

## ASEAN's 2045 Vision, Powered by Technology Transformation

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When ASEAN Leaders adopted ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future in May 2025, they presented a clear and ambitious roadmap for a region defined by peace, prosperity, and partnership. It is a vision of an ASEAN that is not only cohesive and resilient, but also forward-looking—one that thrives in a rapidly transforming world. Achieving this vision will depend not only on our unity, but also on how effectively we harness the defining forces of our time—foremost among them, artificial intelligence (AI), which forms a vital pillar of digital transformation.

AI is no longer a distant promise. Across Southeast Asia, we are already witnessing its impact in tangible and meaningful ways. In Cambodia, the agriculture sector is embracing AI to support evidence-based decision-making aimed at enhancing productivity and achieving climate resilience. In Malaysia, students are learning with AI-powered tutors that adapt to their individual needs. In Indonesia, smallholder farmers consult AI chatbots that provide real-time crop advice, boosting yields and improving livelihoods. In Thailand, doctors are using AI to detect diabetic retinopathy in remote areas where specialists are limited. In Vietnam, AI-driven flood forecasting systems now predict disasters up to a week in advance, giving communities precious time to prepare and protect lives.

Around the world, nations are racing to define the rules and reap the rewards of AI. The United States, China, and the European Union are investing billions and setting global standards. ASEAN, too, has no time to lose—its approach must be uniquely Southeast Asian: inclusive, collaborative, and people-centred.

The economic potential is equally transformative. Recent research projects that AI could add USD 270 billion<sup>1</sup> to Southeast Asia's economy, driving innovation and productivity while helping the region move further up the global value chain. Yet these gains will not materialise automatically. The real question is not whether AI will reshape ASEAN, but how it will do so—and for whom. For ASEAN, the opportunity is to turn technology from a disruptor into an equaliser—ensuring that every community, from urban innovators to rural entrepreneurs, shares in the benefits.

This is precisely why ASEAN is committed to ensuring that digital transformation remains inclusive, ethical, and human-centred. The region's approach is anchored in three imperatives: building enabling infrastructure, developing an AI-ready workforce, and promoting responsible and inclusive AI governance.

First, a robust AI ecosystem demands solid digital foundations and infrastructure. Encouragingly, this is already taking shape. In Thailand, Google's USD 1 billion investment in a new data centre and cloud region is set to accelerate digital transformation, while in Malaysia, a USD 2 billion investment will strengthen cloud capacity and support the country's growing innovation economy. In Indonesia, meanwhile, Google's recent expansion of its Jakarta cloud region reflects surging demand for cloud services, creating new opportunities for businesses and communities alike. Together,

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<sup>1</sup> Google (2025) *The AI Opportunity in Southeast Asia*, in <https://aiopportunity.publicfirst.co/eur-sea/>

these investments along with other investments are projected to add billions to local GDPs and support thousands of jobs annually.

Enhancing access to shared computing resources and open datasets—especially those comprising local ASEAN languages and cultural knowledge—to ensure an inclusive and distinctly Southeast Asian AI future is also being championed by several ASEAN Member States. Initiatives such as the Southeast Asian Languages in One Network Data (SEALD), which develops an open dataset for ASEAN languages (including Indonesian, Thai, Tamil, Filipino, Khmer and Myanmar language), are instrumental in making digital transformation culturally relevant and linguistically inclusive.

These efforts signal a growing recognition that technology should strengthen, rather than fragment, our societies as the region advances toward a more trusted and human-centred AI ecosystem. Yet challenges remain: connectivity gaps persist in rural areas, and the cost of digital access remains prohibitive for many. Addressing these disparities is not optional—it is essential to ensuring no one is left behind. Bridging this divide will determine whether AI becomes a unifying force—or deepens inequality.

Second, people must remain at the centre of this transformation. Closing the gender digital divide alone could lift 30 million women out of poverty and add USD 1.5 trillion to the global economy by 2030.<sup>2</sup> ASEAN is already advancing large-scale skilling initiatives. Through the AI-Ready ASEAN initiative, a partnership between the ASEAN Foundation and Google.org, 5.5 million people across ASEAN Member States will be trained in AI and digital skills, with a particular focus on women and youth. The Google.org AI Opportunity Fund: Asia Pacific complements this by providing localised AI training and resources for MSMEs, the lifeblood of ASEAN's economy. The goal is ambitious but necessary: to transform not just what people know, but what they can do—turning anxiety about technological displacement into confidence about new opportunities and new possibilities.

Third, as AI's influence grows, so too must our frameworks for governance and ethics. AI is a cross-border technology, and ASEAN is taking the lead in shaping a regionally coherent approach. The ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics, and its expanded version on Generative AI, provide practical guidance for organisations in the region that wish to design, develop, and deploy traditional AI technologies.

Furthermore, the ASEAN Responsible AI Roadmap provides customised and actionable steps for ASEAN policymakers and stakeholders for responsible AI adoption and deployment across the region. The implementation of the Roadmap is being institutionalised through the ASEAN AI Safety Network (AI SAFE), established by ASEAN Leaders at the 47th ASEAN Summit in October 2025 as the world's first regionally endorsed AI safety network. This milestone marks a crucial step in embedding AI safety, ethics, and governance principles across the region, ensuring that ASEAN's approach to AI development remains responsible, trusted, and inclusive. It also signals ASEAN's determination to lead by example—showing that innovation and integrity can coexist.

All these efforts will achieve greater coherence and regional reach with the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA), which is set to become the world's first regionally binding digital economy agreement. Once concluded, DEFA will unlock USD 2 trillion in digital economic value by 2030, advancing cross-border data flows, digital trade facilitation, and the responsible deployment of emerging technologies.

As ASEAN looks toward its 2045 vision, one truth stands out: technology alone will definitely not define our future—people will. ASEAN's challenge, and opportunity, is to

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<sup>2</sup> United Nations, *UN Gender Snapshot*, 2025, in <https://unstats.un.org/sdgs/gender-snapshot/2025/>

shape the AI revolution into a force not merely for economic expansion, but a force for shared prosperity and human progress, creating a future where technology empowers and unites people. Indeed, AI is not merely a tool of progress but a test of our values, cooperation, and collective will. The measure of success will not be in the number of algorithms deployed, but in the number of lives improved.

The path forward requires actions from all stakeholders: governments must finalise and implement DEFA; businesses must commit to ethical AI deployment; and citizens must engage with these technologies critically and constructively. If each sector does its part, ASEAN can turn its shared vision into a shared momentum and reality.

With shared vision, responsibility, and partnership, ASEAN can ensure that technology serves humanity, and that by 2045, the region stands not only more connected and competitive, but also more compassionate, equitable, and united. By ensuring that AI reflects ASEAN's values of inclusivity and cooperation, the region can demonstrate that technological and human progress are not opposing forces—but partners in a shared future.

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