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ASEAN: Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience



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one vision
one identity
one community

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ANNUAL REPORT 2024

**ASEAN:
ENHANCING CONNECTIVITY
AND RESILIENCE**

The ASEAN Secretariat
Jakarta



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FOREWORD

In 2024, ASEAN demonstrated resolve and unity under the theme of “Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience,” as defined by Lao PDR’s Chairmanship. ASEAN has continued its work to strengthen connectivity, foster inclusivity, and build a more resilient ASEAN Community. This Annual Report (AR) reflects the progress made in realising that vision by ASEAN’s Pillars: the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC), the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC), and the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASSC), as well as the ASEAN Connectivity with significant advancements in enhancing regional connectivity through its continued implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025.

The APSC, known as the peace pillar, continues to be instrumental in promoting regional stability. In 2024, the APSC addressed transnational criminal threats through, among others, the Vientiane Declaration on Law Enforcement Cooperation Against Online Job Scams. It also continued efforts towards regional maritime peace and stability in the accelerated negotiations on the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea. Enhancing cybersecurity was supported by training programmes, like those held by the ASEAN Defence Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM). Meanwhile, the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) continued to guide our external relations while reaffirming ASEAN’s Centrality in the evolving regional security architecture.

For the AEC, or the prosperity pillar, ASEAN’s economy remains resilient, with regional GDP projected at 4.5% this year, reinforcing its trajectory towards becoming the fourth-largest economy globally by 2030. The region’s collective GDP stands at USD 3.8 trillion, while the region ranks as the third-largest trading bloc globally, with total trade reaching USD 3.5 trillion. In 2023, ASEAN also attracted USD 229.8 billion in Foreign Direct Investment, the highest among developing economies. Sustainability and digitalisation remain central to its integration agenda, with notable advances in decarbonisation, the circular and blue economies, and the ongoing negotiations for the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA). ASEAN is also reinforcing its position as a globally competitive region by implementing the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) and upgrading its internal and external Free Trade Agreements (FTAs), such as the ASEAN Trade in Goods



Agreement (ATIGA) and the ASEAN-China FTA, ensuring that they remain modern, relevant, and dynamic in the evolving global economy, while proactively exploring new high-growth markets.

The ASCC, known as the people pillar, has been advancing inclusivity and sustainability in ASEAN's programmes, to ensure that the benefits of development, growth, and prosperity are shared equally. Initiatives such as the Vang Vieng Declaration on promoting cultural enterprises for green growth, the declaration strengthening biosafety and biosecurity, the ASEAN Public Health Emergency Coordination System framework, as well as ASEAN's environmental commitments illustrate ASEAN's whole-of-society approach to improving the lives of all the region's peoples. The ASCC also strengthened resilience in the region, particularly in the regional health architecture, disaster management, labour migration governance, and protection for women and children. The vital role of the 213 million youths across Southeast Asia in shaping the present and future state of the region was also harnessed through the ASEAN Youth Convergence initiative.

As ASEAN comes to the end of the implementation period for the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, work has begun on developing the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and the new Strategic Plans. ASEAN is broadening its focus to address a wide range of challenges, including climate change, digital transformation, and socio-economic disparities. We are certain that ASEAN Member States will work collaboratively to create a Community that will rise above these challenges, by enhancing regional integration, becoming more resilient and sustainable, and responding more effectively in the ASEAN spirit of unity and solidarity. ■



Dr. Kao Kim Hourn
Secretary-General of ASEAN



1. Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, paid a courtesy call on Prime Minister of Australia, the Honourable Anthony Albanese in Melbourne
2. Judging Committee Meeting for ASEAN Prize 2024
3. Secretary-General of ASEAN shares perspectives with media on the margins of 57th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting
4. An Audience with His Majesty the Sultan and Yang Di-Pertuan of Brunei Darussalam



5. Secretary-General of ASEAN meets with Vice-President of International Committee of the Red Cross
6. Courtesy session with the Prime Minister of Lao PDR, Sonexay Siphandone
7. Secretary-General of ASEAN convenes town hall meeting with ASEAN Secretariat staff in 2024



INTRODUCTION

The year 2024 has been pivotal for ASEAN in terms of accelerating the full implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and its Blueprints, as well as in charting its new course for the next two decades by developing the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and its Strategic Plans. ASEAN navigated challenges from shifting geopolitical landscapes and economic transformations, to increasing impacts of climate and environmental challenges at both global and regional levels. ASEAN emerged ever more united and resilient - a fitting achievement during Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship, inspired by its theme, "Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience."

Peace and security lie at the foundation of the region's pursuit of growth and sustainable development. In this regard, the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) stepped up cooperation on maritime security and safety, border management, cyber security, combating transnational crime, and keeping ASEAN free from nuclear weapons. ASEAN reaffirmed its centrality in the regional architecture through sustained leadership of and successful convening of the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Plus Three, the ASEAN Regional Forum, and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM+). ASEAN's continued relevance is also seen in the expansion and enhancement of its external relations guided by the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC), as well as the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP). Significant progress has also been made in the accession of Timor-Leste to become a full member of ASEAN.

Riding on a strong recovery from the pandemic, the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) took proactive steps to optimize opportunities from the digital and green transformation, while continuing to deepen economic integration. The ongoing negotiations on the Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) are expected to be concluded in 2025, which once in force, is projected to double ASEAN's digital economy to USD 2 trillion by the year 2030. Significant focus was also put on important digital initiatives, such as Artificial Intelligence (AI) and the development of the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics, which set out ASEAN's approach towards governing and leveraging the power of AI.

The year has also seen a surge in sustainability initiatives within the AEC, with the implementation of the ASEAN's Carbon Neutrality Strategy, and mainstreaming sustainability in sectoral cooperation on finance, energy, minerals development, agriculture, and tourism, among others. The Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) has deepened economic integration and already generated USD 2 trillion in trade as of 2023 and the foreign direct investments (FDI) from ASEAN RCEP partners reached USD 66.3 billion. A crucial milestone was achieved this year for the RCEP with the establishment of the RCEP Support Unit (RSU) Office. The RSU is a special unit within the ASEAN Secretariat which will provide the necessary support to the RJC and its subsidiary bodies on the implementation of the RCEP Agreement. Furthermore, ASEAN has substantially concluded its upgrading of the Free Trade Agreement

(FTA) with China and worked on upgrading the FTA with India as well as a new FTA with Canada. ASEAN also enhanced cooperation for a harmonised and efficient trading environment through standards and conformance, as well as seamless cross-border payment systems.

The people-centred and people-oriented initiatives remained central to the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) throughout the year, ensuring that the benefits of community building are widely shared and felt by the people. The ASCC put a spotlight on the role of cultural enterprises in the green economy and sustainable development. It promoted regional resilience in the face of health and environmental challenges through heightened cooperation on biosafety, biosecurity, coordination on public health emergencies and disaster management. It advanced gender equality and inclusion with commitments to strengthening the care economy. The ASCC also promoted human resource development through the digital transformation of the education system, strengthening early childhood education, and promoting skills recognition and mobility of migrant workers. Expanded scholarship opportunities for ASEAN students, people-to-people exchanges, youth leadership and engagement in decision-making also marked the year's achievements.

Regional connectivity has seen substantial progress in four crucial areas to foster a more integrated, competitive, and resilient community. On sustainable infrastructure, ASEAN updated its Initial Rolling Priority Pipeline of Infrastructure Projects. On smart and sustainable cities, the ASEAN Smart Cities Network expanded to 31 cities. On seamless logistics, ASEAN improved regional trade integration with the completion of the Framework on ASEAN Supply Chain Efficiency and Resilience and Implementation Plan. And on people-to-people connectivity, the ASEAN-Republic of Korea (ROK) Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Mobility Programme is now in a full swing.

These achievements would not have been possible without the support and strong collaboration with ASEAN's partners. Throughout the year, ASEAN has mobilized a total of over USD 102 million, to support 58 projects across the community pillars. Over half of the projects and resources went to the ASCC (58%), followed by the AEC (39%), and then the APSC (2.47%).

The equally important work was on the increasing awareness of ASEAN and engaging stakeholders, which gained strong momentum in 2024. ASEAN has broadened its engagement with various stakeholders such as think tanks, media, ASEAN-affiliated entities and students and youth organisations from across the region.

Looking ahead, ASEAN is set to finalize the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and the Strategic Plans for the APSC, AEC, ASCC and ASEAN Connectivity in 2025, by drawing valuable lessons from the end-term reviews of the current community blueprints 2025 and be generating useful inputs from various stakeholders' consultations. ■



ASEAN POLITICAL-SECURITY COMMUNITY (APSC)

I. Introduction

The theme for Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship, "Enhancing Connectivity and Resilience," encapsulates the work of the ASEAN Political-Security Community (APSC) Pillar during the reporting period.

In 2024, the APSC helped ensure that ASEAN and ASEAN Member States (AMS) remained resilient to economic shocks and responded to the changes brought on by an evolving geo-political and strategic environment. APSC continues to acknowledge the critical role played by connectivity in advancing the region's recovery from the COVID-19 pandemic, fostering ASEAN competitiveness, promoting regional economic integration, and supporting ASEAN's overall Community-building process.

A peaceful, stable and secure region is the foundation of a prosperous ASEAN Community. Accordingly, in 2024, APSC's sectoral bodies conducted a host of activities, initiatives, and programmes to promote the ASEAN Chair's goals of enhancing connectivity and resilience.

II. ASEAN Political-Security Community highlights

A. Connectivity

Connectivity is often associated with cyberspace and its attendant risks. Accordingly, the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Cybersecurity and Information Centre of Excellence (ACICE) held a course on cyber incidents, responses, and threat analysis in early 2024. The course introduced measures for handling cyber incidents and for devising cyber security assessments.

Separately, under the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) framework, progress continued on developing the Roadmap to Enhance ASEAN's Effectiveness in Combating Cybercrime. Two workshops on ICT-enabled critical infrastructure were held under the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF). Meanwhile, a session analysing cyberterrorism and its impact on national security was convened as part of the ASEAN-Institute of Peace and Reconciliation Discussion Series 2024.


*Dato' Astanah
Abdul Aziz, Deputy
Secretary-General of
ASEAN for ASEAN
Political-Security
Community*



ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting (ADMM) Retreat in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR

APSC also worked to promote awareness of cyber-related and cyber-enabled crimes, such as online scams, misinformation, and disinformation. To address the increasing prevalence of online scams in AMS, the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) adopted the Vientiane Declaration on Enhancing Law Enforcement Cooperation Against Online Job Scams. The Declaration strengthened cooperation between law enforcement and border management agencies for timely and effective responses.

To explore how to counter harmful content while safeguarding human rights, boost ASEAN's digital resilience, and enhance information connectivity, the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR) and the European Union held a Dialogue on Disinformation and Misinformation in January 2024.

B. Border management

The ASEAN Directors-General of Immigration Departments and Heads of Consular Affairs Divisions of Ministries of Foreign Affairs Meeting (DGICM) adopted in August 2024 the Work Plan to Implement the ASEAN Plan of Action on Cooperation on Immigration and Consular Assistance Matters (2022-2031). A cross-Sectoral ASEAN border management roadmap is also under development. Further, implementation continues on the ASEAN Multi-Sectoral Work Plan Against Trafficking in Persons 2023-2028 (Bohol TIP Work Plan 2.0) within the mandate of the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC). A framework for monitoring and evaluating progress was adopted in September 2024.

C. Transnational crime

Lao PDR, as current AMMTC Chair, initiated a review of the Plan of Action (PoA) in Combating Transnational Crime, which has been slated to end

18TH ASEAN MINISTERIAL MEETING ON TRANSNATIONAL CRIME AND ITS RELATED MEETINGS

27-29 AUGUST 2024, VIENTIANE, LAO PDR



The 18th ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime in Vientiane, Lao PDR

in 2025. The review will ensure that a successor PoA will be relevant, given the constantly evolving and extremely complex nature of transnational crime in ASEAN.

On illicit drugs, progress continued on the Final Review of the ASEAN Work Plan of Security Communities Against Illicit Drugs 2016-2025. Meanwhile, annual publication of the *ASEAN Drug Monitoring (ADM) Report* continues to be a flagship

initiative of the APSC. The most recent Report was launched during the 45th ASEAN Senior Officials' on Drugs (ASOD) in October 2024.

D. Maritime security and safety

On the Code of Conduct in the South China Sea (COC), APSC has continued its work to make ASEAN's maritime domain an avenue for peace and cooperation. Following adoption of the

AICHR-EU Dialogue on Disinformation and Misinformation in Singapore, 29 January 2024



Guidelines for Accelerating the Early Conclusion of an Effective and Substantive Code of Conduct in the South China Sea, ASEAN and China expedited negotiations on the early conclusion of the COC while continuing implementation of the *Declaration on the Conduct of Parties in the South China Sea (DOC)*.

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) in July 2024 adopted the ARF Statement on Enhancing Regional Cooperation on Ferry Safety, affirming the commitment of participating AMS to enhance ferry safety and calling for increased effort to promote regional ferry safety cooperation. Further, the ARF approved a Concept Paper for the Compendium of Best Practices on the Implementation of the International Ship and Port Security (ISPS) Code among ARF Participants. Arrangements have been

proceeding for a conference to be held by late 2024 on maritime cooperation and connectivity for the defence sector.

E. Nuclear non-proliferation, safety, and security

ASEAN has continued its consultations with the Nuclear Weapons States (NWS) on their individual signing and ratification of the Protocol of the Southeast Asian Nuclear Weapons-Free Zone (SEANWFZ) Treaty. ASEAN has also been engaging other relevant organisations, including Organismo para la Proscripción de las Armas Nucleares en la América Latina y el Caribe (OPANAL), which oversees the prohibition of nuclear weapons in Latin America and the Caribbean. In the reporting period, ASEAN and OPANAL convened a workshop to share experiences on NWS' signing and ratifying the Treaty of Tlatelolco, which prohibits the use, storage or transport of nuclear weapons in OPANAL member states. Separately, the SEANWFZ

45th ASEAN Senior Officials' on Drugs (ASOD) in October 2024





Meeting of the Executive Committee of the Southeast Asia Nuclear Weapon-Free Zone (SEANWFZ EXCOM) in June 2024, in Vientiane, Lao PDR

Commission approved Timor-Leste's accession to the Treaty, and deliberations have been underway to realise Timor-Leste's formal accession.

Further, APSC has continued its collaboration with the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), extending until 2029 the Practical Arrangements between ASEAN and IAEA on Cooperation in

the Areas of Nuclear Science and Technology and Applications, Nuclear Safety, Security and Safeguards (PA).

F. Enhancing resilience

Lao PDR, as ASEAN Chair, has called for ASEAN to remain resilient to navigate its evolving geo-

Secretary-General of ASEAN briefed the 11th ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus on recent developments in ASEAN, in Vientiane, Lao PDR, 21 November 2024.





The 25th ASEAN-Republic of Korea (ROK) Summit to Commemorate the 35th anniversary of Dialogue Relations

political and strategic environment. Accordingly, the 57th ASEAN Foreign Ministers' Meeting (AMM) and Related Meetings, convened in July 2024, in Vientiane, Lao PDR, discussed ASEAN's strategic future directions, including the conduct of ASEAN's external relations. The Meeting worked to find concrete and sustainable ways to further strengthen ASEAN Centrality and the ASEAN Community in ways that enhanced regional resilience and unity amid regional and global challenges.

Facing increased strategic competition among major powers, ASEAN remains the driving force in the regional architecture, as evidenced by its sustained leadership of ASEAN-led mechanisms, such as the East Asia Summit (EAS), ASEAN Plus Three (APT), ARF and ADMM-Plus.

G. ASEAN partnerships

In 2024, ASEAN commemorated key milestones in relations with several Dialogue Partners. ASEAN and Australia celebrated the 50th anniversary of their relations with a Special Summit in March, while ASEAN observed the 35th anniversary of relations with the Republic of Korea (ROK) by establishing a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP) in October 2024.

ASEAN continues to strengthen its Sectoral Dialogue Partnerships with Brazil, Morocco, Norway, Pakistan, South Africa, Switzerland, Türkiye and the United Arab Emirates, as well as its Development Partnerships with Chile, France, Germany, Italy, the Netherlands, and Peru, which was welcomed as ASEAN's newest Development Partner in January 2024. Working visits by the Secretary-General of ASEAN were made to Australia, Chile, China, India, Japan, the ROK and the US, among other nations, to promote ASEAN's relations.



ASEAN and Australia celebrated the 50th anniversary of their relations with a Special Summit in March 2024.

Meanwhile, an increasing number of external parties have sought to become formal partners of ASEAN or have requested to accede to the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC). With Luxembourg's accession to the TAC in October 2024, the number of High Contracting Parties (HCPs) to the TAC is 55. Meanwhile, to reaffirm the TAC's values and principles and promote practical cooperation between ASEAN and HCPs, the first Conference of the HCPs to the TAC was held in June 2024, at the ASEAN Headquarters/ASEAN Secretariat.

A total of 95 non-ASEAN Ambassadors have been accredited to ASEAN, while 55 ASEAN Committees in Third Countries and International Organisations (ACTCs) have continued to promote ASEAN's interests and raise its profile in their respective host countries and organisations around the world.

H. ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)

The AOIP continues to gain momentum as a key reference framework for cooperation between ASEAN and its External Partners. The ASEAN Leaders' Declaration on the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific for the Future-Ready ASEAN and ASEAN-Centred Regional Architecture was issued during the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summits and Related Summits in October 2024. Earlier in 2024, a paper titled 'Promoting the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific under the ASEAN Plus One Mechanism: A Roadmap to Complement the Mainstreaming of the AOIP' was finalised. In August 2024, Lao PDR and Thailand organised the AOIP Forum: Towards UN Sustainable Development Goals 2030, which shared best practices on how to move forward with implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, one of the areas of cooperation stipulated by the AOIP. The AOIP remains ASEAN's most recent tool to further promote its Centrality in the regional architecture.

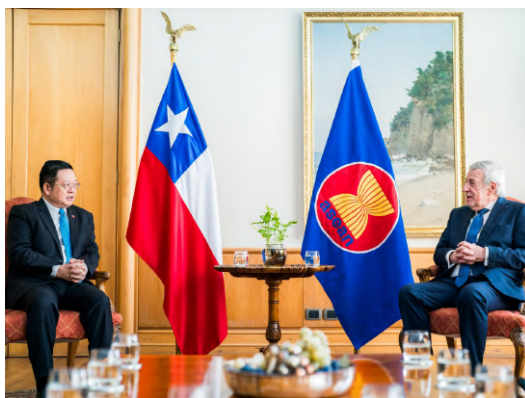


Plenary Session of the 16th Meeting of High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision.

I. Human rights

Development of a Human Rights Index is a critical step for ASEAN, as it seeks to foster a resilient region anchored by resilient people whose basic human rights are promoted and protected. Initial consultations on an ASEAN Human Rights Index in May 2024 explored the possibility of creating

Secretary-General of ASEAN met with Foreign Minister of Chile on 6 September 2024.



a data-driven foundation for human rights and ASEAN Community-building. As ASEAN celebrated the 15th anniversary of AICHR in October 2024, the region reaffirmed its commitment to the promotion and protection of human rights, rooted in principles of cooperation and genuine dialogue, ensuring its continued progress toward a resilient, inclusive, and people-centred ASEAN.

J. Timor-Leste

Lao PDR as ASEAN Chair has included in its resilience agenda support for Timor-Leste's preparations to become a full-fledged AMS by implementing the Roadmap for Timor-Leste's Full Membership in ASEAN. A key component of the Roadmap is Timor-Leste's accession to ASEAN agreements across the APSC, AEC, and ASCC. By acceding to these agreements, Timor-Leste will deepen its commitment to ASEAN's objectives, reinforce regional unity, and strengthen ASEAN Centrality in maintaining peace, shared prosperity, and stability in the region.

III. Future priorities

During the reporting period, the APSC accelerated work to craft its part of the ASEAN Community

Vision 2045. After a draft Vision was noted by ASEAN Leaders in late 2023, work in 2024 focused on developing the Vision's Strategic Plans. The High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision (HLTF-ACV), which has been charge of developing the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, has been working on an ASEAN Political Security Community Strategic Plan (APSC SP) to implement the Vision.

To ensure that the development of the APSC SP is holistic, inclusive, and participatory, the HLTF-ACV in 2024 met with stakeholders such as the Centre for Strategic International Studies (CSIS) and the ASEAN Inter-Parliamentary Assembly (AIPA) in June, as well as the ASEAN Mayors Forum and the Institute of Strategic and International Studies (ISIS) Malaysia in August 2024.

To ensure the seamless and well-coordinated development of all Strategic Plans supporting the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, the HLTF-

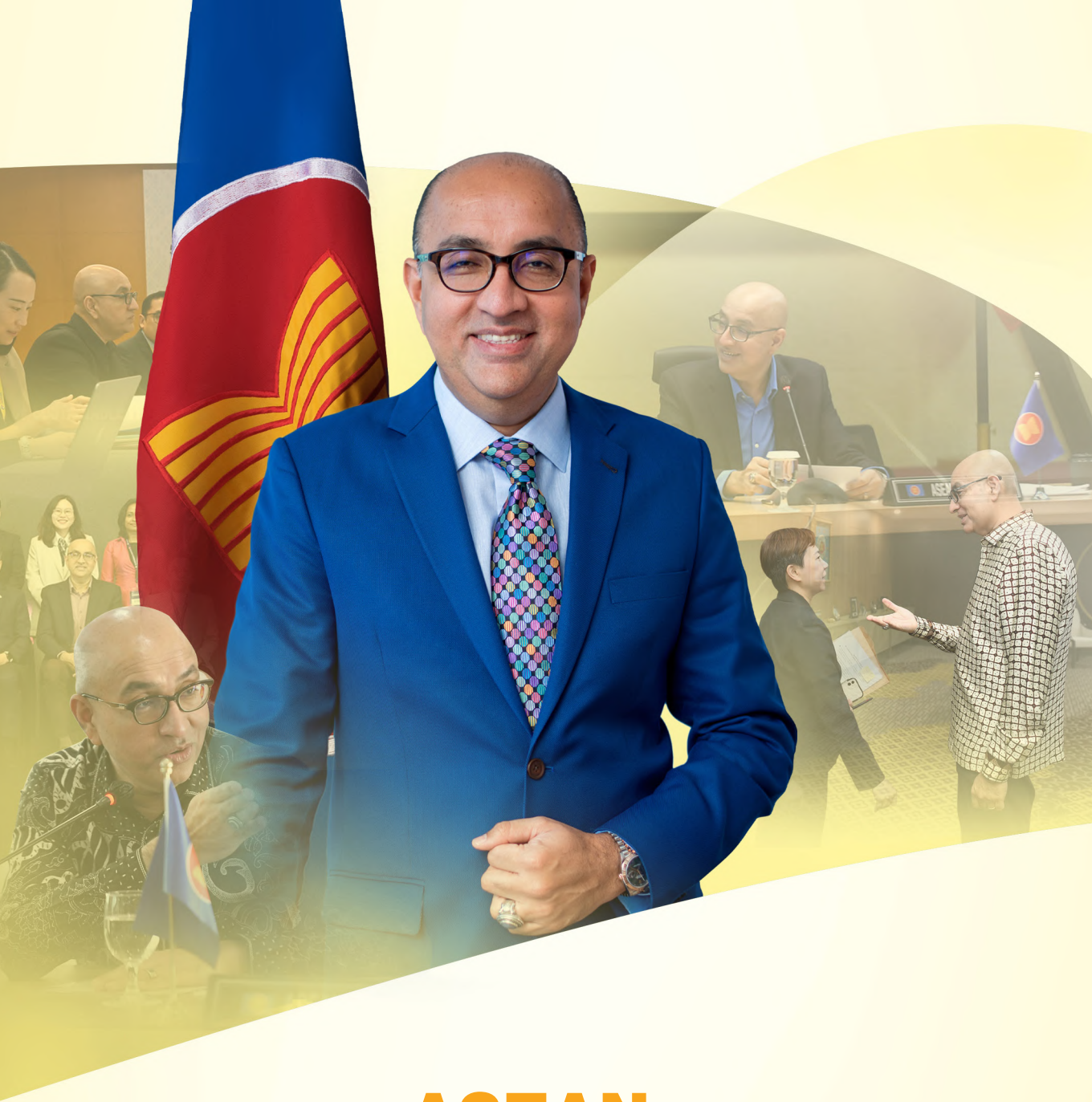
Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR) convened the Final Meeting of 2024 under Lao PDR's Chairmanship at ASEAN Headquarters/ASEAN Secretariat on 12 December 2024.



Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, met with Minister for Foreign Affairs of Japan, H.E. Kamikawa Yoko, in Tokyo, Japan.

ACV has met regularly with the other bodies that have been developing related Strategic Plans: the High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Economic Integration for the ASEAN Economic Community Strategic Plan, the Ad-Hoc Working Group to Develop the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Post-2025 Strategic Plan, and the ASEAN Connectivity Coordination Committee for the ASEAN Connectivity Strategic Plan. ■





ASEAN ECONOMIC COMMUNITY (AEC)

I. Introduction

As the world's fifth largest economy, ASEAN, with a GDP of USD 3.8 trillion, remains on track to become the world's fourth largest economy by 2030. Despite global uncertainties, the region's economic resilience has been evident, with growth projected at 4.5% for 2024, and 4.7% for 2025. ASEAN's total trade in goods reached USD 3.5 trillion in 2024, nearly matching its GDP, and intra-ASEAN trade, which accounted for 21.5% of total regional trade, serving as a cornerstone for regional economic integration. Foreign direct investment (FDI) also surged, reaching USD 229.8 billion, cementing ASEAN's position as a top investment destination among developing economies, while intra-ASEAN sources accounted for 9.5% of the region's total FDI in 2024, second only behind the US.¹

While deepening economic integration, ASEAN has also been addressing two megatrends shaping the global economy: digitalisation and sustainability. These trends fundamentally transformed how businesses and societies have adapted, functioned, and thrived in an increasingly interconnected world. In 2024, negotiations continued the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA), which when complete would be the world's first regionally binding digital economy agreement. DEFA is expected to double the value of ASEAN's digital economy from USD 1 trillion to USD 2 trillion by 2030.² Additionally, implementation of the ASEAN Carbon Neutrality Strategy underscored the region's commitment to an inclusive and sustainable green economy transition. According to estimates, implementing the Strategy will unlock up to USD 5.3 trillion GDP in added value by 2050, attract upwards of USD 6.7 trillion in green investment, and create up to 66 million additional jobs for the region.³

Satvinder Singh,
*Deputy Secretary-
General of
ASEAN for
ASEAN Economic
Community*

ASEAN has also been working to become a fully integrated and globally competitive region. It has been implementing the world's largest Free Trade Agreement (FTA), i.e., the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), covered approximately USD 2 trillion in trade in 2023, up almost

1 Intra-ASEAN FDI was the second largest source of investment in the region if the EU is not considered as a single entity.

2 ASEAN Secretariat (2023), 'Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA): ASEAN to leap forward its digital economy and unlock US\$2 Tn by 2030', 19 August, retrieved from <<https://asean.org/asean-defa-study-projects-digital-economy-leap-to-us2tn-by-2030/>>.

3 ASEAN Secretariat (2023), 'ASEAN Charts Course for a Sustainable Future with Ambitious ASEAN Strategy for Carbon Neutrality', 19 August, retrieved from: <<https://asean.org/asean-charts-course-for-a-sustainable-future-with-ambitious-asean-strategy-for-carbon-neutrality/>>.

25% over pre-COVID pandemic levels. The RCEP accounted for more than half of ASEAN's total trade, while FDI from ASEAN's RCEP partners reached USD 66.3 billion, or nearly one-third of ASEAN's total FDI. Additionally, ASEAN has worked to modernise existing FTAs to ensure that they remain modern, relevant, and fit-for-purpose in the 21st century. Apart from upgrading the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement, ASEAN has been upgrading external FTAs with China and India, two of the world's largest economies, while negotiating a new FTA with Canada, which, when finalised, would be ASEAN's first North American FTA partner.

2024 marks a pivotal year for ASEAN as it draws near to the conclusion of the *ASEAN Community Blueprints 2025* and sets its future goals forth in the *ASEAN Community Vision 2045*. Beyond deepening economic integration, ASEAN aims to unlock new

competitive advantages, while harnessing the potential of emerging trends to drive its sustainable growth. In this transformative year, ASEAN did not just react to global trends. It worked to shape them. While deepening its economic integration, ASEAN has laboured to ensure that the region thrives as a hub of innovation, that resilient and sustainable growth are maintained, and that ASEAN becomes a beacon of peace, stability and cooperation for decades to come.

II. ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) highlights

A. Toward an integrated and resilient economy

ASEAN has accelerated upgrading the ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) to also address food security, remanufactured goods, supply chain connectivity, and trade in crisis, among other

Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr. Kao Kim Hourn engaged with Confederation of Indian Industry (CII) during his official visit to India in February 2024.





Secretary-General of ASEAN joined Chair of the ASEAN Economic Ministers' Meeting 2024 in a Press Conference.

things, to enhance ASEAN's intra-regional trade and competitiveness, promote crisis resilience, and foster innovation and environmental sustainability.

On trade facilitation, all AMS have fully implemented the ATIGA e-Form D, while Indonesia, the Philippines, and Thailand have begun exchanging additional trade documents, such as the ASEAN Customs Declaration Document. Separately, Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand fully implemented the ASEAN Authorised Economic Operator Mutual Recognition Arrangement, and Myanmar became the seventh AMS to join the ASEAN Customs Transit System.

On services sector integration, the ASEAN Services Facilitation Framework was adopted to lower domestic barriers to trade and investment in services and create a more favourable and predictable business environment. Additionally, ASEAN has been finalising the Protocol to Amend the ASEAN Agreement on the Movement of Natural Persons (MNP Protocol) to streamline the temporary cross-border movement of professionals in trade, services, and investment.

On investment, ASEAN continued to deepen regional integration, as evinced by the ranking of intra-ASEAN investment as the region's second largest

source of FDI. Further, AMS signed in 2024 the Fifth Protocol to Amend the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement (ACIA) to enhance investor transparency and ensure alignment with external agreements, while the ASEAN Regional Investment Promotion Plan was adopted in-principle, allowing AMS to collaborate more effectively in attracting and promoting investment across the region.

On digitalisation, DEFA negotiations are expected to conclude by 2025. This comprehensive, forward-looking, and future-proof Agreement is intended to position ASEAN as a leader in the global digital economy while fostering innovation, enhancing connectivity, and driving inclusive growth. Accordingly, ASEAN has implemented capacity-building initiatives, such as the DEFA Exclusive Roundtable, to close gaps between AMS and ensure that DEFA's benefits will be realised by businesses and citizens.

ASEAN also made strides on other key digital initiatives, including implementation of the Bandar Seri Begawan Roadmap, currently 61% complete and on track for full implementation by 2025. Additionally, ASEAN tackled digital challenges through working groups focused on exploring AI governance, combating online scams, and strengthening subsea

Industry leaders engaged in DEFA Exclusive Roundtable, exchanging views on digital payments, digital talent mobility, and digital identity.





Empowering ASEAN Consumers in the Digital and Green Economy: ASEAN Champions Consumer Protection at the 4th ASEAN Consumer Protection Conference, Cambodia, 26 August 2024

cable infrastructure. Simultaneously, development and implementation of the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2030 is expected to guide the region as ASEAN works to adopt the UNCITRAL Model Law on Electronic Transferable Records to further streamline digital trade and financial transactions.

ASEAN also stepped up efforts to create a harmonised and efficient trading environment through standards and conformance. Key agreements signed in 2024 included the ASEAN Food Safety Regulatory Framework and the Mutual Recognition Arrangement (MRA) for Building and Construction Materials. In healthcare, regulatory convergence will be advanced by the expected signing of an updated MRA for Good Manufacturing Practice Inspection of Medicinal Product Manufacturers, alongside development of new frameworks for traditional medicine, health supplements, and pharmaceuticals. ASEAN also harmonised 17 additional international standards in 2024, for a total of 324.

On financial integration, ASEAN made noteworthy progress, including establishing seamless cross-

border payment linkages. Recent launches of QR payment systems connecting Cambodia with Lao PDR and Viet Nam, Singapore with Indonesia and Malaysia, and Lao PDR with Thailand, have positioned ASEAN at the forefront of cross-border payment innovation.

On sustainable finance, the recently updated third version of the ASEAN Taxonomy for Sustainable Finance highlighted ASEAN's commitment to a just and credible transition towards a green and sustainable ASEAN, and to directing capital toward a sustainable and resilient future. Meanwhile, as part of its commitment to sustainable healthcare financing, ASEAN held the 2nd ASEAN Finance and Health Ministers' Meeting to enhance collaboration between sectors, while the inaugural ASEAN Treasury Forum fostered cooperation between AMS in public financial management.

B. Building a competitive, innovative, and dynamic ASEAN

ASEAN has been steadfast in its commitment to become a global hub for competition, economic dynamism, and innovation. In 2024, ASEAN finalised negotiations for the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Competition (AFAC), which is set for signing in 2025. AFAC is expected to strengthen regional coordination

in cross-border competition cases, create a more cohesive market regulatory environment, and promote economic efficiency regionally. Additionally, release of the sixth edition of the *Handbook on Competition Policy and Law for Businesses* further contributed to market transparency and benefitted businesses and consumers.

On consumer protection, ASEAN adopted the ASEAN Guidelines on Unfair Contract Terms, further promoting transparency and fairness in business-to-consumer contracts. Further, the 4th ASEAN Consumer Protection Conference, focused on tackling challenges to the digital and green economies, was organised in 2024 to strengthen collaboration between businesses, consumer authorities, and international partners. Moreover, the updated 3rd edition of the *ASEAN Handbook on Consumer Protection Laws and Regulation* addressed issues affecting the digital economy and sustainability, empowered consumers, and boosted confidence regionally.

Meanwhile, ASEAN's commitment to enhancing intellectual property (IP) and fostering innovation was reflected in the impressive rise of AMS on the WIPO Global Innovation Index (GII) 2024. Six AMS were ranked in the global top-55, three AMS were rated among the fastest movers over the last decade, and five AMS were ranked in the top-10 for high-tech exports as a percent of total trade.⁴

To further streamline the regional IP ecosystem and reinforce ASEAN's role as a global innovation hub, a review was completed for the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Intellectual Property Cooperation (AFAIPC) and plans were made to upgrade to AFAIPC 2.0 by 2025. The ASEAN IP Register, hosting over

7.3 million IP records with 50,000 daily visits, has expanded access for businesses and innovators. Concurrently, work has progressed on the ASEAN Roadmap on IP Valuation to protect genetic resources, traditional knowledge, and cultural expression, as well as to unlock the potential of IP and intangible assets as a driver of economic growth and resilience.

C. Strengthening sectoral connectivity for resilience and growth

ASEAN has committed to sectoral cooperation to promote resilience and growth, foster connectivity, and increase innovation for a sustainable future. On transport, signing of Protocol 5 of Own Stopover Rights between AMS has expanded air connectivity, boosted tourism, and increased regional trade. Adoption of the ASEAN Port Digitalisation and Automation Best Practice Guidelines enhanced maritime infrastructure to increase efficiency and resilience. Additionally, introduction of the Guidelines on Light Electric Vehicles (LEV) and Urban Freight Transport (UFT) promoted ASEAN's shift to low-carbon vehicles and greener logistics networks to advance sustainable transport.

Further, ASEAN made strides in advancing sustainable energy cooperation, as evinced by the ASEAN Power Grid (APG), which boosted regional power interconnection and trade, improved energy security, and integrated clean energy. The APG's cross-border capacity is 7.7GW, with plans to expand it to 17.6GW by 2040 using USD 10 billion from the Asian Development Bank and the World Bank. ASEAN also advanced plans for subsea cable projects to support its long-term energy

⁴ AMS ranked in the global top-55 were Singapore, at No. 4; Malaysia, at No. 33; Thailand, at No. 41; Viet Nam, at No. 44; the Philippines, at No. 53; and Indonesia, at No. 55. AMS rated among the fastest movers over the last decade were Viet Nam (No. 44, up No. 76), the Philippines (No. 53, up from No. 90), and Indonesia (No. 54, up from No.85). Five AMS were ranked in the top-10 for high-tech exports as a percent of total trade: Malaysia, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam).



The #ImaginASEAN's Great Metaverse Hunt features exclusive virtual merchandise drops such as Southeast Asian-themed items that reflect the cultural essence of the region from traditional attire and accessories to iconic landmarks and symbols.

goals. Renewable energy currently comprises 15.6% of the region's total energy mix, with solar and wind capacity accounting for an increasingly larger portion. Meanwhile, regional energy intensity decreased 24.5% from 2005, while innovation in clean coal technology and carbon capture have reduced coal plant emissions.

On natural resources development, ASEAN adopted the Declaration on Promoting ASEAN as an Investment Destination for Sustainable Minerals Development to optimise its mineral resources while ensuring stable supplies to meet rising demand for clean energy, digital transformation, and industrial expansion. Adoption of the ASEAN Principles on Sustainable Minerals Development and the ASEAN Minerals Exploration Strategy (version 1:2023) further highlighted ASEAN's dedication to enhancing governance and improving economic, environmental, and social outcomes in the minerals sector.

On sustainability, ASEAN launched the Action Plan for Sustainable Agriculture and the ASEAN Guidelines on Crop Burning Reduction. These initiatives, along with a forthcoming statement from the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Agriculture and Forestry, are expected to enhance cooperation and knowledge sharing in sustainable practices. The objectives are to combat climate change, foster agricultural growth, reduce greenhouse gas emissions from crop burning, minimise harmful agrochemical use, and promote the adoption of digital technologies and nature-based solutions. To realise these objectives, ASEAN has been collaborating with the public and private sectors on projects such as mangrove ecosystem management, sustainable aviation fuel development, and biological control in livestock. ASEAN will continue to advocate for sustainable agricultural practices, support research, and promote innovation through the forthcoming Leaders' Declaration on Promoting Sustainable Agriculture.

On tourism's transformative potential, ASEAN has championed sustainable tourism by endorsing the Action Roadmap for Sustainable Tourism Development, which focuses on cultural preservation, resource protection, and socio-economic growth. Meanwhile, the ASEAN Ecotourism Standard for Facilities, Activities, and Services and the ASEAN Sustainable Tourism Toolkit fostered eco-friendly practices, while the ImaginASEAN metaverse game promoted Southeast Asia as a global dream destination.

ASEAN has also made advances toward its goal to be a beacon of progress in science, technology, and innovation (STI). The ASEAN Online Education Platform for Industry 4.0 equipped over 11,000 workers with essential skills, while the STI Ecosystem Foresight 2035 report defined a roadmap for future opportunities. With AI projected to boost regional GDP, ASEAN launched ACT on AI to supporting the tech startup ecosystem. Further, initiatives such as the ASEAN-India Scale Hub and ASEAN Startup

Portal have helped to develop ASEAN's innovation landscape, while awards, such as the ASEAN-US Science Prize for Women, celebrated and nurtured scientific talent to foster a culture of innovation and technological growth. Sectoral cooperation was strengthened through stronger private sector engagement, including by adding private sector representatives to the Board of Advisers to the ASEAN Committee on STI and expanding public-private partnerships.

D. Fostering inclusive growth and narrowing development gaps

Businesses of all sizes have been the driving force supporting ASEAN's economic integration. Their dynamism, innovation, and resilience have fuelled regional growth, fostered deeper market connectivity, and created cross-border opportunities. ASEAN has engaged with approximately 150 private sector entities a year to foster collaboration in areas such as digital transformation, green energy transition, and investment. The 11th AEC Dialogue, themed 'Governing and Unlocking the AI Opportunity in

Women entrepreneurs acquire digital and e-commerce skills through training and mentoring programmes in 2024 across AMS through the ASEAN-ROK Cooperation #IDEASProject.



The 11th AEC Dialogue featured booth exhibitions to showcase the transformative power of AI in the modern business landscape and highlight AI's ability to optimise operations, enhance decision-making, and create innovative solutions across industries.

ASEAN', drew over 650 participants and underscored the role of the private sector in realising ASEAN's transformative future. Contributions of business councils, especially the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC), have been crucial in shaping policy and driving deeper regional economic integration.

2024 also saw ASEAN taking major steps to empower regional MSMEs to further strengthen their ability to inclusive economic growth. The ASEAN SME Policy Index 2024 showcased policy frameworks across ASEAN, while initiatives such as Go Digital ASEAN Phase 2 and Increasing Digital Skills and E-Commerce for ASEAN Women MSMEs (IDEAS) have benefitted over 200,000 MSMEs, equipping them with the digital skills needed to thrive in a competitive regional market. ASEAN also advanced its net-zero goals with a capacity-building workshop on green growth and innovations, providing relevant resources on the ASEAN SME Academy platform. Additionally, the ASEAN Inclusive Business Awards continued to spotlight companies that integrate underserved communities. In 2024, the Awards recognised 10 businesses with inclusive business models, bringing the total number of businesses recognised to 50 since 2020.



Secretary-General of ASEAN inaugurated the RCEP Support Unit Office together with the Trade Minister of the Republic of Indonesia, H.E. Budi Santoso, the RCEP Joint Committee Co-Chairs or their representative, the Committee of Permanent Representatives of ASEAN (CPR), and Ambassadors of RCEP Participating Countries, ASEAN Headquarters, 9 December 2024.

On narrowing development gaps, ASEAN has worked to strengthen regional unity and promote inclusive development through the Initiative for ASEAN Integration (IAI) Work Plan IV (2021-2025), which currently accounts for 95 accredited projects in progress valued at approximately USD 20 million. Under Lao PDR's Chairmanship, ASEAN has introduced new strategies focused on digital integration, human resource development, and environmental sustainability to accelerate development in key areas and prepare for future challenges beyond 2025.

In support of Timor-Leste's integration into AEC, four capacity-building sessions, covering investment, trade in services, agriculture, and tourism, were completed by early 2024, with support from the Asian Development Bank and Australia. As of August 2024, Timor-Leste participated in 108 ASEAN Meetings,

including 18 at the Ministerial level and 18 at the Senior Officials level, furthering its path toward full regional integration.

E. Expanding connectivity in the global economy

ASEAN has continued its journey to become a deeply integrated and globally connected region. Following signing in 2023 of the Second Protocol to Amend the ASEAN-Australia-New Zealand Free Trade Area (AANZFTA), ASEAN achieved substantial conclusion of the ASEAN-China Free Trade (ACFTA) 3.0 Upgrade negotiations this year. Additionally, ASEAN has been working to upgrade its FTA with India, while negotiating a new agreement with Canada. These endeavours underscore ASEAN's commitment to enhancing its status as a globally competitive and open economic region and reinforcing its role in shaping international trade dynamics.

Meanwhile, 2024 was an important year for the implementation of the RCEP Agreement, the world's largest FTA. The RCEP Joint Committee finalised the Procedures for Accession to the RCEP Agreement which paves the way for aspiring economies to accede to the Agreement. In addition, a crucial milestone was

also achieved this year, with the establishment of the RCEP Support Unit (RSU) with the recruitment of the first RSU Executive Director (ED) and the inauguration of the RSU Office on 9 December 2024. The RSU is a special unit within the ASEAN Secretariat which will provide the necessary support to the RJC and its subsidiary bodies on the implementation of the RCEP Agreement. These actions have affirmed ASEAN's role guiding the RCEP, ensuring that RCEP remains a platform for fostering inclusive economic growth, enhancing market connectivity, and strengthening its role in the global economy.

III. Challenges and success stories

A. Substantive conclusion of the upgraded ASEAN-China FTA (ACFTA) 3.0

The ACFTA, launched in 2010, which established zero tariffs on over 90% of line items, was upgraded to ACTFA 2.0 in 2019, to enhance market access between ASEAN and China. In November 2022, both parties, recognising the economic benefits of deeper economic integration, initiated negotiations

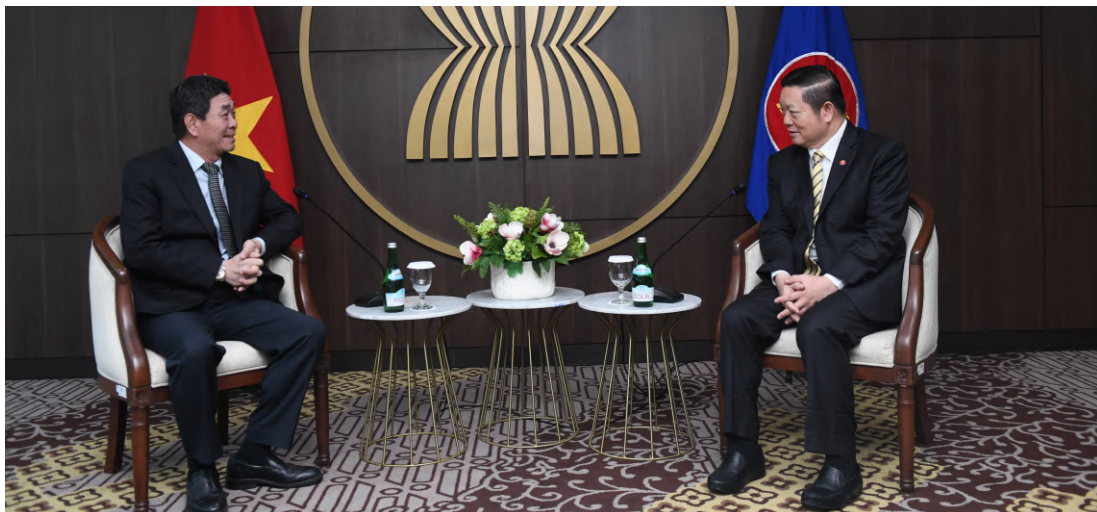
for ACFTA 3.0, focusing on key areas such as reducing non-tariff barriers, boosting connectivity, and advancing the digital and green economies.

The substantive conclusion of ACFTA 3.0 upgrade negotiations was a Priority Economic Deliverable of Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2024. ACFTA 3.0 will introduce upgrades on standards, technical regulations, and conformity assessment procedures; sanitary and phytosanitary measures; and customs procedures and trade facilitation. It covers six new areas: economic and technical cooperation, MSMEs, competition and consumer protection, the green economy, supply chain connectivity, and the digital economy.

Implementing ACFTA 3.0 will be pivotal moment in ASEAN-China relations and unlock new opportunities for trade and collaboration. By fostering deeper integration in the digital and green economies, enhancing connectivity, and boosting trade facilitation, ACFTA 3.0 will empower business of all sizes, strengthen supply chains, and ensure sustainable and inclusive growth.

Participants of the 2nd ASEAN Blue Economy Forum joined site visit to Nam Ngum Dam Hydro Power Plant, Lao PDR.





Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr. Kao Kim Hourn met with Permanent Representative of Viet Nam to ASEAN Ambassador Nguyen Hai Bang at the ASEAN Secretariat, 20 March 2024.

B. Advancing ASEAN's sustainability agenda

Following adoption of the ASEAN Strategy for Carbon Neutrality, the Implementation Plan for the Framework for Circular Economy for the AEC, and the ASEAN Blue Economy Framework in 2023, ASEAN established key governance bodies to ensure implementation of relevant sustainability initiatives and reinforce ASEAN's commitment to a sustainable future. Bodies included the ASEAN Task Force on Carbon Neutrality, the Focal Group for Circular Economy, and the ASEAN Coordinating Task Force for Blue Economy, which held its inaugural meeting in 2024.

Progress was also made on sustainability initiatives to enhance business capacity for circular economies, facilitate sustainable financing, and plan for supply chains with minimal carbon footprints. The 2nd ASEAN Blue Economy Forum was held in early 2024, gathering senior officials and experts from

across the region to emphasise innovation and collaboration in sustainable growth and position the blue economy as a new engine for regional economic development.

Progress was also made in enhancing the Memorandum of Understanding on the ASEAN Power Grid, the ASEAN Petroleum Security Agreement, and the Trans-ASEAN Gas Pipeline. Renewing these agreements will strengthen ASEAN's frameworks and mechanisms to address the emerging requirements of energy security and sustainability, advance multilateral power trade, and boost the supply of sustainable and reliable electricity for AMS.

Finally, the region's first multilateral power project, the Lao PDR-Thailand-Malaysia-Singapore Power Integration Project (LTMS-PIP), facilitated the trade of 266 GWh of hydroelectric power from Lao PDR to Singapore via Thailand and Malaysia. Discussions are underway to develop the Brunei Darussalam-Indonesia-Malaysia-Philippines Power Integration Project (BIMP-PIP), aiming to establish 17 interconnections among four AMS to reduce electricity costs and fossil fuel use. BIMP-PIP is expected to foster greater energy integration through new overland and subsea cables to facilitate

bidirectional trade. Discussions are also in progress on additional bilateral interconnections for subsea cables between Singapore and Viet Nam, Singapore and Cambodia, and overland connections between Lao PDR and Viet Nam.

IV. Future priorities

As ASEAN nears the completion of its Community Blueprint 2025, it is charting a bold and forward-looking economic agenda for the post-2025 era. Drawing on lessons from years of economic integration, ASEAN is positioning itself for the next phase of growth, aiming to become the world's fourth-largest economy by 2030 and elevate all AMS to upper-middle income status by 2045.

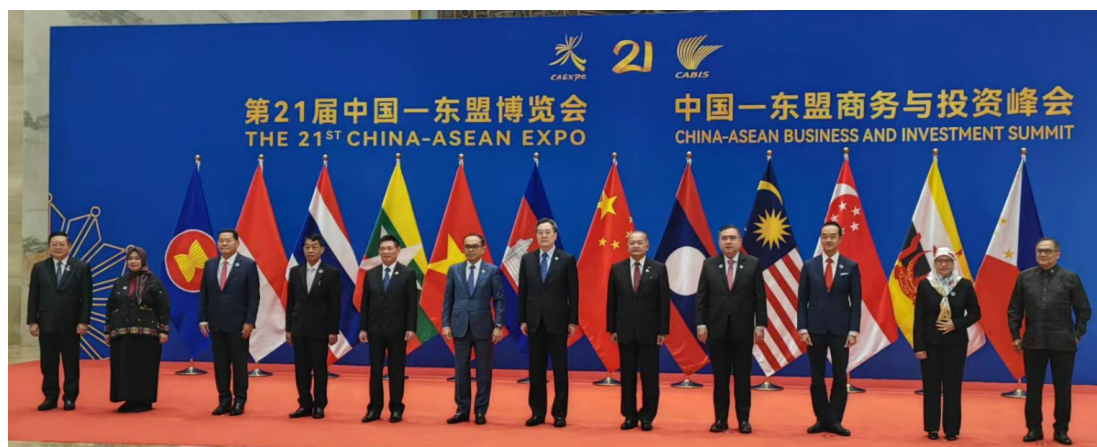
Early reflections on implementing the AEC Blueprint 2025 indicate a need to address global megatrends, such as shifting trade dynamics, the integration of decarbonisation into economic policies, adapting to rapid technological advancements, and planning for a demographic shift toward ageing populations.

Accordingly, the High-Level Task Force on ASEAN Economic Integration (HLTF-EI) has been consulting with diverse stakeholders, including business leaders, academics, civil society representative,

external partners of ASEAN, and parliamentarians, while conducting a survey of over 7,500 respondents across the region. Insights from these outreach initiatives had been crucial in shaping ASEAN's post-2025 priorities and ensuring that the region remains agile and responsive.

2024 has been a pivotal year for the ASEAN Community Blueprint 2025 as it nears completion. ASEAN has started work on defining its future goals through the development of ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Strategic Plan 2026-2030, the first of four plans leading up to 2045, to ultimately attain the *ASEAN Community Vision 2045*. The Strategic Plan will continue to focus on deepening economic integration and unlocking new competitive advantages in critical areas, such as industrial cooperation, as well as in advancing the blue and green economies. Additionally, it will also foster innovation-driven growth, enhanced productivity, and sustainable practices throughout the value chain. Facilitated by the Working Group for the AEC Post-2025, ASEAN is on track to adopt the Strategic Plan by the 46th ASEAN Summit in May 2025. ■

■ **Secretary-General of ASEAN attended the opening ceremony of the 21st China-ASEAN Expo (CAEXPO) on 24 September 2024 in Nanning, China.**





ASEAN SOCIO-CULTURAL COMMUNITY (ASCC)

I. Introduction

ASEAN's population is comprised of very diverse demographic segments. Over half the region's population lives in urban areas, where rapid urbanisation poses both opportunities and challenges. In some ASEAN Member States (AMS), the demographic dividend, e.g., the emergence of a large working-age population, has accelerated economic growth, while ageing populations in other AMS have created a necessity for policies to address the needs of the elderly.

Under Lao PDR's chairmanship, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) made substantive strides in 2024 to enhance the quality of life for ASEAN's citizens. In line with the ASEAN Chair's theme of enhancing connectivity and resilience, the ASCC's achievements in 2024 have underscored the role of culture and arts in sustainable development, promoted resilience when facing regional health and environmental challenges, advanced gender equality and inclusion, and promoted human resource development.

II. ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community highlights

A. Nurturing culture and innovation

Cultural heritage preservation and digital education transformation have been essential items on ASSC's agenda as ASEAN promotes sustainable development. The importance of cultural enterprises for the green economy and social progress was emphasised by the Vang Vieng Declaration on Promoting Small and Medium-Sized Cultural Enterprises Aligned with Green Growth for Sustainable Development. By embracing sustainability, such enterprises have helped mitigate their environmental footprint and created innovative economic opportunities. Further, ongoing policy consultations were held on developing the ASEAN Cultural Heritage List (ACHL), to promote important cultural assets and preserve ASEAN's cultural heritage for future generations.

On technological transformation, several documents were approved, developed or implemented during the reporting period. ASEAN helped facilitate modernisation of AMS national education systems by approving the Roadmap on the Digital Transformation of Education Systems in ASEAN. The Roadmap will guide the integration of digital tools and platforms in education systems, prepare teachers and learners for the future, and ensure equitable access to education. Further, the Vientiane Statement on Equity, Access, and Environment: Advancing

 **Ekkaphab
Phanthavong,
Deputy Secretary-
General of ASEAN
for ASEAN
Socio-Cultural
Community**



Climate Resilience in Early Childhood Settings highlighted foundational learning and environmental stewardship in early childhood education, while the Joint Declaration on the Common Space in Southeast Asian Higher Education aimed to create a hub for collective intelligence and sustainable learning.

On information resilience, ASEAN developed guidelines for AMS on fake news and disinformation, which have increased along with internet access rates.⁵ ASEAN 2035: Toward a Transformative, Responsive, and Resilient Information and Media Sector emphasised the importance of media literacy for an informed citizenry. This was reinforced by the issuance of the ASEAN Guideline on Management of Government Information in Combating Fake News and Disinformation in the Media and the Da Nang Declaration on Media: From Information to Knowledge for a Resilient and Responsive ASEAN. Meanwhile, the ASEAN Task Force on Fake News (TFFN) has been implementing initiatives and youth awareness campaigns on disinformation.

B. Building regional resilience and sustainability

In the reporting period, ASEAN worked to bolster AMS national health systems, address emerging health threats, enhance environmental resilience, and improve its disaster management and response capabilities.

Minister and representatives of AMS and the Secretary-General of ASEAN gathered for the 31st ASCC Council Meeting in Luang Prabang to discuss strategies to foster socio-cultural cooperation.

ASEAN Leaders adopted the Declaration on Strengthening Regional Biosafety and Biosecurity to address the threat of infectious diseases. Further, the ASEAN Public Health Emergency Coordination System (APHECS) Framework was adopted to enhance the region's capacity to respond to public health emergencies.

ASEAN also continued its work to reduce tobacco-related deaths and diseases. The inaugural ASEAN Smoke-Free Awards recognised Bagan, Myanmar; Bogor, Indonesia; Iloilo, Philippines; Luang Prabang, Lao PDR; and Saensuk, Thailand for policies discouraging tobacco use.

Separately, the ASEAN Joint Statement on Climate Change was adopted at the 29th Session of the Conference of the Parties to the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC COP 29). On climate finance, the environment sector conducted the ASEAN Capacity Building Programme for Accessing Green Finance. Meanwhile, work has continued on establishing the ASEAN Centre for Climate Change and the ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Transboundary Haze Pollution Control (ACC THPC).

5 71.50% of the region's total population is using the internet. Datareportal (2024). <https://datareportal.com/reports/?tag=Global+Overview>

On marine plastic pollution, ASEAN adopted the ASEAN Declaration on Plastic Circularity to advance regional cooperation on reducing plastic pollution and promoting the circular economy. ASEAN also adopted the ASEAN Biodiversity Plan to help share biodiversity's benefits and promote a whole-of-society/government approach to sustainability.

ASEAN expanded its network of protected areas by creating five new ASEAN Heritage Parks: Balinsasayao Twin Lakes Natural Park, Turtle Islands Wildlife Sanctuary, and Apo Reef Natural Park in the Philippines; and Nam Pou National Protected Area and Phou Xieng Thong National Protected Area in Lao PDR. The ASEAN Centre for Biodiversity (ACB) continued its efforts to promote awareness, appreciation, and conservation of ASEAN's natural heritage. ASEAN is also working towards establishing the ASEAN Coordinating



The AHA Centre's humanitarian response to Typhoon Yagi included the distribution of relief goods



Ceremonial handover of the Philippines' contribution to assist Myanmar's recovery from Cyclone Mocha

Centre for Transboundary Haze Pollution Control (ACC THPC) to coordinate regional efforts to address haze pollution.

Several documents were developed by ASEAN in 2024 to strengthen disaster preparedness and response, including the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response (AADMER) Work Programme (AWP) 2021-2025, the Report on Strengthening ASEAN Multi-Hazard End to End Early Warning System, and the ASEAN Disaster Risk Communication Framework, among other documents.

The ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management (AHA Centre) continued to support regional disaster preparedness and emergency responses. In September 2024, the AHA Centre delivered humanitarian assistance to AMS affected by Tropical Cyclone Yagi and the Southwest Monsoon. In addition, the AHA

“Being present online without being well-informed about digital rights and privacy is like sailing into a sea without proper navigation skills.”

The ASEAN Editorial Team (2024, 1 February). Raihan Zahirah Mauludy Ridwan, 25, on the importance of digital rights and online privacy. The ASEAN Issue 34-35, p.56.



Centre delivered relief items from the Disaster Emergency Logistics System for ASEAN (DELSA) to support Thailand, in response to flooding, and the Philippines, in response to Southwest Monsoon Tropical Cyclones Gaemi and Prapiroon.

C. Ensuring equal opportunities

During the reporting period, ASEAN continued to promote equality and inclusivity by helping to ensure equal access to opportunities and resources for all.

The 3rd ASEAN Women Leaders' Summit emphasised women's leadership in resilience and the care economy. Additionally, the 2024 ASEAN Care Economy Recognition Awards were held, and the Declaration on Strengthening the Care Economy and Fostering Resilience post-2025 was adopted. Recognising that sustainable peace requires inclusion, ASEAN continued implementing the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace, and Security.

To improve AMS coordination in combating violence against women and girls, ASEAN developed guidelines for National Standard Operating Procedures and integrated gender perspectives through the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework (AGMSF). ASEAN also launched the second edition of the ASEAN Gender Outlook, highlighting gender's importance in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Powerful women shaping the future of ASEAN. Leaders and ministers in charge of women's affairs gathered for the 3rd ASEAN Women Leaders' Summit on 23 August 2024, in Vientiane, Lao PDR.

The ASEAN-Japan Actions on Sports: Gender Equality initiative reaffirmed ASEAN's commitment to promoting gender equality and inclusivity in sports, ensuring equal access to sports opportunities through regional cooperation.

ASEAN also emphasised the importance of leaving no one behind through the ASEAN Enabling Master Plan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities, designed to ensure that the rights of persons with disabilities are integrated with regional development. Further, ASEAN reaffirmed its commitment to inclusivity through the ASEAN Disability Rights Workshop: Advancing Public-Private-People Sector Engagement. Also noteworthy was the 8th ASEAN Children's Forum, which garnered practical recommendations from children from AMS and Timor-Leste on climate action and resilience.

Noting that around 75% of Southeast Asia's population live in rural areas and depend on agriculture for their income⁶, ASEAN continued implementation of the ASEAN Master Plan on Rural Development. The 2nd ASEAN Village Network Meeting was held to discuss village tourism development and help optimise digital/smart villages to revitalise village economies.

6 ASEAN Framework Action Plan on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication 2021-2025



D. Investing in human capital

ASEAN has continued to prioritise human capital development to ensure the region's long-term competitiveness and prosperity.

The ASEAN Youth Convergence was organised to collect the aspirations of young people on ASEAN's policies and programs, while ASEAN's Skills Development for Youth in Sustainable Eco-Tourism and Agro-Tourism project was launched to equip youth with employment-oriented technical and digital skills to increase their economic participation, boost regional economic development, and stimulate the green economy.

Further, the Vientiane Declaration on Skills Mobility, Recognition, and Development of Migrant Workers outlined a comprehensive approach to enhance migrant workers' skills and boost their integration into labour markets, while the ASEAN Green Jobs Forum facilitated knowledge sharing for participants from several sectors, including labour, environment, education, youth, and SMEs.

ASEAN demonstrated progress in implementing the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers. The adoption of the ASEAN Guidelines on Portability of Social Security for Migrant Workers and the ASEAN Guidelines on the Placement and Protection of Migrant Fishers further strengthened the region's efforts to protect their rights and welfare.

Stakeholders and advocates gathered for the ASEAN Disability Rights Workshop: Advancing Public-Private-People Sector Engagement on 16-18 September, in Thailand.



The 2nd edition of the ASEAN Migration Outlook was launched during the 17th Meeting of ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (ACMW).



Young leaders of ASEAN gathered for a transformative mentorship session during the ASEAN Youth Convergence on 20-21 May 2024, in Vientiane, Lao PDR.

The second edition of the ASEAN Migration Outlook provided insights on the connections between climate change, human mobility, and labour migration, while ASEAN conferred the 5th ASEAN Occupational Safety and Health Network (OSHNET) Awards and the 5th ASEAN Red Ribbon for Outstanding Workplaces (ARROW) Award.

Finally, ASEAN adopted the ASEAN Statement on Strengthening Government Strategies on Mental Health and Well-Being, emphasising the importance of supporting civil service workers. The ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Human Resource Toolkit was updated to guide civil service agencies in integrating gender into human resource management practices.

III. Challenges and success stories

The ASEAN region faces multiple challenges that must be addressed if it is to achieve its goals of an integrated, resilient, and sustainable future. For disaster management, ASEAN must empower local communities while confronting climate change related losses and damages, data gaps, financial constraints, and technological limitations. ASEAN's public health challenges include infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases, digital health disparities, the impact of climate change, and food safety.

For education, ASEAN has been facing a pronounced digital divide exacerbated by existing

challenges in promoting teachers' professional development, ensuring curricula are relevant, and fostering inclusive learning environments. For the Future of Work, factors including automation, global value chain shifts, and the green transition, have led to challenges such as job displacement, skill obsolescence, and the need for a skilled and adaptable workforce. Finally, poverty in ASEAN is complex and intertwined with the digital divide, environmental factors, gender, and health, among other factors, while misinformation and fake news continue to pose new problems in the media sector.

Despite these challenges, the ASSC achieved substantial progress in implementing the ASSC Blueprint 2025, with 99 percent of its Strategic Measures completed or ongoing. The ASSC also improved its evidence-based decision-making and progress monitoring by launching the ASSC Database for Monitoring and Evaluation (ADME) System to provide comprehensive and reliable data on sectoral initiatives and follow-up actions, at the regional and national levels.

IV. Future priorities

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASSC) stands at a pivotal moment as it prepares for its next strategic phase. While the ASSC has made significant progress in implementing the ASSC Blueprint 2025, there is still much to be done to achieve ASEAN's vision of an inclusive, sustainable, dynamic, and resilient community.

On many occasions, women put their husband's or children's needs before their own, causing a delay in diagnosis and treatment.

Agbisit, J.B. (2024, 28 May). Healing Women: Tess Barrientos, MD. The ASEAN Issue 37, p.36-37.

THE ADME SYSTEM

The ADME system addresses the need for a comprehensive data management system that can enhance socio-cultural development and progress across the region



Provide timely, comprehensive and accurate data of the Blueprint 2025 implementation



Strengthen the statistical capabilities of ASCC which will enable the effective monitoring and evaluation of ASCC initiatives



Facilitate enhanced coordination and collaboration among ASEAN Member States (AMS) and across different pillars and sectors

ADME DATABASE

Database A and C are accessible for registered users while Database B can be accessed publicly and by the general public.



DATABASE A

Database A contains data from the Framework for Reporting on ASCC Sectoral Bodies' implementation of the Sectoral Work Plans (Tool 1), Monitoring Matrix of the Follow-up Actions to Declarations (Tool 1), and the ASCC Blueprint 2025 Results Framework Monitoring Database (RFMD)



DATABASE B

Database B is public repository containing relevant socio-cultural indicators sourced from reputable organisations like ASEANStats, the World Bank, the United Nations, the Asian Development Bank, and other international organisations



DATABASE C

Database C contains socio-cultural administrative records from ASCC sectoral bodies to support the ASCC Blueprint 2025 implementation

The End-Term Review of the ASCC Blueprint 2025 is underway to evaluate progress made and inform the development of the ASCC Post-2025 Strategic Plan. The Ad-Hoc Working Group to Develop the ASCC Post-2025 Strategic Plan has played a important role in shaping the future direction of the ASCC. By engaging with stakeholders and the public through consultations and surveys to ensure that its successor Strategic Plan reflects the needs and aspirations of the ASEAN Community.

As ASEAN continues to evolve, the ASCC will remain responsive and continue to adapt to emerging trends and challenges as it promotes regional cooperation, fosters cultural exchange, and addresses the shared aspirations of ASEAN's peoples. Key priorities for the ASCC include fostering a shared ASEAN identity, investing in

The ADME system is a web-based database system for reporting and data dissemination, with access roles tailored to users' responsibilities.

human capital, promoting social cohesion and inclusion, building resilience, and promoting sustainable development. The ASCC will continue to focus on these areas, while also addressing challenges such as the digital divide, shifting work landscapes, climate change, and misinformation.

By prioritising these future directions, building on past successes, and addressing existing challenges, the ASCC can play a vital role in shaping ASEAN's future and ensuring a prosperous and sustainable region for all. ■



ASEAN COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT AND OUTREACH EFFORTS

I. Introduction

2024 continues to be an engaging year for ASEAN as the region gears up to the ten-year anniversary of the ASEAN Community. From January to September 2024, the Jakarta-based ASEAN Secretariat welcomed almost 3,300 registered visitors from 75 stakeholder groups, including public servants from governments, students and undergraduates from universities, schools, public institutions, and institutes of higher learning, as well as representatives from civil society organisations and non-profits outfits (CSOs and NPOs), which are mainly based in or around Jakarta, Indonesia. Aligned with the priorities of the Lao PDR Chairmanship, the 57th ASEAN Day celebration took place on 8 August 2024, centered around the theme “Connected & Resilient Community.” The event was graced by 400 distinguished guests, including the Minister for Foreign Affairs of Indonesia, H.E. Retno L.P. Marsudi; Coordinating Minister for Economic Affairs of Indonesia, H.E. Airlangga Hartarto; and Minister of Agrarian Affairs and Spatial Planning of Indonesia, H.E. Agus Harimurti Yudhoyono; as well as by members of the diplomatic community in Jakarta, such as the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN and Ambassadors/Permanent Representatives from ASEAN external partners, and from the regional business community were in attendance.

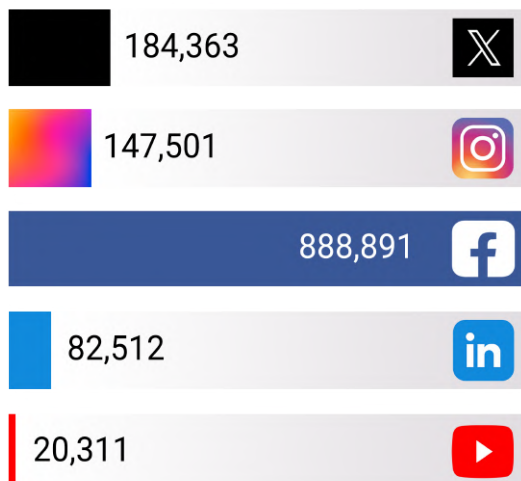
The ASEAN Secretariat is dedicated to fostering and enhancing engagement between ASEAN and essential groups within the community, including civil societies and academia. The Forum of Entities continues to serve as a platform for communication between the 81 ASEAN-accredited entities listed under Annex II of the ASEAN Charter and ASEAN officials, as well as ASEAN Centres, especially those based in Jakarta. The 8th iteration of the Forum, which took place on 14 May 2024, was inaugurated by Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr. Kao Kim Hourn and was attended by 82 participants from 39 ASEAN Centres and Entities. In September 2024, the ASEAN Secretariat hosted the inaugural ASEAN Think Tanks Summit in collaboration with its Annex II entity, the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN ISIS) Network, under the leadership of one of its founding organisations, the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA). The inaugural Forum saw participation from over 150 representatives from think tanks across the region, diplomatic corps, and media outlets.

**Nararya S.
Soeprapto, Deputy
Secretary-General
of ASEAN for
Community and
Corporate Affairs**

Concurrently, the ASEAN Secretariat is deeply committed to ensuring ASEAN's global presence. At the invitation of the State Council of the People's Republic of China, ASEAN continued its participation at the 21st China-ASEAN Expo in Nanning, Guangxi, China. The ASEAN Secretariat's booth at the 21st

Digital Social Media

As of September 2024



CAEXPO garnered almost 1,800 visitors. Moreover, in anticipation of the World Expo 2025 in Osaka, the ASEAN Secretariat is presently engaged in the construction of the ASEAN Pavilion, as well as seeking resource mobilisation – including manpower, merchandises, and display information/content for the pavilion – from partners and ASEAN entities.

57th ASEAN Day was held in ASEAN Headquarters on 8 August 2024.

The World Expo 2025 is scheduled to take place in Osaka, Japan, from 13 April to 13 October 2025.

In light of the growing digital presence in the region, the ASEAN Secretariat actively utilises its digital channels, namely the ASEAN Website and various social media platforms, to disseminate ASEAN-related information and engage with the region's tech-savvy population. As of September 2024, the ASEAN website (www.asean.org) has recorded approximately 8 million visitors. Furthermore, the ASEAN Secretariat's social media platforms have amassed a total of 1.3 million followers, with significant growth in followers across Twitter (184,363), Instagram (147,501), Facebook (888,891), LinkedIn (82,512), and YouTube (20,311 subscribers).

II. Highlight on Outreach Efforts

A. School and University Outreach

In 2024, the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) received approximately 3,273 registered visitors from 75 stakeholder groups, including public servants from governments, students and undergraduates from universities, schools, public institutions, and institutes of higher learning, as well as





Contemporary artwork from the Kingdom of Thailand to commemorate the 57th ASEAN Day, the 138th collection displayed in the ASEAN Gallery.

representatives from civil society organisations and non-profits outfits (CSOs and NPOs), which are mainly based in or around Jakarta, Indonesia. This figure reflects a 100% increase from the previous year, attributed to the gradual reopening of the ASEC during the post-COVID-19 period and the increasing ASEAN public diplomacy.

In addition to hosting student visits to its Headquarters, the ASEAN Secretariat conducted presentations on ASEAN and the ASEAN Community in educational institutions as part of the “ASEAN Goes to School” initiative.

In May 2024, the ASEAN Goes to School programme conducted a session at the National University of Laos (NUOL) in Lao PDR, engaging over 100 students from diverse academic disciplines. The primary objective of the programme was to facilitate knowledge exchange and dialogue on ASEAN-related topics. Through interactive discussions and a Q&A session, the ASEAN Goes to School initiative provided students with a platform to enhance their understanding and perspectives on ASEAN matters.

B. ASEAN Gallery

On the occasion of the 57th ASEAN Day, the ASEAN Gallery was honoured to receive a painting from the Royal Kingdom of Thailand. Titled “ASEAN Community Vision 2045: Resilient, Innovation, Dynamic and People-Centred ASEAN,” the

painting was graciously presented by Ambassador Phantipha Iamsudha Ekarohit, Permanent Representative of the Kingdom of Thailand to ASEAN, and Mr. Nikorndej Balankura, Director-General of the Department of Information and Spokesperson of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Kingdom of Thailand to Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn on 7 August 2024. Additionally, the ASEAN Gallery received three (3) batik paintings from the Warisan Budaya Indonesia Foundation. The symbolic handover took place on 8 August 2024. These four (4) new art pieces contribute to a total collection of 141 notable works.

C. International expositions

ASEAN's active participation in international expositions highlights its increasing global influence. The recent involvement of the ASEAN Secretariat in the 21st China-ASEAN Expo in Nanning, Guangxi, People's Republic of China, from September 24 to 28, 2024, exemplifies this commitment. During this significant event, the ASEAN Secretariat conducted a series of outreach activities, including:

- Operating an ASEAN booth and organising a trivia quiz to raise awareness among over 1,200 visitors.
- Arranging a lecture at Guangxi University featuring Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr. Kao Kim Hourn as the speaker to discuss the theme of ‘Fostering Friendship and Cooperation: The Role of People-to-People Connections and Exchanges in ASEAN-China Relations.’
- Conducting a media interview for Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr. Kao Kim Hourn with Chinese local media on ASEAN-China bilateral relations, as well as an exclusive interview with Siam Associated Press, covering ASEAN's response to global challenges.

Looking ahead, at the upcoming World Expo 2025 Osaka, ASEAN will prominently showcase



Secretary-General of ASEAN witnesses the ASEAN Prize awarding ceremony at the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits

its achievements, contributions, and vision for a prosperous future. The ASEAN Secretariat has diligently prepared a series of activities, innovative exhibitions, and engaging programs to enrich ASEAN's participation. These efforts aim to foster a sense of pride within the ASEAN community, attract new supporters, and amplify the region's unity and global significance.

Moreover, beyond enhancing ASEAN's international presence, the upcoming Expo will serve to strengthen ties within and beyond the community. Collaborative outreach and cultural activities have been carefully planned with ASEAN Member States throughout the Expo period to celebrate the region's rich cultural heritage and dynamic identity. ASEAN is also actively fostering partnerships with its accredited Centres and Entities, as well as external partners, with the aim of delivering impactful participation at the Expo and nurturing stronger relationships.

D. ASEAN Prize

The ASEAN Prize plays a pivotal role in the realisation of a people-centered ASEAN Community and is esteemed as the region's foremost award. Its purpose is to provide regional recognition by

honoring individuals and organisations across ASEAN for their exceptional contributions in promoting greater awareness and advancing the regional integration process.

In its 7th edition, the ASEAN Prize has concluded the selection of the 2024 ASEAN Prize Recipient. Following the call for nominations from 1st March to 31st May 2024, the ASEAN Prize received twenty-seven (27) applications, all endorsed by ASEAN member states. Chaired by the current Secretary-General of ASEAN, the ASEAN Prize Judging Committee has meticulously examined and deliberatively selected a regional youth movement based in Jakarta, ASEAN Youth Organization (AYO), as the 2024 Recipient. AYO was chosen for its resolute contributions to fostering cross-cultural collaborations among ASEAN youths and furthering regional community engagement. The awarding ceremony of the ASEAN Prize 2024 was convened at the 44th and 45th ASEAN Summit and Related Summits in Vientiane.

In the middle of 2024, the ASEAN Secretariat, with support from the Temasek Foundation, and in cooperation with Mekong Institute and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Lao PDR, successfully organised an ASEAN Prize Symposium 2024 to, among others, raise awareness and understanding on the regional accolade among the Lao community to encourage nominations of individuals and organisations that impactfully contribute to an inclusive, people-oriented, people-centered ASEAN Community. The symposium attracted over 200 participants, including representatives from ASEAN Member States diplomatic missions, colleagues representing the IOs and CSOs, ASEAN Entities, academicians, private sectors, and youths, predominantly based in Vientiane.

In addition, the ASEAN Prize continues to expand public awareness through the mobilisation of digital platforms, including social media, a podcast series, a dedicated webpage, and engagement

with previous ASEAN Prize Recipients. The ASEAN Prize monitoring session 2024 was also held to gather insights, aspirations, and updates from the participants on their ongoing contributions and journey.

E. Digital media efforts

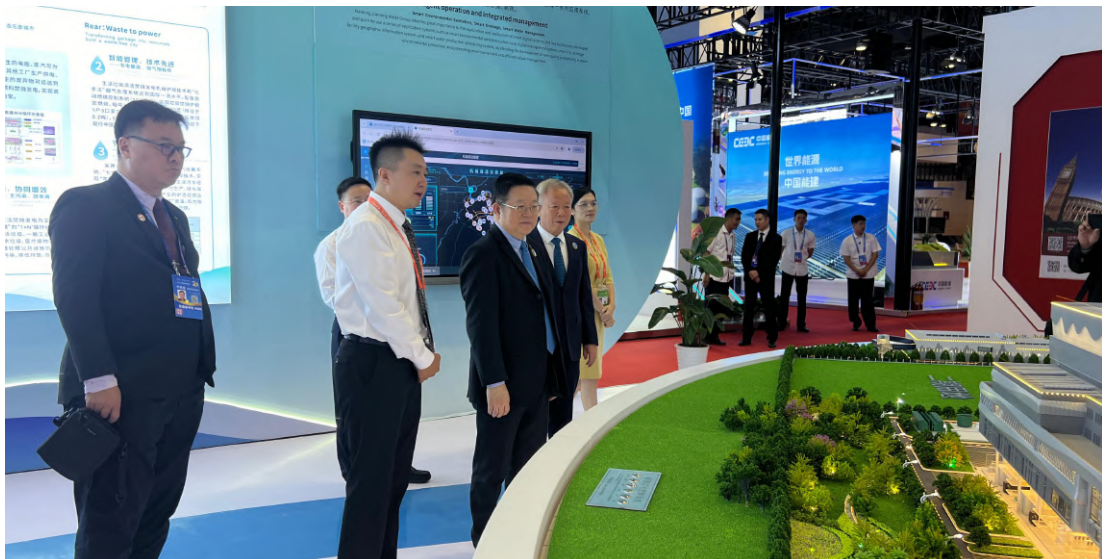
ASEAN has undergone a remarkable digital transformation in 2024, a change that has been driven and shaped by the active participation of its audience. This has resulted in a significant increase in public interest and engagement with its initiatives, highlighting the effectiveness of a well-defined digital strategy in fostering a vibrant online community.

Traffic to the ASEAN website (www.asean.org) surged in September 2024, exceeding 11 million visitors. This growth can be attributed to the ASEAN Secretariat's (ASEC) commitment to providing timely updates on key activities, events, and regional initiatives. Additionally, strategic search engine optimisation (SEO) initiatives ensured the website's discoverability for those seeking information on ASEAN.

Recognising the growing influence of social media, ASEC implemented a comprehensive digital media strategy. The cornerstone of this strategy was the introduction of concise, one-minute videos launched in February 2024. These videos effectively communicated ASEAN's vision and mission across political, security, economic, and socio-cultural aspects, leading to a substantial increase in social media followers. Notably, Instagram and Facebook followers surpassed 148,000 and 888,000, respectively, while platform X witnessed a significant rise to 185,800. This growth translates to a large and engaged community seeking information and actively participating in online discussions.

The impact extends beyond public engagement. Our LinkedIn network has grown to a robust 86,176 connections, fostering stronger professional engagement with industry leaders and stakeholders.

Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, toured the 21st China-ASEAN Expo (CAEXPO) Pavilion. The tour covered the B2 area of the Nanning International Convention and Exhibition Center, where the ASEAN Member States, Observer, and the ASEAN Secretariat are located.





Secretary-General of ASEAN, Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, met with Permanent Representative of Brunei Darussalam to ASEAN, H.E. Amb. Latifah Zaini at the ASEAN Secretariat, on 20 March 2024.

This online network facilitates real-time communication, content sharing, and collaboration among policymakers, business leaders, and experts from all ten member states. This engagement fosters a more dynamic and impactful ASEAN, enabling collaborative solutions to regional challenges.

The year 2024 marks a pivotal moment in ASEAN's digital presence. By embracing innovative communication methods and fostering a culture of online engagement, ASEAN has become more accessible, relevant, and impactful than ever before. This digital transformation serves as a catalyst for deeper regional integration and collaboration. As ASEAN continues to refine its digital strategy and leverage the power of social media, we can expect even greater engagement, strengthened regional ties, and a more connected Southeast Asia.

III. Highlight on Stakeholders Engagements

A. Engagement with Centres and Entities

The Forum of Entities Associated with ASEAN continues to serve as a vital platform for communication between the 81 ASEAN-accredited entities listed under Annex II of the ASEAN Charter and ASEAN officials, as well as ASEAN Centres, including those based in Jakarta. Over the years, it has proven to be an effective platform for gathering valuable inputs and ideas from grassroots organisations to support ASEAN community building. This year's forum was attended by 82 participants from 39 ASEAN Centres and Entities, alongside CPR Ambassadors from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, the Philippines, Thailand, and Viet Nam. CPRWG colleagues represented Malaysia and Singapore.

On 10-11 September 2024, the inaugural ASEAN Think Tank Summit (ATTS), coordinated by the Singapore Institute of International Affairs (SIIA), an Annex II-accredited entity, successfully brought together nearly 150 participants. The event was held to revitalise Track II dialogue and foster collaboration among think tanks and research institutions. It was officially opened by Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN, and attended by ASEAN ambassadors, Dialogue Partners, and various research organisations.

In addition to these two highlights, the ASEAN Secretariat continues to build strong engagement with entities associated with ASEAN by facilitating activities, courtesy calls, fostering collaboration, and supporting the accreditation process. This year, ASEAN Member States granted accreditation to the



The inaugural ASEAN Think Tank Summit was convened in September 2024 to promote regional track-II diplomacy.

International Rice Research Institute (IRRI), which is now listed under Annex II of the ASEAN Charter under “Academic and Think Tanks Institution”. The accreditation of IRRI brought the total of entities associated with ASEAN to 81.



B. Media relations

Recognising the media’s crucial role in shaping ASEAN’s narrative, Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr. Kao Kim Hourn plans regular informal meetings, breakfast or afternoon tea, with Jakarta-based journalists to foster closer ties and ensure accurate information dissemination. These informal gatherings take place twice a year, at the beginning of the ASEAN Chairmanship and towards the end.

Even as digital media continues to rise, traditional outlets like print, TV, and radio remain a keystone of ASEAN communication. The ASEAN Media Forum (AMF), established in 2017, has been instrumental in disseminating ASEAN messages to the public. Entering its 8th year, the AMF continues to serve as a vital platform for ASEAN to share its progress, challenges, and aspirations directly with its citizens. In line with this year’s Chairmanship theme of Connectivity and Resilience, the 8th AMF focuses

Secretary-General of ASEAN emphasised strong ASEAN-ROK ties during his interview with media outlets in Jeju, including Herald Business, Yonhap News, News 1, KCTV and New Jeju Daily.

on Regional Connectivity and the ASEAN sub-regional development. The 8th AMF was convened on 25 November 2024 in Vientiane, Lao PDR.

From January to October 2024, the Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr. Kao Kim Hourn participated and granted interviews to major media outlets, including; The Scoop, Vietnam News Agency, Bloomberg, Asahi Shimbun, Press Trust of India, Asian News International, Radio Television Hong Kong, Voice of America, Reuters, Associated Press, Washington Post, Radio Free Asia, Jiji Press, Xinhua News Agency, China Media Group, Korea Herald, Herald Business, Yonhap News, News1, Korean Central Television, New Jeju Daily, Kim Jiyoung's Knowledge Play, CNBC, Nikkei Asia, BS TV Tokyo, The World, Viet Nam Report, Tim Harcourt's Great Transformation podcast, Sky News, Australia Financial Review, CNN, TVRI News, Medcom.id, Diario Financiero, World Magazine, SEA Today, ANTARA TV, and China Central Television (CCTV).

Secretary-General of ASEAN Dr. Kao Kim Hourn addressed questions from reporters during a media roundtable hosted by the U.S. Department of State during his Working Visit to the U.S. in June 2024.

IV. Highlight on Information Management

ASEAN Secretariat Resource Centre (ARC)

The ARC continues to serve as an information centre, providing ASEC staff, AMS officials and the general public with access to an extensive collection of primary sources on topics related to ASEAN. From January to September 2024, the Library at ARC welcomed over 40 researchers and hosted approximately 40 group visits by appointment for conducting literature research and library tours.

In addition to the aforementioned services, ARC receives ASEAN-related inquiries via email. Throughout the above-specified period, ARC responded to approximately seventy (70) email inquiries from the general public. The public can submit their requests to visit the ARC-Library and direct their ASEAN-related inquiries through resourcecentre@asean.org.





Permanent Representative of Malaysia to ASEAN presented Letter of Credence to the Secretary-General of ASEAN.

Moreover, the Archives at ARC continue to serve as a repository for the ASEAN documents, however, access to the Archives is limited only to ASEC staff and officials.

V. Looking Ahead

As the ASEAN Community prepares to observe a decade of its establishment and progress towards the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, the year 2025 holds great significance for the region. The ASEAN Secretariat, dedicated to enhancing its outreach and engagement endeavours, has outlined a series of events and initiatives to commemorate this important milestone.

The 58th ASEAN Day, the 9th ASEAN Entities Forum, the 9th ASEAN Media Forum, and the 2nd ASEAN Think Tanks Summit will be conducted under the theme and priorities of Malaysia's ASEAN Chairmanship. These events will serve as platforms for dialogue, collaboration, and knowledge exchange among ASEAN Member States, entities, and stakeholders. Additionally, the ASEAN Secretariat will continue to acknowledge and support outstanding individuals who are contributing positively to the region through the ASEAN Prize platform.

In addition to its internal events, ASEAN will also occupy a prominent position on the global stage. The ASEAN Pavilion at the World Expo in Osaka, Japan, will not only provide visitors with an opportunity to explore the diverse cultures, rich heritage, and dynamic development of the region but also showcase the achievements of ASEAN Centers and Entities, as well as its formal partners and cooperation projects. The celebratory activity of the 58th ASEAN Day will be a highlight of the ASEAN Pavilion, attracting visitors from around the world and inspiring them with ASEAN's vision and progress.

Aligned with the theme of Lao PDR's ASEAN Chairmanship 2024, which focuses on enhancing connectivity and resilience, the ASEAN Secretariat will continue to prioritise digital media outreach. As the custodian of the ASEAN Website and social media channels, the Secretariat will harness its digital presence to disseminate information about ASEAN's work and activities. Acknowledging the increasing importance of digital platforms, the ASEAN Secretariat will endeavour to uphold its credibility and expand its reach as a reliable source of information for ASEAN followers. ■

Secretary-General of ASEAN attended the launch of ASEAN-Australia Centre in Canberra, 27 November 2024





ASEAN CONNECTIVITY

I. Introduction

In 2024, ASEAN made substantial progress in enhancing regional connectivity through its continued implementation of the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025. Work was done across several sectors to foster a more integrated, competitive, and resilient Community.

Connectivity was enhanced in four crucial areas:

Sustainable infrastructure. ASEAN intensified its work to update the Initial Rolling Priority Pipeline of Infrastructure Projects and deepened its engagement with the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) through a relevant joint programme.

Smart and sustainable cities. The ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) expanded to 31 cities, showcasing the region's dedication to smart and sustainable urban development. Initiatives like the ASEAN Smart City Professional Program and the ASEAN Smart City Financing Toolkit equipped policymakers with the skills and knowledge needed to drive urban innovation.

Seamless logistics. ASEAN improved regional trade integration with completion of the Framework on ASEAN Supply Chain Efficiency and Resilience and Implementation Plan.

People-to-people connectivity. Advancements were seen in the ASEAN-ROK TVET Mobility Programme and the launch of a tourism website aimed at the Chinese market, both of which fostered educational exchanges and promoting ASEAN's diverse tourism offerings.

ASEAN continues to address the challenges of coordinating and advancing complex and diverse cross-Pillar and cross-sectoral initiatives across ASEAN Member States (AMS). Looking ahead, ASEAN is committed to boost the implementation of the MPAC 2025 and developing its successor, the ASEAN Connectivity Strategic Plan (ACSP), to ensure future regional connectivity. The ACSP, set to be adopted by ASEAN Leaders in 2025, will reflect a forward-looking approach and embody ASEAN's vision for a connected, sustainable, and resilient future.

These collective efforts have underscored ASEAN's dedication to enhancing connectivity, while laying a strong foundation for continued growth, cooperation, and resilience in the face of future challenges and opportunities.

II. Connectivity highlights

In 2024, ASEAN noted continued progress in implementing the MPAC 2025. Advances were made across several sectors that strengthened regional interconnectedness and development, underscoring ASEAN's commitment to creating a more integrated, competitive, and resilient Community.

A. Sustainable infrastructure

AMS have intensified work to advance and update the Initial Rolling Priority Pipeline of ASEAN Infrastructure Projects, aimed at promoting investment in connectivity-related infrastructure. ASEAN has been engaging the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) by developing the ASEAN-AIIB Joint Programme Supporting ASEAN Connectivity, which is expected to be launched in late 2024 to provide capacity building on sustainable infrastructure and support the Initial Pipeline. Meanwhile the ASEAN Sustainable Leadership in Infrastructure Programme (ASLIP) completed

its second year of courses, providing essential capacity-building training for the next generation of urban infrastructure policymakers in AMS.

B. Smart Cities

The ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) expanded to 31 cities in 2024, showcasing the region's dedication to smart and sustainable urban development. In July 2024, the ASCN convened the Conference on Smart Solutions for Solving Urban Issues in Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, to share knowledge and promote collaborative problem solving.

Meanwhile, the project on the second phase of Accelerating the Implementation of the ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Strategy (ASUS) began, focusing on identifying cities for targeted technical advice and capacity building. The ASEAN Smart City Professional Program (ASPP) also continued to deliver short-term training sessions and master's degree courses at Seoul National University. Recognising the role of financing in realising smart city ambitions, ASCN developed the ASEAN Smart City Financing Toolkit as comprehensive resource to empower policymakers with knowledge on financing options.

The 7th ASEAN Smart Cities Network (ASCN) Annual Meeting





Southeast Asia Tourism website for the Chinese market

C. Seamless logistics

ASEAN concluded in 2024 an important project titled Development of ASEAN Database on Trade Routes and Framework for Enhancing Supply Chain Efficiency. Results included the Framework on ASEAN Supply Chain Efficiency and Resilience, developed in 2023, and a detailed Implementation Plan for the Framework, developed in 2024, with practical activities to strengthen ASEAN supply chain connectivity. A public version of the Framework was prepared to engage stakeholders and foster more collaboration between the public and private sectors in enhancing supply chain efficiency and resilience.

D. People mobility and skills development

In 2024, the ASEAN-ROK TVET Mobility Programme, an ongoing flagship initiative fostering people-to-people connectivity, facilitated intra-ASEAN exchanges for 328 technical and vocational education and training (TVET) students and faculty members. Additionally, 27 TVET personnel received

intensive training in building construction and information and communication technology.

On tourism, ASEAN launched in January 2024 the Southeast Asia Tourism website for the Chinese market (<https://visitsoutheastasia.cn>). The website is a gateway that promotes Southeast Asia's diverse tourism offerings to potential visitors from China, the region's largest source of international tourists.

These achievements collectively demonstrate ASEAN's commitment to enhancing connectivity in multiple dimensions. From bolstering physical infrastructure and Smart City development to improving logistics efficiency and fostering educational and cultural exchanges, ASEAN has laid a strong foundation for continued growth and cooperation through connectivity. Moving forward, these initiatives will play a crucial role in creating a more integrated, sustainable, and resilient ASEAN Community that is ready to meet the challenges of the future.

III. Challenges and success stories

Implementation and coordination of ASEAN Connectivity continue to present challenges due to their cross-Pillar and cross-sectoral nature. As

ASEAN grapples with complex and cross-cutting issues such as sustainability and digitalisation, the need for seamless coordination across sectors and Pillars has become pronounced. ASEAN's multifaceted approach requires an intricate balance of diverse priorities, stakeholder interests, and resource allocation to ensure comprehensive development.

The challenges of synergising initiatives and implementing projects reflect this complexity and interconnectedness. Ensuring consistent progress across AMS, each with a unique context and

priorities, adds another layer to implementation. Despite these challenges, ASEAN has realised notable successes that have underscored the effectiveness of its collaborative approach.

Planning and development for sustainable infrastructure has strengthened since establishment of the Lead Implementing Body on Sustainable Infrastructure in 2018. Implementation of and updating the Initial Rolling Priority Pipeline of ASEAN Infrastructure Projects have underscored the importance of coordination, collaboration, and capacity building for the practical application

Seamlessly and Comprehensively Connected ASEAN

Enhancing ASEAN Connectivity would benefit all ASEAN Member States by improving physical, institutional and people-to-people linkages, and strengthening resilience across all three Community pillars.

The Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 is unlocking more opportunities to create stronger network of peoples, infrastructure and cities that will improve the way we live, work and travel.



Five Strategic Areas of MPAC 2025



Sustainable Infrastructure

Enhance the region's infrastructure investment and productivity as well as achieve sustainable urbanisation development goals.



Digital Innovation

Connect ASEAN with the digital world of opportunities through adoption of digital technology and standards, enhancing digital financial inclusion, open data and digital data management.



Seamless Logistics

Create a more competitive and seamless ASEAN by strengthening the region's supply chain ecosystem.



Regulatory Excellence

Implement good regulatory practice for a more integrated ASEAN.



People Mobility

Bring opportunities closer to the people through enhancing intra-ASEAN mobility and human capital.

of sustainability principles in infrastructure development.

Smart and sustainable urban development has seen growing interest, with the start of Phase II cooperation with UN-Habitat to develop and implement city technical proposals and capacity-building programmes. ASPP also noted increasing participation from national and local governments in its short-term training and master's degree scholarships programs. This reflects recognition of the importance of developing quality programmes on smart and sustainable urban development in areas such as data-driven smart city planning.

On seamless logistics, a milestone achievement was the development and endorsement of the Framework on ASEAN Supply Chain Efficiency and Resilience and its Implementation Plan, signifying the importance of stakeholder consultation, which embodies the spirit of collaboration that is central to ASEAN's approach.

These success stories demonstrate that ASEAN's commitment to collaboration and shared development continues to yield tangible results, despite the inherent challenges of coordinating cross-Pillar and cross-sectoral initiatives.

III. Future priorities

A. MPAC 2025's final lap

As MPAC 2025 enters its final year, ASEAN remains committed to addressing its remaining measures. Work is ongoing to ensure the successful completion of key initiatives across various strategic areas. An end-term review report of the MPAC 2025 is expected in 2025, evaluating the plan's impact and effectiveness.

On smart and sustainable urban development, ASEAN is expected to convene in 2025 the 2nd

ASEAN Sustainable Urbanisation Forum as part of ASUS Project-Phase II. Recruitment is underway for the third batch of ASPP short-term training and the ASPP Master's Degree Course Spring 2025 at Seoul National University.

On seamless logistics, ASEAN is exploring implementation of the Framework on ASEAN Supply Chain Efficiency and Resilience. And on people mobility, ASEAN and China are aiming to continue the promotion of ASEAN destinations to Chinese tourists.

B. The ASEAN Connectivity Strategic Plan

Looking beyond MPAC 2025, ASEAN has been shaping the future of regional connectivity through development of the ASEAN Connectivity Strategic Plan (ACSP). Led by the ASEAN Connectivity Coordinating Committee (ACCC), ACSP development has been aligned with guidance from the High-Level Task Force on the ASEAN Community's Post-2025 Vision and has been crafted in parallel with Strategic Plans of the ASEAN's Community Pillars. A finalised ACSP is expected to be adopted in 2025 by ASEAN Leaders, which would mark another milestone for ASEAN's Connectivity agenda.

Building on MPAC 2025, the ACSP will broaden its scope to six areas: sustainable infrastructure, smart and sustainable urban development, digital innovation, seamless logistics and supply chains, regulatory excellence and cooperation, and people-to-people connectivity.

The ACSP development has embraced a whole-of-community approach, incorporating insights from diverse stakeholders including national agencies, relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies, ASEAN's External Partners, and the private sector. This collaborative approach underscores ASEAN's commitment to fostering a connected, sustainable, and resilient future for the region. ■



ASEAN COOPERATION PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES

I. Summary

ASEAN remains intent on strengthening its development initiatives through ASEAN cooperation projects and programmes supported by ASEAN's External Partners. ASEAN continues to foster collaboration, aiming to accelerate sustainable development and inclusive growth across the region.

The cumulative value of ASEAN cooperation projects and programmes between 2009 and September 2024 totalled USD 2,143,209,307.82, comprising USD 2,047,296,904.53 for on-going, implemented, or completed projects and USD 95,906,503.29 for projects under appraisal. The utilised portion comprised 1,519 projects (USD 1,416,464,157.32) and 30 programmes (USD 630,832,747.21).

II. ASEAN Cooperation Projects and Programmes highlights

A. Breakdown by Pillar

The ASCC accounted for 43.90% (USD 898,720,471.49) of the total value of submitted ASEAN cooperation projects and programmes between 2009 and September 2024, supporting in part initiatives related to culture, disaster management, education and youth, the environment, gender and social inclusion, health, labour migration, and media and information.

The AEC accounted for 32.81% (USD 671,816,754.38) of the total, supporting in part initiatives related to the digital economy, energy, forestry, food and agriculture, MSMEs, science and technology, tourism, trade, and the transport sector.

The APSC accounted for 7.19% (USD 147,301,429.41) 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, 0.64% (USD 13,108,581.16) was allocated for the ASEAN Integration Initiative (IAI) and Narrowing the Development Gap Initiative and used to support education programmes in Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Viet Nam (CLMV), attachment programmes for CLMV officers, and capacity building programmes for CLMV on electronic commerce, MSMEs, and science and

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technology; while 15.45% (USD 316,349,668.09) went to general and cross-Pillar projects that supported ASEAN promotional activities, ASEAN Connectivity, ASEAN project development trainings, and strengthening the ASEAN Secretariat.

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

B. Projects approved in 2024

In 2024, 58 ASEAN cooperation projects totalling USD 102,483,422.11 were approved for implementation, implemented, or completed.

USD 2,143,209,307.82

**The cumulative value of ASEAN
Cooperation Projects and Programmes
between 2009 and September 2024**

UTILISED FOR PROJECT

USD 2,047,296,904.53

USD 95,906,503.29

- On-going
- Implemented
- Completed

- Under appraisal

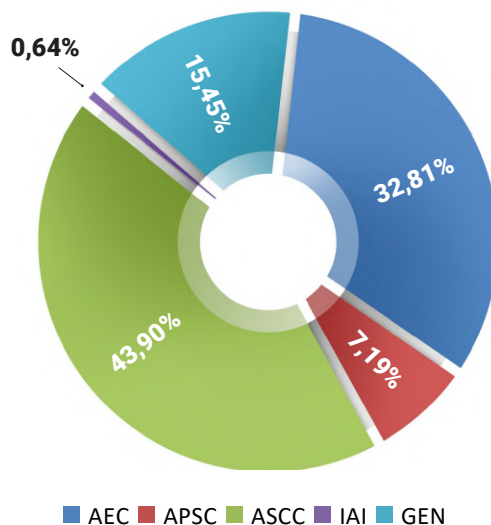
1,519
projects

USD 1,416,464,157.32

30
programmes

USD 630,832,747.21

CONTRIBUTION OF ASEAN PROJECTS AND PROGRAMMES BY PILLAR (2009 - September 2024)



ASCC accounted for 58.27% (USD 59,715,923.36) of expenditures for those cooperation projects, which supported education and youth-related initiatives, such as Australia for ASEAN Scholarships, EU-ASEAN SCOPE Higher Education and JENESYS2024; environment initiatives, such as the ASEAN-Korea Cooperation for Methane Mitigation (AKCMM) and Development of the ASEAN Climate Change Strategic Action Plan 2025-2030; and culture-related initiatives, such as the ASEAN-UK Creative Economy Initiative, and ASEAN Heritage Train-Enhancing Connectivity toward Cultural Diversity.

AEC accounted for 39.26% (USD 40,236,133.75), for cooperation projects supporting the science and technology sector such as Building High-Performance Computing Infrastructure and HPC Capacity for ASEAN Data Utilisation and the Korea-ASEAN AI Development & Start-up Competition; energy-related initiatives, such as Promoting Energy Efficiency in Buildings in ASEAN; and

agriculture, such as the ASEAN-India Fellowship for Higher Education in Agriculture and Allied Sciences, among other programmes.

APSC accounted for 2.47% (USD 2,531,365.00) for cooperation projects providing assistance for technical and development cooperation initiatives, such as the ASEAN Multi-Sector Capacity Building Facility, intellectual property initiatives, and human rights programmes, such as the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights Engagement Project 2024-2025.

C. Strengthening the ASEAN Project Management Framework

Full implementation continues for Project Management Framework (PMF) documents, guidelines and standard operating procedures to provide guidance on proposal formulation, appraisal and approval, implementation and monitoring, completion, and reporting for ASEAN Cooperation Projects (ACP). Relevant documents are available at <https://asean.org/asean-cooperation-projects/>.

The Programme Cooperation and Project Management Division (PCPMD) continues to advance PMF monitoring and evaluation (M&E) to foster a results-based management (RBM) approach for ACP development and implementation. In 2024, this was enhanced by support from the Aus4ASEAN Futures programme, which enabled PCPMD to refine the PMF and introduce enhanced methods for ACP monitoring and evaluation. Outreach efforts to share ACP success stories have expanded to support ASEAN Community building through stories featured at <https://asean.org/my-asean/>.

Meanwhile, PCPMD continued to deliver guidance on results-based monitoring and evaluation and technical assistance covering all stages of the ACP process to ASEAN Secretariat staff. Updating PMF documents for ASEAN Cooperation Projects

began in early 2024 and has been scheduled for completion in Q4 of 2024. This will ensure that the ASEAN PMF is up to date, addresses emerging challenges, and reflects the latest advancements in ACP implementation.

D. Capacity building for AMS on project proposal development

PCPMD continued to build the capacity of stakeholders in AMS to improve the quality of regional project proposals, ensure that proposals are developed using an RBM approach, and strengthen implementation to reach the intended outcomes. An increased number of implemented ASEAN Cooperation Projects is expected to contribute to the effective use of funds and support realisation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and beyond.

The ASEAN Development Fund (ADF) continued to support the second phase of ASEAN Project Development Training under the 4th ADF Work Programme, which has been extended until December 2024. A training was convened for Myanmar in February 2024, benefitting 46 Myanmar officials, and bringing the total number of

Indonesia hosts ASEAN Project Development Training for Tourism Officials



beneficiaries to 253, when combined with sessions from the Programme's second phase.

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. They also shared their intention to implement M&E and RBM tools when designing activities to support their current initiatives.

PCPMD also continued to provide briefings and capacity-building support on ASEAN project development for AMS, such as the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication (SOMRDPE) held in Malang, Indonesia, on 30 August 2024, and the ASEAN National Tourism Organisation (NTOs) meeting held in Bali, Indonesia, from 24 to 25 September 2024. Support was provided as part of the ASEAN Secretariat's efforts to provide advice, capacity building, and information on ASEAN cooperation projects for AMS, so they may develop and implement high-quality, results-based regional projects and increase the effective use of available resources for ASEAN Cooperation Projects.

III. Success story

Clearing landmines and empowering communities in the Mekong region

In June 2023, ASEAN, working with the Japan-ASEAN Integration Fund and the Thai Civilian Deminer Association, launched the Project to Assist Thailand in Fulfilling Its Clearance Obligation under the Mine Ban Treaty Phase 2, along with the Vocational Training Programme for Mekong Region Communities Affected by Landmines. These initiatives aimed to enhance the safety of local community members in Cambodia, Lao



Participants of ASEAN Project Development Training for Cambodia were trained to develop regional project proposals and manage ASEAN cooperation projects using a results-based management approach.

PDR, and Thailand through landmine clearance, while providing vocational training for affected communities. By May 2024, the project addressed its challenges, improving both safety and livelihoods in targeted communities.

A dedicated Mine Action Team cleared over 440,000 square meters of land, removing more than 4,000 landmines and explosive remnants of war in heavily affected areas. The return of cleared land allowed communities to resume fundamental activities like farming and construction. Despite difficult terrain, the team cleared minefields in Sri Saket Province—safeguarding lives and opening up new development opportunities.

The project also emphasised empowering communities through vocational training. Experts delivered specialised workshops on alternative livelihoods, including mushroom cultivation and organic farming, to more than 200 community members, with a significant focus on women's participation. The skills acquired through these workshops, led by model farmers such as Mrs.

Passorn Phusa, sparked awareness of sustainable agricultural practices across the region. Another success story is that of Mr. Kunha Sa Morn, a Cambodian participant who, after attending the project's capacity-building sessions, installed solar-powered water pumps for his durian plantation, reducing labour costs and enhancing his farm's efficiency.

This cross-border collaboration between Cambodia, Lao PDR, and Thailand fostered knowledge exchange and strengthened regional ties. Participants engaged in field visits and workshops and learned innovative farming techniques. Economic linkages between Lao PDR and Thailand were strengthened, resulting in new markets for agricultural products. After concluding in May 2024, the initiative left communities that are safer and more resilient, with more residents enjoying sustainable livelihoods in ways that will benefit future generations.

IV. Ongoing and future initiatives

The Australia for ASEAN Futures (Aus4ASEAN Futures) Program, originally focused on the AEC,

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

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

The Permanent Mission of the Republic of Indonesia to ASEAN in collaboration with the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC) and the ASEAN-China Cooperation Fund (ACCF) Management Team (AMT), hosted the ASEAN Project Development Training for Indonesian government officials in November 2024, in Malang, Indonesia



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Starting in 2024, the ASEAN-USAID Partnership Program has been providing technical assistance across ASEAN'S three Pillars to strengthen their capacity to advance economic growth, good governance, resilience, stability, and trade in the region. With a budget of up to USD 40 million until September 2029, the program, which operates under the Regional Development Cooperation Agreement (RDCA), supports inclusive economic growth, evaluates non-traditional security threats, and promotes good governance, inclusive development, ASEAN Entities, and AMS policy pilot programmes.

Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, Secretary-General of ASEAN, gave remarks on the "Deepening ASEAN-USAID Engagement through Partnership and Cooperation" event at the ASEAN Headquarters/ASEAN Secretariat, on 7 February 2024.

The UK, as ASEAN's newest Dialogue Partner, committed GBP 25 million to the ASEAN-UK Economic Integration Programme, which was launched in 2024 to support AMS in implementing ASEAN initiatives and strategies on financial services, open trade, and regulatory reform. The Programme will run until March 2028.

On 26 August 2024, the CPR approved a no-cost extension for the EU-supported Smart Green ASEAN Cities (SAGC) project to promote more sustainable urbanisation in ASEAN's cities while reducing their environmental footprints and improving the quality of life for citizens. Project implementation has been extended to 30 December 2025 to allow development of project pipelines and facilitate SAGC transition to a successor programme.



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