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ASCC 2045: Road to Gender Equality?

Tamara Nair

In May 2025, the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 was launched at the 46th ASEAN Leaders' Summit in Kuala Lumpur. The vision aims to create a "Resilient, Innovative, Dynamic, and People-Centred ASEAN" in an increasingly uncertain geopolitical landscape. Within this framework, the ASCC Strategic Plan outlines ten strategic goals addressing regional megatrends and challenges. Gender equality is embedded across these objectives, reflecting ASEAN's recognition that inclusive development is essential for long-term regional resilience.

Despite these ambitions, achieving any form of gender equality across ASEAN by 2045 remains challenging.

Where ASEAN Stands on Gender Equality

Gender equality and the empowerment of women have long been priorities in ASEAN policy frameworks. Institutions such as the ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW) and the ASEAN Commission on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC) promote gender mainstreaming and inclusive policies across member states.

The [ASCC Strategic Plan](#) emphasises women's economic empowerment through improved access to education, technical and vocational training, and entrepreneurship opportunities. It also highlights the need to reduce systemic barriers faced by women through social protection policies and measures that address unpaid care responsibilities. Gender-responsive budgeting and gender-sensitive disaster risk management are also identified as key policy tools.

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Nevertheless, progress remains uneven across the region. The [ASEAN Gender Outlook 2024](#) shows improvements in poverty reduction and education outcomes but also highlights persistent gender disparities. Climate change and environmental degradation disproportionately affect women, increasing risks of food insecurity, limited access to water and clean energy, and higher unpaid care burdens. Although gender-disaggregated data collection has improved, significant differences remain across ASEAN member states.

Barriers to Achieving Gender Equality by 2045

Several structural barriers continue to hinder gender equality in ASEAN, including sociocultural norms, economic inequality, technological divides, and institutional constraints.

Deeply embedded gender norms remain a major challenge. Across Southeast Asia, women perform substantially more unpaid care and domestic labour than men. These responsibilities limit women's ability to participate fully in the labour market, advance professionally, and engage in political life.

Economic inequality also presents a significant obstacle. Women entrepreneurs often face limited access to finance, markets, training, and business networks. Gaps in financial literacy and digital skills further restrict their ability to expand enterprises in increasingly digital economies.

Global geopolitical and economic developments intensify these challenges. Conflicts in major energy-producing regions, including the Middle East, have contributed to volatility in global energy markets and rising fuel prices. For ASEAN economies sensitive to energy costs, such disruptions can trigger inflation and rising living costs. These pressures disproportionately affect women, who are more likely to work in informal sectors or operate micro-enterprises with limited financial buffers. Rising food and energy prices may therefore undermine women's economic empowerment and increase financial insecurity for women-led businesses.

As ASEAN economies adopt digital technologies, many women—particularly in rural areas—continue to face barriers to accessing digital infrastructure and education. Women remain underrepresented in STEM fields, limiting their participation in technological innovation and emerging sectors such as artificial intelligence.

Institutional factors within ASEAN also shape implementation outcomes. The organisation's principles of consensus and non-interference mean that regional agreements often rely on voluntary implementation rather than binding enforcement. As a result, gender equality initiatives are adopted unevenly across member states.

Can the ASCC Vision Move the Needle towards Gender Equality?

Achieving gender equality across ASEAN by 2045 is both ambitious (and near impossible) given the region's diverse political, economic, and social contexts. Nevertheless, the ASCC Strategic Plan provides a roadmap for progress.

Any success will depend on sustained political commitment from ASEAN member states to move beyond policy rhetoric and allocate resources to gender-responsive initiatives. Strengthening social protection systems, expanding women's access to economic opportunities, and ensuring women's participation in policymaking will be critical.

At the same time, ASEAN's progress will be influenced by broader geopolitical and economic dynamics. Global conflicts, energy market disruptions, and economic volatility may shift government priorities toward economic stabilisation and security concerns. To achieve the goals of the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, member states must therefore develop resilient and inclusive policy frameworks that maintain gender equality as a core component of regional development.

Ultimately, progress toward gender equality will require sustained regional cooperation, stronger institutional capacity, and continued engagement from civil society and international partners. Addressing structural inequalities while adapting to global economic and geopolitical changes will be essential if ASEAN is to realise its vision of an inclusive community by 2045.

SUGGESTED READINGS

ASEAN. "ASEAN Community Vision 2045: Resilient, Innovative, Dynamic, and People-Centred ASEAN." Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 2025.

ASEAN. "ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Strategic Plan 2025–2045." Jakarta: ASEAN Secretariat, 2025.

ASEAN and UN Women. "ASEAN Gender Outlook 2024: Achieving the SDGs for All and Leaving No Woman or Girl Behind." Bangkok: UN Women Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, 2024.

IMF. "World Economic Outlook: Global economy in Flux, Prospects Remain Dim. Navigating Global Divergences." Washington, DC: International Monetary Fund, 2025.

Enriquez, Jose Miguelito. "ASEAN 2045: Setting Ambitious Goals Amid Uncertain Times." *RSIS Commentary No. CO25/36*. S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies (RSIS), Nanyang Technological University, 23 June 2025

CLIMATE CHANGE



Photo Credit: Freepik.com

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Italy calls for suspension of carbon price in major attack on EU climate policy

The Italian government has demanded the European Union pause its flagship climate law, the 20-year-old Emissions Trading System (ETS), marking another sign of waning support for the EU's central tool in combatting climate change.

Ben Munster, Zia Weise, and Elene Giordano

Politico | 26 February 2026

S'pore sets up heat resilience office, invests \$40m in heat research as part of new adaptation efforts

Protecting Singapore from climate impacts will be a major focus for the Ministry of Sustainability and the Environment (MSE) this year, having designated 2026 as the Year of Climate Adaptation. These initiatives include girding coastlines against rising sea levels and strengthening Singapore's food security.

Shabana Begum

The Straits Times | 3 March 2026

China sets 17 per cent carbon intensity cut in new five-year climate plan

China has released a new five-year plan aimed at reducing the carbon emissions of its economy, relying heavily on its rapidly expanding renewable energy sector to curb coal use and greenhouse gas output. Aiming to cut carbon intensity by 17 per cent between 2026 and 2030, the target progresses but falls short of its pledges under the Paris climate agreement.

Taejun Kang

Eco-Business | 6 March 2026

Super El Niño could bring severe drought to ASEAN and push 2027 to record heat

Meteorologists around the world are closely monitoring the El Niño event expected to develop this year, which may evolve into a severe "Super El Niño" by 2027. Coupled with effects of climate change, scientists are anticipating periods of lower-than-normal rainfall in Southeast Asia, which will directly affect food security and agricultural output.

Krittapol Suthetpattarakool

Nation Thailand | 11 March 2026

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Strengthening ASEAN-India ties: Increasing climate cooperation in the maritime domain

Maritime security has traditionally been a key area of cooperation for ASEAN and India. ASEAN and India could build on pre-existing maritime mechanisms, such as the ADMM-Plus Experts' Working Groups (EWGs) on Maritime Security and Track II level interactions, to use as an avenue to share knowledge and enhance cooperation on climate change.

S. Nanthini

IDSS Paper, S. Rajaratnam School of International Studies | 2026

Sea level much higher than assumed in most coastal hazard assessments

The impacts of sea-level rise and other hazards on the coasts of the world are determined by coastal sea-level height and land elevation. The study finds that measured coastal sea level is higher than assumed in most hazard assessments. This means 31–37% more land and 48–68% more people (increasing estimates to 77–132 million) would fall below sea level.

Katharina Seeger and Philip S. J. Minderhoud

Nature | 2026

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

First Conference on Transitioning Away from Fossil Fuels

The Conference aims to initiate a concrete process to transition away from fossil fuels. This process will be informed by the experience and perspectives of national and subnational governments, academia, Indigenous Peoples, Peoples of African Descent, peasants, civil society, workers, the private sector, and other key actors at different stages of the transition.

Santa Marta, Colombia

24-29 April 2026

ENERGY SECURITY



Photo Credit: Adobe Firefly Generated Images

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

How renewable energy shields countries from oil price shocks

Countries that generate more of their power from wind, solar and other renewable sources are better protected from global energy shocks, experts say, as the escalating conflict in the Middle East rattles global markets.

Natalie Muller

DW | 10 March 2026

Four more countries join global commitment to Triple Nuclear Energy at Paris Summit

Announced at the 2nd Nuclear Energy Summit 2026 in Paris on 10 March, the governments of Belgium, Brazil, China and Italy have endorsed the Declaration to Triple Nuclear Energy, joining a growing coalition of nations committed to expanding nuclear capacity as part of the global clean energy transition.

World Nuclear Association

10 March 2026

Vietnam promotes science, technology, energy cooperation with French businesses

Vietnam hopes that French enterprises will step up partnerships with Vietnamese counterparts, enhance technology transfer, and regard Vietnam as a promising venue for piloting and implementing innovative technologies.

Vietnam National Agency

12 March 2026

How the Iran war is disrupting the Strait of Hormuz

Oil and gas prices have surged since the start of the war amid the collapse in Hormuz transits, and as Gulf producers lower their crude output as storage tanks fill up.

Bloomberg

Channel News Asia | 12 March 2026

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Financing the ASEAN power grid

Another common element across scenarios is the revival of fortunes for nuclear energy, with investment rising in both traditional large-scale plants and new designs, including small modular reactors (SMRs). More than 40 countries now include nuclear energy in their strategies and are taking steps to develop new projects.

James Bragg, et al.

Paris: International Energy Agency | 2026

The state of energy innovation 2026

The report finds that the context for energy innovation is tilting towards competitiveness and security. Many of the innovation-relevant policies launched in 2025 promote technological strength for economic competitiveness and energy security.

International Energy Agency

Paris: IEA | 2026

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

The International Conference on Computer Security in the Nuclear World: Securing the Future

The purpose of the conference is to provide a global forum for competent authorities, operators, system and security integrators, vendors, and other relevant entities engaged in computer security activities related to nuclear security or safety to share experiences, exchange information and foster international cooperation in computer security.

Vienna, Austria

11-15 May 2026

FOOD SECURITY



Photo Credit: Adobe Firefly Generated Images

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Strait of Hormuz: Gulf states' food security is at immediate risk but wider shortages could push up consumer prices globally

With more than 30% of Urea exports sourced from Gulf countries, and 11% of global seaborne trade passing the Strait of Hormuz (including 34% of seaborne oil), there is a risk that food and energy prices could increase amidst the Middle East war.

Gokcay Balci and Ebru Surucu-Balci

The Conversation | 4 March 2026

A big burden for farmers': Gulf shipping crisis threatens food price shock

Global fertiliser supply chains could be significantly impacted if the effective closure by Iran of the strait of Hormuz persists, prompting concerns from analysts about crop production and food security. The global nitrogen supply is expected to be further knocked by shutdowns of fossil gas plants in the Gulf. Qatar closed its largest facility after a drone attack.

Joanna Partridge

The Guardian | 5 March 2026

China aims to boost seed industry for self-reliance and food security, says minister

This year's Government Work Report emphasizes maintaining a strong focus on grain production, setting a target of 700 million metric tons as a key expectation for economic and social development. This comes after significant progress was reported from the 14th Five-Year Plan period (2021-25), with reported significant contributions of China's agricultural scientific and technological progress and coverage of improved seeds.

Zhao Yimeng

China Daily | 9 March 2026

Securing ASEAN's food resilience amidst the Middle East conflict

The Middle East conflict is set to have a double-whammy impact on both ASEAN's import of fertilisers, and its energy-intensive fertiliser production. The timing is critical as in the coming months, the five major crops, including rice, are being planted in ASEAN.

Jose Ma. Luis Montesclaros, Kayven Tan and Mely Cabalero-Anthony

RSIS Commentary | 20 March 2026

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

High-technology agriculture system to enhance food security: A concept of smart irrigation system using Internet of Things and cloud computing

This study explores the role of advanced digital technologies in improving agricultural productivity and water management to strengthen global food security. Recognising that climate change, inefficient irrigation practices and growing water scarcity threaten agricultural sustainability, the authors propose a high-technology smart irrigation framework that integrates Internet of Things (IoT), embedded systems and cloud computing.

Abdennabi Morchid, et al.

Journal of the Saudi Society of Agricultural Sciences | 2026

Assessing the relative roles of public and private inventories in buffering rice price volatility in the Philippines

This study assesses the roles of public and private rice inventories in stabilising rice prices in the Philippines. Using monthly data, it found that private stocks help smooth routine price fluctuations, while public reserves are crucial during major shocks such as production shortfalls or global price surges. The study concludes that a hybrid system combining private stocks with modest public reserves is most effective for managing price volatility and supporting food security.

Bernhard Dalheimer, et al.

Food Policy | 2026

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

NTU team awarded SSHR Seed Grant for study on digital agriculture in Singapore and Southeast Asia

An interdisciplinary team at RSIS NTU has recently received the NTU Social Sciences and Humanities Research (SSHR) Seed Grant to examine how digital agriculture can strengthen food security outcomes in Singapore and the broader Southeast Asian region.

NTU Food Research Systems

9 March 2026



Photo Credit: Adobe Firefly Generated Images

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Over 1 in 3 S'pore seniors have undiagnosed eye disease; 1 in 5 has significant hearing loss: Study

Singapore study reveals over one-third of seniors have undiagnosed eye disease, 70% hearing impairment with minimal aid use, plus high obesity and poor muscle health, urging holistic care and targeted awareness campaigns across ethnic groups.

Joyce Teo

The Straits Times | 23 February 2026

Genomics for Kids in ASEAN programme to set up registry to further tackle rare diseases in region

The Genomics for Kids in ASEAN programme established a genetic registry, cutting diagnosis time to weeks with a 52% success rate for 510 families, building regional precision medicine capabilities, especially for rare diseases.

Judith Tan

The Straits Times | 27 February 2026

Israeli strike kills 12 healthcare workers in southern Lebanon

Israel's strikes killed 12 medical workers in Lebanon, raising the toll to 31 in 12 days. Despite Israeli claims of Hezbollah misuse, human rights groups and the World Health Organization condemn these attacks as war crimes violating international humanitarian law and endangering healthcare security.

William Christon

The Guardian | 14 March 2026

Restraining and sedating dementia patients 'routine' in hospitals in England, study finds

A UK study reveals dementia patients face routine restraints and non-consensual sedation in hospitals. Staff cite safety concerns, but experts urge alternatives like supported walking to ensure dignified, less restrictive care for vulnerable patients.

Tobi Thomas

The Guardian | 15 March 2026

SELECTED PUBLICATION

Improved long-term care provision in the context of population ageing

Global population ageing demands robust long-term care systems to bridge the gap between life and healthy life expectancy. Strengthening integrated, equitable services is essential for dignity, reducing caregiver burdens, and achieving universal health coverage worldwide.

Jagadish K. Chhetri, et al.

Bulletin of the World Health Organization | 2026

Human hippocampal neurogenesis in adulthood, ageing and Alzheimer's disease

A Nature study reveals super-agers possess significantly more new hippocampal neurons than typical older adults of Alzheimer's patients, suggesting adult neurogenesis and unique genetic programming may preserve memory and cognition despite aging.

Ahmed Disouky, et al.

Nature | 2026

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

The Asian Conference on Aging & Gerontology (AGEN) 2026

Tokyo Japan hosts AGen 2026 conference for multidisciplinary insights on global aging. This conference offers networking, publishing opportunities, and access to both academic and practitioner presentations of new and intercultural knowledge on aging, mental health, and future collaborations.

Tokyo, Japan

22-27 March 2026

BIOSECURITY



Photo Credit: Adobe Firefly Generated Images

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Report finds US biodefense lagging as biological risks intensify

US biodefense capabilities have steadily weakened as biological threats have grown more frequent and dangerous and as US adversaries see biowarfare as an area of advantage. To strengthen US biodefense, key proposals such as the creation of White House Office of Biopreparedness have been raised.

Laine Bergeson

CIDRAP (University of Minnesota) | 6 February 2026

Experts warn open access bio-data could help AI design dangerous pathogens

Artificial Intelligence (AI) models for biology rely heavily on large volumes of biological data. But should this information be universally accessible, and how can its legitimate use be ensured? More than 100 researchers call for safeguards on high-risk biological datasets to prevent AI misuse, which could create deadly pathogens.

Marta Iraola Iribarren

Euro News | 18 February 2026

'I thought I was safe': What's behind Malaysia's rising TB cases

The timing of the spike in TB Infection in Malaysia has prompted warnings to curb TB transmission during the Ramadan season. As Malaysians flock to bazaars and gatherings to break fast, Malaysia's Health Ministry has reminded the public to take precautions in crowded and enclosed spaces.

Hadi Azmi and Muzliza Mustafa

The Straits Times | 26 February 2026

Thailand to digitally consolidate national disease surveillance system

Thailand is moving to digitally consolidate its national disease surveillance system after the Department of Disease Control signed a memorandum of understanding with the National Science and Technology Development Agency to integrate research, data platforms, and digital tools into a more proactive public health monitoring framework.

Adam Ang

Healthcare IT News | 15 March 2026

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Post-pandemic Southeast Asia: Revisiting the relevance of the sovereignty script

This piece examines Kilian Spandler's (2024) concept of 'sovereignty scripts' and interprets a state's engagement with a regional organisation as a pattern of interaction that both constrain and enable action through rules. In the context of post-pandemic Southeast Asia, it argues that regional dynamics are articulated through two sovereignty scripts: state-relational and people-relational.

Bama Andika Putra

Humanities and Social Sciences Communications, Vol. 14 | 2026

Biosecurity needs an expanded lens to remain effective

As the world enters 2026, global biosecurity stands at a crossroads. Its core institutions were shaped during bipolar and unipolar geopolitical eras and remain poorly adapted to today's contested multipolar world. A planet health perspective shifts from pathogen lists and national biodefense to a more coordinated, AI-aware governance that seeks to protect Earth's living systems.

The Lancet Planetary Health, Vol. 10, Issue 1
2026

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

2026 ABSANZ Annual Conference

With the theme, 'Shaping the Biosafety and Biosecurity Guardians of Tomorrow,' the conference will explore the diverse array of biosafety and biosecurity developments, initiatives, experiences, impacts and best practice ideas that unite community.

Melbourne, Australia

27-31 July 2026

MIGRATION



Photo Credit: Wikimedia Commons

NEWS & COMMENTARIES

Millions of Asian migrant workers in Gulf in danger as war with Iran rages on

Millions of migrant workers, who support some of the Middle East's most crucial sectors, are in the line of fire as Iran retaliates against the US-Israeli strikes that killed the Islamic Republic's supreme leader. Southeast and South Asian nations supply a large share of the labour in the Gulf, including medical practitioners, construction workers and household.

Bloomberg

The Straits Times | 4 March 2026

Singapore to ban caged lorries for transporting workers from 2027

Singapore will ban the use of caged lorries to transport workers from next year. Companies that fail to comply will face penalties, with details to be announced ahead of the 2027 deadline. The safety of transporting workers on lorries has been a long-running debate in Singapore.

Justin Ong Guang-Xi

CNA | 4 March 2026

Migrant fishers' deaths expose unchecked power at sea: Study

The deaths of migrant fishers at sea are largely driven by structural labour and governance failures, rather than by safety or compliance issues alone, a new study shows. Migrant sea workers, especially those recruited from low-wage Southeast Asian countries such as Indonesia, often experience violence and fatal abuse while aboard distant-water fishing vessels.

Basten Gokkon

Eco-Business | 5 March 2026

Spain's migrants welcome amnesty: 'It will help us in every way'

The Spanish government recently announced a scheme to legalise the status of at least half a million migrants. Migrants, both registered and undocumented, have a huge presence in the elderly care, agriculture and hospitality sectors.

Guy Hedgecoe

BBC | 9 March 2026

SELECTED PUBLICATIONS

Employment and social trends 2026

This publication examines the state of global labour markets, highlighting stable headline employment alongside stalled progress in job quality and widening inequalities. The report analyses productivity, demographic and economic pressures shaping work in the year ahead and outlines the challenges to achieving more inclusive growth.

International Labour Organization
2026

ICMPD migration outlook 2026

This report presents a brief analysis of recent migration and policy trends and provides an outlook on developments and events to watch out for in 2026. The global geopolitical environment is expected to remain volatile in 2026, and the underlying demand for protection and migration opportunities towards Europe and other safe, stable destination regions will therefore continue to be high.

International Centre for Migration Policy Development
2026

EVENT & ANNOUNCEMENT

Migration: A New Approach - World Economic Forum Annual Meeting 2026

Forced displacement has reached unprecedented levels, with more than 122 million people affected worldwide as of mid-2025. As natural disasters and geopolitical pressures intensify this trend, the growing scale and complexity of forced displacement underscores the need for new financial and operational approaches.

Recorded Webinar
20 January 2026