



Building leaders to shift systems across ASEAN region

Countering human trafficking requires more than technical expertise. It demands leaders who can navigate complexity, build trust across institutions, and drive collaboration to sustain reform. In response, the Australian Government-funded ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking (ASEAN-ACT) program developed the Counter Trafficking in Persons Leadership Excellence in ASEAN Program (LEAP) to strengthen the leadership capabilities of senior government officials working across the region.

Achievements

Launched in 2025, LEAP brought together mid to senior-level government officials from Cambodia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Thailand and Viet Nam working across law enforcement, judiciary, labour and migration, social welfare, financial investigations and national coordination bodies. Over 12 months, participants engaged in in-person and virtual workshops, coaching, self-assessment tools and practical Capstone Projects focused on real institutional challenges.

An independent review found LEAP was highly relevant and delivering impact at individual, organisational and system levels. Participants reported applying new leadership approaches in their agencies, strengthening cross-agency collaboration, contributing more effectively to national action plans, and improving engagement with teams and stakeholders. Supervisors also observed increased confidence, more inclusive leadership and stronger effectiveness in national and regional forums.

The success of the inaugural cohort has informed the design of the second LEAP cohort, which commenced in 2026 and expanded participation to include government leaders from Indonesia, further strengthening regional cooperation across Southeast Asia.

Key outcomes of LEAP include:

- Strengthened leadership capabilities that enable public officials to lead complex reform and systems change.
- Enhanced cross-agency and cross-border collaboration, helping leaders build trust and collective action across institutions.
- Practical Capstone Projects that translated learning into real-world results, including harmonising counter-trafficking curricula in the Philippines and embedding leadership modules into frontliner training in Cambodia.
- Greater self-awareness and mindset shifts among participants, fostering more collaborative, inclusive and adaptive leadership approaches.
- Evidence that leadership development is a strategic investment in sustaining reform, helping translate technical expertise into lasting impact across counter-trafficking systems.

