



## ► Policy Brief

March 2023

# Green jobs potential in *ger* and nature tourism in Mongolia

### Key points

- ▶ Green job opportunities exist in *ger*<sup>1</sup> and nature tourism, which has a lower environmental impact than more traditional tourism and contributes to the socio-economic development of herders and their communities by providing new/additional sources of income. If this additional income also allows herders to undertake/invest in more sustainable livestock management practices, the impact of greening employment would be further magnified.
- ▶ The green jobs and just transition challenges highlighted through this assessment fall into two main categories: (i) ensuring *ger* tourism is a form of sustainable tourism; and (ii) ensuring the job quality of employment generated by *ger* tourism is sufficient to meet decent work criteria.

Recommendations emerging from this assessment include:

- ▶ **1. Provide bespoke and targeted sustainable tourism training opportunities** for herders undertaking or considering *ger* tourism, including skills development in hospitality management, responsible tourism and decent work criteria, as well as training on environmental sustainability issues such as waste management and information on nature conservation activities that herders can communicate to tourists.
- ▶ **2. Build a culture of decent work across the sector.** Creating an enabling environment for decent work requires the involvement of other actors such as tour companies and tourists, as well as supporting policy and incentives created by government.
- ▶ **3. Provide network support for the community-based *ger* tourism model.** This support can include physical and virtually meeting spaces for herders interested in *ger* tourism and other related service providers to meet and develop tourism offerings.
- ▶ **4. Ensure policy coherence on green jobs and decent work during a just transition in regard to policy supporting *ger* and nature tourism.** This can be achieved by providing strategic focus on the mechanisms of capacity-building activities and other policies, infrastructure investments and incentives to encourage increased environmental performance and green jobs in *ger* tourism.

<sup>1</sup> A *ger* is a traditional round tent constructed using a wooden frame covered by layers of felt, and is used by traditional nomadic herders in Mongolia. *Ger* and nature tourism refers to eco and cultural tourism in which guests stay with herder families in the countryside.

## About the project

The COVID-19 pandemic created significant economic and social impacts for Mongolia. The Mongolian economy contracted by some 9.7 per cent in 2020 (Mongolia, National Statistical Office 2020). The tourism sector, the third-largest contributor to national GDP and employment, was the most severely impacted sector. The pandemic further exacerbated the socio-economic vulnerabilities of herders, women and low-skilled youth (United Nations Mongolia 2020).

The UN PAGE programme<sup>2</sup> together with national counterparts developed a green recovery project to support Mongolia's COVID-19 economic recovery plans by contributing to the development of a road map, national standards, and an investment plan to develop community-based *ger* and nature ecotourism activities in rural Mongolia.

*Ger* and nature tourism is an established concept in Mongolia, with several sustainable tourism projects focusing on the concept dating back to the 1990s. *Ger* tourism offers significant opportunities for diversifying the agricultural income of herder families, which are increasingly vulnerable due to fluctuating commodity markets and the increasing impacts of climate change. The agricultural sector accounts for 12.8 per cent of Mongolia's GDP, with more than 181,000 herder households estimated to account for 27 per cent of Mongolia's population (Mongolia, National Statistical Office 2020).

The ILO's activities within PAGE focus on green jobs and ensuring a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies and societies that will manage workplace changes due to the impacts of climate change and climate action in a just, equitable and inclusive manner.

The ILO's work has three objectives in analysing the green jobs potential of community-based *ger* and nature tourism in Mongolia:

- i. Reviewing the *ger* tourism concept in the context of green jobs opportunities in the tourism sector.
- ii. Reviewing *ger* tourism employment work standards with a decent work lens, to ensure that new green jobs are also decent jobs.

Building from (i) and (ii) above, the project seeks to identify capacity-building needs, resources and activities for people with various learning needs.

## Green jobs and decent work

The ILO defines green jobs as jobs that are good for people, good for the environment and good for the economy. Green jobs are both a mechanism to achieve sustainable development, as well as an outcome, in that they can provide the double dividend of just and decent employment creation with reduced environmental impacts. Developing and implementing policy to promote green employment is the ambition of governments around the world, including in Asia and the Pacific.

Green jobs not only need to contribute to increasing the sustainability of our economies and societies; they also need to provide decent employment to the people that carry out these jobs. The ILO (n.d.) defines decent work as "work that is productive and delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection for all, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom for people to express their concerns, organize and participate in the decisions that affect their lives and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men". Four strategic objectives are set under the concept of decent work, as follows:

- i. rights at work, underpinned by fundamental principles and international labour standards;
- ii. employment and income opportunities;
- iii. social protection and social security; and
- iv. social dialogue and tripartism.

These objectives apply to all workers regardless gender, age, geographic condition, private or public employment, and family setting. Decent work principles apply to almost all spheres of human life and livelihoods, and assessing the decent work aspects of green jobs requires looking at the characteristics of green employment at three different levels – individual, enterprise and economy.

At the individual job level, one needs to assess whether the new employment is fairly remunerated and with all the relevant workplace benefits and rights, and whether workers have a safe working environment in which to undertake their work.

<sup>2</sup> The Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE) was launched in 2013 as a response to the call at Rio+20 to support those countries wishing to embark on greener and more inclusive growth trajectories. PAGE brings together five UN agencies – UN Environment Programme, International Labour Organization, UN Development Programme, UN Industrial Development Organization, and UN Institute for Training and Research – whose mandates, expertise and networks combined can offer integrated and holistic support to countries on inclusive green economy, ensuring coherence and avoiding duplication.

At the enterprise level, one needs to assess enterprise commitments and capacity to support decent working conditions alongside environmental sustainability – including fair wages, safe working environments with health risks minimized and free from all forms of discrimination, harassment, and violence. Are there commitments and actions to address gender equality, to provide career development and training, and to support social dialogue processes for enterprise decision-making?

At the economy level, one needs to assess how employment generation and upgrading employment quality are linked to the green development agenda within the economy. The focus needs to not only be on employment creation but also employment quality, which can be improved by increasing formalization of employment, ensuring that regulatory and policy systems develop a supportive culture for rights at work, and ensuring that policy mechanisms provide for social protection and social dialogue processes.

## Results and conclusions

### How are green jobs conceptualized?

*Ger* tourism offers opportunities for diversifying agricultural income for herder families; however, these opportunities are unevenly distributed across geographical regions, household structures and livelihoods, with the main employment opportunities emerging from providing accommodation, meals, adventure and cultural activities such as trekking and horse riding (Dorjsuren 2022). Related activities in business services, such as marketing, booking and travel arrangements, also create employment opportunities.

Figure 1. About green jobs



Source: ILO 2016.

In the *ger* tourism context, green job opportunities exist in providing sustainable tourism activities. These activities have a lower environmental impact than more traditional tourism, and they contribute to the socio-economic development of herders and their communities by providing new/additional sources of income. When this additional income also allows herders to undertake/invest in more sustainable livestock management practices, the impact of greening employment is further magnified.

### Challenges in ensuring green jobs

The green jobs and just transition challenges highlighted throughout this assessment prompt two principal questions:

- i. Is *ger* tourism sustainable tourism?
- ii. Is the job quality of the employment generated by *ger* tourism sufficient to meet decent work criteria?

#### *Ger* tourism as sustainable tourism

All the evidence collected in the assessment shows *ger* tourism to be a less environmentally impactful mode of tourism. It operates on a small scale and builds on the patterns of life in local nomadic culture. Issues around waste minimization and processes for waste disposal as well as the sustainable provision of water and sanitation services were also highlighted through the assessment. Strategies aimed at further enhancing the sustainability and associated green jobs in *ger* tourism would need to include ways to address these issues.

Sustainable livestock management is a related issue. The number of livestock in Mongolia is beyond the carrying capacity of the environment, reaching over 67.3 million heads of livestock as of 2021 (Mongolia, National Statistical Office 2021), and desertification is intensifying. Sustainable livestock management is an issue that will impact herder livelihoods. Closely integrating the development of sustainable tourism opportunities for herders alongside livestock management changes offers pathways to a just transition, in that herders can supplement and grow income from sustainable tourism while transitioning to more sustainable livestock management, with a smaller number of animals, reducing pressure on grassland environments.

### Job quality of *ger* tourism employment

Job quality is an ongoing issue in developing green jobs in the tourism sector. The sector can be characterized by work that has weak or poorly implemented and enforced labour standards, allowing for informality and other decent work deficits such as long working hours, low wages, limited social protection and gender discrimination (ILO 2017). This assessment found a limited understanding about decent work among various actors involved in tourism, with the concept of green jobs not being clearly attached to the requirements for decent work.

The assessment highlighted that herder families generate important and adequate income from their work in *ger* tourism – although this work involved long hours. It will be important that these adequate income levels are maintained as tourism activities are very time-intensive. Most families involved in *ger* tourism use the income as additional income, with livestock management representing their main income source. *Ger* tourism income provides families with additional income in the summer months that they can spend on children's education or to maintain the family, as livestock income can be unstable and highly seasonal and market-driven.

The workload associated with *ger* tourism could upset work–family life balance and increase the workload of women in the herder communities. The community model of undertaking *ger* tourism offers the best opportunities to manage these challenges, in conjunction with training and capacity-building for herder families in communicating and managing tourists.

The lack of knowledge and strategies dealing with occupational safety and health (OSH) in *ger* tourism – for both herders and tourists – also impacts job quality and the sustainability of the *ger* tourism model. OSH guidance materials and training can be built into targeted training activities for herders (detailed in the next section).

The assessment details the unstable nature of livestock management – both in terms of workload and income. External factors, including natural disasters, pastureland degradation and volatile commodity markets for fibres and meat, regularly impact income and work. Participating in *ger* tourism offers an opportunity to diversify income streams, particularly given the lack of more comprehensive social protection systems. However, as the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated, tourism markets can also be disrupted, and job quality in both livestock management and *ger* tourism would be further enhanced if adequate social protection was available.

The study highlights that *ger* tourism is best suited to community-scale operations. The labour-intensive nature of both pastoral nomadic animal husbandry and small-scale tourism opportunities means that simultaneously undertaking both activities is often too much within a single family unit, but achievable in a community situation, where tasks can be shared. The community tourism model provides opportunity for division and specialization in undertaking tasks. For example, some families may focus and specialize in accommodation and meal provision, while others focus on providing cultural activities such as guided walks and horse riding.

There is also a strong gender breakdown to the work in *ger* tourism – with women undertaking most of the work related to accommodation and food and beverage service, and men undertaking activities such as horse and camel trekking. Accommodation and meal service provision is very labour-intensive.

Hosting tourists can also intrude on the work–life balance of herder families, as they must balance their ongoing livestock management activities alongside tourism services. Livestock activities need to be undertaken at set times each day, meaning that hosts may not be available to provide tourism activities at certain times desired by the tourists. In many cases this tension can be eased by effective communication with tourists and by explaining how these daily activities represent local culture. The community model – where herder families share tourism tasks – provides a good avenue to maintain work–family life balance within herder families undertaking *ger* tourism.



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## Implications and recommendations

The study findings highlight the green jobs opportunities associated with the increasing development of the *ger* tourism model, and how *ger* tourism, alongside sustainable livestock management, offers a pathway for a just transition in Mongolia. However, the current understanding of green jobs in *ger* tourism demonstrates a lack of knowledge of decent work attributes.

Based on this assessment, the following recommendations are made for policy and industry support to further develop the green jobs potential within the *ger* tourism model in Mongolia.

**Recommendation 1 – Provide bespoke and targeted sustainable tourism training opportunities.** If the *ger* tourism model is to be supported by government and industry strategies and a road map, this planning needs to include resources to develop sustainable tourism training opportunities for herders. The training should cover aspects of tourism service standards; decent work criteria, including advice on income, managing work hours and OSH measures; and addressing environmental sustainability issues, such as waste management, livestock management and the provision of information on nature conservation activities that herders can communicate to tourists. The specific mix of knowledge needs and seasonal requirements for training means that bespoke or targeted training programmes will need to be developed. Bespoke training opportunities also provide network-building opportunities.

**Recommendation 2 – Provide training and capacity-building to build a culture of decent work across the sector.** Creating an enabling environment for decent work involves other actors, such as tour companies and tourists, as well as the development and implementation of supporting policies and incentives by the Government. Often there are power imbalances between herders and tour companies, which can impact ability of herders to negotiate suitable service fees and payment schedules,

which in turn can impact decent work aspects. In particular, tour companies and their staff (such as guides) can make impractical or unattainable requirements on herder families with respect to tourists' itineraries and demands, in part because these companies do not understand the context of herders' work and family routines. Capacity-building activities that increase knowledge about traditional nomadic settings and the nuances of their seasonal daily routines would help alleviate these imbalances.

Capacity-building activities can focus on sharing existing good practices, such as: limiting the use of motorized vehicles in community visits; meeting requirements for all potential participants in the sector, including people with disabilities and young people; and effective practices in litter management and pursuing a traditional way of living. Such practices can be shared and applied in other regions.

**Recommendation 3 – Provide network support for the community-based *ger* tourism model.** This support can include physical and virtually meeting spaces for herders interested in *ger* tourism, as well as similar spaces for other related service providers to meet and develop tourism offerings. Support could also be extended to supporting digital education and the uptake of online promotion and booking options for *ger* tourism. This network support could include and extend social dialogue processes as a key mechanism for enabling the promotion of green jobs through *ger* tourism.

**Recommendation 4 – Ensure policy coherence on green jobs and decent work during a just transition in regard to policy supporting *ger* and nature tourism.** This can be achieved by providing a strategic focus on the mechanisms of capacity-building activities, as well as through other policies, infrastructure investments and incentives that can encourage increased environmental performance and green jobs in *ger* tourism. The learning needs highlighted in this assessment offer an example of policy coherence needs, including the need for training and capacity-building, recognition and certification of trainers, and formalization of informal community-based tourism. Such formalization will require regulation, education and capacity-building, as well as incentives, entrepreneurship support and networking, social protection, and partnerships with the private sector.

## Methodology

This project utilized two qualitative assessments, namely, a green jobs assessment and a decent work assessment. These assessment methods characterize the changes and opportunities available through greening labour markets in specific national and sectoral contexts. The results of these qualitative analyses can inform policy and labour market activity in their specific contexts, as well as being used to inform proxies for green jobs estimates/indicators using existing labour force statistical collections.

The green job assessments included desktop analysis of policy and programme activity for greening employment, identifying key drivers of change, policy settings and key stakeholders. This included understanding how green jobs are defined and positioned within the wider green economy agenda, as well as the relevant policy frameworks and institutional mechanisms that can support green job promotion. The assessment then implemented a guided questionnaire to be completed by a range of relevant stakeholders, in this case, stakeholders involved in progressing and implementing community-based ger and nature tourism activities in rural areas of Mongolia. Initial findings of this work were validated through tripartite plus consultations as part of the delivery of capacity-building activities identified through the research activities.

The decent work assessment was undertaken together with the green jobs assessment to ensure the greening of labour market activity is also accompanied by improving work quality. In this activity the researchers work with social partners to build awareness of decent work standards, identify gaps and risks of deficits in decent work standards, and how these can be addressed through capacity-building activities and other interventions.

Study participants included herders, tour operators, an academic and a government official. A snowball sampling technique was administered in which initial contact was made with individuals who met study criteria. Sixteen interviews were undertaken between 9 March and 7 July 2022, and the consultative tripartite meetings occurred during 4–7 July 2022.

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## Acknowledgements

This policy brief has been prepared for the Partnership for Action on Green Economy (PAGE) Green Recovery Mongolia Project.

The policy brief was prepared by Samantha Sharpe PhD, Associate Professor at the Institute for Sustainable Futures (ISF), University Technology Sydney (UTS), building on the input from the project team, in particular Amartuvshin Dorjsuren PhD, National Consultant for PAGE-Mongolia, under the direction of Cristina Martinez PhD, Senior Specialist, Environment and Decent Work, Asia-Pacific Coordinator - Green Jobs & Just Transition.

We would like to thank our colleagues for their guidance and support, including Dr Chang-Hee LEE, Bolormaa Purevsuren, Narantsetseg Davaa-Ochir, Namuundari Altangerel, Tsen-Ayush Bayasgalan, Tseltmeg Urtnasan and PAN Wei of ILO Country Office for China and Mongolia, and Eric Roeder, Hongye Pei, Wasana Sittirin, Lailly Prihatiningtyas, Kavya Raman, Monty Chanthapanya and Supaporn Runtasevee for their contributions and support for the production of this brief.

We would like to also express our appreciation to all of the constituents and other stakeholders for their generous support and participation in this project.

*This policy brief has been produced with the support of PAGE funding partners: European Union, Finland, Germany, Norway, Republic of Korea, Sweden, Switzerland and the United Arab Emirates.*

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