



2026 Southeast Asia Talent Report

The Transparency Mandate:
Speed, Clarity, and Trust.

Singapore | Malaysia | Philippines



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Introduction

For decades, the hiring process in Southeast Asia has operated in a shadow of information asymmetry. Across Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines, the era in which employers held the data and candidates held the hope is ending. Roles without salary clarity or defined processes are increasingly filtered out before they are even considered. A trust cliff is coming up, one where even the most prestigious branding cannot compensate for a hiring experience that feels slow, silent, or opaque.

This change is being accelerated by more informed candidates. They use AI to audit roles, benchmark pay, and test employer credibility early. For them, trust is verifiable currency. When that currency is withheld, disengagement happens tacitly through accumulated friction, unanswered questions, and unexplained delays. While this behavioural pattern is consistent across Southeast Asia, its weight and meaning change across markets and workforce profiles.

Singapore, with its mature economy, ageing workforce, and high cost of living, is recalibrating its success around sustainability. Talent exits when intensity rises without structural redesign. Malaysia, strengthened by a growing professional middle class and rising career ambition, is no longer willing to choose between competitive pay and meaningful growth. The Philippines, carved by a young workforce and strong family ties, increasingly treats career movement as a safeguard, changing roles when financial progress and long-term stability begin to stall.

In a region where talent is now an auditor, brands with the highest share of voice have ceded advantage to brands that are transparent. Our intent, here, is to map the friction points where employers risk loss of trust and provide the blueprint for where it can be deliberately nurtured.



SECTION 1

The Macro Reality:

The Transparency Mandate

Trust Is Now the Entry Condition for Talent Across Southeast Asia

Across Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines, workers are recalibrating how they evaluate employers. The shift is pragmatic. Purpose still matters, but financial clarity and process credibility now determine whether engagement begins at all.

Transparency is no longer limited to pay. It now encompasses salary visibility, role clarity, communication quality, and alignment between promise and experience.

This is not a behavioural trend. It is a structural recalibration of trust.

The Broader Transition

Southeast Asia's workforce is balancing aspiration with risk management.

Workers still seek growth and mobility, but they are increasingly screening employers for:



Financial transparency



Credible career progression pathways



Alignment between brand and employee experience



Communication discipline during hiring



Trust must be earned early, reinforced through clarity, and sustained through follow-through.

The Trust Reality

In high-liquidity markets like Singapore, speed reinforces trust.

In Malaysia and the Philippines, pay clarity anchors decision-making.

Across the region, ambiguity reduces conversion.



What the Regional Data Reveals Across all three markets:

67–72%

Say salary in jobs ads is the top trust signal

Between 42–60%

Cite vague ads, poor communication, or delays as major frustrations

2–4 weeks

Nearly half will not wait beyond this stretch in a hiring process

35–48%

Believe unclear jobs ads trigger loss of trust

33–55%

Believe pay opacity triggers loss of trust



SECTION 2

Regional Snapshots

Retention Breaks for Different Structural Reasons Across Southeast Asia

Employees across Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines are not responding solely to pay. Retention breaks where effort, progression, or financial security feel misaligned.



SINGAPORE: THE PRAGMATIST

- 

Persona: Career-mature, efficiency-oriented professionals with low tolerance for friction and slow processes.
- 

Motivation: Sustainable performance. Flexibility now rivals compensation, **39% cite work-life balance as a trigger to move.**
- 

What Builds Trust: Clear timelines, efficient hiring, realistic KPIs, and predictable workload intensity.
- 

Trust Breaker: Long hiring cycles (patience capped at **2-4 weeks**), workload escalation without structural redesign, and incremental pay increases that do not reduce intensity.

Jobseeker-speak

Share salary ranges upfront and don't change the goalposts mid-process. Clear salary + clear timeline = faster hiring. Good candidates won't wait forever.

-Respondent, Male, Singapore



MALAYSIA: THE BALANCER

- 

Persona: Holistic career builders who seek pay, growth, and meaning in equal measure.
- 

Motivation: Advancement that feels visible. **34%** require a **20-30%** uplift to move, pay signals progression, not just income.
- 

What Builds Trust: Clear internal mobility pathways, transparent promotion criteria, and meaningful salary progression tied to responsibility.
- 

Trust Breaker: Stalled career paths, moderate wage growth without advancement, and unclear development opportunities.



PHILIPPINES: THE ASPIRER

- 

Persona: Young, upwardly mobile professionals who equate effort with financial progress.
- 

Motivation: Income growth and leadership credibility. For **37%**, a higher salary is the moment they start looking; mobility is a pathway to security.
- 

What Builds Trust: Transparent pay progression, strong employer reputation, and leadership that signals stability.
- 

Trust Breaker: Salary opacity, rising workload without proportional income growth (**29%** cite overwork), and weak organisational credibility.

Retention strategy cannot be standardised across Southeast Asia. It must reflect the structural breakpoint in each market.



SECTION 3

Every Jobseeker Has a Co-Pilot Now

AI Adoption Is Expanding Faster Than Confidence

Across the region, candidates admit to using AI in their job search. On average, **29–38% use AI tools for job matching and 20–32% use it for salary benchmarking**. Yet, there is a widening capability-confidence gap: **only 36–50% feel very confident about staying future-relevant**.

Candidates are doing their research

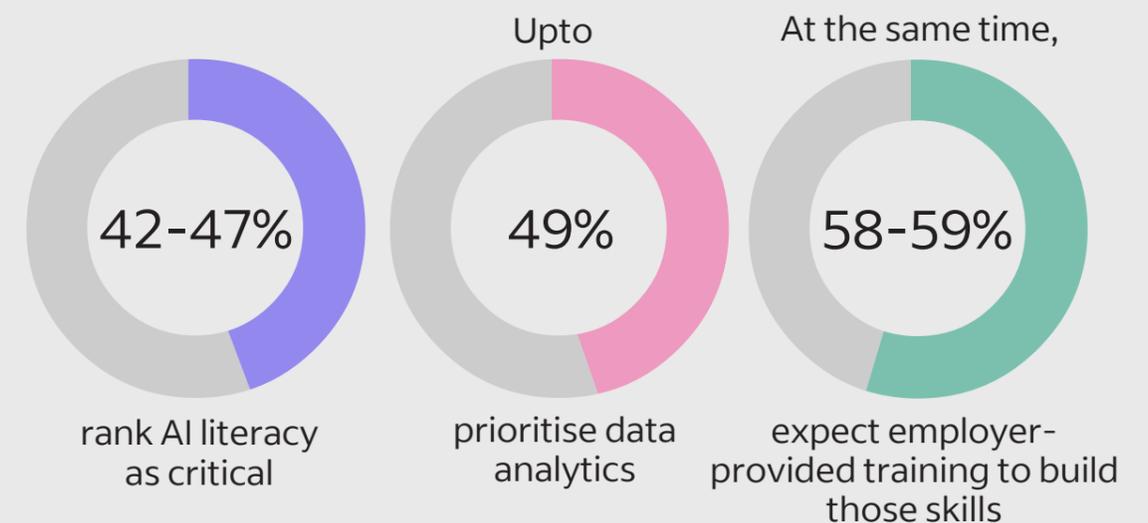
Candidates today arrive well-informed on pay, productivity, and positioning. AI is reshaping interview readiness and negotiation leverage.



Young talent isn't waiting to be told how to use AI, they already are

- Across the region, AI is now standard for job discovery among students and entry-level workers. **Usage among under-18s reaches 83% in Singapore and 76% in the Philippines.**
- Yet confidence is lagging. **In Singapore, 36% of professionals say they have low confidence in staying future-relevant.**
- AI fluency is strongest at the base of the workforce. Confidence is not.

Nearly half of candidates now say AI literacy and data skills are non-negotiable.



People are learning on their own, but they still expect organisations to create clear, supported paths to grow. **Skills are fast becoming the real currency of progression**

In places like Singapore and Malaysia, government-backed upskilling initiatives are reinforcing that expectation.

Jobseeker-speak

Be transparent about skills-based hiring instead of pedigree so candidates can decide quickly.

-Respondent, Female, Philippines



What Employers Should Do Now

1

**Embed
AI literacy
into core role
design**

2

**Prioritise
mid-career
reskilling**

3

**Link
pay progression to
skill acquisition**

4

**Make training
visibility part of
employer
branding
initiatives**

SECTION 4

The Hiring Conversion Gap



Where Conversion Breaks

Interest is high. Completion is not.

Across Southeast Asia, hiring breakdown is not caused by weak employer brands or unmotivated candidates. It is caused by friction in the journey from intent to offer.

When hiring timelines exceed tolerance windows, interview rounds multiply, and salary clarity is delayed, candidates don't just lose interest; they lose confidence.

Across markets, nearly half of candidates are unwilling to wait beyond **two to four weeks**, and only one in five will extend that window, usually when communication is consistent.

Two to three interview rounds are widely viewed as reasonable. Beyond that, candidates begin interpreting the process as bureaucratic or misaligned.

This is the patience deficit.

Friction Signals Indecision

Hiring speed is now a competitive signal

In Singapore



cite long delays as their biggest frustration

Around



in Singapore and Malaysia point to excessive interview rounds

In the Philippines,



are frustrated when the salary is missing altogether

When Pay Is Equal, Clarity Decides

Salary opens the door. Clarity determines who walks through it.

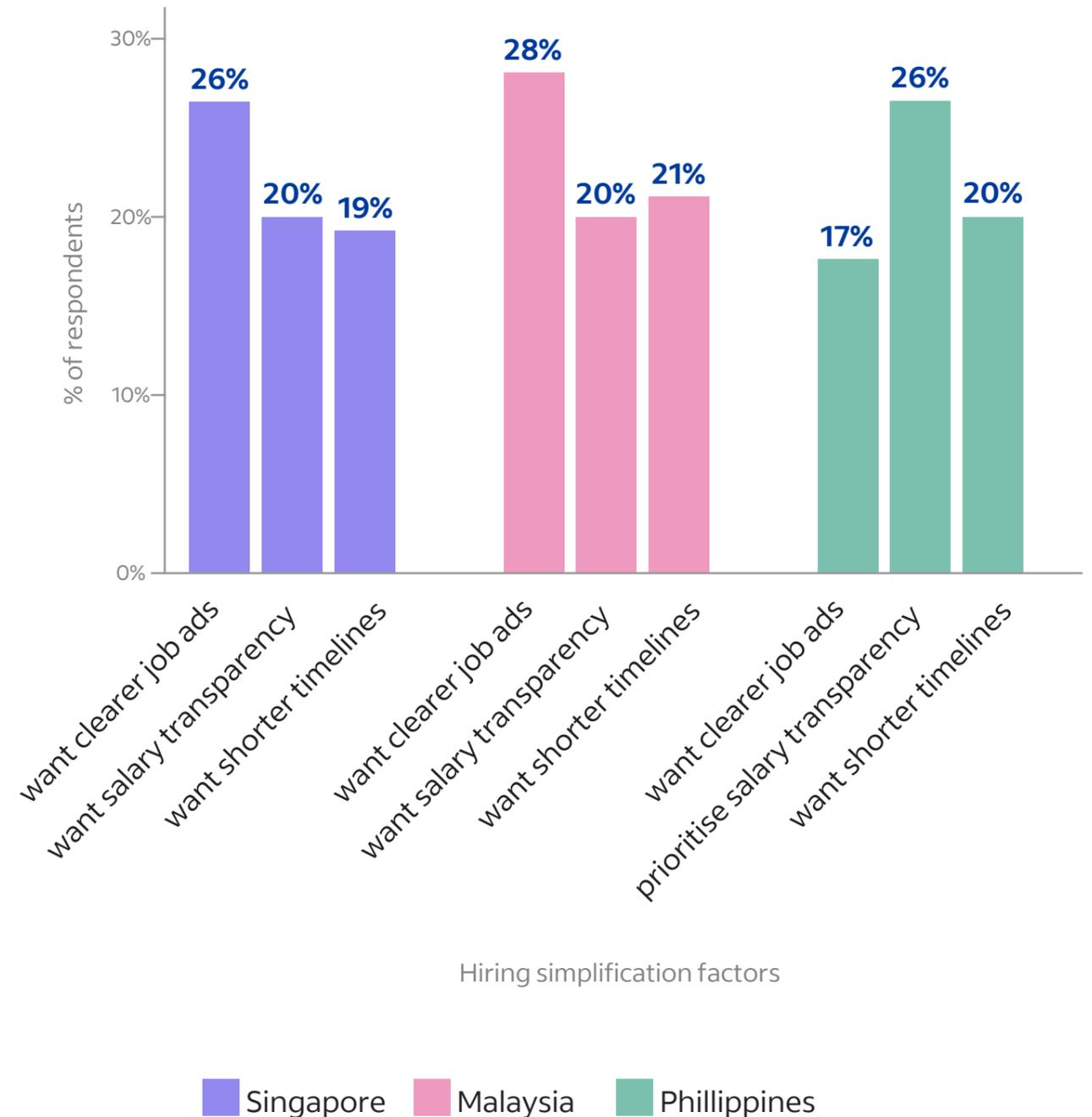
When compensation is comparable, **20–32% prioritise career progression** and visible advancement. Interestingly, senior leaders favour role clarity and streamlined access over employer branding.

Guidance Gaps Create Silent Drop-Off

Candidates are ambitious but need support.

- **30–43%** need help finding the right opportunities
- Up to **37%** seek negotiation support
- Across the region, Financial Services and Government workers show higher demand for salary direction

Without clear progression pathways, transparent pay positioning, and structured communication, candidates hesitate, and this hesitation kills conversion.



Jobseeker-speak

Be transparent about relevant assessments only instead of making the process feel endless. Don't schedule interviews and then disappear for weeks. Give feedback that's specific and actionable. Transparency should be the default.

-Respondent, Male, Singapore



What Employers Should Do Now

1

Use communication to keep candidates engaged through longer hiring processes

2

Role clarity and progression must precede recruitment

3

Salary positioning must be explicit

4

Guidance must be built into the journey, not left for candidates to navigate alone

The verdict is clear: Hiring advantage in 2026 will belong to organisations that are faster, clearer, and more decisive

SECTION 5

The Real Reasons People Stay or Switch Jobs



Financial Security

Pay plays a big role in retention. In the Philippines, **47% of workers say salary increases are why they stay.**

What it takes to make people switch jobs varies by market: **in Singapore, 36% would move for a 10–20% raise, while in the Philippines, 22% would only move for a 20–30% bump**, showing that sensitivity to pay changes differs across countries.

Salary Sensitivity Peaks Early

54%

of Singapore's **18–28** cohort stay for salary increases

33%

of **under-18** stay for salary increases

Growth Motivation Is Cross-Generational

Growth keeps people committed in Malaysia, **where 31% stay for learning and advancement.** In the Philippines, though, **30% would start job hunting if they saw better career prospects elsewhere.** In Malaysia, **26% are drawn to employers known for promoting people quickly**, showing how **visible growth opportunities influence where people choose to work.**

Growth tends to matter most to those

aged 29–44,

but in Singapore, older employees care about it just as much, if not more.



Work-life Balance

Work-life balance keeps **31% of employees in Singapore in their roles. But when workloads become too heavy, people leave. 23% in Malaysia say overwork is their real reason for quitting, and 34% would start job hunting for a role with better balance.**

This shows how unsustainable workloads can quickly push people to move on.

What Work-Life Balance Means by Age

36%

of worker in Singapore between **18-28** would switch for better balance.

49%

in Singapore and

34%

in the Philippines between **45-60** would move for better work-life balance.

Organisational Credibility

Trust in an employer strongly affects job decisions. In **Singapore and the Philippines, 61% and 58% respectively say online reviews influence whether they apply.** In the Philippines, **50% lose trust when a company's promises don't match real employee experiences, highlighting how a bad reputation can drive people away.**

How much online reviews influence job applications

(% who say "a lot")

Singapore



(Highest among ages 18–28)

Philippines



(Highest among ages 29–44)

Malaysia



(Similar across ages)

SECTION 6

Employer Resources and Action Plan



How to Compete for Talent in Southeast Asia

Now that we know what job seekers and workers want, let's simplify this.

Across Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines, candidates aren't disengaged. They are cautious.

They are comparing, researching and paying attention to how you hire, not just what you offer.

Today, hiring advantage will belong to the organisations that reduce friction faster than candidates lose patience.

The Three Rules That Matter

Instead of multiple tactics, focus on three operating rules

- 1 Transparency Is the Starting Line**
- 2 Speed Signals Competence**
- 3 Progression Wins When Pay Is Equal**

1 Transparency Is the Starting Line

Quick evaluation checklist:

- Salary ranges are published in job ads
- Role scope, reporting lines, and success metrics are clearly defined
- Interview stages and timelines are disclosed before the first interview
- Candidates receive consistent updates, even when there are delays
- Rejections are communicated, not left silent

2 Speed Signals Competence

Quick evaluation checklist:

- Roles are designed to close within a 4-week benchmark
- Structured interviews are capped at 2–3 rounds
- Decision authority is clarified before the role is launched
- Stage-level drop-offs are tracked as a conversion metric
- Delays are proactively communicated, not silently extended

3 Progression Wins When Pay Is Equal

Quick evaluation checklist:

- Career pathways are documented and shareable
- Promotion criteria are transparent
- Salary progression is clearly tied to scope, skills, or impact
- Hiring managers can articulate a 12–24 month growth pathway
- Training or upskilling opportunities are visible before offer stage

SECTION 7

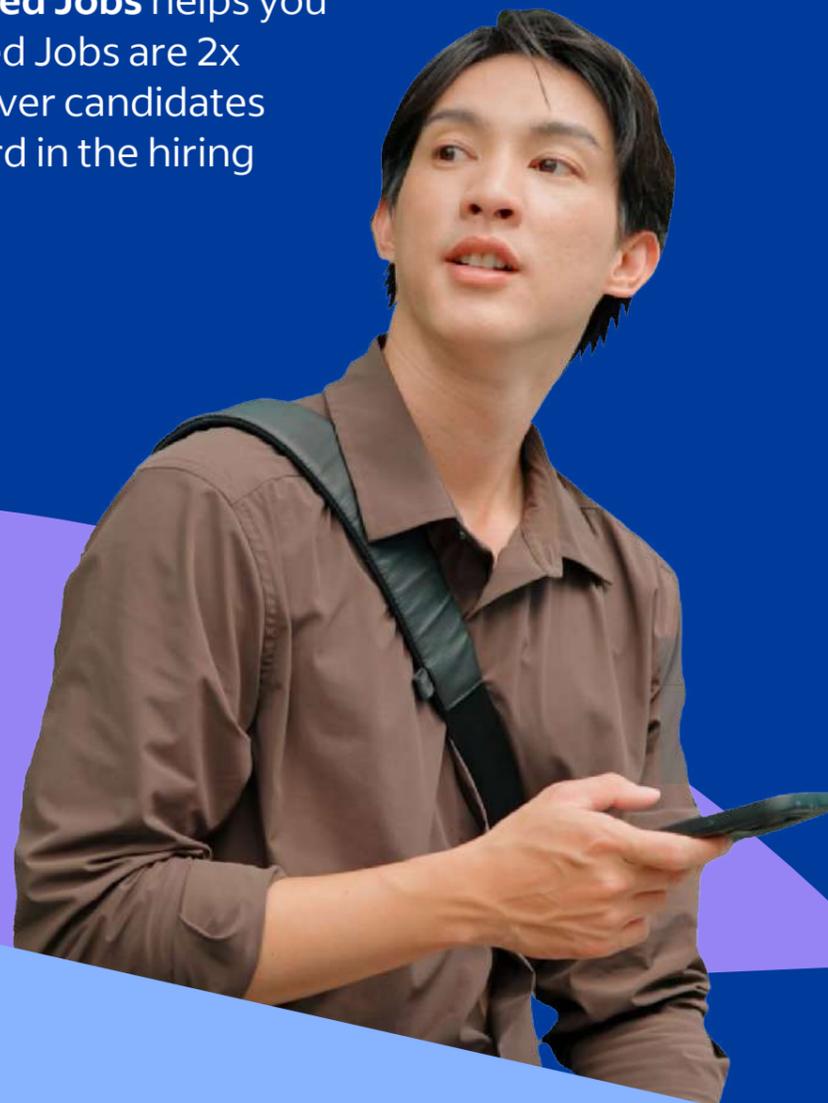
How can Indeed help?



Get your job ads in front of millions of job seekers across Southeast Asia

In hiring, relevance and visibility win.

Indeed's **Sponsored Jobs** helps you do that. Sponsored Jobs are 2x more likely to deliver candidates who move forward in the hiring process.¹



For the millions of job seekers who are searching for jobs on Indeed across Singapore, Malaysia, and the Philippines every month, your **sponsored job** posts give you:

- **More visibility** – Your job ad stays in front of relevant candidates longer.
- **More reach** – Attract more qualified applicants, faster.
- **Better results** – Connect with the right people at the right time.

Show candidates why they should choose you

Job seekers want the full picture. **Indeed and Glassdoor's employer branding tools** help you capture demand, shape perception and reinforce trust.

- Showcase culture, benefits, values, and career progression on your company profile
- Highlight salary ranges and role expectations clearly.
- Share consistent employer messaging across the candidate journey, from awareness to interviews.

Transparency builds credibility before interviews begin.

Tap into smart hiring technology to hire with confidence

Use Indeed's Smart Sourcing solutions to match qualified candidates to your roles and reduce time to hire.

With access to over

8.5M searchable profiles across Singapore, Malaysia and the Philippines,

you can:

- Instantly identify and evaluate candidates aligned to your job criteria.
- Seamlessly share candidate information with hiring managers.
- Track recruiter activity and hiring progress from a central dashboard.

¹Indeed data (worldwide)

Indeed is more than a job board; it's your strategic hiring partner in a competitive talent market.

Visit sg.indeed.com/hire to get started.



The Indeed logo, featuring a stylized white 'i' with a curved line above it, followed by the word 'indeed' in a lowercase, sans-serif font.

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