

Labour and human capital represent the cornerstone of socioeconomic advancement. As integral components of a nation's productive capacity, investments in these areas are crucial for fostering innovation, productivity, and competitiveness. Furthermore, addressing disparities in labour market participation, skills acquisition, and access to education, and building on the gains of recent sector initiatives are imperative to achieve inclusive growth. For the Philippines, the current administration has maintained that the generation of high-quality jobs will be among its priorities. Among the steps that the government is taking to bolster employment among Filipinos are the expansion of training and reskilling programs, implementation of programs that adopt wider alternative work arrangements, as well as the promotion of digitalisation and innovation in businesses.¹

In recognising the role of social and human capital development in the country's economy, the Philippine government has likewise underscored its prioritisation of advancing the responsiveness and adaptability of the country's educational system.² It is critical that all stakeholders, including governments, private sector players, and educational institutions work to bridge the gaps and maximise opportunities. Through concerted efforts and strategic investments in human capital development, societies can unlock their full potential and pave the way for sustainable prosperity.

As a steadfast partner of the government in helping the growth and development of our youth to better prepare them for the workforce, the ECCP recommends that DepEd **increase the minimum 80-hour requirement for the work immersion program** to allow them more time to become more hands-on with the work environment and fully develop and retain the necessary skills and competencies required in the workforce. Another policy measure that would complement the government's efforts to develop its future workforce is the enactment of a revised apprenticeship law. The ECCP likewise strongly calls for Congress to **fast-track the passage of the proposed legislation to promote the employability and entrepreneurship of higher education graduates in the Philippines**. This critical piece of legislation will ensure the professional development of pre-workforce individuals by equipping them with marketable and highly desirable technical skills based on the industry's needs and providing a continuous supply of skilled workers, thus addressing youth unemployment. At the same time, the proposed measure will protect apprentices from exploitative and incompetent employers.

The ECCP also supports developments made on **easing the restrictions on foreign employment**. The Chamber trusts that the Philippine government will continue to revisit the law and regulations that serve as a guide for the employment of foreign nationals, either medium- or long-term. In addition, the Chamber urges increasing **labour productivity through improved workplace productivity schemes**. The proposed Enterprise Productivity Act may aid businesses in alleviating some of the challenges brought about by the pandemic and several external pressures.

In light of the discussions to legislate minimum wage increases, the Chamber urges the Philippine government to **strongly reconsider the proposals to legislate minimum wage increases and their adverse effects on the country and its people**. The ECCP, together with business and industry associations, recommends adopting a more comprehensive approach to addressing economic inequality, including investing more in education, skills development, and infrastructure, as well as creating an enabling environment for business growth and job creation.

¹ Ph Gov't To Prioritize Addressing Job Vulnerability as Employment Continues to Improve in September 2023—NEDA, 2023

² Ferdinand R. Marcos Jr., Second State of the Nation Address, July 24, 2023

Lying in the cornerstone of human capital development is education. Indeed, investing in education is a strategic necessity to form a globally competitive and skilled workforce. Recent industry developments reflect a commitment to enhancing quality and accessibility to education in the Philippines, evidenced by the unveiling of the National Technical Education and Skills Development Plan (NTESDP) 2023-2028 of Technical Education and Skills Development Authority (TESDA) as well as the issuance of a special allotment release order for the implementation of the Universal Access to Quality Tertiary Education (UAQTE) Act.

The Public-Private Education Complementarity Framework and the MATATAG Agenda further emphasise collaborative efforts to improve the quality and inclusivity of education programs in the country. Legislative initiatives such as the Academic Recovery and Accessible Learning (ARAL) Program bill and House Bill No. (HBN) 5728 institutionalising the Expanded Tertiary Education Equivalency and Accreditation Program (ETEEAP) will also aid in making education accessible to all Filipinos once passed.

Despite these advancements, barriers remain in the Philippine education system. To address these challenges, **the basic education system curriculum must be enhanced** to generate job-ready citizens. There is also a need to effectively implement online and blended learning modalities to improve the quality of education amidst the adoption of hybrid learning. Moreover, the Education Committee pushes for the **allocation of sufficient funds for the re-skilling and upskilling of teachers**. Relatedly, the ECCP and its Education Committee urge policymakers to implement comprehensive industry immersion programs designed to bolster teachers' proficiency in both soft and hard skills. **Strengthening vocational programs and augmenting the implementation of academic equivalency programs** will also bridge the gap between academia and industry. It is imperative to address the international recognition of Bachelor's degrees and undergraduate courses to facilitate opportunities for graduates on a global scale.

As the Philippines continues to trail behind in terms of infrastructure competitiveness, particularly with respect to education infrastructure,³ issues on **educational facilities and teaching-learning materials should be addressed**. Equally important is **integrating health, nutrition, disaster preparedness, and security initiatives into education development strategies**. Such a move will cater to the well-being of Filipino students, laying the foundation for a more productive human capital in the country. Considering these policy recommendations will help the Philippines strengthen its education system and foster a competent and empowered workforce.

³ World Competitiveness Ranking 2023