

## **In Nepal, labour market information is increasing the impact of employment services**

*KOICA and the ILO combine to lift the performance of employment service centres across the country.*

Nepal has one of the youngest populations in Asia with approximately 7 million of its people aged between 15 and 29. Unemployment amongst this group is verging on 20 percent and large numbers of Nepalese youth leave the country in search of low skilled or unskilled work. As with many low income economies, addressing the skills gap is one of the key policy improvements needed if this pool of potential talent is to find decent work and contribute to the continued development of the country.

Strategies to tackle skills deficits are, by necessity, complex and multifaceted. [The G20 Training Strategy for Strong, Sustained and Balanced Growth](#), which provides a policy framework for developing a skilled workforce for the future, identified a number of key elements for a successful strategy. They included among others: anticipating skills need; the participation of social partners; training quality and relevance; broad access of disadvantaged groups to training; and improving labour market information and employment services.

It was on this last measure that the International Labour Organization, with the support of the Korea International Cooperation Agency (KOICA), has intervened in the labour markets of Nepal since 2014. The project is called [Labour Market Information and Employment services \(LIfE\)](#) and it targets five of the 14 Public Employment Service Centres (ESCs) in the country.

Well run Employment Service Centres can help identify job growth potential in their regions, assess skill needs, and provide better information to both young persons and their local training providers. They also assist unemployed youth in making well informed choices about education, training, employment or entrepreneurship opportunities.

Saurav Ram Joshi is the National Project Coordinator of the LIfE project. He says that prior to the ILO's engagement ESCs were concentrating on just one element of the many roles an effective Centre can achieve: "In the early days the ESCs are simply collecting information from the job seekers, they were not effectively communicating with employer organizations. They were not fulfilling other services for job seekers, such as career counselling as well as services for employers."

Mahendra Prasai, who works as an employment counsellor in Nepal agrees. "In the eyes of many Nepalese, the status of the ESCs was low." However, since the intervention of the LIfE project he has noted more interest. "When I started there were very few people coming, but after the capacity building programme organized by the LIfE Project we are able to offer them more services such as vocational counselling, employment counselling, CV writing guidance and so on."

The aims of the project are threefold: one, to enhance the capacity of the ESCs, through training of staff, and broadening their remit to include career counselling. Alongside this aim, money was spent improving the physical resources available to the ESCs – building new premises or renovating older ones. Two, develop a system of skills indicators which can integrate their own data with labour market information. And three, enhance networking among the social partners to ensure that information about jobs and job seekers was shared.

Liaising with Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) services run by the public and private sector is also a key way in which ESCs can contribute to narrowing the skills gap. Ideally, Employment Service Centres occupy a central space between jobseekers, employers and vocational training institutions. Saurav noted that in Nepal there were “huge gaps” in communicating even basic information between these three groups.

Not only have ESC staff been trained through the programme, but also staff of employers’ and workers’ organizations, with the aim of promoting the integration of their respective activities. One tangible result of this collaboration has been a series of jobs fairs, well attended by employer groups that have successfully matched workers with available jobs.

Additionally, the LiFE project has helped to integrate the functions of migration resource centres (MRCs) and ESCs particularly in counselling services and referrals for job seekers of domestic employment through ESCs and for safer migration through MRCs

Funding for the programme ends later in 2017. Saurav believes the big challenge for the ESCs will be sustaining the changes implemented through the LiFE project. He says that conversations with the government lead him to believe the improvements will continue to roll out to other ESCs. However, he believes more capacity building would be useful, especially in completing a jobs portal project to aggregate employment notices online.

Mr Hansa Ram Pandey, Director of the Federation of Nepalese Chambers of Commerce and Industries is confident the programme will have a lasting influence: “It’s in the institutional memory now, and we think there might well be a way to use this training to really benefit the private sector”.

Several significant steps forward and a sound foundation has been laid for strengthening employment services and providing better information and knowledge about the labour market. With the leadership of the Ministry of Labour and Employment, the Department of Labour, and technical assistance from ILO, together with the engagement of all stakeholders, the KOICA funded LiFE project is making formative changes within existing practices and shaping the future direction of employment services in Nepal.