



Photo Credit: Pixabay

## Staying the Course: ASEAN's Socio-Community and 2026 Sustainable Development priorities

*Danielle Lynn Goh and Mely Caballero-Anthony*

The vision of building an integrated ASEAN Community anchored on the three community pillars of political-security, economic and socio-cultural communities remains central amidst the rising tide of geopolitical uncertainty and global risks. The ASEAN Community Vision 2045, adopted at the 46<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Summit in 2025, identifies future megatrends ranging from climate change and natural disasters, health security, ageing societies, the impact of Artificial Intelligence (AI), future of work, and the empowerment of women and youth. These issues transcend national borders and require a concerted effort across the region for responding to these challenges. Out of ASEAN's three community pillars – the political-security community (APSC), economic community (AEC) and the Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), the ASCC pillar is indispensable in ASEAN's endeavour to actualise a regional community that is caring, prosperous and inclusive. This requires commitment to deeper regional integration and solidarity to ensure that responses to current threats remain anchored in protecting human security through social protection, poverty reduction, gender and youth inclusion, health security, climate resilience, as well as the strategic use of ASEAN's soft power through culture, arts and sports.

### Priorities of the ASCC 2045 Strategic Plan

Within the ASCC 2045 strategic plan, digitalisation and the changing labour workforce in ASEAN with emerging technologies such as AI have surfaced as a prominent area of growth. Digital upskilling and literacy are recognised as a means to enable ASEAN member states to close the developmental gap for example be-

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tween rural and urban populations. Access to information, communication and digital technologies is fundamental in the actualisation of a broad array of human rights and social justice. A recent study on the state of digitalisation in Southeast Asia found that within the region, there remains a digital divide between the member states, presenting challenges to economic integration and growth. Regionally, there have been several frameworks that undergird ASEAN's ambitions in digital integration, including the ASEAN Digital Framework Integration Action Plan and the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement. Beyond advancing equal access to technologies, digital literacy is vital to counter misinformation and disinformation, and a more informed society on the opportunities and risks embedded in the usage of emerging technologies.

ASEAN's ambition toward reducing the developmental gap is also seen in the ASCC 2045 focus on inclusive development, and the full and equal participation of women in the ASEAN community building processes. The 2025 ASEAN Women, Peace and Security (WPS) summit reaffirmed the region's commitment to the Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace and Security, placing the agenda as integral to the realisation of ASEAN 2045. The four pillars of WPS – prevention, participation, protection and relief and recovery are embedded in the ASCC strategic plan, with a particular focus on the participation and empowerment of women in the region, and in peace and security. The ASCC 2045 also highlights the need to recognise and reduce the burden of unpaid care work of women and girls.

To address the long-term challenges of climate change and sustainable development, the ASCC 2045 strategic plan envisions the growth of a 'green ASEAN', through the strengthening of policies and regional agreements on transboundary environmental issues, such as the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution (AATHP), and the development of a sustainable green economy, with opportunities for growth in 'green jobs' and the low-carbon energy transition. Biodiversity conservation is also an indelible part in the advancement of its sustainability agenda. The ASEAN biodiversity plan endeavours to foster collective action and coordination across the region on the conservation and sustainable use of its biological resources and enhance the implementation of the National Biodiversity Strategies and Action Plans (NBSAPs). While biodiversity conservation is mentioned in the ASCC 2045, more attention can be made toward nature-based solutions of the restoration of ecosystems and biodiversity in the region.

ASEAN states also face changing health security and labour concerns, with demographic shifts in most countries in the region, with Thailand, Singapore and Vietnam having the highest share of elderly persons as of 2023. These trends call upon ASEAN member states to adapt healthcare and social support systems, to reduce the risks of non-communicable diseases and the promotion of healthy and active ageing. Through the ASCC 2045, ASEAN is also aiming to strengthen its collective resilience for future health crises, pandemics and health-related impacts from climate change. The One Health Initiative and the established ASEAN One Health Network would expand multilateral efforts to coordinate national and regional implementation, recognising the interconnectedness of the health of the environment, animals, plants and humans.

### What's Next in 2026?

With the Philippines taking on the ASEAN chairmanship in 2026, much is expected in moving the ASCC these strategic thrusts forward. Against the ASCC imperatives, the ongoing conflict in Myanmar and the border disputes between Thailand and Cambodia are issues that the Philippines would have to contend with during its chairmanship. Early statements from the country's foreign affairs departments have shown that Manila is likely to have a renewed focus on the socio-cultural pillar and press on with the need for ASEAN to maintain regional solidarity, with broad priorities on peace and security, maritime cooperation, climate change and AI governance.

### SUGGESTED READINGS

ASEAN. "Achieving the ASEAN Community Vision 2045." *The ASEAN Magazine*, 2024.

ASEAN. *ASEAN 2045: Our Shared Future*. Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, May 2025.

Buensuceso, Elizabeth P. 2025. "ASEAN Vision 2045: What Does It Hold for Our Shared Future?" *ASEANFocus+*, 12 June 2025.

Danish Raja Reza, "Philippines to Bring Fresh Sociocultural Focus to 2026 ASEAN Chairmanship," *Free Malaysia Today*, 29 October 2025.

Jose Miguelito Enriquez, "ASEAN 2045: Setting Ambitious Goals Amid Uncertain Times," *RSIS Commentary*, no. CO25136, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies, 23 June 2025.

# CLIMATE CHANGE



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

## NEWS & COMMENTARIES

### **Bridging the disconnect: COP30 and the way forward in climate governance**

Despite its emphasis on collective action, civil society and Indigenous-led backlash at COP30 highlight a persistent gap in climate governance. Addressing state-centrism and COP lobbyism while adopting a human security approach is essential to achieve climate justice.

**Adam X. Hansen**

RSIS Commentary | 1 December 2025

### **Between ambition and implementation: Just and inclusive energy transitions in Southeast Asia**

While ASEAN has embraced the vision of a just and inclusive energy transition, its latest planning documents do not adequately address the justice-related issues on the ground. As energy transitions accelerate, closing this gap will require a stronger focus on concrete participatory actions and greater regional accountability.

**Margareth Sembiring**

RSIS Commentary | 9 December 2025

### **Extreme weather caused \$288 billion in disaster losses in 2025: Reinsurer Munich Re**

Weather disasters made up 92% of all 2025 losses worldwide and 97% of insured losses, global reinsurer Munich Re has said, highlighting the increasingly costly and deadly effects of climate change. The Asia-Pacific was particularly affected in 2025, accounting for 13,600 out of 17,200 disaster-related deaths worldwide, while only 8% of all losses in Southeast Asia were insured, leaving many people without a vital safety net.

**David Fogarty**

The Straits Times | 13 January 2025

### **As the UN's high seas treaty takes effect, what does it mean for Southeast Asia?**

A landmark United Nations deal commonly referred to as the High Seas Treaty or BBNJ enters into force in 2026, becoming international law. The law, ratified by seven Southeast Asian countries, fundamentally rewrites ocean protections, bringing new opportunities and challenges for the region.

**Jack Board**

Channel News Asia | 17 January 2025

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

### **Steadying the ship: ASEAN's role in global climate action in the Trump 2.0 era**

The second Trump administration has reversed US climate policy. This creates an opportunity for ASEAN to assert regional leadership by establishing leadership in global carbon markets by harmonising a regional framework, championing multilateral climate diplomacy with key partners, and pioneering a regional data and resilience hub to counter the loss of US scientific support.

**Pey Peili and Adam X. Hansen**

S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies | 2025

### **Counting the cost 2025: A year of climate breakdown**

In 2025, the intensity of extreme weather reached new heights: heatwaves pushing the limits of human adaptation, record-breaking hurricanes and typhoons overwhelming disaster response systems, and a brutal combination of extreme rainfall and severe droughts. This year has been marked by climate breakdown on an alarming scale, resulting in 2025 being one of the costliest years.

**Joe Ware and Oliver Pearce**

Christian Aid | 2025

## EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

### **Asia-Pacific Forum on Sustainable Development**

The APFSD aims to inform, empower, and support Asia-Pacific countries (especially least developed countries, landlocked developing countries and small island developing States) in their efforts to achieve the 17 Sustainable Development Goals and their targets set out by the 2030 Agenda by identifying regional trends and sharing best practices and lessons learned.

**Bangkok, Thailand**

24-27 February 2026

# ENERGY SECURITY



Photo Credit: Adobe Firefly Generated Images

## NEWS & COMMENTARIES

### Southeast Asia's nuclear future

As COP30 concluded in Brazil, nuclear power received renewed global attention as countries seek reliable, low-carbon solutions to growing energy demand – including the surge driven by artificial intelligence. A few Southeast Asian states are now taking preparatory steps toward nuclear deployment or building up local capacity, requiring long-term public trust, strong capacity-building and workforce development, and deeper regional and international cooperation on nuclear safety, security, and governance.

**Julius Cesar Trajano**

RSIS Commentary | 9 December 2025

### Asia's coal surge reshapes global power priorities

Global renewable energy production is expected to double by 2030, creating extremely lucrative business opportunities for the companies that manage to carve out a share of the market. Energy production and energy storage are both crucial components of the energy transition from fossil fuels to renewables.

**Kaleigh Harrison**

E+E Leader | 16 December 2025

### Energy Asia 2025 offers clear road map for sustainable global net-zero transition

Its conclusions paved the way for Asia's economies to build on their net-zero plans – where harmful greenhouse gas emissions are balanced by removing the same amount from the atmosphere.

**Morning Studio Editors**

South China Morning Post | 19 December 2025

### Coal transition: An advantage for Southeast Asia

Southeast Asia is a catalyst in the global energy transition story. It can be the example other emerging economies look to when asking how to cut coal emissions while supporting growth. And the region has strong incentives to move now: lower power prices, investment in clean industries, and a workforce ready for the jobs of tomorrow.

**Julia Skorupska**

Inquirer.net | 2 January 2026

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

### The role of nuclear energy in powering universal energy abundance for emerging economies

The findings suggest that under the right policy and regulatory conditions, nuclear power — including small modular reactors (SMRs) — could play a more meaningful role in these countries' energy futures than previously assumed, including delivering up to 30% of electricity generation and lowering system costs by up to 31% by 2050.

**Bayesian Energy, Radiant Energy Group and The Rockefeller Foundation.**

2025

### Critical minerals and the clean energy transition: the role of innovation across the supply chain

This paper presents a simple framework to explore how innovation can strengthen critical mineral supply chains. It examines technological, digital and organisational solutions across the full lifecycle — from mining exploration and processing, to manufacturing, reuse and recycling.

**Eugenie Dugoua and Joelle Noailly**

Grantham Research Institute on Climate Change and the Environment | 2025

## EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

### 2026 Call for Papers: Redefining Nuclear Physical Security – The Evolving Paradigms of the 21st Century

The physical security landscape for nuclear facilities is undergoing rapid transformation. Recent global conflicts and technological innovations have introduced new risks that threaten both the civilian nuclear energy sector and the military nuclear deterrent.

**International Journal of Nuclear Security**

Paper Submission by 1 April 2026

# FOOD SECURITY



Photo Credit: Adobe Firefly Generated Images

## NEWS & COMMENTARIES

### Prabowo orders village-level food barns to boost food security

President Prabowo Subianto has instructed the development of food storage facilities, or food barns, down to the village level as part of a strategy to strengthen national food security and anticipate the impact of natural disasters and disruptions to logistics and distribution networks.

**Anton Santoso**

Antara | 17 December 2025

### Singapore Food Story 2: Setting hand to plough once again

On 4 November 2025, the hand was once again set to the plough, with the announcement of “Singapore Food Story 2”, marking another transition point in the city-state’s food security strategy leading up to 2035. This new strategy represents a step forward in improving the clarity of its food self-sufficiency goals compared to its predecessor strategies. But the push for clarity will need to be sustained in the long term, while shifting focus to improving farming profitability.

**Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros**

RSIS Commentary | 29 December 2025

### Rice production milestone: India overtakes China as top global producer, says minister; output hits 150.18 million tonnes

India has emerged as the world’s largest rice producer. The Union agriculture minister Chouhan said India attributed this “great success” to the production of high-yielding seeds that have transformed the “food-deficient” nation into a global food provider, as part of a new phase of its agricultural revolution driven by climate-resilient seeds resistant to major pests and diseases.

**TOI Business Desk**

Times of India | 4 January 2026

### Rice farmers in the Philippines face more pressure as imports resume

Starting this year, rice imports in the Philippines as the world’s largest rice importer will resume under a “flexible” tariff scheme that lets duties rise or fall in response to global prices. While this allows for lower rice prices for consumers, farmers have clamoured that the prices with open trade are too low to allow them to recover their production and investment costs.

**Vonn Andrei E. Villamiel**

Business World | 5 January 2026

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

### Food insecurity across age: Evidence from a global study

This study uses Gallup World Poll data from over 390,000 people across 132 countries to examine how food insecurity varies by age. It finds that adolescents experience the highest levels of food insecurity, worsened by factors like the COVID-19 pandemic and geopolitical instability. Key socioeconomic determinants include income, education, health, and social capital. The authors argue for age-specific policies to address these disparities, especially to protect adolescents’ health and development.

**David Leblang, et al.**

Global Food Security | 2025

### Can digital literacy reduce the intensity of pesticide application by farmers in the context of labour ageing?

This research examines how digital literacy influences farmers’ pesticide use intensity amid an aging agricultural workforce in China, using 2020 cross-sectional data. It finds that higher digital literacy significantly reduces pesticide application, partly by encouraging the purchase of agricultural insurance and enabling more informed, green production decisions. The effect varies by region and income level, with stronger impacts in wealthier and larger areas. The authors recommend improving farmers’ digital skills especially among older farmers to promote sustainable pest management.

**Haoming He, et al.**

Frontiers in Sustainable Food Systems | 2025

## EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

### Food Systems Solutions Webinar 2025 | Leveraging the Rio Conventions

This webinar is organized in partnership with the Committee on World Food Security (CFS) and the Agroecology Coalition and the Coalition of Action for Soil Health (CA4SH) and examines how harnessing the synergies between the three Rio Conventions—the Convention on Biological Diversity (CBD), the UN Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD), and the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC)—can drive sustainable food systems transformation, accelerate the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and deliver transformative results.

**Recorded Webinar**



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## NEWS & COMMENTARIES

### **US approves oral drug for adults with rare type of lung cancer after early clinical trials globally**

FDA granted accelerated approval to oral sevabertinib for HER2-mutant non-small-cell lung cancer, after trials involving National Cancer Centre Singapore showed tumour shrinkage, manageable safety, and earlier access for previously treated patients.

**Judith Tan**

*The Straits Times* | 15 December 2025

### **Babies with too much screen time may become anxious teens with slower decision-making: Singapore study**

A Singapore study links excessive infant screen time from before age two to altered brain development and teen anxiety. However, frequent parent-child reading from age three can significantly mitigate some of these effects. Experts recommend responsible use of screens with parental involvement.

**Judith Tan**

*The Straits Times* | 30 December 2025

### **CDC says flu activity probably has not peaked amid record-breaking season**

The US Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) reports flu activity remains high and likely has not peaked globally. Record hospitalisations, 17 pediatric deaths, and low vaccination rates in the US amid a dominant Influenza A(H3N2) with a new variant called subclade K means that flu cases are still surging.

**Deidre McPhillips**

*CNN Health* | 10 January 2026

### **‘Dangerous and alarming’: Google removes some of its AI summaries after users’ health put at risk**

Google removed AI health summaries after a Guardian investigation revealed dangerous inaccuracies, including misleading liver test info; experts warn broader issues with AI-generated medical advice remain unresolved.

**Andrew Gregory**

*The Guardian* | 11 January 2026

## SELECTED PUBLICATION

### **Topological turning points across the human lifespan**

A large-scale study identifies four major brain network turning points at ages 9, 32, 66, and 83, revealing distinct lifespan phases of structural topology development linked to cognitive, behavioural, and health milestones.

**Alex Mousley et al.**

*Nature Communications*, Vol. 16, Article 10055 | 2025

### **Caregiver perceptions of the impact and effect of family conferences for patients with complex and high-level palliative care needs: a cross-sectional survey study**

Family conferences in palliative and primary care improved caregivers’ perceptions of communication, collaboration, and care planning, with high satisfaction and better alignment between desired and actual place of death, highlighting their value in end-of-life care.

**Ana Nascimento, et al.**

*BMC Palliative Care* | 2026

## EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

### **Singapore Conference on Ageing and Health 2026**

Themed ‘Ageing Well in the Community, Exploring New Horizons’, the Singapore Conference on Ageing and Health 2026 features keynote speeches by international experts and presentations by over 170 presenters from 15 countries. Panel discussions and networking sessions will also highlight new strategies and opportunities for collaborations emerging research and practice.

**National University of Singapore**

2-3 February 2026



Photo Credit: Adobe Firefly Generated Images

## NEWS & COMMENTARIES

### **Malaysia launches landmark National Action Plan for Health Security (MyNAPHS 2025-2030)**

Malaysia has taken a big step forward to strengthen its health security with the launch of the Malaysia National Action Plan for Health Security (MyNAPHS 2025-2030). The plan sets out a comprehensive roadmap to prevent, detect and respond to health emergencies, ensuring resilience across sectors and communities.

**World Health Organization**

4 December 2025

### **BAI sounds alarm as deadly goat, sheep virus threatens Philippines**

The Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) is urging goat and sheep raisers to strengthen their biosecurity measures following the detection of peste des petits ruminants (PPR) disease that could wipe out the majority of the affected herd. The disease causes fever, eye and nasal discharges, mouth lesions, pneumonia, severe diarrhoea, and often a high mortality rate in affected animals.

**Dexter Barro II**

Manila Bulletin | 8 December 2025

### **The United States isn't prepared for another pandemic. Here's what should happen**

This short news report tackles the question of how best should the US government and others around the world prepare for another virus to spark a pandemic? A good place to start would be to double-down on the medical science to develop better vaccines that either are more durable or more broadly effective against a range of viruses and to develop a consensus around what didn't work during COVID and how to improve next time around.

**Matt Field**

Bulletin of the Atomic Scientists | 10 December 2025

### **China and Malaysia co-hosted the second regional workshop on implementing the BWC and promoting biosafety and biosecurity in Southeast Asia**

More than 70 participants from ten ASEAN Member States, as well as representative from 15 different Chinese institutions attended the event. They highlighted the value of bringing together stakeholders from diplomatic, security, and health sectors, which fostered a meaningful multisectoral dialogue at the regional level.

**United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs**

24 December 2025

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

### **African Conference on the biological weapons convention**

After three years of activities supporting the universalization and implementation of the BWC in Africa, the conference served as an important milestone in assessing the progress made and the way forward. The objective of the conference itself was also to provide a platform for National Contact Points and national experts to strengthen collaboration at the regional and subregional level.

**United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs**

Summary Report | 2025

### **WHO revises global framework for monitoring nonpharmaceutical interventions in health emergencies**

The WHO has released a revised edition of its Global Guidance on Monitoring Public Health and Social Measures Policies During Health Emergencies. The revised document offers a comprehensive, actionable framework for establishing and maintaining a robust public health and social measures monitoring system through six-step process.

**Yan Liu, et al.**

Journal of Biosafety and Biosecurity, Vol. 7, Issue 4 | 2025

## EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

### **Second World Animal Biosecurity Association (WABA) Conference**

This conference will bring together over 250 leading experts, decision-makers, and professional from across the globe, all united by a shared commitment to advancing biosecurity in animals.

**Ghent, Belgium**

24-26 November 2026

# MIGRATION



Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

## NEWS & COMMENTARIES

**Growing shares say the Trump administration is doing 'too much' to deport immigrants in the U.S. illegally**

With the escalation of deportations by the Trump administration, 53% of Americans surveyed say that the US is doing "too much" when deporting immigrants living in the country illegally. The percentage has increased from 44% in March.

**Hannah Hartig**

Pew Research Center | 15 December 2025

**Migrant women at risk of violence and exploitation**

Migration can offer the chance for new opportunities and to build a better life. But for millions of women around the world, crossing a border can come at an enormous cost: violence, labour exploitation, and discrimination.

**UN Women** | 15 December 2025

**The biggest climate migration problem may be that there's not enough of it**

When disaster strikes, people with disabilities, the elderly, and the poor tend to be less likely to be able to evacuate, and therefore account for a large number of fatalities. In the long run, "trapped populations" may be the worst victims of climate change.

**Julian Hattem**

Grist | 5 January 2026

**Africa needs to prepare for its new reality of climate migration**

Across Africa, climate change is inducing millions of people to move. These movements are often treated as humanitarian stories, but they are also institutional stress tests. Sudden inflows of people highlight the strengths and weaknesses of systems meant to manage land, employment opportunities, housing, and security.

**Nixon S. Chekenya and Canicio Dzingirai**

LSE | 6 January 2026

## SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

**Advancing skills mobility, recognition and development in ASEAN: Unlocking opportunities for migrant workers through the Vientiane declaration**

The report provides an analysis of the current challenges and opportunities in advancing skills mobility across ASEAN. It identifies critical policy gaps and offers practical recommendations to strengthen labour migration governance through a skills lens.

**International Labour Organization**

2025

**Best practices for designing and managing labour migration corridors to Europe**

Europe is facing a looming skills and labour crisis. What policies and practices can help ensure that labour migration benefits countries of destination and origin, employers, and migrant workers alike?

**Migration Policy Institute**

2025

## EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

**Achieving the "Quadruple Win": Labor Migration Strategies for Europe to Meet its Skill Needs**

The webinar presents the findings from a research report commissioned by the European Commission on the best practices for managing labour migration corridors of EU member states and partner countries. The research was based on the mapping of bilateral labour migration corridors, and fieldwork research with government, civil society, employers and migrant workers.

**Webinar**

11 December 2025