

Strengthening Leadership for Systemic Impact

Independent Review of the
Counter Trafficking in Persons Leadership
Excellence in ASEAN Program (CTIP LEAP)



Why leadership matters

Complex challenges such as human trafficking cannot be addressed through technical solutions alone. Effective responses depend on leaders who can navigate institutional constraints, coordinate across agencies, and sustain change within complex systems.

The Counter Trafficking in Persons Leadership Excellence in ASEAN (CTIP LEAP) program was established in recognition of this reality, with the aim of strengthening leadership capability among government officials responsible for counter-trafficking efforts across ASEAN Member States.

CTIP LEAP is an initiative of the Australian Government funded ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking program (ASEAN-ACT) and delivered by executive coaching consultants Polaris Global.



Why invest in public-sector leadership?

Counter-trafficking efforts rely on leadership across multiple sectors, with public-sector leadership playing a distinct role in setting policy direction, coordinating institutions, and sustaining implementation across justice, labour, migration, and social protection systems.

CTIP LEAP is an investment aimed at cultivating counter-trafficking leadership to strengthen institutions. This approach encourages reforms to be scaled and sustained, which is critical in the ASEAN context where regional commitments rely on effective public-sector leadership for national action.

An independent review found that this systems-thinking leadership focus addresses a critical gap in traditional capacity-building approaches, which often prioritises technical knowledge without building the leadership capability needed to mobilise complex systems.



Independent review of the first CTIP LEAP cohort

An independent review of the first CTIP LEAP cohort was conducted between January and March 2026 by Ethos of Engagement Consulting.

The review included interviews with participants and their supervisors, the consultant trainers and ASEAN-ACT program team, alongside an analysis of survey results and other program data. The Kirkpatrick Model was applied to assess program performance, providing a clear and structured framework for examining participant responses and early outcomes.

The review explored five Key Evaluation Questions and assessed:

- relevance and effectiveness
- early signs of sustained impact
- value for money
- equality and inclusion principles
- leadership change at individual, institutional, and system levels

The review found clear evidence that CTIP LEAP strengthened leadership capabilities and contributed to more effective counter-trafficking practice.



Who participated in the first CTIP LEAP?

The first CTIP LEAP cohort consisted of twenty mid to senior-level government officials (11 females, 9 males) from five ASEAN Member States in which ASEAN-ACT implements programming – Cambodia, Lao PDR, Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam.

Participants represented government agencies with a key role in counter-trafficking, including justice and prosecution services, law enforcement, labour and migration authorities, social welfare agencies, anti-money laundering, and national coordination bodies.

All twenty participants completed the full 12-month program, with the graduation held in December 2025.

What participants learned over 12 months

CTIP LEAP was designed as a 12-month leadership journey delivered through five virtual modules and three in-person workshops in Bangkok, Ho Chi Minh City and concluding with a Summit-graduation in Manila.

Participants began with systems thinking, building a shared understanding of counter-trafficking as a complex, interdependent system.

“Understanding myself in that system added to my realisation that I have a big part in pushing for change., helping my colleagues to be better and more efficient workers that we can help the organisation achieve”

— Participant

Subsequent modules focused on breaking bias and building psychological safety, encouraging participants to develop deeper self-reflection and self-awareness in relation to power, hierarchy, and leadership identity.

“Before the course, I feel pressure to have the right answer and provide solutions... After the course, my mindset had changed.”

— Participant

As learning progressed, modules on influencing and advocacy focused on engaging and aligning stakeholders to support coordinated action.

Later modules reinforced resilience, wellbeing, and business acumen, reframing performance to include people-centred and sustainable leadership.

“It’s also instilled in the program our wellbeing and wellbeing of others...We don’t just focus on targets, but also on the people.”

— Participant

Participants noted that honest engagement on leadership identity, power, and wellbeing required a level of openness not commonly practised in the region.



How leadership development translated into change

1. Leading under pressure

Many participants described changes in how they managed pressure and responsibility in demanding counter-trafficking roles.

“I have more confidence to take on a bigger role, I have implemented certain changes in the work of my team and slowly I’m doing some system change...like introducing urgent / important matrix...”

— Participant

These changes were associated with improved stress management, clearer decision-making, and a greater sense of control in complex and high-pressure environments.

2. Leadership style and team engagement

Several participants described a shift from directive leadership to more inclusive and consultative approaches.

“Before the course, I was the one who had high responsibilities and make decisions. After the course I have learned how to listen to the team and what they think and explain why I want to do and check with the team about my ideas.”

— Participant

These changes were associated with stronger team engagement, clearer communication, and improved accountability.

3. Policy and operational impact

Participants applied leadership learning directly to national planning and operational practice.

“...it’s (social inclusion and disability) not emphasised enough in the NAP [National Action Plan]... so we included it.”
– Participant

One participant described changes in frontline practice to strengthen victim-centred approaches:

“We had a training manual, and I wrote the victim identification so I can show the officers how to work with the victims... I try to make the officers act properly to be more connected with the victims or returnees.”
– Participant

4. Regional cooperation and networks

CTIP LEAP created informal peer networks across ASEAN Member States that supported cross-country collaboration and information sharing.

“When collaborating with other agencies, we might discuss about what type of training for victims and how to get them jobs. Sharing the common goal and interest, work together and share responsibilities.”
– Participant

Supervisors recognised the value of these connections:

“Building relationships helps us with our work as well.”
– Supervisor



Key factors contributing to CTIP LEAP effectiveness

- ✓ A systems thinking-based leadership course design
- ✓ Intentional focus on wellbeing and resilience, recognising the personal and professional toll of leading complex crime reform
- ✓ Face-to-face engagement, with structured individual and group reflections
- ✓ Country-specific Capstone Projects, grounded in real institutional challenges and refined through peer and facilitator guidance
- ✓ Use of 360-degree feedback surveys and a self-assessment tool focused on motivations and strengths
- ✓ Program and curriculum designed to foster gender equality, disability, social inclusion practices and principles
- ✓ Guest speakers from various sectors, broadened perspectives and exposed participants to alternative leadership approaches.

“Face to face gave protected time for learning... with few distractions.”
– Participant

Key lessons for the future

The review identified opportunities for refinement:

- Shorter program duration to maintain momentum and participant engagement
- Stronger integration and normalisation of coaching
- Reduced virtual delivery, as competing professional demands limited online engagement - hybrid approaches may be more effective
- Increased focus on ASEAN-relevant speakers and case studies
- Earlier sharing of course materials to allow sufficient time for translation and participant preparation.

Looking ahead

The independent review found clear evidence that CTIP LEAP strengthened leadership capability, encouraged institutional change, and supported early system-level impact across national counter-trafficking responses.

As participants continue to apply their learning, the effects of the leadership program extend beyond individual development, contributing to more resilient institutions and stronger regional coordination across ASEAN.