

## REGIONAL COOPERATION

Asia's importance for the EU is incontestable, and accordingly, the EU follows a forward-looking policy of engagement with Asia, both in the region and globally. In 1994, the European Commission published 'Towards a New Asia Strategy', a policy document underlining Asia's importance for Europe and calling for a balanced and comprehensive approach towards the region. As a follow-up, ['Europe and Asia: A Strategic Framework for Enhanced Partnership'](#) was adopted in 2001. Its core objective was to strengthen the EU's presence in Asia, raising it to a level commensurate with the growing global weight of an enlarged EU. The strategy focused on six key dimensions: strengthening EU engagement with Asia in political and security fields, expanding two-way trade and investment, reducing poverty and promoting the spread of democracy, good governance and the rule of law. In turn, the EU hoped to build global partnerships with key Asian partners and promote mutual awareness and understanding.

The EU Strategy ['Connecting Europe and Asia'](#) was renewed in September 2019. It focuses on sustainable, comprehensive and rule-based connectivity. The EU will support Asian countries in the four following areas:

1. Transport: Diversified trade and travel routes linking existing and future transport networks, shorter transit times and simplified customs procedures
2. Energy: More interconnected regional energy platforms, modern energy systems and environmentally friendly solutions
3. Digital: Increased access to digital services while maintaining a high level of protection of consumer and personal data
4. Human dimension: Advanced cooperation in education, research, innovation, culture and tourism

EU regional cooperation consists of Asia-wide regional programmes and cooperation with the [Association of South East Asian Nations](#) (ASEAN) on regional integration, principally managed by the [Mission of the EU to ASEAN](#).

### 1. EU programmes for regional cooperation

EU programmes for regional cooperation complement national cooperation programmes. They tackle challenges with a regional dimension and promote interstate cooperation on issues of mutual interest. Vietnam is an active participant in several EU-funded programmes supporting regional cooperation.

- EU-South East Asia cooperation on Civil Aviation aligns EU and South East Asia policy in civil aviation, facilitates market access for EU aviation industry and minimizes the impact of aviation on the environment and climate change.
- 'Advancing EU's role in multilateral fora in Asia' project promotes the political, security and economic interests of the EU by strengthening its engagement in different multilateral fora in Asia (for example ASEM).
- 'EU Business Avenues in South East Asia' project promotes market access for EU's small and medium enterprises in targeted sectors in South East Asian countries.
- 'IP Key South East Asia' project supports the introduction and spread of an EU level of IPR protection and enforcement in EU's South East Asian trading partners, with focus on countries where FTA negotiations/IP dialogues are on-going or foreseen.
- 'Responsible supply chains in Asia' project promotes smart, sustainable and inclusive growth by supporting CSR practices in global supply chains in Asia.
- 'Cooperation on competition in Asia' project fosters cooperation in competition policy between the EU and Asia with a view to promote convergence of laws and enforcement.

- 'Reducing plastic waste and marine litter – Circular Economy Asia' project implements actions that will address sustainable consumption and production of plastic and contribute to significantly reduce marine litter.
- 'Public diplomacy SEA' project aims to raise awareness of EU's policies through engagement with policy makers, media/opinion leaders, and the wider public at South East Asia level, especially in Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam.
- 'Economic empowerment of women' project strengthens women's role and their access to business opportunities and leadership within the private sector (through capacity building, expertise and knowledge sharing between the EU and Asia to advance an enabling business environment).
- 'EU-Indonesia and EU-Vietnam Partnership Facility' aims to strengthen EU-Indonesia and EU-Vietnam relations by supporting the implementation of the Partnership and Cooperation Agreements (PCAs) in key priority areas for the EU and in areas of mutual interest with the partner countries.
- Sustainable forestry programmes like FLEGT aim at improving sustainable forest governance.
- The [SWITCH-Asia](#) programme promotes Sustainable Consumption and Production.

## 2. ASEAN Regional Integration Cooperation

The EU and ASEAN share a commitment to regional integration as a means of fostering regional stability, building prosperity, and addressing global challenges. The EU fully supports ASEAN's renewed efforts to build closer relationships amongst its Member States.

The EU is seeking to increase dialogue with ASEAN, as well as pursuing closer coordination on regional and international issues. The Nuremberg Declaration and the joint Plan of Action aim to enhance this longstanding partnership by pursuing closer cooperation on political, security, economic, socio-cultural and development issues, as well as in the field of energy security and climate change/environment.

The EU's private sector is the largest investor in ASEAN, holding a quarter of total investment in the region. The EU is ASEAN's second largest trading partner worldwide and ASEAN ranks third in the list of the EU's trading partners.

The government of Vietnam is the Chair of ASEAN in 2020, participating actively in ASEAN policy dialogues and is keen to follow regional issues aligned to the national agenda. Vietnamese government officials benefit from regional institutional support provided by EU-funded projects.

### Current EU-ASEAN cooperation initiatives

As the largest donor to ASEAN, in the current budget cycle (2014-2020), the EU supports ASEAN integration and the ASEAN Secretariat with over € 250 million. The programme focuses on enhancing connectivity, trade, addressing disaster management, climate change and promoting dialogue.

The **cooperation agenda for 2014-2020** was agreed at the [21st EU-ASEAN Joint Cooperation Committee \(JCC\) Meeting](#) and focuses on three focal sectors:

#### 1. Connectivity: sustainable and inclusive economic integration

- A key goal of the connectivity envelope is to improve connectivity between the ASEAN member states through sustainable, inclusive economic integration and trade. Special attention is paid to countries that joined ASEAN the latest – Cambodia, Laos, Myanmar and Vietnam.

- The 'ASEAN Regional Integration Support by the EU' ([ARISE Plus](#)) programme supports (i) trade facilitation, standards, customs as well as transport facilitation; (ii) intellectual property rights; (iii) ASEAN Secretariat capacity building; (iv) Integration monitoring and statistics; and (v) Air transport. In addition, ARISE Plus Country-level interventions / National trade support programmes aim to boost the dialogue and interaction on trade-related areas in some ASEAN member states, including Vietnam.

## **2. Climate change, environment and disaster management**

- In the area of climate change, the 'Sustainable use of Peat Lands and Haze Mitigation in ASEAN (SUPA)' project aims at sustainable use of peatlands and reducing problems caused by haze, environmentally sustainable, low carbon and climate resilient cities, and environmental education.
- The 'Integrated Programme Enhancing Capacity of ASEAN Coordinating Centre for Humanitarian Assistance on Disaster Management' strengthens disaster management capacities in ASEAN and its Emergency Response Mechanisms.

## **3. Comprehensive Dialogue Facility**

The Regional EU-ASEAN Dialogue Instrument ([E-READI](#)) aims at supporting ASEAN regional integration processes and reducing poverty, by offering technical assistance and by conducting dialogues in multiple sectors:

- i. Human rights, maritime cooperation, peace and reconciliation, election observation, migration and mobility in the Security and Political pillar;
- ii. Science and technology, ICT, energy, trade facilitation, agriculture and natural resources, forestry in the Economic pillar;
- iii. Climate change, disaster management, environment, education and youth, development goals, health and communicable diseases, food safety, culture and media, and tourism in the Socio-Cultural pillar.

Apart from the above mentioned programmes, on-going cooperation activities include:

- 'EU Support to Higher Education in ASEAN Region' ([EU SHARE](#)), a programme that supports the harmonisation of recognition systems between ASEAN universities.
- 'Safe and Fair' programme that aims to assist women migrant workers in ASEAN.
- 'SMART Green ASEAN Cities' programme that aims to support smart solutions enabled by digitalization and use of technologies in ASEAN cities.

For more information please visit the website of the [Mission of the EU to ASEAN](#)