

TikTok says creators earn more than minimum wage

By Justine Irish D. Tabile
Reporter

FILIPINO creators who use the short video application TikTok as a source of income earn more than the minimum wage, a regional study said.

In TikTok's Southeast Asia Socio-Economic Report 2023, around 40% of polled creators in the Philippines reported having been earning more than the minimum wage.

The minimum wage in the Philippines is P570 a day in Metro Manila and P341 a day in the

Bangsamoro Autonomous Region in Muslim Mindanao.

In Southeast Asia, 80% of TikTok creators said that they boosted their incomes through multiple avenues like TikTok LIVE and working with brands through paid sponsorships.

Meanwhile, small- and medium-sized businesses in the region saw a nearly 50% increase in revenues after using TikTok to sell products and services.

"We've empowered businesses to shift from traditionally offline marketing channels to meet new customers online," TikTok Chief Executive Officer Shou Zi Chew

said at TikTok's Southeast Asia Impact Forum 2023 on Thursday in Jakarta, Indonesia.

The survey, which ran from August to September 2022, showed that 79% of businesses said the platform had helped them to transition from offline to online marketing channels, while 93% said TikTok provided them a platform to monetize their skills and experience.

"We have the privilege of providing a platform for over 15 million small businesses in Southeast Asia, helping them to grow and thrive," Mr. Chew said.

The report showed that 93% of the surveyed creators reached

their right target audience, while 94% thought that TikTok helped in increasing engagement with their target audiences.

To further boost this growth, TikTok committed to investing \$12.2 million in Southeast Asia, in which it has around 325 million monthly active users.

"I think it is really important that we continue to invest, to foster these local entrepreneurs and to make sure that we are benefiting the local economies that we are operating in," Mr. Chew said.

He said TikTok lowers the friction and barrier for brands to reach their customers and feed

information to the users of the platform.

"Because TikTok is special in the way that we allow people to discover, because of the way we provide recommendation feed, if you have good content, you can be easily discovered on TikTok. That discovery has helped many entrepreneurs to build their businesses on our platform," he added.

Nina Ellaine Dizon-Cabrera, chief executive officer of cosmetics brand Colourette, said that TikTok helped in increasing brand awareness and public engagement.

"It really did help us in more ways than one, from increasing our

brand awareness... and to increasing views and engagement, which also translated into sales," she said.

She said the brand was able to reach record-breaking sales during a sale in March through the platform.

"Now with the TikTok shop, we are making record-breaking sales. In 3.3 sale in March, we made 26,700 orders in a span of four hours. So, that is really something TikTok was able to do with us because we are able to build a community on the platform and around the brand," she added.

Ms. Dizon-Cabrera is among the Filipino delegates at TikTok's Southeast Asia forum.



Remittances,
from S1/1

"Cash remittances from overseas Filipinos have remained resilient through the ups and downs of the global economy," BSP Deputy Governor Francisco G. Dakila said during the Philippine Economic Briefing in Singapore on Thursday.

China Banking Corp. Chief Economist Domini S. Velasquez said high Philippine inflation and a weaker peso may have prompted OFWs to send more money in April.

"Improving economic conditions in host countries such as the US and the UK also helped keep remittance inflows robust. Additionally, the increase in the minimum wage in the UK also likely provided overseas Filipinos with more disposable income," she said.

Headline inflation slowed to 6.6% in April from 7.6% in March. However, April marked the 13th straight month that inflation breached the central bank's 2-4% target range.

For the first four months of the year, inflation averaged 7.9%.

Security Bank Corp. Chief Economist Robert Dan J. Roces said seasonality, economic conditions in host countries, and the exchange rate affected remittances in April.

"Remittances tend to be seasonal, with highs in the months leading up to the Christmas holidays and lows in the summer months including April, especially during school breaks," Mr. Roces said.

High interest rates and elevated inflation around the world also affected the amount of money sent home by OFWs, he said.

"The exchange rate for April may also be a factor — the peso weakened against the dollar in April 2023, where the average exchange rate for the month was P55.27 a dollar, weaker than the average exchange rate of P55 a dollar in March," he said.

"If the exchange rate is weaker, migrant workers will get less pesos for every dollar they send home," Mr. Roces added.

For the first four months of the year, cash remittances increased by 3.2% year on year to \$10.49 billion.

The growth in cash remittances during the January-to-April period was driven mainly by inflows from the United States, Singapore, and Saudi Arabia.

Nearly half or 41.3% of remittances came from workers in the United States, followed by Singapore, Saudi Arabia, Japan, the United Kingdom, the United Arab Emirates, Canada, Qatar, South Korea, and Taiwan.

Remittances from the top 10 countries accounted for 79.2% of the total during the four-month period.

Meanwhile, personal remittances, which included inflows in kind, went up by 3.8% year on year to \$2.77 billion in April from \$2.67 billion in the same month in 2022.

This brought personal remittances to \$11.68 billion in the first four months of the year, 3.2% higher year on year.

"Looking ahead, expect remittance growth for the year to stay positive. Remittances were resilient in the depths of the pandemic, and we do not see a massive drop despite a global slowdown," Mr. Roces said.

"Moving forward, we expect remittances to continue posting moderate growth given the resilient US and Asian economies. Remittances from the Middle East would likely remain robust, though declines in oil prices could weigh on the growth prospects in the region," Ms. Velasquez said.

The BSP expects remittances to grow by 3% this year. — **Keisha B. Ta-asan**



Meralco future-proofs business operations through customer-centric digital transformation program

The COVID-19 pandemic accelerated digitalization across different industries driven by the need to adapt to the fast-changing business landscape.

While the global crisis brought about roadblocks to companies across various industries, the Manila Electric Company (Meralco) took it as an opportunity to advance digital transformation to further improve its service delivery to its close to 7.7 million customers and future-proof its business operations.

Meralco's Customer Centricity Transformation Program and Digital Projects is a holistic and end-to-end approach that aims to improve customer touchpoints, and level up operational efficiencies and services to achieve better customer experience.

This program also forms part of the power distributor's commitment to support the government's thrust to promote research and development and innovation.

As the Philippines marks the National Information and Communications Technology (ICT) month this June, Meralco showcases state-of-the-art facilities that are aimed at contributing to expand and strengthen the country's digital infrastructure.

REVOLUTIONIZING TRAINING AND EDUCATION WITH PIXL

Meralco recently unveiled the Powertech Innovation and eXperience Lab (PIXL)—the power distributor's own virtual world rendering studio and metaverse that uses real-world data to create simulations for training and education.

Featuring 10 short-throw high-definition projectors, a 360-degree projection wall, LED lights, and extended reality devices such as Microsoft HoloLens, and Oculus VR headset, PIXL is a state-of-the-art facility that aims to drive the use of new technologies for the energy industry to achieve the country's smart grid vision.

Smart grid is the integration of

innovative systems to the power grid for improved generation and distribution of electricity. Meralco considers the digitalization and transformation of the country's power grid is one of the most important digital strategies. This entails making the grid smarter through new investments in technology particularly to deploy smart substations, smart meters, advanced metering infrastructure and advanced network infrastructure.

PIXL can help accelerate innovation and improve Meralco's business operations as it can serve a variety of functions critical to the power distributor's mandate to deliver reliable and stable electricity service to its customers. These include technology scanning, proof of concept, prototype development, extended reality previews of different vital facilities such as substations and business centers, simulations of critical incident resolutions, distant learning, knowledge transfer, and remote support.

According to Rocky D. Bacani, Meralco's First Vice-President for Information, Communication, Technology and Transformation (ICTT), PIXL is aligned with the power distributor's digital transformation goals and forms part of its efforts to find new growth opportunities for customers, employees, and the future generation of engineers.

PIXL is also envisioned to serve as a venue for co-innovation initiatives with the academe, regulators, other electric cooperatives, and distribution utilities in the Philippines or even other countries.

"The way we want to use PIXL is like a studio where you can teleport to any location you want and be able to experience that in a digital reality," said Mr. Bacani, who is also Meralco's Chief Information and Technology Officer.

"As a leader in the energy industry, Meralco continuously invests in new technologies that will enhance our business operations to deliver consistent excellent service. With customer-centricity at the core



Meralco executives showcase the new ICT OPTIC, a new state-of-the-art facility that aims to reduce unplanned downtime of critical ICT systems, increase productivity of employees, and enhance service delivery to customers.

of Meralco's operations, we continuously explore new and relevant innovations as part of our digital transformation journey to stay ahead of trends, and proactively address the ever-evolving needs of our customers," the official added.

ADVANCED ICT SYSTEMS MANAGEMENT THROUGH OPTIC

Prior to the launch of PIXL this year, Meralco also introduced its most advanced command and control center called the Operations Platform and Telecommunications Integrated Command Center (OPTIC) which manages all ICT systems of the company.

OPTIC is a state-of-the-art facility and the first of its kind among power distributors in the Philippines.

Operated by highly skilled ICT engineers, OPTIC provides a centralized monitoring system that allows faster fault detection and restoration of technology services. It also helps reduce unplanned downtime of critical ICT systems, increase productivity of employees, and enhance service delivery to Meralco customers.

The command center operates 24/7 and boasts of an industrial grade and energy-

efficient LED display wall, as well as a smart and audible alarm system for alerts and incidents. OPTIC is also equipped with a 360-degree video conferencing system to coordinate activities during major incidents and emergency response scenarios.

"This platform plays a pivotal role in the effective management of Meralco's daily operations resulting in higher efficiency, improved incidents mitigation, and response capabilities which translate to consistent and reliable services to our customers and workforce," Mr. Bacani said.

The underlying platform is powered by Artificial Intelligence that analyzes all systems logs, provides actionable information and insights, and enables predictive and proactive maintenance.

ICT OPTIC serves as an essential foundation in achieving Meralco's goal of becoming smarter and innately digital. It revolutionizes the way data is harnessed and used to closely monitor our mission critical systems in real-time, proactively identify and address issues, make intelligent operational and business decisions, and eliminate barriers to heighten collaboration.



A Meralco employee wears the Oculus VR headset during a simulation of a critical incident resolution at the Powertech Innovation and eXperience Lab (PIXL). A state-of-the-art facility, PIXL is Meralco's new digital twin laboratory that uses real-world data for training and education.



A Meralco employee wears the Microsoft HoloLens during a simulation at the Powertech Innovation and eXperience Lab (PIXL). PIXL uses real-world data so that real-time assessment of critical facilities can be done remotely to enhance customer experience.