up training when pathways are visible, trusted, and connected to real employment outcomes, rather than presented as standalone courses. As neighbouring economies move up the value chain and strengthen their technological capabilities, Singapore's ability to maintain workforce competitiveness will depend on whether workers can access clear, credible, and industry-relevant pathways into higher-value roles.

For NTUC, this points to the importance of closing the gap between skills acquisition and employment outcomes. The LM can help shape clearer skills demand signals, support job redesign, and advocate for skills to be fairly valued in wages and progression. The “last mile” between training and better employment outcomes should not be left for workers to navigate alone.

Insight 3: Labour Institutions Must Move Upstream



The LAB delegation paid a visit to the Ho Chi Minh City Labour Federation. This visit provided useful perspectives on how regional labour institutions are adapting to changing workforce realities. Representatives shared efforts to strengthen digital capabilities amongst Vietnamese union leaders and workers, including training initiatives to build awareness of emerging technologies such as AI, to prepare workers for ongoing workforce transformation. Improving digital capacities and modern communication skills among trade union officials was viewed as an urgent priority, both to strengthen the effectiveness of workers' movements and enable more proactive information dissemination at the grassroots level. These efforts reflected a broader recognition that labour organisations must evolve alongside workers and industries they serve.

This anticipatory role was also reflected in the federation's engagement with university students, including regular resume writing and labour law workshops. In 2025, HCMC Labour Federation conducted 50 classes for approximately 5,000 university students, with a target of reaching 10,000 students in 2026. This suggested that labour institutions were helping future labour market entrants understand employment rights and prepare for work.

Participants observed that Vietnam's labour institutions took a holistic approach to worker support, combining workplace representation with social housing support, legal assistance, worker welfare programmes, community engagement, and labour-rights outreach. Partnerships with educational and legal partners also helped raise awareness among students and workers. This approach recognised the close connection between workers' employment, social, and living needs.

This was reinforced by the wider Becamex/VSIP ecosystem, which showed how sustainable industrial growth depends on surrounding social infrastructure. Workers' ability to access and remain in industrial jobs is shaped by housing, transport, healthcare, education, commercial amenities, and community support. For labour institutions, this points to the importance of understanding workers' everyday social needs, especially as industrial transformation becomes more closely linked to living conditions and social resilience.

The visit prompted reflection on Singapore's labour model. Tripartism remains an enduring strength bringing labour, employers, and government together through pragmatic, trust-based cooperation. As work evolves, tripartism must continue enabling economic transformation with workers' interests at its core.

Why This Matters for NTUC and Singapore Workers

This highlights a wider regional shift in what labour institutions are called to engage workers even before they formally enter the workforce, through outreach on employability, workplace rights, and readiness for work.

For Singapore, this reinforces the importance of strengthening the LM's relationship with workers throughout their careers, from students and new entrants to mid-career, platform and older workers. As work becomes more fluid, NTUC's value will increasingly depend on being a source of protection and a trusted guide through career choices, transitions and opportunities.

Earlier support can help workers make informed job choices, keep their skills current, manage career moves and address workplace issues before they become urgent. This requires the LM to build trust, visibility and confidence early.

Insight 4: Green and Digital Transitions Must Translate into Better Jobs for Workers

Green and digital transitions must be understood as workforce transformation issues. As industries move towards greener and smarter operating models, competitiveness will increasingly depend on whether firms can align sustainability, productivity, technology adoption, and workforce capability-building so that transformation supports higher-value work, stronger skills, and better worker outcomes.

This was evident at LMV, where sustainability was deeply integrated into business and operational planning. The facility was presented as the LEGO Group's most environmentally sustainable factory at the time of opening, with features such as Leadership in Energy and Environmental Design (LEED) certification, rooftop solar, energy and carbon management systems, smart lighting, heat recovery, and environmentally conscious site design. LMV also invested in people before production began by building competencies and culture, dedicating time to skills development and introducing global manufacturing standards. Its operating model connected the factory's design and energy systems with how work was organised, managed, and supported.

Green transformation can create better jobs when workforce planning is built into implementation. New sustainability practices, energy systems, automation,

compliance requirements, and resource-efficient operations may reshape job scopes and increase demand for higher-value technical, operational, supervisory, and problem-solving capabilities. Firms should prepare their workforce to move into these redesigned or emerging roles, for more positive worker outcomes.

The move towards VSIP 2.0 reinforced that long-term competitiveness depends on higher-value industries, greener practices and sustained investment. The delegation observed Vietnam pursuing this shift through deliberate planning and closer integration of technology, infrastructure, skills, innovation, and worker outcomes. Such industrial ecosystems will be critical to achieving competitive and inclusive growth.

VSIP 2.0's activation of the triple-helix model, synchronising the efforts of government, academia, and industry, provides an institutional basis for such coordination. By linking research, commercialisation, and industrial application, the model helps move tenants towards a future-ready talent and technology pipeline.

The wider ecosystem also showed how green industrial development could be linked to talent development. Green infrastructure, ecological industrial parks, renewable energy, resource efficiency, logistics connectivity, and smart technologies were presented alongside efforts to build human capital through institutions such as EIU. By connecting applied learning, employer partnerships, research, and talent development to surrounding industry needs, this ecosystem creates conditions for workers and future entrants to access higher-value work, rather than remain confined to lower-value roles.

Why This Matters for NTUC and Singapore Workers

The LM's priority is ensuring that workers share the gains from green and digital transformation. Cleaner technologies, automation, energy management systems, sustainability reporting, and smarter operating models will reshape jobs and skills requirements. Early planning is essential to provide workers with clear support, progression pathways, and wage recognition.

Unions should engage employers early to map specific job impacts, identify roles at risk of displacement or redesign, and co-develop targeted training and redeployment pathways. NTUC could also push for clearer commitments from firms to link sustainability investments with measurable workforce outcomes, including structured job redesign, recognised skills upgrading, and wage progression tied to higher-value roles.

With the right support, green and digital transformation can strengthen workers' capabilities, improve workplace safety, raise productivity, and create better jobs and wages.

Insight 5: Regionalisation Is Becoming a Workforce Issue

A recurring reflection amongst participants was the growing importance of ASEAN as a source of future economic and workforce opportunities.

Several participants observed that Singaporean students and young professionals tended to prioritise overseas exposure in Europe, North America, and East Asia, giving less attention to ASEAN economies such as Vietnam, Indonesia, and Thailand. Vietnam's rapid development, expanding industrial base, young workforce, and growing innovation ecosystem highlight ASEAN's growing importance to Singapore's

economic future. Regional exposure can develop cultural agility, regional business understanding, leadership capabilities, and experience across different institutional and labour market contexts. It can also strengthen young Singaporeans' regional fluency and sense of shared Southeast Asian identity as economic cooperation across ASEAN deepens.

Overseas exposure should not be viewed merely as travel, cultural experience, or short-term attachment. When intentionally designed with structured onboarding, employer mentorship, workplace responsibilities, and on-ground support, such experiences can become part of a broader workforce strategy to develop Singapore youths who are adaptable, commercially aware, culturally fluent, and capable of operating across Southeast Asia.



Through an NTUC convened Singapore-Vietnam networking session in collaboration with the SMU OCHCMC, the delegation exchanged perspectives with senior leaders across academia, industry and workforce development from Singapore and Vietnam.

The session featured keynote contributions from Edward Lim, Country Director of NUS Enterprise; Nancy Ha, Country Manager of SUSS Success Academy Vietnam; Viet Anh Vu, Chief Representative Officer of SMU

OCHCMC; and Shareeda Morrison, Country Head (Vietnam) of Ngee Ann Polytechnic, alongside participation from vice presidents, associate presidents, deans, vice deans, and heads of international relations from leading Vietnamese institutions including Vietnam National University (VNU) HCMC, HCMC University of Technology (HCMUT), University of Science (VNU-HCM), University of Economics and Law, HCMC University of Technology (HUTECH) University, RMIT Vietnam and Kühne Logistics University.

Attendees noted that Singapore–Vietnam cooperation now encompasses trade, investment and joint initiatives in talent development, innovation, research, advanced manufacturing and start-up development. This is reflected in growing cross-border partnerships in infrastructure, research, and advanced manufacturing, including smart manufacturing, semiconductors, robotics, and start-up development. These developments highlight the growing importance of regional workforce networks that connect educational institutions, industry partners, government agencies, and professional communities, enabling ideas, skills, technology, and people to move more effectively across borders.

This is consistent with Singapore's wider economic and workforce context. ASEAN remains a key destination for Singapore firms' internationalisation.¹ Overseas

¹ Singapore Business Federation. (2026). *National Business Survey 2025: Scaled Internationally Supplement*. SBF reported that 84% of internationalised businesses operate in ASEAN in 2025, while 65% of businesses planning overseas expansion intend to expand within ASEAN.

investments by Singapore-based firms can have a positive effect on their revenue, profits, value-added, and employment in Singapore.²

Singapore is headquarters for many multinational enterprises with senior leadership and top regional roles. Workers with global or regional experience are better positioned to take on leadership roles in regional offices or manage multi-country teams. This points to the need for sustained efforts to broaden the international exposure and leadership readiness of our local workforce.³

The visit highlighted how ASEAN's economic transformation may shape Singapore's long-term workforce interests. VSIP showed how regional ecosystems that connect infrastructure, investment, technology, talent, and institutions to create industrial value. For Singapore, workforce opportunities are likely to arise in regional project development, capability transfer, management, and cross-border collaboration involving its enterprises, institutions, and workers. ASEAN's industrialisation can thereby strengthen Singapore's role in joint economic development and support regional stability, security, and sustainable growth.

Why This Matters for NTUC and Singapore Workers

Regionalisation is increasingly a workforce issue, as work, value creation, and career opportunities become more connected across borders. As Singapore enterprises expand across ASEAN and move up the value chain, workers will need stronger regional readiness to navigate cross-border flows of work, capital, technology and talent, operate effectively across the region and remain competitive in Singapore's labour market.

Workers will increasingly benefit through access to higher-value regional roles. As advanced manufacturing becomes more automated, capital-intensive and less labour-intensive, opportunities will increasingly arise in regional coordination, technology adoption, sustainability, logistics, professional services, innovation and enterprise development, including where production is located elsewhere.

Tailored pathways can help different worker groups capture these opportunities. Regional exposure, attachments and curated development pathways can prepare younger workers for regional management, capability-transfer and high-growth roles. Experienced and mature workers with technical, supervisory or stakeholder-management capabilities can move into regional advisory, training, project-management and capability-transfer roles. Stronger regional understanding will also help the LM anticipate risks and opportunities arising from domestic restructuring and ASEAN's continued development.

Conclusion

The NTUC LAB Overseas Engagement and Learning Journey to Vietnam provided valuable opportunities to examine how workforce transformation is being approached within a rapidly developing ASEAN economy.

² Ministry of Trade and Industry. (2021). *Impact of Direct Investment Abroad on Firm-Level Outcomes of Singapore-Based Firms*.

³ Manpower Research and Statistics Department, Ministry of Manpower. (2026). *Labour Force in Singapore 2025*.

The key learning was not that Singapore should replicate Vietnam's model. The two countries differ in context, labour market structure, institutions, and stage of development. Rather, the value of the visit lay in surfacing strategic questions that are highly relevant to Singapore's LM: How can workforce development be built into industrial transformation from the start? How can skills systems provide clearer pathways to better jobs and wages? How can labour institutions move upstream to support fair transitions? How can green and digital transitions be designed around workers? How can Singapore workers become more regionally ready as ASEAN economies grow and integrate?

Across the engagements, a central question emerged: whether transformation will create good jobs that are stable, dignified, sustainable, and capable of supporting broad-based progress. This is where the LM's perspective remains critical, ensuring that innovation, investment, productivity gains, and regional growth translate into meaningful outcomes for workers.

The learning journey also reinforced the value of LAB as a platform for cross-disciplinary labour insight. By bringing together perspectives from research, education, industry, policy, and worker representation, LAB can help NTUC better understand emerging workforce shifts and translate them into evidence-informed approaches that support Singapore workers. These insights can continue to inform future research, knowledge exchange, and collaborations on issues such as skills pathways, industrial transformation, sustainability transitions, regionalisation, and worker well-being. For NTUC, maintaining a strong understanding of regional developments and emerging workforce trends will be increasingly important as Singapore navigates AI adoption, economic restructuring, sustainability transitions, and regional competition. Ultimately, the learning journey reinforced that the future of work should not be left to market forces alone. It must be shaped deliberately so that transformation delivers better jobs, better wages, and better lives for Singapore workers.

Strategic Value of the Learning Journey for the LM

Direct exposure to Vietnam's workforce transformation strengthened NTUC's foresight by giving LAB members a comparative view of shared workforce challenges, emerging approaches and implications for Singapore.

The delegation brought together academics, researchers, practitioners, and LM stakeholders across policy, industry, worker representation and regional development.

Formal and informal exchanges on AI adoption, workforce transformation, skills, labour institutions, talent mobility, sustainability, regional opportunities and Singapore's labour model strengthened LAB's network and generated cross-disciplinary insights. They also surfaced areas for research and collaboration and reinforced the importance of strong partnerships, clear priorities, purposeful pacing and worker-centred transformation.

By connecting these perspectives, the learning journey strengthened LAB's ability to translate grounded, pragmatic, and regionally informed insights into evidence-informed approaches that help NTUC anticipate workforce shifts, surface emerging risks and opportunities, and advance Singapore workers' interests before challenges become urgent domestically.

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