



## TOURISM AND EMPLOYMENT IN ASIA: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN THE CONTEXT OF THE ECONOMIC CRISIS

### Keynote, Session IV: Tourism Labour Market in the Asia Pacific Region

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#### Summary

There is no doubt that tourism has been an important engine of growth and - hence employment - on a global scale. This is in particular the case for Asia. Tourism in Asia has grown faster than anywhere else in the world, driven to some degree by the increasing wealth of countries like Japan, South Korea and Malaysia, and by the huge populations of China, India and Indonesia - the first, second and fourth biggest countries in the world.

Despite the significance of the tourism industry it is however still under researched and it is not easy to obtain data on the labour dimensions of tourism. Moreover as we speak the world is battling one of the worst global economic crises since the Great Depression. There is no doubt the tourism industry will be affected by this crisis.

But we need to view this crisis in a broader perspective. Even before the crisis began, Asia's rapid economic growth in recent years did not create enough decent employment opportunities for the region's massive workforce. Inequalities within and between countries were widening. Most recently, food prices were skyrocketing, pushing millions back into poverty. Moreover, developing Asia has been struggling with finding a way to move towards a more 'balanced' development path that is both economically and environmentally sustainable in the long term.

The current economic crisis and renewed interest in social justice and protection of workers sparked by the crisis, combined with a growing realization of the impact of climate and the need to make growth - not just economically - but also - socially and environmentally sustainable has provided opportunities for advocating tourism in the new green economy as a sector that can deliver on smart growth.

My PowerPoint presentation will focus on the employment dimension of the tourism sector, the impact of the crisis on the employment potential of the sector and some of the opportunities ahead of us in turning this crisis into an opportunity to re-engineer the sector to make it more socially and environmentally sustainable.