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2023**  
(JUNE–DECEMBER)



# ASEAN MATTERS: EPICENTRUM OF GROWTH

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one vision  
one identity  
one community

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) was established on 8 August 1967.  
The Member States are Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam.  
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**ASEAN: A Community of Opportunities for All**

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**ANNUAL REPORT 2023  
(JUNE – DECEMBER)**

**ASEAN MATTERS:  
EPICENTRUM  
OF GROWTH**

The ASEAN Secretariat  
Jakarta



8



18



32



58



50



44



## TABLE OF CONTENT

4 FOREWORD

8 **ASEAN** POLITICAL-SECURITY COMMUNITY (APSC)

18 **ASEAN** ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (AEC)

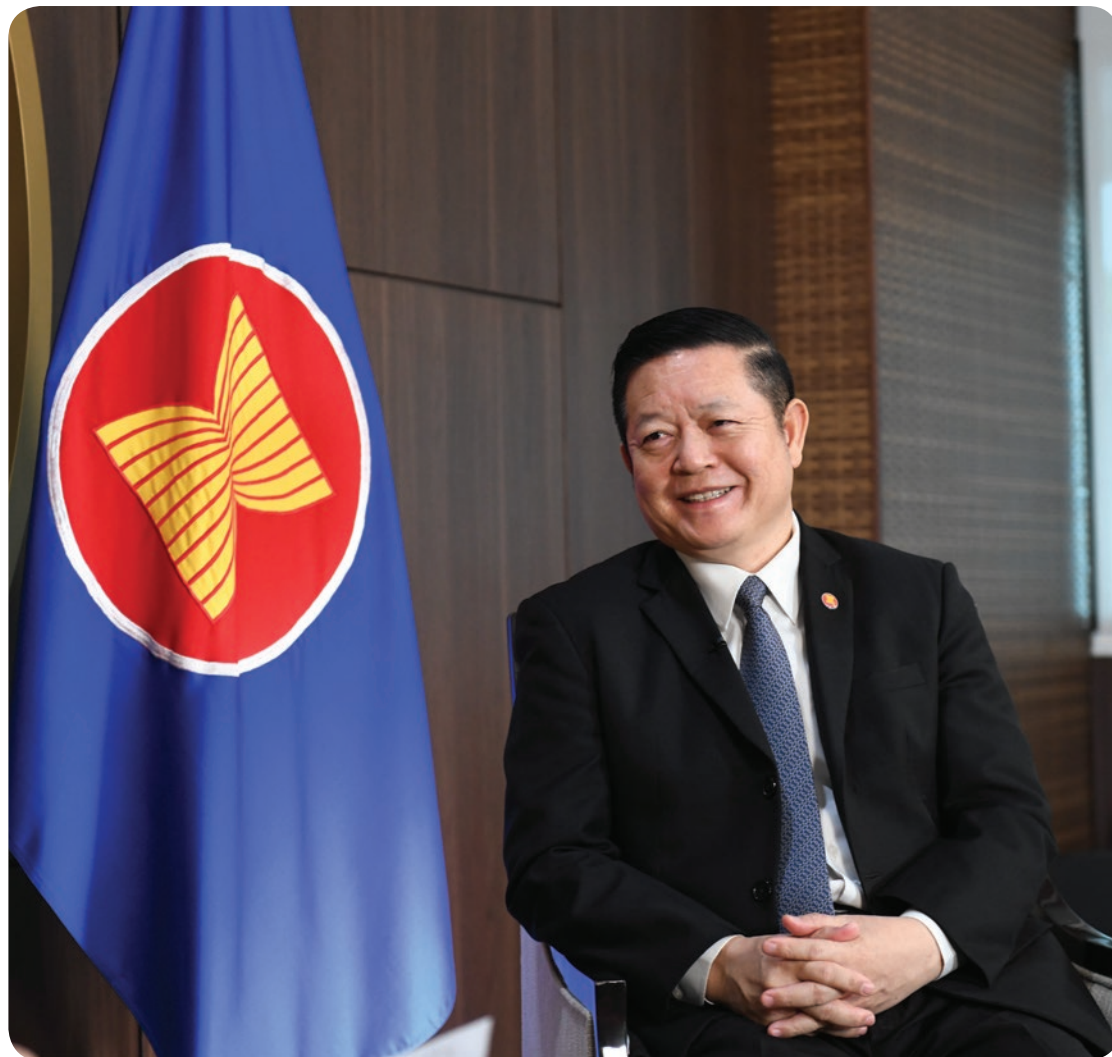
32 **ASEAN** SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY (ASCC)

44 **ASEAN** CONNECTIVITY

50 **ASEAN** ANNIVERSARY AND OUTREACH EFFORTS

58 **ASEAN** COOPERATION PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES





Under the able leadership of Indonesia as the ASEAN Chair in 2023, the past year has been pivotal in showcasing the exemplary resilience and adaptability of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), in the face of global uncertainties and emerging challenges. All three ASEAN Community pillars, namely the ASEAN Political-Security

Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), as well as the ASEAN Connectivity have witnessed significant progress and developments to realise the policy thrusts defined by Indonesia's ASEAN Chair under the theme **"ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth."**

The mandate of the APSC in upholding peace and stability in the region and beyond has been exemplified by the endorsement of the *Guidelines for Accelerating the Early Conclusion of an Effective and Substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea*. In the second half of 2023, the APSC successfully shepherded the adoption of declarations at the 17<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) and secured endorsement of the *ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on the ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue* (AHRD) at the 43<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit in Jakarta, Indonesia, in September 2023, where the ASEAN Leaders affirmed their commitment to mainstream the implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on Indo-Pacific (AOIP) through tangible projects, among its four key priority areas: maritime cooperation, connectivity, sustainable development, and economic cooperation.

Moreover, ASEAN's pledge to foster cooperation and partnership on the international arena saw the inclusion of new formal partners to ASEAN. Morocco and South Africa were acceded as Sectoral Dialogue Partners, while the Netherlands was granted Development Partner status. In addition, ASEAN signed Memorandums of Understanding (MoU) with the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) to pave the way for practical cooperation in areas of common interest. The year 2023 also served as the commemoration of the 50<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of ASEAN-Japan relations, which was marked by a Commemorative Summit for the 50<sup>th</sup> Year of ASEAN-Japan Friendship and Cooperation

held in Tokyo, Japan, on 17 December 2023. Progress in advancing Timor-Leste's accession as ASEAN's 11<sup>th</sup> member state also continued steadily, including the establishment of Timor-Leste's Mission to ASEAN and the appointment of its first dedicated Ambassador to ASEAN. Such developments served as the basis to support Timor-Leste's participation as an observer in ASEAN meetings at all levels and signified the important strides made towards the realisation of Dili's integration to the region.

On the economic front, the AEC directed its focus in 2023 to reinforcing the pursuit of three thrusts as defined by the ASEAN Chair, namely developing the digital economy, recovery and rebuilding, as well as sustainability. Work is presently underway to refine and upgrade the *ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement* to reflect contemporary economic conditions. Resolute efforts were also invested in pursuing ground-breaking new initiatives, such as the *ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement* (DEFA), which would be a global first, to improve regional competition and innovation. Signatories of the *Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) Agreement*, including all the ASEAN Member States, continued to seize the opportunities and benefits brought forth by this mega free trade area (FTA) agreement. Moving forward, ASEAN will progressively upgrade existing as well as establishing new FTA arrangements with its partners in order to expand its external economic spaces. The AEC also continued to put people and businesses at the centre of its activities by delivering trainings on topics to facilitate cross-border trade and proactively



upskilled and reskilled ASEAN's workforce through the regional platform for education in science, technology, and innovation.

In support of the sectoral connectivity for resiliency, ASEAN endorsed the *ASEAN Sustainable Aviation Action Plan*, an essential step towards realising net-zero carbons emissions by 2050. There was also remarkable progress in coordinating multilateral power trade between the ASEAN Member States, the deployment of coal and clean technology, as well as the adoption of the *Principles for Sustainable Mineral Development*.

The ASCC, as the People's Pillar, made noteworthy steps in 2023 in enhancing resilience, supporting vulnerable groups, preparing the youth for the future of work, and promoting the ASEAN Identity as part of the ASEAN Community-building endeavours. ASEAN's leadership in disaster management was particularly evident through the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance (AHA) Centre's support of Myanmar's emergency response and recovery efforts following the Tropical Cyclone Mocha in the middle of 2023. Meanwhile, the Financial Rules of the ASEAN Disaster Management and Emergency Relief Fund was revised to enable the people of ASEAN to contribute during natural disasters. The ASCC also facilitated the *ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change* at the 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework, in Dubai, U.A.E. It also commenced implementation of the *Roadmap for the Ha Noi Declaration on Strengthening Social Work Towards*

*a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community* and released the inaugural *ASEAN Employment Outlook* to enhance human capital development. To cap it, the 43<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit reiterated the importance of finalising the Establishment Agreement and the early operationalisation of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED) to serve as a centre of excellence and regional hub to strengthen ASEAN's regional capabilities to prepare for, prevent, detect, and respond to public health emergencies and emerging diseases.

This Annual Report reflects ASEAN's continued affirmation towards realising a resilient, innovative, dynamic, and people-oriented, people-centred community. With crafting of the *ASEAN Community Vision 2045* and its four Strategic Plans taking shape, ASEAN is well placed to build on its achievements, including those captured in this Annual Report, in deepening and broadening ASEAN's regional integration for years and generations to come and reinforcing its position in the region as an "Epicentrum of Growth."

24 June 2024



**Dr. Kao Kim Hourn**  
Secretary-General of ASEAN





# ASEAN POLITICAL- SECURITY COMMUNITY

The theme chosen by Indonesia as ASEAN's Chair, "ASEAN Matters: Epicentrum of Growth," reflects the need to prepare for future regional and global challenges and to maintain regional strength as the global driver of economic growth. For the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), these priorities are anchored on the three pillars: ASEAN Matters, Epicentrum of Growth, and the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

17<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM)  
in Jakarta, Indonesia





## ASEAN Matters

### An Agile, Adaptive and Responsive ASEAN

Ensuring that ASEAN Matters requires that ASEAN remains relevant in a fluid global and regional strategic environment. In order to do so, ASEAN must continue to enhance its capacity and institutional effectiveness.

In accordance with ASEAN's commitment to implement the *ASEAN Leaders' Statement on Strengthening ASEAN's Capacity and Institutional Effectiveness*, and the *Recommendations on Strengthening ASEAN's Capacity and Institutional Effectiveness* by the High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision, ASEAN Leaders have approved the adoption of the *Rules and Procedures to Support Decision-Making Process at the ASEAN Summit* (ROP on DMP) by the ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC) in September 2023.

The Leaders noted that the ROP on DMP, which was developed by the ASEAN SOM Working-Group on Decision Making Process (SOMWG-DMP), operationalises relevant Articles of the ASEAN Charter and would enable ASEAN to respond effectively to urgent situations in a timely manner.

### Keeping the Region Peaceful and Stable

Under the ASEAN Matters framework, efforts have been made to maintain peace and stability in the region, particularly in the

maritime domain. ASEAN Member States (AMS) and China are dedicated to fully and effectively implementing the Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC). Following the adoption of the *Guidelines for Accelerating the Early Conclusion of an Effective and Substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea* and the announcement of the third reading of the Single Draft Negotiating Text of the COC (SDNT) in 2023, ASEAN and China are working to hasten negotiations for the timely conclusion of a Code of Conduct (COC) in the South China Sea that is both effective and substantive.

At the 43<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit in September 2023, ASEAN Leaders welcomed the release of the first edition of the ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO), which was introduced at the 13<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF) in Bali, Indonesia, in August 2023. The AMO provides a holistic overview of maritime cooperation both within ASEAN as well as between ASEAN and its external partners and friends, involving 15 ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, mechanisms, and processes. The AMO serves as a reference and practical tool for ASEAN to discover and recognise opportunities for enhanced cooperation to strengthen the maritime capacities of AMS.

Meanwhile, ASEAN continues to ensure that the region remains free from nuclear weapons by engaging all the Nuclear Weapon States (NWS) to resolve all outstanding issues pertaining to their signing and ratification of the Protocol to the Treaty of Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ Treaty). To further enhance the profile of the SEANWFZ Treaty, an ASEAN-sponsored

biennial resolution on the SEANWFZ Treaty by the 78<sup>th</sup> Session of the UN General Assembly was adopted in 2023.

Furthermore, ASEAN maintains its contribution to global non-proliferation and disarmament efforts including through the peaceful uses of nuclear energy. The ASEAN Network of Regulatory Bodies on Atomic Energy (ASEANTOM) actively promotes cooperation among nuclear regulatory bodies to strengthen regional nuclear safety and security. Progress in implementing the *Practical Arrangements between ASEAN and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) on Cooperation in the Areas of Nuclear Science and Technology and Applications, Nuclear Safety, Security, and Safeguards* (PA) continues to be made, with concrete projects either implemented or planned. ASEANTOM and the IAEA are also undertaking work to renew the PA for another five-year period.

Contributors to regional peace and stability include ASEAN-led mechanisms such as the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Having celebrated its 30<sup>th</sup> year in 2023, the ARF continues to provide participants with a platform to foster dialogue and cooperation on political and security issues, as well as strengthen confidence building and preventive diplomacy efforts in the region. In conjunction with the 30<sup>th</sup> ARF, the Ministers adopted the *ARF Statement on the Commemoration of 30 Years of the ARF*, which recognised the significant contribution the ARF has made in building trust, confidence, and preventive diplomacy in the region. During the reporting period, the ARF also carried out activities related to food security, health security, information and communication technologies (ICTs), and UNCLOS.

**Secretary-General of ASEAN attends 30<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Regional Forum**



## Addressing the Security Challenges Affecting ASEAN's Peoples

The defence sector, continues to address security issues that matter to people in the region by enhancing readiness for various crisis scenarios. Between June and December 2023, numerous exercises were conducted, testing different regional frameworks and identifying gaps that could potentially undermine resilience. Reflecting the sector's commitment to being more people-oriented, the first large-scale deployment to improve the health of underprivileged communities was successfully organised in General Tinio, the Philippines in October 2023.

The law enforcement sector's unwavering commitment to set a future direction for cooperation was notable in the declarations adopted by the 17<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) in August 2023. These declarations include *Advancing Law Enforcement Cooperation in Combating Transnational Crimes, Strengthening Cooperation in Protecting and Assisting Witnesses and Victims of Transnational Crime, Developing Regional Early Warning and Early Response (EWER) Capability to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (PCRVE), and Combating Arms Smuggling*.

Furthermore, the 17<sup>th</sup> AMMTC adopted new guiding documents to strengthen the institutional capacity of existing law enforcement cooperation mechanisms, improve the effectiveness of its subsidiary

mechanisms, and align them with ASEAN's processes and procedures.

Building on the momentum of cross-sectoral and cross-Pillar coordination and the success of the first multi-sectoral work plan led by the law enforcement sector, the 17<sup>th</sup> AMMTC adopted the *ASEAN Multi-Sectoral Work Plan against Trafficking in Persons 2023-2028 (Bohol TIP Work Plan 2.0)*. This plan, which will continue to engage a total of 10 ASEAN Sectoral Bodies to lead its implementation, is a testament to the region's collective resolve and the promising future of our security initiatives.

As part of implementing the *ASEAN Plan of Action in Combating Transnational Crime (2016-2025)* and the *Work Plan of the ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (Bali Work Plan) 2019-2025*, the AMMTC also published the ASEAN Handbook on Promising Practices on Deradicalisation, Rehabilitation, and Reintegration of Prison Inmates Related to Terrorism and Violent Extremism to provide decision-makers with useful guidance for creating and implementing effective rehabilitation and reintegration programmes, based on knowledge collated from relevant experts.

Meanwhile, efforts to strengthen existing institutional mechanisms were also manifested in the cooperation to combat illicit drugs. The ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Drug Matters (ASOD) adopted the *Terms of Reference (TOR) for the ASOD Working Groups on Preventive Education, Research, and Alternative Development* to align the organisation of their future meetings with

ASEAN's processes and generate more robust discussions on their respective priority areas.

To showcase ASEAN's collective response to the emerging challenges posed by illicit drugs and its contribution to the international efforts to address the drug problem, the 8<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Drug Matters (AMMD) in August 2023 adopted the Joint ASEAN Statement to be delivered at the 67<sup>th</sup> United Nations Commission on Narcotic Drugs (CND) in 2024 on the occasion of the mid-term review of the Ministerial Declaration 2019 titled *Strengthening Our Actions at the National, Regional, and International Levels to Accelerate the Implementation of Our Joint Commitments to Address and Counter the World Drug Problem*.

ASEAN also continued to share the regional outlook on the illicit drug situation and countermeasures undertaken by individual AMS with the publication of the annual *ASEAN Drug Monitoring Report (ADM)*, which was coordinated by the ASEAN Narcotics

Cooperation Centre (ASEAN NARCO). The *ADM Report 2022* was launched during the 8<sup>th</sup> AMMD, while development of the *ADM Report 2023* is ongoing.

## Epicentrum of Growth

### Promoting Human Rights and Other Agenda

For the 75<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Universal Declaration on Human Rights in December 2023, ASEAN restated its commitment to promote and protect human rights in the region through cooperation and dialogue. In order to develop the region as an epicentrum of growth, ASEAN placed emphasis on fostering dialogue and exploring homegrown initiatives on human rights. This effort included the adoption of the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on the ASEAN Human Rights Dialogue (AHRD)

13<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Maritime Forum





at the 43<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit in September 2023 and the successful gathering of the 5<sup>th</sup> AHRD in November 2023. Additionally, ASEAN encouraged engagements with its Dialogue Partners, such as the 5<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-EU Policy Dialogue on Human Rights and the inaugural AICHR-UN Dialogue on Human Rights held in September–October 2023, as well as other one-on-one meetings to identify areas of cooperation.

The ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) continued its work to address priority issues such as the rights of vulnerable groups; the right to a safe, clean, and sustainable environment; trafficking in persons; the freedom of opinion and expression; business and human rights; and the prevention of torture, among other things. AICHR strengthened its engagement with ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, the Southeast Asia National Human Rights Institutions Forum, and different stakeholders, including ASEAN youth and civil society organisations. AICHR held its inaugural interface with the Child Rights Coalition Asia on 9 July 2023, with the participation of children. The event offered a safe and constructive space for children to express their concerns and aspirations on education, the environment, mental health, security, and social welfare in relation to the rights of children.

The ASEAN Women, Peace, and Security Summit: High-Level Dialogue to Advance the Implementation of the *Regional Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security* (RPA WPS) was a significant event in July 2023. It successfully promoted a whole-of-ASEAN approach in implementing RPA WPS, with the defence sector also joining ASEAN's effort in advancing

the WPS Agenda. The 10<sup>th</sup> ADMM-Plus in November 2023 further solidified these efforts by adopting a joint statement on Women, Peace, and Security. This statement, which is currently being implemented, is intended to mainstream the WPS Agenda in all Experts' Working Groups, ensuring a comprehensive and unified approach to women's rights and security in the ASEAN region.

Recognising the essential role of youth in upholding peace, ASEAN has actively pursued avenues to advance the Youth, Peace, and Security (YPS) agenda. In September 2023, the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR) convened a seminar to deliberate on the Lessons Learned in Developing National Action Plans on Youth, Peace, and Security. Additionally, a baseline study on YPS in ASEAN was commissioned to provide guidance for incorporating youth into peacebuilding endeavours. Moreover, the ASEAN-UN Regional Dialogue VI on Climate, Peace, and Security took place in September 2023 to facilitate the exchange of information, experiences, and best practices in addressing the nexus of climate change, peace, and security.

## ASEAN's External Relations and Engagements

ASEAN continues to strengthen and deepen its engagements with Dialogue, Sectoral Dialogue, and Development Partners while exploring mutually beneficial collaborations with other external partners. In 2023, ASEAN and Japan celebrated the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of their relations with a Commemorative Summit, reaffirming their commitment to

strengthen the ASEAN-Japan Comprehensive Strategic Partnership. Additionally, in 2023 ASEAN expanded its formal partnerships with the addition of Morocco and South Africa as Sectoral Dialogue Partners and the Netherlands as a Development Partner.

In recent years, more countries outside the Southeast Asian region have shown an interest in acceding to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation (TAC) in Southeast Asia. This demonstrates the growing significance of ASEAN and the values it promotes. As of the end of 2023, there were 54 High Contracting Parties (HCPs) to the TAC.

As of December 2023, a total of 95 non-ASEAN Ambassadors have been accredited to ASEAN, while 55 ASEAN Committees in Third Countries and International Organisations (ACTCs) continue to promote and raise ASEAN's interest and profile in their respective host countries and organisations.

The law enforcement sector continues to deepen its engagements with Dialogue

Partners. The end of the COVID-19 pandemic has led to the full resumption of cooperation. Accordingly, ASEAN has developed new work plans and renewed previous work plans on transnational crime with its Dialogue Partners.

Furthermore, the 17<sup>th</sup> AMMTC in August 2023 adopted the *Guiding Criteria and Modalities in Engaging External Parties for the AMMTC and Its Subsidiary Mechanisms*, as well as *Guidelines on Inviting External Parties' Participation in the Open Sessions of the AMMTC and Its Subsidiary Mechanisms*. The documents aim to streamline and enhance the law enforcement sector's engagement with external partners and ensure that ASEAN Centrality is upheld in various stages of cooperation.

**17<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) was convened in Labuan Bajo, Indonesia on 21 August 2023**



## Mainstreaming Implementation of the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)

ASEAN Leaders, during the 43<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit in September 2023, reaffirmed their commitment to mainstream and promote the implementation of the AOIP through concrete projects, as well as to encourage ASEAN's external partners to support practical, substantive, and tangible cooperation with ASEAN in four key areas: maritime cooperation, connectivity, implementing the UN Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) 2030, and economic and other possible areas of cooperation.

The success of the 43<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit was evident in the adoption of the *ASEAN-China Joint Statement on Mutually Beneficial Cooperation on the AOIP* and the *ASEAN-Republic of Korea Joint Statement on the Cooperation on AOIP*. These statements underscored the strengthening of ASEAN's cooperation with its Dialogue Partners. Additionally, the ASEAN Indo-Pacific Forum (AIPF), which was held at the sidelines of the 43<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit, showcased infrastructure projects under four sub-themes: green infrastructure and resilient supply chains, inclusive digital transformations, sustainable and innovative financing, and the creative economy.

Noting an interest in more profound engagements with the wider Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean regions while maintaining ASEAN Centrality, the 43<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit

welcomed the signing of the Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with ASEAN and the Pacific Islands Forum (PIF) and between ASEAN and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). The MOUs are the basis for strengthening cooperation with these regional organisations in areas of common interest.

Meanwhile, in the spirit of advancing the AOIP, the 17<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) in November 2023 adopted the *Concept Paper on the Implementation of the AOIP from a Defence Perspective*. The defence sector will focus on maritime cooperation and connectivity, including specifically promoting maritime safety and security as well as freedom of navigation and overflight. The inaugural AOIP activity is expected to take place in 2024, subject to ADMM approval.

## ASEAN towards 2025 and Beyond

Looking ahead, the 43<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit discussed the draft ASEAN Community Vision 2045, which was prepared by the High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision (HLTF-ACV). According to the *Roadmap for an ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision*, the HLTF-ACV will develop Strategic Plans for the APSC, ASEAN Economic Community, ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community, and ASEAN Connectivity.

Following the ASEAN Leaders' decision in 2022 to accept in-principle Timor-Leste as the 11<sup>th</sup> AMS, the 43<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit noted the First Progress Report on the implementation

of the Roadmap for Timor-Leste's Full Membership in ASEAN. It was reiterated that all AMS and external partners are called upon to fully support Timor-Leste in fulfilling all the criteria contained in the Roadmap. This collective responsibility underscores the importance of our shared commitment to Timor-Leste's membership process. One notable achievement in implementing the Roadmap was the appointment of Timor-Leste's dedicated Ambassador to ASEAN and the establishment of the Mission of Timor-Leste to ASEAN in October 2023. ASEAN also welcomed Timor-Leste's intention to accede to the SEANWFZ Treaty, which would be an important step towards full membership in ASEAN and would further strengthen implementation of the SEANWFZ Treaty while reinforcing ASEAN's commitment to nuclear disarmament and non-proliferation in the region and beyond.

It should be noted that since the beginning of 2023, Timor-Leste has participated in ASEAN Meetings as an observer at all levels, from ASEAN Summit plenaries to the meetings of the ASEAN Coordinating Council (ACC),

ASEAN Community Councils, ASEAN Sectoral Ministerial Bodies, Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN, HLTF-ACV, as well as working-group level meetings and ASEAN meetings with Dialogue Partners and other external partners.

Meanwhile, the ASEAN Secretariat is actively supporting Timor-Leste's full membership in ASEAN. The ASEAN Travelling Resource Persons Programme (ATRPP), which began in 2023, is a six-month programme aimed at providing orientation and training to Timor-Leste's desk officers, as well as to enhance the capacity of Timor-Leste government officials in preparation for Timor-Leste's full ASEAN membership. In November and December 2023, resource persons from APSC took part in two ATRPP missions to familiarise officials from relevant Timor-Leste ministries with the work of ASEAN under the APSC Pillar. ●

**Youth Consultation Simulation of ASEAN-IPR Discussion Series 2023, Series 2: Lessons Learned on Developing National Action Plan (NAP) on Youth, Peace and Security (YPS)**





# ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY

**A**SEAN has continued to evince economic growth, resilience, and stability in 2023 despite global headwinds.

The combined GDP of ASEAN Member States (AMS) was USD 3.8 trillion in 2023, making it the world's fifth-largest economy. Projections indicate that by 2030, AMS are poised to ascend to the position of the world's fourth-largest economy. In 2023, ASEAN achieved 4.1% economic growth, with a trajectory expected to persist, underpinned by robust foundational elements. Anticipated regional growth rates are set to surpass the estimated global averages, with a projected increase to over 4.6% in 2024 and 4.7% in 2025.

ASEAN continues to be an important player in global trade and investment. As the third-largest trader in the world, the region booked USD 3.6 trillion in total trade, or 9.5% of the global total

*AECC Chair 2023 H.E. Airlangga Hartarto, Deputy Permanent Secretary, Ministry of Commerce of Thailand Ekachai Seetavorarat and Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr. Kao Kim Hourn launch the DEFA negotiation*

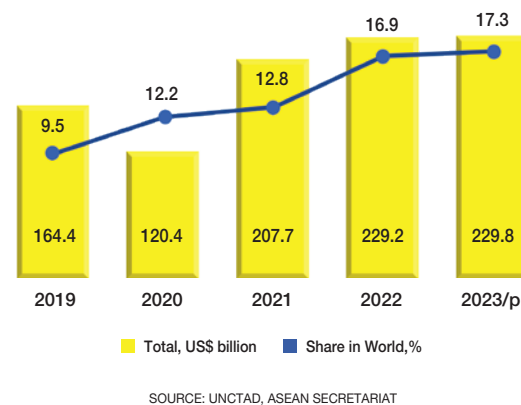




in 2023.<sup>1</sup> Despite ongoing global economic uncertainties, ASEAN continues to be a favoured international investment destination. This is evident from the significant foreign direct investment (FDI) of USD 229 billion in the region, surpassing the investments made in other developing economies.

The region continues to be a focal point for emerging trends in supply chain diversification. ASEAN has attracted a substantial number of investors, particularly in the areas of sustainability and technology. Key technology companies, including Amazon, Google, and NTT, have established regional operations, while AMD and Nvidia have been assessing the region's potential for artificial intelligence.

## Total FDI inflows to ASEAN (2019-2023)



*Workshop on Developing the Guideline for the Reduction of Crop Burning in ASEAN*

Investment in electric vehicles (EV) in ASEAN topped USD 18.1 billion in 2022, up a staggering 570% over 2021.<sup>2</sup>

Intra-ASEAN trade and investment and a continuing commitment to open economic regionalism are the foundation of ASEAN's economic integration. Intra-ASEAN trade topped USD 770 billion in 2023, comprising 21.6% of total regional trade, ahead of China's share (USD 702.3 billion, 19.7%) and the US' share (USD 400.6 billion, 11.3%). Meanwhile, intra-ASEAN FDI topped USD 22.7 billion, or 9.9% of ASEAN's total FDI, in 2023, behind only the US (USD 73.6, 32.1%) and the European Union (EU; USD 25.6, 11.2%).<sup>3</sup>

Indonesia, as ASEAN Chair in 2023, championed the region as an Epicentrum of Growth by strengthening AMS collaboration to sustain regional growth and prepare for the next phase of ASEAN Community building

after 2025. The sixteen Priority Economic Deliverables advocated by Indonesia as ASEAN Chair featured three strategic thrusts –digital economy, recovery and rebuilding, and sustainability– to rebuild regional growth by connecting markets, increase competitiveness, accelerate inclusive transformations in the digital economy, and promote sustainable economic growth for a resilient future.

## Progressing Toward a Highly Integrated and Cohesive Economy

ASEAN is in the process of refining the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) to make it relevant and fit-for-purpose while supporting contemporary global trade. The upgraded ATIGA will encompass both traditional trade concerns, such as tariff liberalisation and trade facilitation, and evolving issues including the circular economy, food security, and paperless trade. Furthermore, the proposal includes the introduction of an Alternative Dispute Resolution mechanism to effectively address non-tariff measure-related cases. The proposed amendments to ATIGA would modernise the agreement, making it more adaptable to evolving regional and global dynamics, as well as the evolving demands of businesses. AMS are working towards finalising negotiations by 2024 and expect to release the updated ATIGA by 2025.

In September 2023, ASEAN customs administrations signed a Mutual Recognition Arrangement for their respective Authorised

Economic Operator Programmes. This agreement aims to increase trade predictability and transparency within AMS and improve trade among them by reducing regulatory burdens. In December 2023, six AMS (Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, the Philippines, Singapore, and Thailand) launched a six-month pilot program for the initiative. The remaining AMS are expected to implement a second pilot program in 2024.

The ASEAN Single Window (ASW) has been crucial in connecting and ensuring the compatibility of individual AMS National Single Windows to facilitate cargo movement and promote economic integration. Significant progress was made in 2023, enabling AMS to implement e-Form D issuance and acceptance via the ASW platform starting on 1 January 2024. Moving forward, Form D, a key customs document that facilitates trade in goods under ATIGA, will only be issued and accepted in hard copy for technical issues. With implementation of this initiative, document processing time and administrative

### Go Digital Viet Nam



<sup>1</sup> World trade data from UNCOMTRADE database as of May 2024.  
<sup>2</sup> <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/12/AIR-Special-2023.pdf>  
<sup>3</sup> Preliminary figures from ASEANStats.



costs will be reduced significantly, benefitting businesses taking advantage of ATIGA.

ASEAN has made significant strides in its work on standards and conformance, with revisions finalised for the ASEAN Guidelines for Harmonisation of Standards, which has allowed AMS to align their national and international standards. We have also seen significant progress in developing the ASEAN Pharmaceutical Regulatory Framework Agreement, a cross-cutting initiative of the economic and health sectors. In a clear demonstration of our commitment to sustainability, the standards and conformance sector has developed the Roadmap of ASEAN Harmonised Standards to Support Sustainable Development Goals Implementation. This Roadmap will foster ASEAN's integration agenda by harmonising standards that are responsive to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN-EU Technology Management Hub (TMH) Workshop 2023*



The integration of services sector accelerated in 2023, as evidenced by the signing of the Protocol to Amend the ASEAN Agreement on Movement of Natural Persons (MNP) and the adoption of the ASEAN Services Facilitation Framework (ASFF). The Protocol to Amend the ASEAN Agreement on MNP is expected to facilitate the movement of people involved in providing trade in goods, services, and investment within the region. Meanwhile, the ASFF is essential for improving policies and regulations, and for creating a more favorable business environment for trade and investment related to services.

Significant progress has been made in advancing ASEAN's endeavours to enhance the regional investment climate. The forthcoming signing of the Fifth Protocol to Amend the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement (ACIA) in 2024 signifies a commitment to providing investors with enhanced certainty and transparency pertaining to ASEAN's investment regime. This amendment also seeks to uphold the

continued significance of ASEAN's internal investment and external agreements.

Considering the importance of ASEAN economic integration and its direct impact on the accessibility of financing for individuals and businesses, as well as the facilitation of capital transactions for financial institutions across AMS, ensuring seamless connectivity is of utmost importance. It is critical to ensure the stability of institutions against potential shocks and crises. To boost the significant components of regional financial integration, ASEAN Leaders have pledged to enhance the affordability, convenience, and seamlessness of inter-country payments, thereby enabling individuals and businesses to conduct transactions with greater efficiency. ASEAN Leaders have also acknowledged the potential benefits of local currencies in bolstering financial resilience, fortifying regional value chains, and promoting deeper regional financial integration by fostering improved intra-ASEAN trade and investment. Despite prevailing geopolitical uncertainties, this high-level commitment is set to assist ASEAN in establishing a robust and resilient regional financial architecture.

Finally, regional economic integration was bolstered by the Ministerial Declaration on the Framework of ASEAN Industrial Project-Based Initiative (AIPBI), which has significantly strengthened regional economic integration. It has a key focus on revitalising and mainstreaming industrial cooperation, thus playing a critical role in enhancing the participation of AMS in global value chains. The Framework prioritises forward-looking sectors, green technological advancements, private sector

participation, intra-ASEAN complementarity, and collaboration with relevant partners.

## Enhancing ASEAN's Competitiveness, Innovation, and Dynamism

Enhancing regional competitiveness, innovation, and dynamism has consistently contributed to ASEAN's progress in strengthening its comparative advantages in an increasingly competitive global market. Recent efforts have encompassed impactful initiatives centered on competition policy, consumer protection, digital economy, intellectual property rights (IPR), and sustainable economic development.

Strengthening the regional digital economy has been a key priority for the AEC. In September 2023, ASEAN launched landmark negotiations on the Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA), aiming to finish deliberations by late 2025. Anticipated to be the world's first such agreement, the DEFA envisions doubling the value of ASEAN's digital economy from USD 1 trillion to USD 2 trillion by 2030. DEFA implementation will mark ASEAN as a global digital frontrunner. Accordingly, ASEAN is working to establish regionally-recognisable digital identities for businesses to help counter problems faced by businesses doing cross-border trade.

In 2023, a significant initiative was launched, namely the Regulatory Pilot Space to Facilitate Cross-Border Digital Data Flows for Self-

Driving Cars. This initiative aimed to identify and address the challenges related to cross-border digital data flows for self-driving cars and autonomous vehicles within the region. Additionally, the development of the ASEAN Framework on Logistics for Digital Economy Supply Chain for Rural Areas was undertaken to bolster infrastructure and improve connectivity in rural areas through ICT solutions, thereby fostering the expansion of the digital economy.

On competition, the negotiations for the conclusion of the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Competition (AFAC) have been making steady progress and are anticipated to be finalised by mid-2024, following a two-year effort. AFAC aims to promote the establishment of fair and competitive business environments through cross-border collaboration and coordination among competition agencies. It also seeks to harmonise competition policies with regional

and domestic policies and enact measures that address competition in areas of mutual interest. Furthermore, an important competition-related initiative is the Guidance Document for the ASEAN Competition Business Perception Index, which incorporates indicators designed to evaluate the impact of e-commerce on market competition. This index will aid ASEAN in gauging the awareness, perceptions, and comprehension of the region's competition regulations among businesses.

Furthermore, in 2023 ASEAN achieved significant milestones in consumer protection, including the creation of the ASEAN Guidelines on Consumer Impact Assessment. These guidelines are intended to assist national consumer protection authorities in developing laws, policies, and regulations that safeguard consumer interests and rights. Additionally, there were updates made to essential tools, such as the ASEAN Peer Review Guidance Document and ASEAN Consumer Empowerment Index, to incorporate assessment indicators on AMS e-commerce consumer protection policies, consumer

skills, and awareness of the digital economy. These refinements aimed to ensure that consumer rights and interests are taken into consideration in national policies.

Cooperation on intellectual property rights (IPR) has made significant advancements through the facilitation of a study aimed at harmonising industrial design requirements and conducting gap analyses for regional e-Commerce regulations related to intellectual property. This effort is designed to streamline registrations and enhance legal certainty. Additionally, efforts have been made to strengthen collaboration between ASEAN and its long-standing partner, the World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). A memorandum of understanding (MoU) was signed between ASEAN and WIPO to expand collaboration, and the ASEAN IP Register was launched as a platform for data exchange to be utilised by businesses seeking to expand into ASEAN markets. These initiatives are crucial for achieving ASEAN's aim of becoming a regional innovation hub.

Recognising the pressing need to balance economic growth, environmental protection, and sustainable natural resource utilisation, ASEAN has intensified its efforts in promoting sustainability. In 2023, ASEAN adopted the Implementation Plan of the Framework on Circular Economy for the AEC, outlining 67 initiatives aimed at expediting the achievement of a low-carbon economy. Moreover, ASEAN has endorsed the ASEAN Strategy for Carbon Neutrality and the ASEAN Blue Economy

Framework. The Carbon Neutrality Strategy provides a credible and strategic pathway for ASEAN to hasten the transition to a low-carbon future, while the ASEAN Blue Economy Framework fosters collaborative endeavours to foster the blue economy, ensuring regional competitiveness amidst global climate action.

Highlighting the crucial role of finance in advancing the green transition, substantial progress has been made in developing coherent and interoperable frameworks within the financial sector. Particularly noteworthy are the establishment of the ASEAN Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance and the ASEAN Transition Finance Guidance, designed to aid investors in channeling resources towards sustainable economic activities in the region. ASEAN also developed bond market standards to attract capital investment in green, social, and sustainable activities. Overall, ASEAN's drive for a carbon-neutral future is expected to yield GDP increases between USD 3.0 trillion and 5.3 trillion by 2050, potentially attract USD 3.7 trillion to 6.7 trillion in green investment and possibly create between 49 million and 66 million additional jobs for the region.<sup>4</sup>

## Enhanced Sectoral Connectivity for Resiliency

Significant progress was made in advancing sectoral economic cooperation, which has played a pivotal role in enhancing connectivity

### Launch of ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) Negotiations



<sup>4</sup> <https://asean.org/asean-charts-course-for-a-sustainable-future-with-ambitious-asean-strategy-for-carbon-neutrality/>



and bolstering the region's overall resilience. Notable accomplishments were achieved in key sectors such as the digital economy, energy and minerals, food, agriculture, and forestry, science and technology, tourism, and transport.

On transport, ASEAN has continued to demonstrate its strong and proactive commitment to sustainability by placing a significant emphasis on promoting green and low-carbon development. This commitment is apparent through the implementation of innovative and efficient transport operations. Notable examples include the adoption of the ASEAN Sustainable Aviation Action Plan, which aligns with the International Civil Aviation Organisation's objective of achieving net-zero carbon emissions by 2050. Additionally, policy recommendations have been issued to enhance electric vehicle (EV) infrastructure and charging stations, aiming to accelerate EV

adoption and reduce carbon emissions in land transport. Moreover, the adoption of guidelines concerning Small Ports aims to assess and analyse the performance of 14 ASEAN Network Ports, ultimately striving to improve their operational efficiency and sustainability.

On energy, ASEAN has made significant progress as the region has advanced its multilateral power trade, with projects like the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines Power Integration Project and the Lao PDR-Thailand-Malaysia-Singapore Power Integration Project. These projects aim to enhance the ASEAN Power Grid and sustain power trades up to 100 MW, while also focusing on reducing emissions through the deployment of Coal and Clean Technology as well as Carbon Capture, Utilisation, and Storage (CCUS). There are currently 12 proposed or implemented CCUS projects, and a natural

### 4 key outcomes of the Carbon Neutrality Strategy

ensuring ASEAN's competitiveness on the global stage and readiness for the transition



#### Developed green industries

Capturing the full value of regional green value chains to unlock ASEAN manufacturing and export potential



#### Interoperability within ASEAN

Enabling exchange of green electricity, products, and feedstocks to accelerate roll out of green technologies



#### Globally credible standards

Ensuring ASEAN remains a top destination for international capital to increase liquidity in regional markets



#### Green capabilities

Developing the necessary green talent and expertise within ASEAN to drive the climate transition

# ASEAN Public Private Sector Engagement Activities in 2023



## Consistently high frequency of engagement

ASEAN had 149 engagements with private sector entities in 2023. Most of the engagements are between private sectors and ASEAN Sectoral Bodies. This highlights ASEAN's openness to listen to feedback from the business communities in the implementation of ASEAN Economic Communities.



## 1000+ Business Participation

This year ASEAN embarked on important milestone with the formulation of ASEAN Strategy for Carbon Neutrality, the start of negotiation for ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement, and the launch of ASEAN Tariff Finder. ASEAN has conducted business roundtable, dialogue, and workshop for the initiatives which were attended by more than 1000 private sectors in the region.



## ASEAN for Business Bulletin

In 2023, ASEAN Secretariat published 11 monthly edition and 1 special edition of ASEAN for Business Bulletin. The bulletin provided quick update on the latest ASEAN economic integration initiatives and featured the opinion editorial from business leaders from ASEAN.



## Business Mission to ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partners

ASEAN Secretariat also supported the business mission to ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partners, namely Pakistan and Türkiye in 2023. The business mission were held in August and November and facilitated more than 80 business people from ten ASEAN Member States to find business partners and business opportunities.



## Help Us Improve!

ASEAN Secretariat is conducting its end-year Public Private Engagement Survey to improve our engagement in 2024. Please help us improve by scanning the QR Code and fill the survey. The survey will open until 20 January 2024!

gas processing project is scheduled to begin by 2025. As a result of ongoing programmes, ASEAN has achieved a 24.5% reduction in energy intensity based on 2005 levels, with renewable energy contributing to 33.6% of ASEAN's installed power capacity.

On minerals, ASEAN is focused on ensuring a consistent and ample supply of metals while encouraging responsible investment in the sourcing of mineral inputs and products to enhance the region's competitiveness. The ASEAN Minerals Exploration Strategy aims to coordinate efforts to enhance geological prospecting, with a focus on attracting investments. This includes plans to gather and analyse data to support exploration activities in the region. Additionally, ASEAN has endorsed the Principles for Sustainable Minerals Development, initiated a Work Programme to strengthen minerals governance within ASEAN, and partnered to conduct a Joint Study on Critical Minerals Value Chains for ASEAN's transition to a Low Carbon Future.

**Go Digital Philippines**



For the food, agriculture, and forestry sector as ASEAN places great importance on sustainability, focusing on reducing carbon emissions, minimising the use of harmful chemicals, promoting digital applications, and creating public-private partnerships. To address the environmental and economic impact of unsustainable agricultural practices, ASEAN has worked on reducing crop burning in the region. This has sparked significant interest and involvement from various partners within and outside the region.

The tourism sector, one of the most significant contributors to ASEAN's economy, has played an essential role in driving the region's economic recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to boost intra-regional tourism, ASEAN launched the Intra-ASEAN Tourism Recovery Campaign on World Tourism Day. This six-week Campaign was hosted on Facebook, Instagram, TikTok, and X (formerly Twitter) to encourage travellers in Southeast Asia to visit other parts of the region. The tourism sector refined its institutional set-up to ensure a more coherent, integrated, and systematic approach to accelerate connectivity,

boost sustainable development, encourage public-private partnerships, and exchange quality data to close existing information gaps.

On science, technology, and innovation (STI), ASEAN continues to convert scientific knowledge into practical solutions, capitalising on alliances between academia, industry, policy-makers, and society. Following COVID-19, ASEAN enhanced its epidemic preparedness via the Real-Time Epidemic Genomic Surveillance and ASEAN Diagnostic Initiative. Moreover, considering that over 80% of jobs in the region will require workers with basic digital skills<sup>5</sup> and that 1.2 billion jobs worldwide are expected to be affected by Artificial Intelligence,<sup>6</sup> ASEAN has been proactively upskilling and reskilling its workforce through the ASEAN Platform for Education in STI. Additionally, having noted that women comprise only 28% of workforce in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM);<sup>7</sup> ASEAN, over the past decade, has continued to promote gender equality to advance women's participation in the sector—a commitment that will be pursued consistently in the future.

## Realising a People- and Business-Centred AEC

The AEC has maintained its focus on initiatives and policy-making that benefit people and businesses, particularly micro, small, and

medium enterprises (MSMEs). In 2023, the ASEAN Access LEARN platform was introduced. This free-of-charge platform provides live training sessions and self-study courses on commerce and international trade to support businesses of all sizes. The training and topics covered are relevant to various industries and can be customised to meet the needs of MSMEs preparing for cross-border trade. Additionally, the ASEAN SME Academy offered 16 learning modules on business resilience and continuity. Through the Go Digital ASEAN 2 initiative, in collaboration with the private sector, around 150,000 micro and small businesses, especially in rural areas, were equipped with essential digital skills to enhance business efficiency and broaden market access. The ASEAN finance sector also engaged in policy dialogues and best practice exchanges to improve digital financial inclusion and literacy for consumers and MSMEs, ensuring that everyone can participate in an increasingly digitalised economy.

Furthermore, ASEAN organised multiple business roundtables with over 1,000 participants to address key issues such as digitalisation, sustainability, and trade facilitation. Moreover, ASEAN facilitated business missions for more than 80 business entities across AMS, including Pakistan and Türkiye, two important ASEAN Sectoral Dialogue Partners, to explore potential business opportunities.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.spf.org/en/gender/publications/24175.html>

<sup>6</sup> [https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/future-of-work/#:~:text=Over%20the%20next%2010%20years,US\\$2414.6%20trillion%20in%20wages](https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2020/01/future-of-work/#:~:text=Over%20the%20next%2010%20years,US$2414.6%20trillion%20in%20wages)

<sup>7</sup> [https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Policy-Brief-Strengthening-ASEAN-Womens-Participation-in-STEM-Endorsed.FINAL\\_.pdf](https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/10/Policy-Brief-Strengthening-ASEAN-Womens-Participation-in-STEM-Endorsed.FINAL_.pdf)





*HLTF-EI Direct Interface on AEC Post-2025 Agenda with Business Communities*

## Narrowing the Development Gap

ASEAN has made significant progress in reducing development disparities both within and between its member states. The per capita GDP variance between the wealthier ASEAN-6 countries and the less affluent ASEAN-4 nations decreased from 3.4 in 2000 to 2.0 in 2020. ASEAN has reaffirmed its dedication to advancing regional community-building initiatives through the implementation of 75 projects outlined in the current Initiative for ASEAN Integration Work Plan, focusing on five key areas: education, food and agriculture, health and well-being, micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs), and trade facilitation.

ASEAN's consistent display of commitment to cooperation is evident in its alignment of priorities and objectives with several sub-regional growth triangles, including the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines

East ASEAN Growth Area (BIMP-EAGA), the Indonesia-Malaysia-Thailand Growth Triangle (IMT-GT), and the Greater Mekong Subregion (GMS). This collaborative approach serves as a crucial driver of collective accomplishments.

In support of Timor-Leste's integration into ASEAN's economic agreements, the second Capacity Building Programme took place in July 2023. This program provided comprehensive insight into the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) and relevant topics. Fifty-five officials from diverse ministries and agencies in Timor-Leste partook in the program, which also involved a session with private sector entities for an exchange of perspectives regarding their role in the accession process.

## Globalising ASEAN

While further strengthening its internal economic integration, ASEAN remains an open economic region. ASEAN continues to lead implementation of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), the world's largest FTA. To ensure its effective implementation, ASEAN has taken the lead in

institutionalising the RCEP Support Unit, which is expected to be operational in 2024.

ASEAN made significant progress in upgrading or establishing FTAs with its strategic economic partners, including those covered by AITIGA, the ASEAN-China Free Trade Area (ACFTA) 3.0 Upgrade Negotiations, and the ASEAN-Canada Free Trade Agreement. ASEAN is also working with its partners to effectively implement other FTAs, ensuring that the benefits of these agreements can be reaped by the region's private sector. All of this illustrates ASEAN's unwavering commitment to the multilateral trading system, which will ensure its trade regime remains open, modern, and fit-for-purpose in the 21<sup>st</sup> century.

## Charting the Future

As the AEC Blueprint 2025 nears its conclusion, 2023 marked a defining year in shaping ASEAN's economy beyond 2025. The AEC

worked relentlessly to support the shaping of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and its Strategic Plans. The AEC will endeavour to advance a prosperous, innovative, and sustainable single economy with highly skilled and productive workers. To ensure inclusivity in economic component of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, the AEC engaged with diverse stakeholders, including representatives of academia, the business community, civil society organisations, and the public to understand their expectations and aspirations for the AEC Post-2025 agenda and priorities. This underscores ASEAN's steadfast dedication in building an action-oriented, adaptable, enterprising, inclusive, nimble, and sustainable economic community by 2045. ●

*The 3<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN-EU Technology Management Hub (TMH) workshop was held in Phnom Penh, Cambodia on 22-23 November 2023*





# ASEAN SOCIO- CULTURAL COMMUNITY

In 2023, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) focused on increasing resilience to climate change, health emergencies, and natural disasters. The ASCC also worked on supporting vulnerable groups, preparing young people for changes in the job market, and fostering a shared identity and sense of community. During Indonesia's tenure as ASEAN Chair, the ASCC made significant progress in the areas mentioned as well as in education, gender equality, and sustainable resilience. As the ASCC Blueprint 2025 comes to an end, ASEAN has reviewed its progress and started planning for the development of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045.

*Emergency aid was delivered by aircraft to the earthquake survivors in remote areas of Mamuju, West Sulawesi, in January 2021*





## Strengthening Resilience

Conscious of the links between climate change, disaster management, and health, ASEAN has worked to strengthen its crisis resilience, health system, and infrastructure. In collaboration with its stakeholders, ASEAN has recognised the urgent need for comprehensive solutions to health challenges. Collective effort is needed to fortify regional resilience during crises, particularly when responding to hazards and health threats, and to strengthen health systems and access to care.

The ASEAN health sector, emerging stronger from the COVID-19 pandemic, has prioritised bolstering its health architecture for long-term resilience. This includes increasing global and regional cooperation on public health emergencies, such as preparedness and responses. The ASEAN Public Health Emergency Coordination System (APHECS) Framework plays a crucial role in establishing mechanisms for national and regional action on public health emergencies and cross-border health threats. Prioritising the operationalisation of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED) is vital for the region to ensure a solid response to future threats.

Through integrated and interdisciplinary cooperation, the ASEAN One Health Joint

**ASEAN-Emergency Response and Assessment Team (ERAT) deployment to provide strategic advice to contain landfill fire in Yangon in 2018**

Plan of Action 2023-2030 and the ASEAN Strategic Framework to Combat Antimicrobial Resistance through One Health Approach 2019-2030 (ASF-AMR) have significantly contributed to maintaining a healthy balance between the health of humans, animals, plants, and the environment in AMS. The ASEAN One Health Network (AOHN) is a shining example of a regional health platform that promotes whole-of-society and whole-of-government engagement, fostering an inclusive and responsive One Health governance.

Furthermore, the ASCC has enhanced existing mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Emergency Operation Centre (EOC) Network, the ASEAN+3 Field Epidemiology Training Network, and the ASEAN BioDiaspora Virtual Centre (ABVC). It has bolstered its disaster preparedness and response capacity by fully integrating the Standard Operating Procedure in the Coordination of Emergency Medical Teams in ASEAN (EMT SOP) with the Standard



Operating Procedure for Regional Standby Arrangements and Coordination of Joint Disaster Relief and Emergency Response Operations (SASOP).

## Building Resilience and Leadership in Disaster Management

ASEAN has made significant progress in ensuring that disaster resilience is built through a comprehensive, cross-sectoral approach that aligns with strategic declarations, such as the Bandar Seri Begawan Declaration on the Strategic and Holistic Initiative to Link ASEAN Responses to Emergencies and Disasters (ASEAN SHIELD) and the ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on Sustainable Resilience.

This strategy has been supported by efforts to enhance financial preparedness by reinforcing existing mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Disaster Management and Emergency Response Fund, which currently accepts contributions from private and public sources to support disaster response efforts.

ASEAN is dedicated to enhancing disaster resilience through the ASEAN Capacity Building Roadmap 2025-2030 and the implementation of competency assessments via the ASEAN Standards and Certification for Experts in Disaster Management (ASCEND). ASEAN is committed to being a global leader in disaster management and is actively implementing the ASEAN Declaration on One ASEAN One Response. To achieve this, ASEAN continues to strengthen the



**ASEAN-ERAT swiftly deployed to assess Tropical Storm Nalgae's impact in the Philippines in October-November 2022**

ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) and other crucial systems such as the ASEAN Disaster Information Network (ADINet) and the Disaster Monitoring and Response System (DMRS). The sustained commitment and collaboration from ASEAN Member States (AMS) and ASEAN's partners are vital for strengthening the Disaster Emergency Logistics System for ASEAN (DELSA) and the ASEAN Emergency Response Assessment Team (ASEAN-ERAT).

A clear example of ASEAN's solidarity in action was its swift support of Myanmar's emergency response and recovery efforts following the Tropical Cyclone MOCHA in May 2023. The ASEAN Secretary-General's role as the ASEAN Humanitarian Assistance Coordinator (SG-AHAC) was activated, and the AHA Centre coordinated the deployment of the ASEAN-ERAT to Myanmar.

## Demonstrating Climate Commitment and Action

ASEAN showed its commitment to climate action by issuing the ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change at the 28<sup>th</sup> Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP28). ASEAN will actively participate and showcase its commitment at the upcoming UNFCCC COPs, including through ASEAN events at COP29 in Baku, Azerbaijan in 2024. Additionally, it finalised the Agreement on the Establishment of the ASEAN Centre for Climate Change (ACCC) in Brunei Darussalam, which aims to enhance regional cooperation on climate action, strengthen science and policy linkages, promote evidence-based policy decision-making, and foster cooperation between ASEAN and its partners.

Further, ASEAN expanded its network of ASEAN Heritage Parks by adding Phu Khieo Wildlife Sanctuary-Nam Nao National

Park and Phu Kradueng National Park in Thailand. To address biodiversity loss, ASEAN developed the ASEAN Action Plan on Invasive Alien Species Management and advanced cooperation on nature-based solutions for conservation.

The ASEAN Regional Action Plan on Combating Marine Debris in the ASEAN Member States addressed the issue of marine pollution by offering regional programs to support AMS in capacity building, improving knowledge management, and developing policies. As for air pollution, ASEAN focused on enhancing AMS capacities to monitor air quality, mitigating air pollution and its negative impacts, and providing technical assistance.

Combating transboundary haze pollution, a major environmental concern, remained a key focus of ASEAN. AMS adopted the Second ASEAN Peatland Management Strategy 2023-2030, the Second Roadmap on ASEAN Cooperation towards Transboundary Haze Pollution Control with Means of Implementation 2023-2030, and the ASEAN Investment Framework for Haze-Free Sustainable Land Management to promote peatland ecosystem protection, peatland fire control, and sustainable land management practices. Further, the Establishment Agreement of the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Transboundary Haze Pollution Control (ACC THPC) was concluded in 2023. It will

*Anti-poverty programme recipient returns to his community as a health worker in Brooke's Point, Palawan*



be hosted by Indonesia to facilitate regional cooperation and coordination on land and forest fires and the impact of transboundary haze pollution.

## Empowering and Safeguarding ASEAN's Vulnerable Communities

In building the region's resilience to various challenges, ASEAN has taken steps to protect and empower its most vulnerable peoples, ensuring they are not left behind.

### Ensuring People Living in Poverty and Rural Areas Are Not Left Behind

Recognising the pivotal role of rural development in fostering collective prosperity, ASEAN has made it a priority to adopt inclusive, sustainable, and transformative approaches aimed at bridging the rural-urban gap and empowering rural communities, including women and youth. This commitment encompasses safeguarding the rural poor and vulnerable from the impacts of the pandemic, bolstering local rural economies and food systems, and ensuring a recovery approach that is both climate-responsive and gender-responsive, while also being inclusive and pro-poor.

ASEAN is committed to promoting inclusive rural development through its ASEAN Villages Network (AVN). This platform encourages

collaboration and resource mobilisation to advance digitalisation for smart villages, the One Village/One Product approach, and rural tourism. ASEAN's national and regional initiatives aim to strengthen community-based approaches to social protection for the poor and most vulnerable communities while supporting nano, micro, and small enterprises. Recognising the important role of women, ASEAN has made empowering women's entrepreneurship in rural communities and agricultural value chains a priority.

### Advancing Gender Equality and Empowerment of All Women and Girls

ASEAN has been actively promoting gender equality through the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Steering Committee (AGMSC) and the Advisory Group on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). These entities foster collaboration across different sectors and Pillars to implement essential strategies, notably the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework (AGMSF) and the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace, and Security (ASEAN RPA on WPS).

The elimination of all forms of violence against women and children remains a top priority. ASEAN has provided regional guidance through e-learning modules on trafficking in persons, emphasising victim-centered approaches. The ongoing implementation of the ASEAN RRPA on WPS includes a toolkit and guidelines to facilitate localisation efforts.



Addressing child online protection, the ASEAN has developed the ASEAN Guidelines for Harmonized and Comprehensive National Legislation against All Forms of Online Child Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. Additionally, the ASEAN Guidelines for Provision of Protective and Support Services for All Child Victims and Children in Contact with the Law as a Result of Online Child Sexual Abuse and Exploitation have been established.

## Promoting Disability Inclusive Development and Empowerment

ASEAN has reaffirmed its commitment to promoting disability inclusion through the ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities. In addition, the ASEAN High-Level Forum on Disability Inclusive Development and Partnership beyond 2025 underscored ASEAN's strong political commitment. Furthermore, the Mid-Term Review of the ASEAN Enabling Master Plan 2025 ensured meaningful engagement of the ASEAN Disability Forum (ADF) and organisations representing persons with disabilities in the review process.

## Enhancing Migrant Worker Protections

ASEAN has demonstrated its commitment to protecting migrant workers through the adoption of the ASEAN Declaration on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers, as well as the ASEAN Declaration and its Guidelines on the Protection of Migrant Workers and Family Members in Crisis Situations.



*Migrant workers sewing or stitching leather shoes in footwear production line of a factory in Sankhlaburi, Kanchanaburi, Thai-Myanmar border province*

Additionally, ASEAN has adopted non-binding and voluntary recommendations to enhance the effectiveness of legal pathways for labor migration in ASEAN and labor inspections in migrant worker workplaces. A regional study on how to better protect migrant domestic workers through standard employment contracts has also been completed.

*“Our government’s assistance to seafarers during the pandemic was excellent based on our experience. I would suggest that they offer seminars on financial literacy. This will help us on how to allocate and grow our hard-earned money, so when another pandemic hits us again, we know how to survive independently, and not rely only on our government.”*

*-Rodrigo and Ma. Sheena Blanca, Migrant worker and family, Philippines (The ASEAN, Issue 28)*

## Strengthening Social Work and the Wider Social Service Workforces

Recognising the essential role that members of the social service workforce play, ASEAN is actively promoting the advancement of the social work profession and strengthening the wider social service workforce to enable delivery of quality social services and social development programmes in ASEAN, especially to most vulnerable groups and those at risk. Current efforts are being made to implement the Roadmap for the Ha Noi Declaration on Strengthening Social Work Towards a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community. These efforts include providing regional guidance for delivering high-quality social services to at-risk women and children, as well as strengthening social work in the justice and health sectors.

## Preparing ASEAN's Peoples for the Changing World of Work

ASEAN has implemented measures to assist individuals and organisations in adapting to and thriving in the evolving world of work, as well as managing other disruptions caused by artificial intelligence, climate transition, and digital technologies.

## Promoting Decent Work for All

ASEAN continues to promote decent work for all and develop the future workforce. The first edition of the *ASEAN Employment*

*Outlook* focused on ensuring human capital development and providing social protections to workers in the platform economy.

The Guidance Document for Implementing the ASEAN Declaration on Promoting Competitiveness, Resilience, and Agility of Workers for the Future of Work was adopted to ensure that workers are equipped with the necessary skills. The ASEAN TVET Council (ATC) also played a role by showcasing success stories on how technical and vocational education and training (TVET) catalyses positive employment outcomes, encourages student interest, and fosters industry engagement.

## Improving the Quality of Education

ASEAN is focused on enhancing educational quality from early childhood through higher education, ensuring that learners acquire needed foundational knowledge and skills, including critical thinking. ASEAN Leaders endorsed the ASEAN Declaration on Early Childhood Care and Education in Southeast Asia to strengthen universal access to high-quality early childhood care and education.

ASEAN's commitment to fully operationalising the ASEAN Higher Education Space is a testament to its dedication to harmonising and internationalising higher education in the region. This initiative includes implementing quality assurance measures and promoting greater student mobility, as well as mutual recognition of qualifications and the establishment of an ASEAN-branded scholarship scheme, all of

which are designed to benefit the students and the region as a whole.

Recognising the importance of honing digital skills and accessing digital resources for teaching and learning, ASEAN devised a roadmap for implementing the Declaration on Digital Transformation of Education Systems in ASEAN.

“I think less emphasis should be placed on rote memorisation or just blindly memorising our textbooks to do well in exams. I feel that schools should focus more on 21<sup>st</sup>-century competencies and transferable skills that can be applied to any area in the workforce. For example, time management, leadership, public speaking, etc. I think schools should provide more avenues for students to explore these areas instead of focusing so much on exams.”

–Ally Candra, 17, Student, Hwa Chong Institution, Singapore (*The ASEAN*, Issue 29)



## Raising Civil Service Standards

ASEAN is dedicated to improving the standards of the civil service and the well-being of public sector employees. The ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters (ACCSM) has been focusing on creating a more agile and future-ready ASEAN civil service. As part of this effort, they have organised a series of activities on digital governance and service delivery, leadership, and workforce planning in the public sector.

Additionally, they have developed an enhanced toolkit for gender mainstreaming in the human resources of civil service agencies. This toolkit serves as an assessment tool for human resource managers and practitioners to ensure gender-responsive processes and practices in analysis, budgeting, and planning.

“Enhancing the competencies and standards of the public sector’s employees is one of ACCSM’s priority areas. A competent workforce is required to provide efficient public services for the greatest benefit of the ASEAN people.”

–Ajman Meludin, Permanent Secretary, Civil Service Governance, Prime Minister’s Office of Brunei Darussalam (*The ASEAN*, Issue 23)

Performers at the regional gathering themed “Echoes of ASEAN Bronze”



Delegates of ASEAN Youth Dialogue 2023

## Promoting Shared Identity and Community Building

ASEAN has carried out measures to build a stronger ASEAN Community that recognises its shared identity and values accurately, while creating a space for people’s voices.

## Supporting the Development of Creative Industries and the Cultural Economy

AMS continues to harness its rich cultural heritage by promoting distinctive arts, crafts, traditions, and other creative elements to enhance its creative and cultural industries. This effort aims to generate employment opportunities, improve people’s quality of life, and enhance their livelihoods. ASEAN has been providing support for capacity-building programs, networking, and policy discussions to bolster ASEAN’s creative and cultural economy.

“Believe in our people and our culture. Investing in content that reflects our values is critical, especially since it shapes the minds of future generations—the upcoming leaders, doctors, teachers, and parents.”

–Nizam Razak, Animator, Creator and Director of *BoBoiBoy* (*The ASEAN*, Issue 32-33)

## Fostering Responsible Media and Enhancing Information Accessibility

ASEAN’s media and information sector has created a vision for a responsive, resilient, and transformative information and media sector. This is to emphasise the importance of accurate and timely information provided by inclusive media that supports ASEAN’s goals.



Significant efforts have been made to combat the spread of fake news and to promote information and digital literacy. This is evident in the Da Nang Declaration on Media: From Information to Knowledge for a Resilient and Responsive ASEAN and the ASEAN Guideline on Management of Government Information in Combatting Fake News and Disinformation in the Media.

“Being present online without being well-informed about digital rights and privacy is like sailing into a sea without proper navigation skills. In today’s digital world, I spend a lot of time online and share a lot of personal information with companies and organisations. Thus, it is important for me to understand how this information is being collected, used, and handled, and to have control over it.”

–Raihan Zahrah Mauludy Ridwan, 25, Associate Account Manager, Google and Official Youth Representative at 42<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Summit 2023, Indonesia (*The ASEAN*, Issue 34-35)

## Encouraging Youth Dialogues and Programmes

ASEAN places great value on the voices of youth across the region and actively involves them through various platforms, including the annual youth dialogue, youth volunteer programs, and student exchanges. The recommendations presented by young delegates at the ASEAN Youth Dialogue 2023, on the sidelines of the 42<sup>nd</sup> ASEAN Summit, have been taken into consideration by ASEAN leaders.

“I really hope that ASEAN as an organisation can meet the youth’s needs, especially in helping them discover themselves, become leaders who contribute to ASEAN and their own communities.”

–Hai Dang Trinh, Student at University of Social Sciences and Humanities, Vietnam National University (*The ASEAN*, Issue 29)

## Tracking Progress, Engaging Communities

ASEAN has closely monitored the progress made in implementing strategic measures contained in the ASSC Blueprint 2025. Currently, 99 percent of these measures are ongoing or completed, and 98 percent of ASSC declarations and statements have corresponding national or regional follow-up actions. This demonstrates the commitment of AMS to translating policy into action.



Community effort during the Mount Merapi eruption in 2019

## REGIONAL WORKSHOP ON THE DEVELOPMENT OF THE ASSC DATABASE FOR MONITORING AND EVALUATION SYSTEM Tuesday, 21 November 2023



Additionally, ASSC has been working on the ASSC Database for Monitoring and Evaluation (ADME) System. This system aims to monitor and assess the ASSC Blueprint, work plans of Sectoral Bodies, declarations, statements, and relevant socio-cultural indicators in the region. The goal of the ADME System is to support evidence-based policy formulation, and planning, implementing and monitoring of initiatives and programmes, in line with the aspirations of ASEAN’s peoples.

With the conclusion of the ASSC Blueprint 2025 approaching, ASEAN has initiated work on the Post-2025 ASSC Strategic Plan, which will prioritise human and sustainable development to cultivate a dynamic, resilient, and sustainable ASEAN Community.

The ASSC Research and Development Platforms Programme has provided expert analysis of trends and developments in ASSC

### Delegates of the Regional Workshop on the Development of the ASSC Database for Monitoring and Evaluation (ADME) System

sectors, including disaster management, education, health, and labour. The objective is to offer evidence-based insights and recommendations to assist decision-makers in planning and implementing better programs and policies at regional and national levels.

Efforts have also been made to enhance the visibility of ASEAN’s achievements and the tangible benefits of its Community-building endeavors. *The ASEAN* magazine and other public engagement tools have been instrumental in promoting broader community engagement and fostering a well-informed regional populace, underscoring ASEAN’s dedication to an informed and united ASEAN Community. ●



# ASEAN CONNECTIVITY

In 2023, significant progress was made to advance the ASEAN Connectivity agenda. Indonesia, as ASEAN Chair, prioritised the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP), which defined connectivity as a key area for action. Additionally, the ASEAN Connectivity Coordinating Committee (ACCC) emphasised the acceleration of the implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 in its final three years. It also focused on initiating the development of the ASEAN Connectivity Strategic Plan for the ASEAN Community Vision 2045.

## Promoting Sustainability in Infrastructure and Urban Development

Launched in September 2023, the initiative titled “Advancing and Updating of the Initial Rolling Priority Pipeline of ASEAN Infrastructure Projects” aims to support ASEAN Member States (AMS) in identifying and prioritising infrastructure projects for potential

*14<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Connectivity Symposium: Advancing Connectivity  
towards ASEAN's Epicentrum of Growth*





inclusion in the Updated ASEAN Infrastructure Pipeline. The initiative is expected to promote more infrastructure investment, facilitate the movement of people, goods, services, investment, and innovation, and also consider emerging connectivity trends and priorities.

Efforts to enhance capacity-building have been reinforced with support from ASEAN's external partners. This support includes training for AMS officials in sustainable infrastructure and infrastructure productivity. The upcoming ASEAN Sustainable Leadership in Infrastructure Programme (ASLIP) Course and the Workshop on Women's Leadership and Gender Mainstreaming in Infrastructure, both scheduled for early 2024, are anticipated to strengthen regional expertise in these areas.

On sustainable urbanisation, ASEAN has continued to engage with various partners to enhance the capacity of local governments in ASEAN cities to advance their smart and sustainable urban development goals. The second phase of the project, Accelerating the Implementation of the ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Strategy (ASUS), is set to commence, providing strategic and technical assistance to more cities in the region.

The ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) has grown its membership from 26 to 29 cities in ASEAN and is currently enhancing capability through the ASEAN Smart City Professional Program. The ASCN has also organised a series of discussions on various topics within the six focus areas for ASEAN cities, enabling them to share experiences and engage with experts in addressing urban challenges.

## Enhancing Supply Chain Efficiency and Resilience

ASEAN has undertaken efforts to strengthen the resilience of regional supply chains and bolster ASEAN's position in global value chains. This includes the identification and development of cross-sectoral initiatives and priority actions to support the implementation of the Framework on ASEAN Supply Chain Efficiency and Resilience. Furthermore, a supply chain analysis focusing on ten specific product groups is currently in progress to evaluate the impact of both internal and external disturbances on food security and energy resilience.

## Promoting Digital Innovation through Open Data

In September 2023, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) finalised the ASEAN Open Data Development Framework. The comprehensive report evaluated various characteristics, levels of development, and priorities within individual AMS relating to open government data. It introduced the concept of a regional open data dictionary, delineated activities, guiding principles, and strategies for a prospective model of the ASEAN Open Data Framework, and provided recommendations and a conceptual roadmap for associated initiatives.



## Strengthening People Mobility for Stronger People-to-People Connectivity

ASEAN continued to promote people mobility through various initiatives, particularly in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET). The intra-ASEAN TVET mobility program, which facilitates student and faculty exchanges, successfully completed its first batch, with participants from eight AMS. Additionally, capacity-building training programs for TVET personnel were conducted in the Republic of Korea, focusing on the automotive, building construction, computer and information services, electrical and electronics, and hospitality and tourism sectors.

*ASEAN Smart Cities Network steps up efforts on promoting smart, sustainable cities*

Efforts to ease travel within ASEAN also progressed, with completion of a survey on developing e-visa and online visa application systems in the region. The next step will involve consolidating survey results to developing good practices for e-visa development.

## Continued Engagement with a Wide Range of Stakeholders

ASEAN remains committed to collaborating with Dialogue Partners and other external stakeholders to secure resources for the implementation of MPAC 2025 and the development of the post-2025 ASEAN

Connectivity agenda. The ACCC has maintained close collaboration with ASEAN Lead Implementing Bodies and Sectoral Bodies to involve stakeholders and coordinate workshops aimed at enhancing the coordination and execution of MPAC 2025. Furthermore, broader stakeholders were actively involved in the 14<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Connectivity Symposium in November 2023, which was centered around the theme “Promoting Connectivity towards ASEAN as an Epicentrum of Growth.”

The Lead Implementing Body on Sustainable Infrastructure also continues to promote sustainable infrastructure opportunities in the region, including through the ASEAN Infrastructure Discussion Series with the 5<sup>th</sup> Discussion Series held in October 2023

in Singapore with the theme “Driving Decarbonisation in Asia”.

## Preparing for the Future

As the conclusion of MPAC 2025 approaches, the groundwork for the ASEAN Connectivity Strategic Plan for the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 has commenced. This forthcoming plan will capitalise on the accomplishments of MPAC 2025, tackle encountered challenges, and set a trajectory for bolstering regional connectivity in the next twenty years. The formulation of this plan is of utmost importance for ASEAN to ensure the region’s enduring competitiveness, integration, and connectivity in the years ahead. ●



## Enhancing Human Capital through Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET)

Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 seeks to strengthen TVET in ASEAN as one of its initiatives to improve the way we live, work and travel

WHY DOES THIS MATTER?

Enhance human capital and prepare for future workforce

Reduce the vocational skill gaps in ASEAN

Exchange good practices and innovation in TVET across ASEAN

Students  
TVET personnel  
TVET institutions  
Government  
Policy makers  
Private sector  
Industry

WHO WILL BENEFIT

WHAT WILL WE DO?

Identify five TVET priority sectors and up to 10 priority programmes

Cross-border internship for student and faculty exchange for teachers

Capacity building for TVET personnel

Forum and dialogue for policy makers

TVET personnel will have strengthened capacity for skills development and management

Students will be able to access quality education and have more opportunities for employability

Policy makers will have enhanced knowledge on the skills and competencies required of ASEAN's future workspace

Private sector and industry would be better placed to meet their future workforce needs

HOW DO THEY BENEFIT?

More about MPAC 2025: <https://connectivity.asean.org> Check #ASEANConnectivity on This infographic is supported by





# ASEAN ANNIVERSARY AND OUTREACH EFFORTS

## 56<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Day Celebration

The ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) celebrated ASEAN's 56<sup>th</sup> anniversary on 8 August 2023 with a commemorative event titled "ASEAN 56: Epicentrum of Growth" at its office in Jakarta, Indonesia. The celebration, hosted by the Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, was attended by Indonesian President Joko Widodo and Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, along with approximately 150 members of the diplomatic community. The event was livestreamed on social media platforms and garnered over 6,000 views on YouTube and 4,000 views on Facebook as of this report.

*The Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, joined Indonesian President, Joko Widodo, and Indonesian Foreign Minister, Retno Marsudi, as well as the Jakarta-based members of the diplomatic corps heading to the ASEAN Secretariat after a symbolic ride on the city's MRT rail system to celebrate ASEAN Day*







## Media Engagement

The 7<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Media Forum (AMF) was held in October 2023 to present ASEAN's accomplishments, initiatives, objectives, and policies to prominent media editors and journalists in the region. The forum brought together over 20 media leaders from each AMS, as well as from Timor Leste. The event provided the media participants with an exclusive opportunity to engage in a dialogue with Indonesian Foreign Minister Retno Marsudi, who served as the Chair for the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting (AMM) in 2023.

To enhance its media relations, the ASEC's Community Affairs Directorate arranged regular informal tea sessions for the Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr. Kao Kim Hourn to meet with international, regional, and local journalists. These sessions served as a direct platform for exchanging perspectives on how ASEC could improve collaboration with the media

*Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr. Kao Kim Hourn gave a live interview to CNBC*

to elevate their understanding of ASEAN's undertakings and narratives.

From June to December 2023, Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr. Kao Kim Hourn participated in interviews with major media outlets, including ANTARA News, China Central Television (CCTV), China Media Group, CNBC, Elite Magazine, Global Times, Good News from Indonesia, Medcom.id, Ming Pao, MSNBC, Nikkei, The Economist, Thai PBS, and Xinhua News Agency. These interviews were conducted at ASEC or in conjunction with significant ASEAN meetings and events.

## Entities Engagement

The 7<sup>th</sup> Entities Forum was convened in May 2023 at ASEC, with 57 participants representing

26 entities and centers in physical attendance, along with 16 members of the Committee of Permanent Representatives and its Working Group. A key highlight of the Forum was an interface with Secretary-General Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, during which representatives of the entities and centers posed questions related to their role in ASEAN Community building, ASEAN's Post-2025 Vision, and the ASEAN Secretary-General's vision and priorities for the next five years.

Between June and December 2023, the accreditation of the Canada-ASEAN Business Council and Southeast Asia Tobacco Control Alliance was finalised, bringing the total number of entities listed under Annex II of the ASEAN Charter to 80.

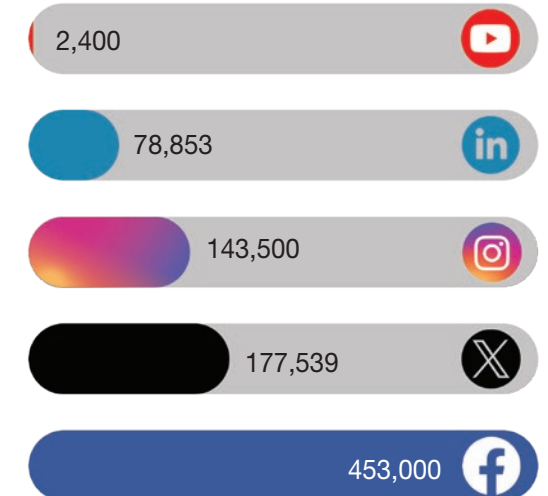
The Forum of Entities Associated with ASEAN (Entities Forum) aims to foster collaborations between accredited entities and ASEC, ASEAN Centres, ASEAN Sectoral Bodies and Facilities, and among the entities themselves.

## Academic Engagement

Following positive feedback from previous ASEAN Studies Dialogues, the Community Affairs Directorate has been working behind the scenes with prospective stakeholders to expand its academic engagement. One initiative has been working with the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN ISIS) to convene an ASEAN Think Tanks Summit (ATTS) to gather regional think tanks to discuss common concerns and potentially offer joint policy recommendations to ASEAN Leaders.

## Digital/Social Media

As of 31 December 2023



**Total: 855,292 followers/subscribers**

ASEAN's website and social media channels serve as a hub for the latest information on ASEAN's messages and narratives, as well as ASEC's activities and engagement with stakeholders. This includes updates on regional initiatives, key events, and the impact of ASEAN's work, all designed to keep online audiences informed and engaged.

In the reporting period, ASEC connected with almost one million followers across its social media platforms and booked annual increases topping 20% for its subscribers on Instagram, LinkedIn, X, and YouTube. On Flickr, an online image hosting service, ASEC has made more than 56,000 images of its activities available to the public.



A revamped ASEAN website ([www.asean.org](http://www.asean.org)) attracted 9 million visitors in the six-month period ending December 2023—a milestone highlighting growing interest and engagement with ASEAN’s digital presence. Real-time updates on ASEAN’s activities and improved search engine optimisation were key in attracting more visitors.

## Outreach

During the period from June to December 2023, ASEC hosted a total of 767 visitors from 20 different groups as part of its Learning Programme. The primary objective of this initiative was to enhance public understanding of ASEAN and ASEC. Participants, including students from ASEAN+3 nations and Portugal, engaged in the programme both in-person and through online platforms.

*7<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Media Forum takes place in the ASEAN Secretariat*



The ASEAN Gallery continues to be a popular space for promoting ASEAN arts and culture and ASEAN identity. The ASEAN Gallery, which hosts a collection of 137 pieces, incorporated 20 works of art into its collection in 2023, including a painting from a Cambodian artist under the ASEAN Artist Residency Programme (AARP), a ceramic plate from Ukraine, a woven fabric from Brunei Darussalam, 16 hand-made art objects under the KONNECT AARP, and a classical boat miniature from Norway.

The AARP reaffirms ASEAN’s commitment to nurture the region’s young and upcoming artists by providing cultural exchanges, exhibitions, and studio space for their creativity to flourish. ASEC also welcomed its 5<sup>th</sup> artist-in-residence, Mr. Srun Rida from Cambodia, who was selected for the AARP’s 2023 iteration. Throughout his month-long residency, Mr. Srun Rida created a mixed media painting entitled “Image on Blue” and led a woodcut printmaking workshop at the National Gallery of Indonesia.



## ASEC Resource Centre (ARC)

During the period between June and December 2023, the ARC welcomed 45 students and researchers who had made appointments to conduct literature research at the ARC Library. The ARC Library is open to the public and offers a wide range of primary sources on ASEAN-related topics in various fields including culture, economy, foreign relations, politics, science and technology, and trade.

In July 2023, ARC welcomed a group visit from the National Archives of ASEAN Member States to explore potential collaborations and gain a deeper understanding of ASEAN and ARC.

Moreover, ARC provides an easily accessible email information service, empowering the public to learn more about ASEAN. Throughout the reporting period, ARC has been receiving an average of 10 email inquiries a month.

*KONNECT ASEAN Exhibition at the ASEAN Secretariat’s New Lobby Area on 16-20 October 2023*

It continues to encourage the public to send their inquiries about ASEAN to [resourcecentre@asean.org](mailto:resourcecentre@asean.org).

## ASEC Participation in International Expositions

After a three-year absence due to the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEC, led by ASEAN Secretary-General Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, resumed participation in the 20<sup>th</sup> China-ASEAN Expo (CAEXPO) from 14 to 20 September 2023 in Nanning, China. The Community Affairs Directorate hosted an ASEAN booth for public-engagement activities that featured games and quizzes, while Dr. Kao delivered a special lecture at Guangxi University and participated in various side events and meetings,



discussing ways to strengthen ASEAN-China strategic relations.

In preparation of the World Expo 2025, ASEC participated at the 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> International Participant Meetings of World Expo from 6 to 8 June and 14 to 15 November 2023 in Osaka, Japan. The meetings were convened to coordinate participants for the Expo in 2025. ASEC representatives attended to emphasise ASEAN's commitment to participate in the Osaka Expo, following a formal confirmation of participation signed at the end of 2022.

From June to December 2023, ASEC also co-coordinated with various Dialogue Partners and Entities to stage exhibitions at ASEAN Headquarters, including the ASEAN-Japan 50<sup>th</sup> Relations Anniversary on 6 June 2023, KONNECT AARP by the ASEAN Foundation on 16 October 2023, the 5<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the ASEAN-Russia Strategic Partnership Exhibition on 3 November 2023, and the 5<sup>th</sup> ASEAN-EAEU Days MoU Signing Commemorative Event on 20 November 2023.

## ASEAN Prize

Established in 2018 during Singapore tenure as ASEAN Chair, the ASEAN Prize continues to recognise the exemplary service and inspiring achievements of ASEAN citizens or ASEAN-based organisations in fostering the ASEAN Community and nurturing the ASEAN Identity. During the opening ceremony of the 43<sup>rd</sup> ASEAN Summit in November 2023 in Jakarta, Indonesia, ASEAN awarded the accolade to Mr. Haji Muhamad Iqbal Fakhri Damit from Brunei Darussalam for 2022 and Madam



Nguyen Thi Tuyet Minh from Viet Nam for 2023. Indonesian President Joko Widodo presented the ASEAN Prize trophies to both recipients in the presence of ASEAN Leaders, members of the diplomatic corps and invited guests.

Madam Nguyen Thi Tuyet Minh was awarded the ASEAN Prize 2023 Recipient, in recognition of her perseverance in promoting women's socio-economic empowerment across regions. Her determination to foster the community of women entrepreneurs and advocacy for key regional initiatives and policies established a solid foundation for regional partnerships and cooperation among female leaders in

the business sector. Her work contributed significantly to the development of a sustainable economy and inclusive ASEAN Community.

Mr. Iqbal Damit was awarded the ASEAN Prize 2022 Recipient, in recognition of his regional initiatives to mobilise operations for displaced and marginalised communities, provide humanitarian relief, and foster community development. Mr. Iqbal Damit's efforts contributed to forming a strong cooperation and awareness among youth on humanitarian actions and volunteerism across AMS.

### *Secretary-General of ASEAN opens ASEAN Day 56 celebration*

As administrator of ASEAN Prize, ASEC collaborates with all AMS and National Focal Points to disseminate promotional materials through individual national media networks. Digital publications, such as social media podcasts, posts, and videos, highlight recipients' continuous contributions and perspectives on ASEAN Community-building. These media are produced regularly and accessible on ASEC's digital platforms and the ASEAN Prize's social media channels. ●



# ASEAN COOPERATION PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES

**A**SEAN continuously strengthens its development cooperation with external partners through cooperation projects and programmes supported by ASEAN's external partners. The cumulative value of submitted ASEAN cooperation projects and programmes from 2009 to December 2023 totalled USD 1,912,017,482.78, comprising USD 1,904,914,986.70 utilised for on-going, implemented, or completed projects and USD 7,102,596.08 for projects under appraisal. The utilised portion comprised 1,456 projects (USD 1,305,082,239.49) and 29 programmes (USD 599,832,747.21).

The ASCC accounted for 44.07% (USD 839,467,745.59) of the total, supporting in part initiatives related to culture, disaster management, education and youth, the environment, gender and social inclusion, health, and labour migration.

The AEC accounted for 31.51% (USD 600,252,214.71) of the total, supporting in part initiatives related to the digital economy; forestry, food and agriculture; MSMEs; science and technology; tourism and energy; trade, and the transport sector.





# USD 1,912,017,482.78

The cumulative value of submitted ASEAN cooperation projects and programmes from 2009 to December 2023

## UTILITISED FOR PROJECTS



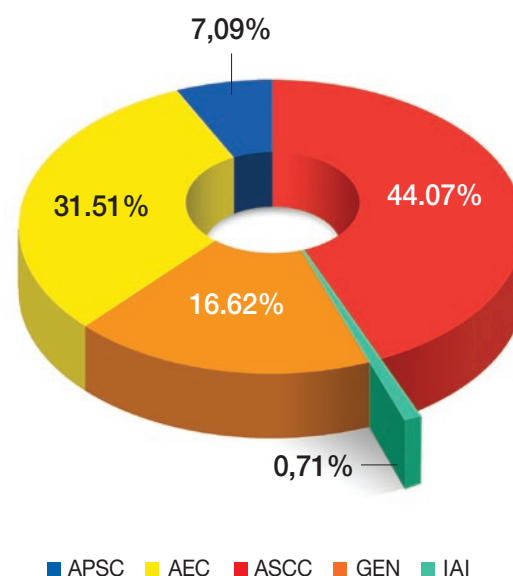
The APSC accounted for 7.09% (USD 135,092,802.73) of the total, supporting in part initiatives related to combating crime, cyber capacity development, development cooperation programmes, human rights, maritime cooperation and victim assistance programmes.

Of the remaining funds, 0.71% (USD 13,595,093.60) was allocated for IAI/NDG and used to support education programmes in CLMV, attachment programmes for CLMV officers, and capacity building programmes for CLMV on electronic commerce, science and technology and MSME; while 16.62% (USD 316,507,130.07) went to general and cross-Pillar projects that supported ASEAN

promotional activities, ASEAN Connectivity, ASEAN project development trainings, and strengthening ASEC.

Implementation was made possible by financial and technical support from ASEAN Dialogue Partners, including Australia, Canada, China, the European Union, Japan, the Republic of Korea, New Zealand, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States, as well as Sectoral Dialogue Partners and Development Partners, including Chile, Brazil, France, Germany, Italy, Norway, Pakistan, Switzerland, and Türkiye.

## Contribution of ASEAN Projects & Programmes by Pillar (2009–December 2023)



## In 2023, 95 ASEAN cooperation projects were approved for implementation, implemented, or completed with a total value of USD 122,528,504.42.

ASCC accounted for 65.68% (USD 80,471,716.41) of expenditures for cooperation projects supporting education; youth-related initiatives, such as the Promoting Women and Girl's Education in ASEAN project; JENESYS programs; labour initiatives, such as the Aus4ASEAN Digital Transformation and Future Skills Initiative; and disaster management initiatives, such as the DELSA Phase IV project.

AEC accounted for 29.08% (USD 35,636,811.52) of expenditures for cooperation projects supporting critical minerals management and a strategy for sustainable environment in ASEAN; digital economy projects, such as Digital Transformation: Facilitating ASEAN's Inclusive and Sustainable Digital Economy and the ASEAN-Australia Digital Trade Standards (DTS) Initiative; and the Promotion of Competitiveness within the Framework of the Initiative for ASEAN Integration, among other things.

APSC accounted for 4.86% (USD 5,955,400.52) of expenditures for cooperation projects providing assistance to ASEAN in countering arms smuggling, supporting women

in peace processes, and offering technical assistance to ASEC to implement AOIP.

Meanwhile, IAI/NDG accounted for 0.30% (USD 361,602.97) of cooperation projects that supported the strengthening of rural health workers in CLMV countries, while general and cross-Pillar projects accounted for 0.08% (USD 102,973.00) of expenditures for initiatives related to promoting the circular economy and smart cities solutions.

The Australia for ASEAN Futures (Aus4ASEAN Futures) Programme, originally focused on the AEC, was expanded to include APSC and ASCC, and funded with AUD 204 million, up from AUD 80 million previously, as approved by AMS on 28 November 2023. In the reporting period, six projects totalling USD 6,163,700 were approved for implementation in areas that included ASEAN investment monitoring, ASEC capacity building to implement IAI Work Plan IV, maritime cooperation, remanufactured goods, and a travelling resource person for Timor-Leste.

The EU-supported Grant Contract for ASEAN Secretariat Capacity Building under the ASEAN Regional Integration Support by the EU (ARISE Plus) was completed in December 2023. The grant increased the ASEC's implementation and monitoring capacity for ASEAN Single Market and Regional Integration Monitoring and strengthened its corporate service system. Meanwhile, six grant-funded staff positions were approved for regularisation under the ASEC Annual Operational Budget (AOB) starting in January 2024.





*Training project proposal for Cambodia*

The implementation timeframe of the Enhanced Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument (E-READI), a demand-driven cooperation programme facilitating ASEAN/EU dialogues on joint priorities in economic and trade connectivity; environment and climate change; human rights and gender equality; science and research; and cross-cutting areas; was extended until 17 December 2025 following the signing of the Addendum to the E-READI Financing Agreement on 13 November 2023.

## Strengthening the ASEAN Project Management Framework

Full implementation of the Project Management Framework (PMF) documents (Guidelines and SOP) is ongoing. The documents provide guidance on proposal formulation, appraisal and approval, implementation and monitoring, completion, and reporting for ASEAN

Cooperation Projects (ACP). Relevant PMF information and documents are available at <https://asean.org/asean-cooperation-projects/>.

The Programme Cooperation and Project Management Division (PCPMD) continuously strengthened the PMF's monitoring and evaluation (M&E), as it moved towards a results-based approach for ACP development and implementation. From June to December 2023, a dedicated Results-Based Monitoring and Evaluation (RBME) specialist, supported by the EU's ARISE Plus Grant, helped the PCPMD strengthen the PMF, and developed ways to boost ACP monitoring and evaluation, which included disseminating ACP success stories to enhance outreach and ASEAN Community building. Featured stories are available at <https://asean.org/my-asean/>.

Meanwhile, PCPMD continued to deliver RBME guidance and technical assistance covering all stages of the ACP process to the ASEC Staff. Separately, updating the PMF documents for ACP began in early in 2024 and has been scheduled for completion in Q3/Q4 of 2024. This will ensure that the ASEAN PMF is up to date, address emerging challenges, and reflect the latest advancements in ACP implementation.

## Capacity Building for AMS Project Proposal Development

PCPMD continues to build the capacity of ACP stakeholders in AMS to improve the quality of regional project proposals, ensure proposals

are created in results-based management approach, and strengthen the implementation and continuous improvement of the ASEAN PMF. An increased number of implemented ACP is expected to contribute to the effective use of funds and support the realisation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and beyond.

Supported by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Singapore and in collaboration with the Republic Polytechnic of Singapore, the fourth cycle of Training on Project Proposal Writing and Project Management for Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam (CLMV) was completed for 121 CLMV officials between May and December 2023, bringing the total number of participating CLMV officials to 381 since the training started in 2020.

Meanwhile, the ASEAN Development Fund (ADF) continues to support the second phase of ASEAN Project Development Training under the 5<sup>th</sup> ADF Work Programme, convened two trainings in 2023 that benefitted 61 Philippine and 40 Indonesian officials, adding 101 ASEAN

officials to the 765 beneficiaries from the first phase conducted from 2017 to 2018.

Participants expressed appreciation for the training and its interactive approach, the information shared, the in-depth exchanges between participants and resource persons, and networking with support agencies interested in developing project proposals.

Feedback also indicated that stakeholders' interest in proposing regional projects was coupled with low awareness of available resources and the mechanisms to tap into those resources. Feedback also clarified a need to target the right participants to maximise the training outcomes, emerging demands for sector-specialised or focused training, and the importance of follow-up to ensure outcome sustainability. ●

*ASEAN Secretariat, EU Delegation to ASEAN co-chair ARISE Plus Grant Capacity Building Project closing meeting*



**Real-Life Story:****TOP ASEAN WOMEN SCIENTISTS TOUCH LIVES OF PEOPLE IN ASEAN\***

**T**he UL Research Institutes-ASEAN-U.S. Science Prize for Women is an award set up by a partnership between the United States, through the US Agency for International Development (USAID), UL Research Institutes, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Since its inception in 2014, this annual award has attracted 418 total applicants from ASEAN Member States and has awarded 12 winners, 11 honourable mentions, and \$240,000 in cash prizes. The competition was created to highlight the work of female academics and professionals, and affirm the important role of women's leadership within the fields of science and technology.

In the most recent iteration of the award in 2023, Dr. Charlle Sy emerged as one of the distinguished recipients, earning acclaim in the Mid-Career Scientist Category for her pioneering efforts in extending electricity access to remote rural communities. Dr. Sy's groundbreaking approach harnesses the power of micro hydro technology, utilising locally available water resources to generate electricity. Employing the Target-Oriented Robust Optimisation approach,

her methodology ensures the efficient and sustainable deployment of micro hydro systems, thereby addressing critical energy needs while fostering economic empowerment at the grassroots level.

In the Philippines, Dr. Charlle Sy's work has been applied in the rural community of Brgy. Parina, where access to electricity has significantly enhanced not just household living conditions but also the local economy. The community now benefits from expanded agricultural work capabilities, enabling activities such as grain milling, farming incubation, and agro-processing, which contribute to improved livelihood.

This initiative is set to continue its impactful journey. It aims to further recognise the scientific contributions of female scientists and promote a more inclusive approach in science and technology development. Moving forward, the ASEAN Committee on Science, Technology, and Innovation (COSTI), in coordination with the ASEAN Secretariat, will play a greater role in managing the Prize. This marks a new chapter in nurturing this vital initiative. ●

\* Excerpted from an article developed by PCPMD in collaboration with USAID, Science and Technology Division, and Community Relation Division; featured on My ASEAN.





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