

People and Reward – Our Asia-Pacific Practice

2025

FRESHFIELDS



Asia-Pacific – The Workplace Redefined

The key workplace theme in Asia as we move into the second half of the 2020s is redefinition.

Disruption within the workplace has been with us for some years now, turbo charged by accelerators such as the pandemic at one end and AI at the other.

Now that the pandemic is firmly in the rear-view mirror, consistent trends are developing across the Asia-Pacific region as the redefinition of the workplace continues.

The talent war is back – if it ever went away. Highly talented workers demand innovation in both their remuneration structures and their working arrangements. Having the ‘edge’ in the design of both elements is essential to attract and retain talent.

As new laws are introduced across the region to strengthen worker rights, disputes in the workplace are on the rise. Regulators around the world are also increasingly scrutinizing culture, introducing new requirements on employers to regulate non-financial misconduct. Employers in Asia, although not yet in the regulatory spotlight for these changes, will need to anticipate those requirements.

Equally the return of Donald Trump as the next President of the United States has already heralded some significant US policy changes in relation to diversity and inclusion. How global employers will respond to these developments is a matter of ongoing debate.

The use of worker data is becoming increasingly regulated and the subject of much more stringent legal protections, particularly in China. And of course, there is AI – the full workplace impact of which is a topic of often heated discussion. These trends are driving a number of new challenges for employers in the region.

Our team of People and Reward lawyers in Asia-Pacific are adept at working alongside our clients to anticipate these trends. Our multi-disciplinary team across the region advises not just on employment law matters; it includes data privacy specialists, and comprises regulatory capability as well as unparalleled equity and incentives expertise.

Whatever your challenge, we want to partner with you to tackle it together.

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The team is very knowledgeable and offers very thoughtful and sound advice.

Chambers Global 2025

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Freshfields have been excellent in guiding us through complex matters which have impacts in a variety of jurisdictions.

Chambers Global 2025



Helping You Across Asia-Pacific (1/2)

Some examples of key recent mandates:

UBS

on its ongoing post-closing integration of the UBS and Credit Suisse businesses, following our initial advice to UBS AG on its takeover of Credit Suisse. Key issues include the intra-group secondment arrangements as well as benefit harmonisation measures, in a highly complex regulatory environment.

BASF

on its data privacy compliance programme across 17 jurisdictions in APAC region, including the development of privacy policies and documents for employee data management.

UCB

on employment and data privacy matters related to the sale of its neurology and allergy business in China.

A leading insurance company

on a number of data privacy matters for its whistleblower platform across 10 APAC jurisdictions.

AstraZeneca

on its \$1.2 bn acquisition of Gracell Biotechnologies Inc.; as a result of the cross-border nature of the transaction, it required significant coordination among the Freshfields US and Asia teams as the company is listed in the US, but has its headquarters in China. The employee-related issues were particularly complex in this transaction due to Gracell's variable interest entity structure, employee retention considerations and PRC data privacy laws.

AIA Company Limited

on its whistleblowing policies and procedures across AIA's offices in the APAC region. Our review involved a desktop document review of the company's extensive whistleblowing-related documentation, as well as interviews with senior stakeholders across the region to identify how these policies were implemented on the ground.

Anheuser-Busch Inbev

on the employment and benefits aspects of the Budweiser Hong Kong IPO, drafting and negotiating the appointment letters and service contracts of directors and other senior executives, advising on the complex employment arrangements of expatriate employees with multiple employment agreements and drafting equity-based incentive schemes for post-listing use.

FWD

on the amendment of its existing cross-border employee share option plan to provide for the grant of restricted share units and advising on the implementation of the new plan in nine APAC jurisdictions, including on follow-up issues in relation to the operation of the cross-border scheme such as the relocation of plan participants.

JP Morgan Chase

on a number of complex human resources mandates with cross-border elements, including coordinating a review and harmonisation of various employment arrangements across different APAC offices.



Freshfields always produces the highest quality work, with practical, commercial advice!

International Employment Lawyer Elite, 2024

Helping You Across Asia-Pacific (2/2)

Some examples of key recent mandates:

Kirin Holdings

on the sale of Kyowa Hakko Kirin's amino acid and Human Milk Oligosaccharide business to Meihua Holdings Group. This mandate involved complex retention bonus arrangements, as well as developing a structure for the secondment of employees between entities post-sale.

ESR Group Limited

on the employment issues of its proposed privatisation from the Hong Kong Stock Exchange by a consortium by way of scheme of arrangement. This is the largest privatization from the Hong Kong Stock Exchange since 2021.

Trusted adviser to a range of Asia-headquartered clients, including bolttech, Bowtie, Nagacorp and Raffles

on a range of employment and incentive matters, including on the structuring and implementation of a range of share-based incentive plans. In particular, the roll-out of bolttech's share incentive plan spanned across more than 20 jurisdictions.

Korean Air

on employment matters related to its acquisition of Asiana Airlines across 13 APAC jurisdictions.

Apple

on a number of sensitive and complex labour law matters in China, Japan, South Korea and Taiwan.

A US automotive and e-mobility supplier

on a large-scale collective redundancy in China affecting circa 200 employees and involving the closing down of an entire site. We supported the client through every stage of the process, from planning to implementation.

Fosun Tourism Group

on the employment issues of its proposed privatisation from the Hong Kong Stock Exchange by way of a scheme of arrangement. The proposed transaction is the first privatisation by way of a share buy-back structured through a scheme of arrangement in the Hong Kong market.

A global pharmaceutical company

on the highly sensitive exit of a senior executive with complex equity arrangements in China and Hong Kong. This mandate involved advising on the exit strategy, compensation entitlements under each arrangement and litigation risks.

China Mobile Hong Kong

on the employment issues relating to its HK\$ 7.8 billion proposed pre-conditional voluntary general offer to acquire all of the issued shares in HKBN Ltd.



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They are always able to provide excellent and succinct advice on the spot.

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