

\$35m Project Approved to Strengthen Education and Health Workforce in Laos

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The World Bank has approved a \$35 million, six-year project to tackle long-term human capital challenges in Laos by improving the performance, training, and management of frontline workers in primary education and healthcare.

The project, *Improving Frontline Workers Performance in Education and Health*, will introduce comprehensive continuous professional development for teachers, including classroom observation and learning assessments. In the health sector, it will expand health worker registration and licensing, strengthen both pre- and in-service training, and improve workforce management systems. Across both sectors, the programme will focus on attracting and retaining qualified professionals in rural and underserved areas, where shortages are most acute.

“Laos still faces significant challenges in education and health,” said Khwima Nthara, World Bank Country Manager for the Lao PDR. “The government is to be commended for its leadership and commitment in mobilising these much-needed resources to support those at the frontline of teaching and medicine, so they can better serve local communities.”

Public spending pressures have intensified these challenges. Investment in education and health declined from 4.9 percent of GDP in 2013 to an estimated 2.3 percent in 2023, while recent surveys suggest a partial reversal of earlier gains in child nutrition. Workforce shortages are widespread in schools and health facilities, particularly in rural and high-poverty areas, compounding regional inequalities in access and outcomes.

The project will strengthen the skills, performance, and deployment of frontline workers through targeted

interventions. For primary education, this includes upgrading teacher training colleges with smart classrooms, supporting an existing two-year continuous bachelor programme, and modernising online professional development platforms.

In healthcare, the project will deliver training and retention packages for staff at district hospitals and health centres across eight target provinces. It will also reinforce national frameworks for health workforce recruitment, deployment, and personnel management, helping to build a more resilient and equitable system.

Together, these measures aim to stabilise and professionalise Laos' education and health workforce, ensuring that frontline services are better equipped to meet the needs of communities, particularly in the country's most disadvantaged regions.