

OVERVIEW OF ASEAN–COOPERATION COUNCIL FOR THE ARAB STATES OF THE GULF (GCC) RELATIONS

Introduction

1. ASEAN and the Cooperation Council for the Arab States of the Gulf (GCC) have steadily expanded their partnership over the past three decades based on shared interests in promoting peace, stability, economic prosperity and sustainable development. Since the convening of the First ASEAN-GCC Summit in Riyadh in 2023, relations have entered a new phase marked by stronger political commitment, an enhanced framework of cooperation, strengthened institutional linkages and expanded practical cooperation across the priority areas.
2. The ASEAN-GCC Framework of Cooperation (FOC) (2024–2028), welcomed by the Leaders at the First ASEAN-GCC Summit, serves as the principal roadmap for advancing the partnership. Building on the outcomes of the First and Second ASEAN-GCC Summits, ASEAN and the GCC continue to deepen engagement through regular high-level dialogue, strengthened institutional mechanisms, and expanded sectoral collaboration, while exploring new areas of mutual interest.

Institutionalisation of Cooperation

3. The first formal contact between ASEAN and the GCC took place in 1990 when the Foreign Minister of Oman, in his capacity as Chairman of the GCC Ministerial Council, expressed the GCC's interest in establishing formal relations with ASEAN.
4. Later that year, the ASEAN Foreign Ministers held their first meeting with the GCC on the sidelines of the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) in New York. Both sides agreed to convene regular consultations on the margins of the UNGA and tasked the ASEAN and GCC Secretariats to initiate cooperation between the two organisations. The establishment of the ASEAN Committee in Riyadh in 2000 further demonstrated ASEAN's commitment to deepening ASEAN-GCC relations.
5. ASEAN-GCC relations gained further momentum in April 2007 when the then Secretary-General of ASEAN, H.E. Ong Keng Yong, paid an official visit to the GCC Secretariat in Riyadh and met with the then Secretary-General of the GCC, H.E. Abdulrahman H. Al Attiyah. Both sides agreed to prepare a framework document to formalise ASEAN-GCC relations.
6. At the ASEAN-GCC Foreign Ministers' Meeting on the sidelines of the 62nd Session of the UNGA in September 2007, Ministers agreed to convene a full-fledged ASEAN-GCC Ministerial Meeting. This culminated in the First ASEAN-GCC Ministerial Meeting, held in Manama, Bahrain, in June 2009, where Ministers

adopted the ASEAN-GCC Joint Vision and witnessed the signing of a Memorandum of Understanding between the ASEAN Secretariat and the GCC Secretariat. The Joint Vision laid the foundation for future cooperation in economic development, trade, culture, education and information.

7. Building on this momentum, the Second ASEAN-GCC Ministerial Meeting was convened on 31 May–1 June 2010 in Singapore, where Ministers adopted the ASEAN-GCC Two-Year Action Plan (2010–2012) to guide practical cooperation between the two regions. It was followed by four working-level meetings: (i) the ASEAN-GCC Consultative Meeting on Education (Bangkok, Thailand, November 2010); (ii) the ASEAN-GCC Working Group Meeting on Food Security and Agricultural Investment (Doha, Qatar, May 2011); (iii) the ASEAN-GCC Tourism Consultation (Luang Prabang, Lao PDR, June 2011); and (iv) the ASEAN-GCC Senior Economic Officials Meeting (Salalah, Oman, July 2011).
8. To further revitalise relations, ASEAN and the GCC convened the First ASEAN-GCC Workshop in Singapore in June 2014, bringing together government officials, academics and business representatives to identify practical recommendations for strengthening cooperation between the two regions.
9. ASEAN-GCC relations entered a new strategic phase with the convening of the First ASEAN-GCC Summit on 20 October 2023 in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The Leaders adopted the Joint Statement of the Summit of ASEAN and the GCC, reaffirming their shared commitment to deepen cooperation based on the purposes and principles of the Charter of the United Nations and international law. The Leaders also welcomed the ASEAN-GCC FOC (2024–2028) as the principal roadmap for advancing practical cooperation across areas of mutual interest, and adopted the ASEAN-GCC Statement on Developments in Gaza.
10. Ahead of the Second ASEAN-GCC Summit, the ASEAN-GCC Ministerial Meeting was convened on 25 May 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. Ministers reaffirmed the importance of strengthening institutional cooperation through enhanced engagement between the ASEAN and GCC Secretariats and between the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR) and the GCC Ambassadors' Council in Jakarta. They also encouraged the establishment of direct communication channels, the development of joint recommendations, and stronger monitoring of the implementation of the ASEAN-GCC FOC and the outcomes of the ASEAN-GCC Summits.
11. The Second ASEAN-GCC Summit, held on 27 May 2025 in Kuala Lumpur, reaffirmed both sides' commitment to strengthening their strategic partnership through the effective implementation of the ASEAN-GCC FOC (2024–2028) and the outcomes of the two Summits. The Leaders also adopted the Joint Declaration

on Economic Cooperation between ASEAN and the GCC, underscoring economic cooperation as a key pillar of the partnership.

12. The ASEAN-GCC-China Summit was also convened as a one-off event, back-to-back with the Second ASEAN-GCC Summit. During the Summit, Leaders agreed to foster collaboration that promotes economic prosperity, resilience and sustainable development among ASEAN, the GCC, and China, based on mutual respect, mutual trust, and mutual benefit, and anchored on the principles of inclusivity and sustainability in engaging all interested partners. Underlining inclusivity, sustainability, resilience, and equal partnership, the Summit agreed to undertake collaborative efforts toward a peaceful, prosperous and equitable future in the areas of economic integration, connectivity, energy security and sustainability, digital transformation and innovation, food and agriculture, and people-to-people exchanges.
13. Under the leadership of the Secretary-General of ASEAN, H.E. Dr. Kao Kim Hourn, and the Secretary-General of the GCC, H.E. Jasem Mohamed Albudaiwi, the ASEAN Secretariat and the GCC Secretariat continue to strengthen coordination and facilitate the implementation of the ASEAN-GCC FOC (2024–2028). This includes identifying areas for practical cooperation, convening regular meetings and exchanges between the two Secretariats, and facilitating the sharing of information, experiences and best practices in areas covered by the FOC.
14. Since 2024, the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN (CPR) and the GCC Ambassadors' Council in Jakarta have convened annual meetings to review the implementation of the ASEAN-GCC FOC (2024–2028), exchange views on the future direction of ASEAN-GCC relations, and strengthen coordination between ASEAN and the GCC. These meetings have become an important mechanism for translating the decisions of the Leaders and Ministers into practical cooperation and fostering closer engagement between ASEAN and GCC institutions. The Third Meeting is scheduled to be held on 14 August 2026.

Political-Security Cooperation

15. Political cooperation between ASEAN and the GCC continues to deepen through regular engagement at all levels, including biennial Summits, Foreign Ministers', Senior Officials' and Ambassadorial-level meetings, as outlined above. Guided by the outcomes of the ASEAN-GCC Summits, both sides remain committed to promoting peace, security, stability and prosperity in accordance with the Charter of the United Nations, international law and the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation in Southeast Asia (TAC).
16. The GCC Member States have continued to strengthen engagement with ASEAN, as demonstrated by the conferment of the status of Sectoral Dialogue Partners of

ASEAN on the United Arab Emirates (UAE) in 2022 and Qatar in 2026, the accession of all the GCC Member States to the TAC, and the accreditation of Ambassadors of all GCC Member States to ASEAN. The UAE has also appointed a dedicated Ambassador to ASEAN and is in the process of establishing a dedicated UAE Mission to ASEAN. Additionally, ASEAN has established Committees in all the GCC capitals: Abu Dhabi, Doha, Kuwait City, Manama, Muscat and Riyadh.

17. ASEAN and the GCC have strengthened cooperation in addressing transnational security challenges, particularly through enhanced engagement between the ASEAN Chiefs of National Police (ASEANAPOL) and the Gulf Cooperation Council Police (GCCPOL). Building on GCCPOL's participation in successive ASEANAPOL Conferences, both sides are currently finalising a Joint Action Plan to guide practical cooperation in combating transnational crime. ASEANAPOL also participated in the First Meeting of the Directors General of Criminal Investigations and Intelligence between the GCC and Asia in April 2026, further promoting institutional cooperation and the exchange of expertise in addressing transnational crime and emerging security challenges.

Economic Cooperation

18. Economic cooperation has become one of the strongest pillars of ASEAN-GCC relations. Guided by the ASEAN-GCC Framework of Cooperation (2024–2028) and the Joint Declaration on Economic Cooperation adopted at the Second ASEAN-GCC Summit, ASEAN and the GCC continue to deepen economic integration by strengthening trade and investment while expanding cooperation across priority sectors, including digital economy and innovation, renewable energy, food security and sustainable agriculture, supply chains, tourism, transport, financial services and micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs).
19. The GCC remains an important economic partner for ASEAN. In 2025, two-way merchandise trade increased to USD 137.75 billion, up from USD 130.39 billion in 2024. While foreign direct investment (FDI) flows from the GCC to ASEAN declined during the same period, tourist arrivals from the GCC increased from approximately 1.2 million in 2024 to 1.3 million in 2025, reflecting the growing economic and people-to-people linkages between the two regions.
20. A key priority of ASEAN-GCC economic cooperation is the proposed ASEAN-GCC Free Trade Agreement (FTA). At the Second ASEAN-GCC Summit, the Leaders agreed to undertake a Joint Feasibility Study on a possible FTA and initiate discussions towards its establishment. Work is ongoing towards advancing discussions and the feasibility study on the proposed ASEAN-GCC FTA.

21. In parallel, ASEAN and the GCC are finalising a Work Programme to operationalise the Joint Declaration on Economic Cooperation through practical collaboration across its priority sectors. The Work Programme covers practical cooperation in areas including trade and investment, digital economy and innovation, energy, food security and sustainability, financial services, micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs), transport, and tourism.
22. Beyond trade and investment, ASEAN and the GCC are expanding cooperation in emerging sectors that support sustainable and inclusive growth, including digital transformation, artificial intelligence, financial technology, Islamic finance, the halal economy, renewable energy and the green transition. Both sides are also exploring closer collaboration in food security and sustainable agriculture, tourism, intellectual property, innovation, and private sector engagement, including through closer cooperation between the ASEAN Business Advisory Council (ASEAN-BAC) and the business community in GCC Member States, as well as by fostering stronger business-to-business partnerships. The ASEAN-GCC-China CEO Roundtable, held in Kuala Lumpur in May 2025, further highlighted growing private sector interest in advancing cooperation in areas such as infrastructure financing, digital transformation, artificial intelligence, food security and the halal economy.

Socio-Cultural Cooperation

23. Socio-cultural cooperation forms an important pillar of ASEAN-GCC relations. Under the ASEAN-GCC Framework of Cooperation (2024–2028), ASEAN and the GCC are exploring collaboration in education, culture, climate change and environment, media, and people-to-people exchanges, including among youth, academics and research institutions. The two sides are also enhancing cooperation in disaster management and humanitarian assistance through the GCC Emergency Management Center's participation in ASEAN disaster management dialogues, consultations and workshops, facilitating the exchange of experiences and best practices in disaster preparedness and emergency response.
