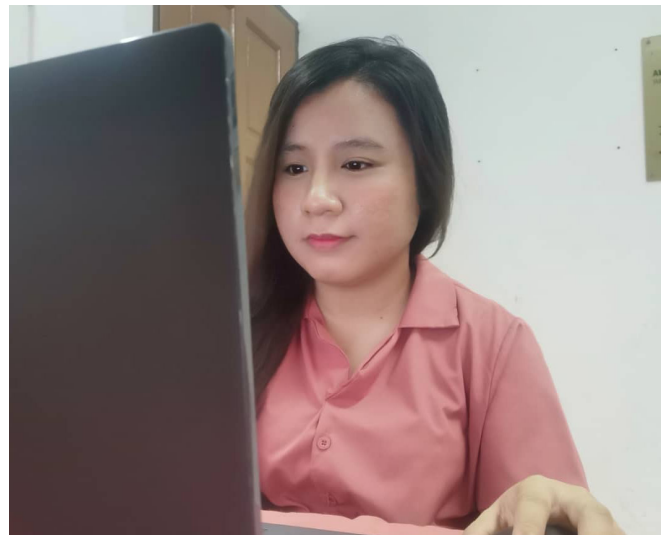


# Malaysia

Malaysia is today one of the most advanced middle-income economies in Asia. With a commitment that began in 1954, The Asia Foundation continues to support Malaysia's development. The Foundation works with government, civil-society, and private-sector partners to strengthen Malaysia's competitiveness in the global economy, support inclusive economic growth and digital literacy, foster women's participation in the business environment, build community-level mediation and conflict resolution skills, and strengthen Malaysia's role in the regional architecture.



## **AMIC STRATEGY: BUILDING A HIGH-SKILLED WORKFORCE**

Like most Advanced Middle-Income Countries (AMICs), economic growth and productivity in Malaysia are constrained by a shortage of highly skilled labor. One important, untapped resource in the country is highly educated young women, many of whom successfully find employment upon graduation, but often leave the workforce after the birth of their first child. Research shows that a critical factor is the severe lack of affordable, skilled childcare services across the country. The Foundation is working to address this barrier by supporting the development of a childcare policy to enable women to remain competitive in the workplace.

The transition to a more innovation-driven Malaysian economy is also heavily constrained by

the current shortage of highly skilled technical and vocational workers. Existing firms in more advanced industries have difficulty filling critical positions, and foreign direct investment (FDI) to Malaysia is restricted due to this. Recognizing the problem, the Malaysian government has invested in setting up 45 Technical/Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Centers nationwide. To further support this government effort, the Foundation will work with the newly formed MYTVET Council to streamline and strengthen policies and systems supporting TVET in Malaysia.

## **COVID-19 RESPONSE**

The Covid-19 crisis resulted in severe economic hardship for many women, and rising incidence of gender-based violence (GBV). With funding from

the Visa Foundation, the Foundation implemented a project to address these two inter-related challenges through activities designed to combat GBV and build the networks and capacity of the most at-risk micro and small women-led enterprises by providing them with targeted training and resources to build their skills, sustain their livelihoods, and access critical services. The initiative includes interventions to support women entrepreneurs to improve their digital and financial literacy, to launch and grow their businesses online, and to provide them with key information and referrals to available GBV services. The program enhances participants' understanding and awareness of GBV-related issues experienced by local women in Malaysia and enabled them to respond more effectively.

The Foundation is also providing digital skills training to women whose careers have been interrupted by the pandemic. Through the Rebound program, designed and delivered by TechSprint Academy with Foundation support, participants learn the specialized skills needed to pursue entry-level careers in the tech industry, or to access the digital economy and convert existing small businesses to online or e-commerce ready enterprises. Rebound comprises 3 levels - the first level is 'Reboot', which is a baseline program that guides participants in navigating their career. The second level, 'Step-up' is a next-level program to help deepen participants' knowledge in specific technical skill sets like data analytics, website design, and robotics. The third level, 'Breakthrough' is a Full Stack Development Bootcamp. A network of women professionals has been established to mentor participants, and many graduating participants have successfully obtained work in tech companies.

Through the regional Go Digital ASEAN initiative, the Foundation in collaboration with Startup Malaysia is designing and providing digital literacy training to

equip micro and small enterprises and underemployed youth, particularly those in rural and isolated areas, with crucial digital skills and tools, expanding economic opportunity across ASEAN Member States and minimizing the negative impact of the Covid-19 crisis.

## **BUILDING YOUNG LEADERS ACROSS ASEAN**

Malaysia plays an important role in ASEAN, and the Foundation supports ASEAN-wide initiatives that build capacity, especially among youth, across the region. Since 2018, the Foundation has designed and implemented seven regional workshops for ASEAN youth as part of the Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative (YSEALI) funded by the US Department of State. In Malaysia in 2019, the Foundation delivered the Young Southeast Asian Leadership Initiative Regional Workshop: Empowering Southeast Asian Educators. The workshop equipped and inspired 100 educators from across the region to adopt a successful, personalized teaching approach by imparting them with the tools to ensure success.

## **BOOKS FOR ASIA**

The Asia Foundation's Books for Asia program in Malaysia targets underserved and rural communities, public schools, universities, and libraries. Books for Asia has distributed over 2.8 million books in Malaysia since its independence in 1957. The Foundation continues to work with Johor Corporation Foundation and the Sarawak Foundation on this program.

*The Asia Foundation is a nonprofit international development organization committed to improving lives across a dynamic and developing Asia. Headquartered in San Francisco, The Asia Foundation works through a network of offices in 18 Asian countries and in Washington, DC. Working with public and private partners, the Foundation receives funding from a diverse group of bilateral and multilateral development agencies, foundations, corporations, and individuals.*



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