



# WORKER VOICE-DRIVEN ETHICAL RECRUITMENT

Operationalizing and validating more responsible labour recruitment, down to the first mile

Global brands, retailers, and importers are increasingly requiring ethical recruitment systems in their supply chains. Employers and recruitment agencies who can demonstrate good ethical recruitment practice will not only be able to retain strategic customers, but also differentiate their business from competition. This can potentially lead to increases in sales to buyers or services to employers, along with improved brand and company reputation. With the partnership support of global brands and retailers, Issara Institute collaborates with suppliers and recruitment agencies in Asia that seek to improve processes for more efficient and ethical labour recruitment.

The Issara approach is unique. It centers on partnerships and trust with business, as well as with workers, civil society, and government—and always keeping the perspectives, experiences, needs, and validation of workers at the center:

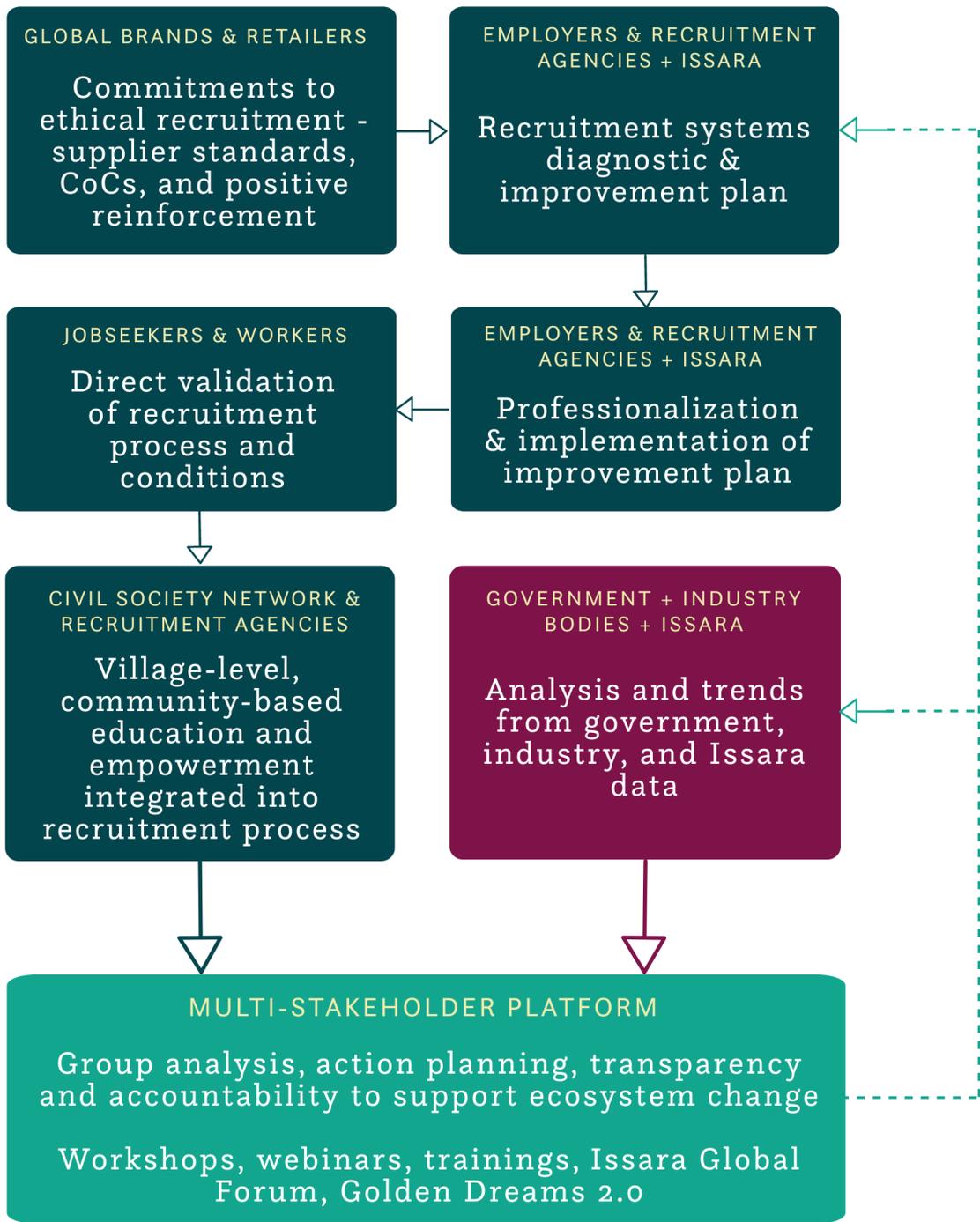
1. To help get businesses on an ethical recruitment track, Issara brings employers and recruitment agencies together to identify the strengths and weaknesses of their current recruitment practices.
2. The businesses commit to making specific improvements in an iterative and time-bound manner so that jobseekers are more ethically recruited, screened, processed, transported and managed.
3. Jobseeker and worker feedback through Issara’s worker voice channels validates how jobseekers and workers are treated within the recruitment process, and how the process is really improving over time.
4. Civil society organizations (CSOs) in the origin country collaborate with Issara and recruitment agencies to improve reach and trust at the first mile, and help to reduce worker indebtedness, vulnerability, and recruitment costs by eliminating the need for informal brokers.
5. Evidence-driven multi-stakeholder discussions periodically reviewing improvements and trends drive ecosystem changes, including legal and policy reform by government and industry regulators.

This innovative collaborative approach helps business and government signal to global customers a commitment to effective labour management practices that can be a model for the ASEAN region and globally.



**Key to our collective success:** Training, monitoring, and empowering workers occur on an ongoing basis at both origin (left) and destination (right).

# THE ISSARA ETHICAL RECRUITMENT MODEL: A WORKER VOICE-DRIVEN SUPPLY CHAIN AND ECOSYSTEM APPROACH



## Why Issara’s 7 Ethical Recruitment Principles go beyond just employer-pays

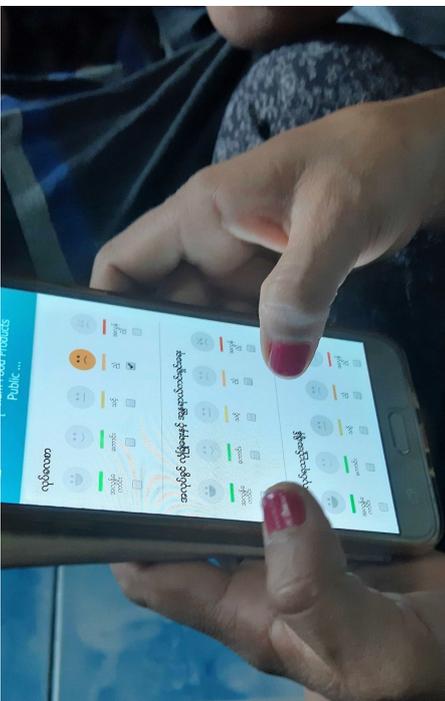
The professionalization of labour recruitment is about far more than just costs! Professionalization—even for those businesses on a path toward employer-pays that have not yet begun implementing zero costs to workers—is a critical element of building sustainable, ethical supply chains. A lot can be achieved by employers and recruiters to advance the ethical practices of their industries besides just addressing costs—including how they treat jobseekers and workers, how they manage their business and brand, how data and services can improve competitiveness and remove risks, and how manpower ultimately fits into national economic strategies and industry growth.

### ISSARA ETHICAL RECRUITMENT PRINCIPLES

1. Legal compliance: respecting all relevant laws
2. Ethical and professional conduct toward workers and each other
3. Free-of-charge services to jobseekers and workers
4. Transparent, ethical terms of engagement
5. Transparent wages, deductions, and benefits
6. Healthy, safe, exploitation-free working and living conditions
7. Access to remedy and functional, credible grievance mechanisms

This is important, because many global brands and retailers are in the early stages of determining how to actively promote ethical recruitment across their global supply chains, and how exactly they will manage the issue of costs and who will pay for higher standards. And while costs are indeed important, buyers / duty bearers need to be promoting all the other important components and principles of ethical recruitment immediately, given the real, tangible benefits that this can bring to jobseekers and workers, as well as to the management systems of the suppliers and recruitment agencies in their supply chains. And as business sourcing may change over time, the impact of those fluctuations on workers and business is managed best when solid ethical recruitment principles and professional practices are already in place.

## The critical role of Issara’s worker voice technologies in ethical recruitment



Issara launched the Burmese-language smartphone app Golden Dreams in 2017, a Yelp-like app allowing Burmese workers to rate and review their employers, recruiters, and service providers. Other worker voice channels, in addition to the Golden Dreams app, include a 24-hour hotline, Facebook and Facebook Messenger, and chat apps such as Line and Viber. Issara receives over 8,000 calls/month on average over these worker voice channels, demonstrating the high level of trust that exists between Issara and workers. (We do not pay workers to call us and share information, as some worker feedback technologies do.)

Issara’s worker voice channels, receiving and managing considerably more traffic than the US and UK national anti-trafficking hotlines combined, prove that Burmese migrant workers have very high interest and capability to use smartphones to access and share information, and to reach out for assistance—as hundreds of thousands have, including the worker rating her employer at left on Golden Dreams.

This mechanism for channeling and managing worker voice, feedback, and remediation needs is important for driving ethical recruitment, because there are numerous ways that brokers, recruiters, agents, and employers could have all of the documentation required to pass a social audit yet still be plagued with recruitment risks. For example, the element of deception and coercion that is fundamental within the definitions of both forced labour and human trafficking—essentially, promising one thing but offering something different once the worker arrives at the workplace—consistently evades auditors and inspectors, and is only consistently and reliably uncovered through worker voice. Similarly, discrimination, harassment, threats, and retaliation are rarely ever identified by auditors but are often reported to Issara worker voice channels because trust and safeguards have been established.

## TOP 10 ACHIEVEMENTS OF ISSARA WORKER VOICE-DRIVEN ETHICAL RECRUITMENT TO DATE

1. **Reduction in fees charged to workers**, documented in numerous partnerships with employers and recruiters, and verified by workers (lower fees or no fees, matching what was promised in their recruitment), as well as trends of fees being covered by employers that were not previously covered.
2. **Reduced indebtedness of migrant workers**, reported through worker voice channels and through representative worker satisfaction surveys in the workplace.
3. **Increased repayment of recruitment fees** when it is found that workers were overcharged, documented by Issara through engagement with employers and recruitment agencies, and repayment verified by workers.
4. **Improved responsiveness to workers' queries and problems** on the part of recruitment agencies, verified by workers.
5. **Improved quality and accuracy of job advertisements of participating companies**—they are more detailed and comprehensive, and verified by workers as more useful and transparent.
6. **Reduced fraud/deception and greater congruence between job advertisements and what is offered in reality**, documented by employer and recruiter ratings in Golden Dreams, and reported by workers to Issara worker voice channels.
7. **More (and better) written service contracts between recruitment agencies and employers**, explicitly outlining each cost and who pays what.
8. **Greater accountability and transparency throughout the recruitment process**, measured through discussions with jobseekers, civil society organizations, recruitment agencies, and employers on emerging good practice.
9. **Strengthened enforcement of company policies**, documented by Issara and verified by worker voice.
10. **Greater awareness of migrant rights and steps in the process, of all actors**—employers, recruiters, civil society organizations, and workers.

## About Issara Institute

Issara Institute ([www.issarainstitute.org](http://www.issarainstitute.org)) is a U.S. 501(c)(3) not-for-profit organization headquartered in Palo Alto, California and Bangkok, Thailand, with offices and operations in Thailand, Myanmar, and the United States, and operations and activities in Cambodia, Malaysia, and Indonesia. Issara has worked extensively within the extended seafood, agriculture, apparel and footwear, and electronics supply chains, working closely with suppliers, recruiters, and global brands and retailers on labour recruitment, working conditions, and identification and remediation of labour abuses.

Issara's goal is to eliminate labour exploitation, including forced labour and human trafficking, through interventions that are driven by empowered worker voice and designed to change the behaviours of jobseekers, workers, recruiters, employers, and duty bearers. These interventions and programs are carried out by the Issara team, a multi-cultural, multi-lingual team of technical experts located primarily in-country (though also in the US and UK) who work directly on the ground with the workers, suppliers, and recruiters that are within the supply chains of Issara's global brand and retailer partners. We have seen from the inside the challenges that businesses face, and contributed to solutions that have generated positive impact for both workers and employers.

