



ASEAN STATEMENT ON STRENGTHENING GOVERNMENT STRATEGIES ON MENTAL HEALTH AND WELL-BEING TOWARDS ACHIEVING WORK-LIFE BALANCE IN PUBLIC SECTOR

The 22nd Heads of Civil Service Meeting of the ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters (ACCSM) chaired and hosted by Brunei Darussalam on 7 August 2024 in Bandar Seri Begawan;

RECALLING the purposes and principles of ASEAN as enshrined in the ASEAN Charter, particularly on enhancement of good governance;

REAFFIRMING the ACCSM goal, which is to build and sustain a people-centric and dynamic civil service for the peoples of ASEAN, and the need to strengthen workforce competencies to cope with emerging challenges that are faced by ASEAN Member States so that efficient civil services can be delivered to the ASEAN Community;

ACKNOWLEDGING the 2022 World Health Organization's definition of mental health, which refers to "a state of mental well-being that enables people to cope with normal stresses of life, to realise their abilities, to learn well and work well, and to contribute to their communities", as well as the 2009 International Labour Organization's definition of workplace well-being, which "relates to all aspects of working life, from the quality and safety of the physical environment, to how workers feel about their work, their working environment, the climate at work and work organisation";

UNDERSCORING the importance of addressing mental health issues, as reflected in the 2013 Bandar Seri Begawan Declaration on

Noncommunicable Diseases in ASEAN, the 2016 ASEAN Mental Health Systems Report, and the 2021 ASEAN Plus Three Leaders' Statement on Cooperation on Mental Health amongst Adolescents and Young Children, among others;

RECALLING that awareness and motivation to improve mental health and well-being is a priority for ASEAN Member States in promoting agile civil service that is resilient and adaptable to new challenges and their leadership role in implementing progressive policies and practices;

DO HEREBY DECIDE TO ENDEAVOUR TO:

1. Recognise the 2022 World Health Organization's definition of workplace mental health as well as the 2009 International Labour Organization's definition as the basis for describing mental health in the civil service as the state of well-being in which public sector employees can realise their own potential, cope with the normal stresses of work, work productively, and positively contribute to their community. Mental health is not only the absence of mental disorders but also the presence of positive attributes such as resilience, work-life balance, and the ability to manage stress effectively.

This endeavour supports:

- **Emotional Well-being:** The ability to manage one's emotions, cope with stress, and maintain a positive outlook at work.
- **Psychological Well-being:** The presence of positive mental health attributes such as resilience, self-esteem, and a sense of purpose in one's work.
- **Social Well-being:** The quality of relationships and social interactions within the workplace, fostering a supportive and inclusive environment.
- **Work-Life Balance:** The ability to balance work demands with personal life, ensuring overall well-being and preventing burnout.
- **Prevention and Support:** Proactive measures to prevent mental health issues and providing support for employees experiencing mental health conditions to improve their mental health literacy and

provide organisational interventions that reshape working conditions, cultures, and relationships.

- **Inclusion and Reducing Stigma:** Encouraging inclusive practices and reducing stigma associated with mental health issues.

2. Strengthen efforts to ensure mental health and well-being principles, guidelines and strategies at the workplace in the civil service, towards:

- i. supporting good mental health at work to benefit employees and contribute to human development and organisational sustainability, and that civil service organisations in ASEAN should take a leading role in implementing progressive policies and practices;
- ii. encouraging policy development and implementation of flexible work policies and work-life balance initiatives and implementation of mental health programmes, including formal methods or systems of providing assistance to employees;
- iii. disseminating knowledge and information on workplace mental health and wellbeing between all levels of employees and management through, but not limited to, seminars, webinars, training programmes, and sharing of best practices;
- iv. building on existing ASEAN mechanisms for mental health, including scaling up cross-sectoral initiatives to foster bilateral and multilateral cooperation as well as alignment of actions, at various levels among ASEAN Member States;
- v. considering the development of regulatory and legal frameworks aligned with Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and guidelines and advisories to improve well-being of employees;
- vi. identifying necessary actions to address through evaluation and monitoring mechanisms, conducting assessments of mental health initiatives in workplaces, and sharing successful implementation efforts;

- vii. enhancing respect and understanding on mental health in the workforce to better integrate individuals with mental health conditions in the workplace, offering emotional and psychological support, and preventing mental health issues through inclusive measures which include elimination of stigma and discrimination against individuals with mental health conditions at workplaces and inclusion of mental health in universal health coverage;
- viii. developing responsive, inclusive and evidence-based, culturally appropriate, human rights-oriented and gender sensitive mental health programmes in the workplace with the key objectives of preventing or minimising exposure to psychosocial or mental health risks, supporting and creating an enabling environment for workers with mental health conditions, and correcting the stigma and discrimination associated with mental health conditions.

WE TASK the ACCSM, in collaboration with other relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies, to take the necessary efforts towards implementation of the proposed initiatives contained in this Statement and make necessary initiatives under the ACCSM Work Plan 2026-2030.

ADOPTED by the 22nd Heads of Civil Service Meeting of the ACCSM through ad-referendum on this Twenty-Fourth Day of September in the year Two Thousand Twenty-Four in a single original copy, in the English language.
