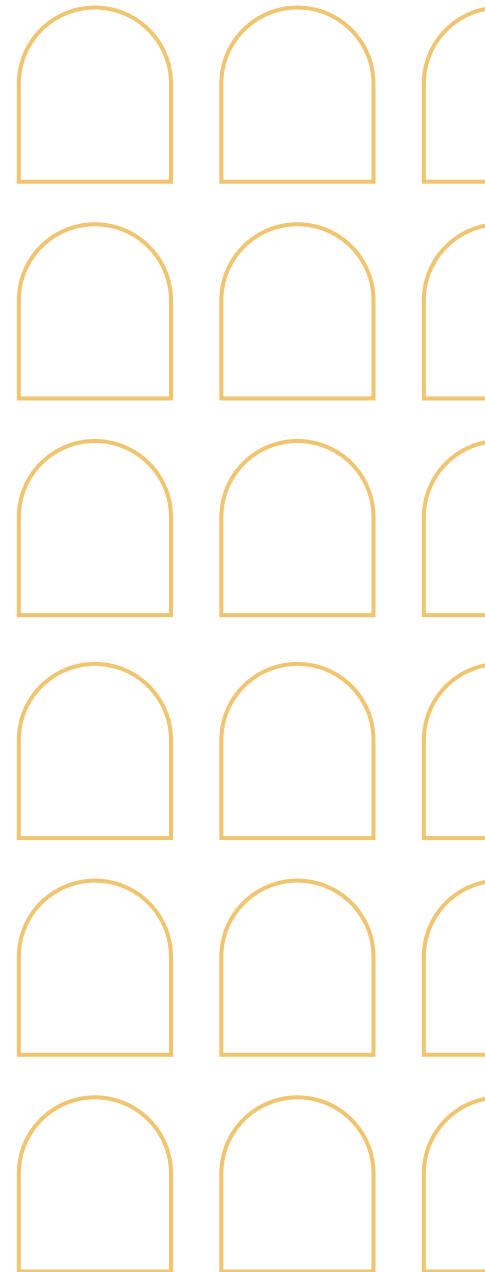


# POLICY BRIEF

## The EU's digital connectivity agenda in Southeast Asia and the benefits of coordination with Japan

### Summary

This policy brief develops the argument for strengthening cooperation between the EU and Southeast Asia in the field of digital connectivity and considers the added value of working with Japan as a like-minded partner in this part of the Indo-Pacific. Coordinated action will serve the long-term interests of the EU, ASEAN and their member states, promoting economic competitiveness and inclusive growth, and resilience, openness and freedom in the digital realm. A future partnership should focus on: (1) digital infrastructure; (2) data governance and digital trade regulation; and (3) the digital economy and financial technologies (fintech). Improved synergies are needed with other key players in the region that share European concerns about creeping digital authoritarianism in order to make the most of the relatively limited funds and action that each actor can bring to the region. All three sides stand to benefit from greater coordination between the EU and Japan, the two preferred and most trusted strategic partners of ASEAN, to hedge against the uncertainties in the US-China strategic rivalry.



**EU-Asia project**

Issue 2022/38

May 2022

### Author

Maaïke Okano-Heijmans is a Senior Research Fellow at the Netherlands Institute of International Relations 'Clingendael' and a Visiting Lecturer at the University of Leiden. Her main research interests are in (digital) connectivity and the geopolitics of high-tech in EU-Asia relations, with a special focus on China, Japan and the Indo-Pacific.

## Introduction<sup>1</sup>

Faced with an increasingly volatile international environment, in recent years the European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) have stepped up cooperation between their two blocs and member states, including in the digital field. The EU and ASEAN formalised cybersecurity cooperation in 2019 and adopted a joint ministerial statement on connectivity the following year, and in December 2021 the EU and Singapore launched talks on a digital partnership agreement.<sup>2</sup> These three agreements form building blocks for the broader EU-ASEAN cooperation that was stipulated in the EU's Indo-Pacific strategy in September 2021.<sup>3</sup>

Prominent examples of practical ties in the digital domain between governments and other key stakeholders in the EU and ASEAN include cyber security dialogues at both the region-to-region and member state levels and EU assistance to develop the ASEAN Digital Index (ADIX), which monitors digital progress and collects and disseminates reliable harmonised data in the region. For their digital infrastructure, various ASEAN governments have contracted Nokia and Ericsson to help develop broadband networks. In addition, the European Space Agency cooperates with the Asian Development Bank sharing satellite imagery to address practical challenges including real estate taxation and protection of mangrove biodiversity in ASEAN countries. Nevertheless, many challenges and opportunities in the digital domain remain to be addressed. These include stronger ties in the digital economy, interoperable data regulation, enhanced digital resilience and narrowing the digital divide.

Beyond ASEAN, the most important partners in the Indo-Pacific that the EU and its member states seek to strengthen ties with are Japan, India and South Korea. The EU first established a connec-

tivity partnership with Japan in 2019 and this was followed by India in 2021. These two countries also receive most mentions in the EU Indo-Pacific strategy. Recently in 2022 the EU has initiated negotiations on a Digital Partnership Agreement (DPA) with Japan and South Korea, which already has such a partnership with Singapore. The partners have a shared interest in reinforcing the rules-based international order, including in the digital domain, and in ensuring that liberal norms are upheld both in the Indo-Pacific and globally. ASEAN's importance is dual: as an organisation it is a key EU partner, and as a region it is a crucial playing field boasting one of the fastest-growing internet user bases in the world and in China's backyard.

While Russia's invasion of Ukraine in February 2022 is taking much of Europe's energy in the short to medium term, care must be taken that the long-term push for greater engagement with the Indo-Pacific is delivered on. United Kingdom (UK) Foreign Secretary Liz Truss recently argued "Euro-Atlantic and Indo-Pacific security is indivisible. We set out our increased strategy focus on the Indo-Pacific last year and remain committed to that."<sup>4</sup> This must also be true for the EU. Russia's military brutality and cyber offenses, and China's unwillingness to publicly criticise it, have only highlighted the importance of digital resilience and cybersecurity, a rules-based order (including in the digital realm) and strength and diversification in (digital) economic ties. Moreover, in the current geopolitical and geo-economic reality, strong partnerships between like-minded partners, including the EU, Japan and ASEAN, are more important than ever.

This policy brief develops the argument for strengthening cooperation between the EU and ASEAN in the field of digital connectivity while also reflecting on the potential for coordinated action between the EU, Japan and ASEAN. Following an analysis of the stakes at play and their current state, the paper offers recommendations for actionable steps in key fields, namely digital infrastructure, governance of the digital domain and the digital economy. It also offers ideas for potential cooperation, coordination and synergies between the EU and Japan in South-east Asia. All three sides stand to benefit from open, safe and inclusive digital connectivity and deeper engagement among their thriving digital economies. ASEAN's rapid economic and demographic growth, and the growing political weight of the Indo-Pacific more broadly make the region a focal point in the strategic initiatives of the great powers – the United

---

1 This policy brief draws on a Clingendael Report co-authored by Maaikje Okano-Heijmans, Henry Chan and Brigitte Dekker, [Growing stronger together: Towards an EU-ASEAN Digital Partnership?](#), The Hague: Clingendael Institute, February 2022.

2 [EU-ASEAN Statement on Cybersecurity Cooperation](#), 1 August 2019; [EU-ASEAN Joint Ministerial Statement on Connectivity](#), 1 December 2020; and [Joint Statement: EU and Singapore agree to strengthen bilateral partnership on digital trade](#), 7 December 2021.

3 [EU Strategy for Cooperation in the Indo-Pacific](#), 16 September 2021, p. 10.

---

4 [While Putin plotted, Nato slumbered – we must never again drop our guard](#), Financial Times, 12 March 2022.

States (US) and China – which seek to bind countries and their (digital) economies to themselves.

## From playing field to players: the EU and ASEAN

In the context of US-Chinese competition for technological hegemony, which has intensified in recent years, the EU and ASEAN are seeking to uphold their economic competitiveness and resilience and are resisting the push to take sides.

China's Digital Silk Road (DSR) has become the element in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) that is the most direct challenge to the EU's global goals. With digital economy products such as digital infrastructure and digital financial services, advanced surveillance technology and smart city technology are also being sold, giving authoritarian-leaning leaders new tools to crack down on dissent. Rather than authoritarian norms and standards, the EU wants to actively push for democratic ideals to be integrated in digital technology. This shows a need for a comprehensive response to the DSR. The EU should learn from China's DSR that a needs-based approach with concrete projects is likely to be the most successful at shaping societies and economies from the bottom up. The EU must distinguish itself from China and its projects must build ownership with people, empowering them to understand, own and control their data and treating them not as recipients but as co-creators of projects.

Originally launched in September 2018, the EU connectivity agenda set out to deliver on this objective. It revolves around three core principles: its projects must be sustainable, comprehensive and rules-based. This strong normative element is also apparent in the 2019 EU-Japan agreement on “sustainable connectivity and high-quality infrastructure” – a thinly veiled reference to BRI modalities perceived to be problematic. In December 2021 the EU connectivity agenda was renamed the Global Gateway and taken to the global level<sup>5</sup> and paralleled with a stronger commitment to the Indo-Pacific region, where the EU commits to defend and uphold the same liberal principles.

The Global Gateway seeks to cement liberal and democratic norms and values within the international order and enhance cooperation with like-minded states. Digital connectivity is highlighted as a prior-

5 [The Global Gateway](#), European Commission and European External Action Service, 1 December 2021.

ity and, together with like-minded partners, the EU aims to promote the objectives of its 2030 Digital Compass in third countries.<sup>6</sup> As the two preferred and most trusted strategic partners for ASEAN to hedge against the uncertainties in the US-China strategic rivalry,<sup>7</sup> cooperation between the EU and Japan in Southeast Asia is only logical. A needs-driven approach should be adopted focusing on real needs to help with the digital transition for economic growth and resilience.

The ASEAN region is one of the fastest-growing internet user bases in the world.<sup>8</sup> The Southeast Asian digital economy is exceeding expectations and is currently on track to grow to US\$300 billion in 2025. Singapore has become a digital infrastructure hub (submarine cables) in the digital economy and is a key player in setting global rules in the digital domain, including Digital Economic Partnership Agreements (DEPAs). Indonesia is the most active e-commerce player in the region and has the biggest market. ASEAN has a noticeably young population and the adult literacy rate in the majority of ASEAN countries stands at over 94 per cent. That said, great differences exist in ASEAN members' economic and social circumstances, and this is also reflected in the widely disparate levels of their digital infrastructure.

## Towards an EU-ASEAN joint approach to digital connectivity?

As the key regional organisations in their regions, the EU and ASEAN are investing in their digital sovereignty with approaches that stress openness, security and inclusion in the digital transformation. In 2021, ASEAN adopted its Digital Masterplan 2025 (ADM 2025) and the EU unveiled its 2030 Digital Compass. Closer bloc-to-bloc ties have been developed in recent years, including through the ASEAN Digital Index (ADIX) and cybersecurity cooperation – at both the regional and country levels.<sup>9</sup> The COVID-19 pandemic added further momentum as the lockdowns accelerated online working by citizens, businesses and governments.

6 [2030 Digital Compass: The European Way for the Digital Decade](#), European Commission, 9 March 2021. For more on the EU's digital connectivity in the Indo-Pacific, see [Factsheet: Europe and the Indo-Pacific working together on Digital Connectivity](#): European External Action Service, February 2022.

7 [The State of Southeast Asia 2022 – Survey Report](#), Institute of Southeast Asian Studies, February 2022.

8 [e-Economy SEA 2021](#), report by Google, TEMASEK and Bain & Company, 2021.

9 For details on ADIX, see <https://adix.tech4i2.com> and below. Key examples of cybersecurity cooperation include the [EU-ASEAN Statement on Cybersecurity Cooperation](#), 1 August 2019, and the [First Indonesia-Netherlands Cyber Policy Dialogue](#) (2021).

An important difference between the EU Digital Compass 2030 and ASEAN's ADM 2025 is that the EU document sets specific numerical targets in its objectives and has funding secured, while ADM 2025 does not. With the absence of hard targets and funding, the ASEAN Digital Masterplan runs the risk of the plan not meeting its goals. Going forward, differences between the blocs must be acknowledged as they are very different organisations. For example, ASEAN countries do not have a common policy in the fields of digital rights and privacy, whereas the EU is increasingly active in joint policymaking. Nevertheless, the EU-ASEAN strategic partnership and the EU-Singapore talks about a digital partnership agreement display a willingness to cooperate despite the differences.

Significant differences also exist in the economic and social development levels of the two regions and within them. In the EU, the overall level of economic and social development is relatively high, with 2019 nominal GDP per capita at almost US\$35,000, compared to the global average of US\$18,000 and the ASEAN average of US\$5,000. Looking at individual member states in the two blocs, the levels of digitalisation in both regions vary significantly.<sup>10</sup>

Notwithstanding the varying levels of development of the EU and ASEAN, and of the countries within them, their approaches to digital policymaking (at home) and digital connectivity (abroad) converge in important ways. Specifically, commonalities exist in their assessments of the challenges and objectives that digital policies should serve. An inclusive digital domain is at the heart of the agendas of both regions, even though the focus of action differs because of differences in economic development, political realities and organisational structures – with the EU having far greater policymaking competence.

## Key domains for action

Three domains stand out as particularly promising for EU-ASEAN cooperation in the field of digital connectivity. Taken together, they could form the basis of a future shared EU-ASEAN approach that delivers to the people.

### 1. Digital infrastructure

The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of a well-functioning and secure digital environment for the economic resilience of countries.

Basic challenges in enhanced cooperation and coordination on digital connectivity are stable and fast telecommunications networks, effective monetisation of 5G and a lack of basic digital skills in the EU and ASEAN.

Weaknesses in the existing digital infrastructure in most ASEAN countries were laid bare by the pandemic, as their telecommunications networks did not provide satisfactory work-from-home, study-from-home and video-conferencing facilities for users. The dominant micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSME) in the region, which account for 98 per cent of ASEAN businesses, were hit particularly hard. Their digital transition is much slower than in larger companies and hence they suffered disproportionately during the pandemic.

The most pressing problems for ASEAN member states in the digital transformation are building physical infrastructure and digital skills. With the exception of Singapore, most ASEAN countries do not have the resources to embark on both fibre optic and 5G mobile deployment at the same time. Many ASEAN experts support the use of low-band and mid-band 5G in the initial deployment as a cost-effective way of quickly rolling out wideband connectivity in their countries.<sup>11</sup> Results can be mutually beneficial if developed countries like the EU and Japan can work out cooperation in these two areas with either the community as a whole or with individual countries. For example, European companies such as Nokia and Ericsson, and also Japan's NTT Docomo, Rakuten Mobile and NEC can help ASEAN countries to develop more innovative ways to fund the roll-out of 5G by partnering with national network providers to help educate ASEAN citizens about 5G. This will increase ASEAN's digital footprint and enhance interoperability, compatibility and shared norms while creating new markets in which digital companies can flourish.

In addition to investments in fixed broadband (hardware), the governments of EU and ASEAN countries must also focus on their citizens' ability to access and use the internet and further development of the online environment. After all, an internet subscription – or an opportunity to use the hardware – is required to tackle the digital divide effectively. Moreover, citizens need digital skills to operate effectively and safely online. When access to the internet is ensured, training programmes through mobile phones – rather than computer-based training – can help to elevate the skills of higher numbers of potential internet users. Offline and online

<sup>10</sup> The Digital Economy and Society Index (DESI), European Commission, 2021, pp. 21–22; and the ASEAN Digital Index (ADIX).

<sup>11</sup> See for example, *E-commerce Connectivity in ASEAN*, ERIA, 2020, chapter 3.

training programmes in both basic digital skills (allowing people to participate in the digital economy) and more advanced digital application development skills (to allow people to contribute to the e-economy) are of paramount importance.<sup>12</sup>

To help identify the needs and gaps in the ASEAN digital economy and society, especially in hard and soft infrastructure, the EU has initiated a capacity-building process to create an ASEAN Digital Index (ADIX).<sup>13</sup> ADIX aims to assist ASEAN governments in steering policies towards areas that require the most attention and investment. Awareness of this important building block in informed policymaking appears to be scant in ASEAN member states. However, efforts to build the ADIX have been ongoing since 2018. ADIX will soon move into a phase in which data are collected by National Statistics Agencies in the ten ASEAN member states, which should enhance its visibility and use.

## 2. Data governance and digital trade regulation

Digital infrastructure is closely connected to data governance (data protection and data sharing) and digital trade governance (digital trade agreements and digital business regulations). Dialogues on these topics are a crucial step forward in connecting regions digitally. Creating an interoperable system enables companies and governments in Europe, ASEAN and other parts of the Indo-Pacific region to freely transfer data across borders without the bureaucratic hassle of binding corporate rules, contractual arrangements, codes of conduct or certification mechanisms.<sup>14</sup>

While the Chinese model supports increased state control and surveillance, and the American model prioritises economic growth above all, Europe has adopted a human-centred approach to digital governance that prioritises privacy and fairness. The 'Brussels effect' has already successfully pushed for democratic standards in digital technology, specifically in data protection and privacy. The General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) of 2016, which governs the use of European citizens' data,<sup>15</sup> was

designed without expectations of an extraterritorial effect. However, the international regulatory impact of the GDPR has made the bloc more conscious of its regulatory influence beyond the EU borders. Other digital governance issues under discussion today are freedom of speech (governed by the Digital Services Act), market fairness (in the Digital Markets Act), trustworthy and ethical artificial intelligence (AI), promotion of an open democratic (debate on the) internet and empowering citizens to manage their data through a European digital identity.

The GDPR inspired ASEAN to develop its ASEAN Digital Data Governance Framework, while the bloc also kept a close eye on India's handling of data-protection regulations. The 2016 ASEAN Framework on Personal Data Protection and the 2018 ASEAN Framework on Digital Data Governance are key to building interoperable and principles-based data-protection, privacy regulation and frameworks. They can smooth cross-border data flows and facilitate digital trade. In the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025, the ultimate aim is to ensure interoperability of standards with the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation's Cross-Border Privacy Rules (CBPR) system and the EU's GDPR.<sup>16</sup>

The issue of data privacy is becoming more urgent with the move towards smart cities. Smart cities are both mechanisms that offer more sustainable solutions to real problems (including traffic congestion and energy-efficient infrastructure operation) and platforms for driving technological innovation in which even more data on many aspects of life are being collected. Considering the risk of government surveillance and manipulation of technologies by criminal actors, there is a need to differentiate the privacy levels of different kinds of data collected. This is an important topic for discussion in the frame of EU and ASEAN digital coordination.

For the EU, cooperation with Indonesia and Singapore could be a stepping-stone to more advanced data-governance talks with ASEAN. Nevertheless, as with trade negotiations, the challenge of moving to engagement with the ASEAN bloc as a whole will be substantial. Indonesia has made digital transformation one of the three pillars in its 2022 G20 Presidency, and it could do the same as ASEAN Chair in 2023. Indonesia will therefore play a key role in digital regulation negotiations in the coming years. For its part, Singapore has established itself as a hub in digital economy partnership agreements (DEPAs) and other areas of digital regulation, such as data governance and digital finance.

---

<sup>12</sup> [Google Launches 5,000 Scholarships Worth \\$3M for Virtual Courses Covering 'In-Demand Digital Skills'](#), The Straits Times, 12 January 2022; and [Google Scholarship Recipients: Build Your Future with Google](#).

<sup>13</sup> For details on ADIX and an online visualisation tool, see <https://adix.tech4i2.com/> and <https://adix.tech4i2.com/adix-data-visualization>. Note that in August 2021, USAID and ASEAN launched the ASEAN Digital Integration Index (ADII), which is narrower in scope.

<sup>14</sup> [What Rules Apply if my Organization Transfers Data Outside the EU?](#), European Commission (europa.eu) and Lurong Chen, [ASEM's Role in Promoting Asia-Europe E-Commerce](#), Policy Brief, ERIA, November 2021.

<sup>15</sup> [General Data Protection Regulation](#), European Parliament and Council, 27 April 2016.

<sup>16</sup> [ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025](#), ASEAN, 2021: p. 22.

### 3. The digital economy

The growing interest in DEPAs attests to the fact that the digital economy is flourishing globally. In Europe, 73 per cent of citizens who have internet access shopped online in 2020 – an increase of 5 per cent since 2019. In the ASEAN region, e-commerce and food delivery have been – and still are – the growth drivers of the ASEAN e-economy.<sup>17</sup>

With e-commerce stronger than ever, digital financial services and financial technology (fintech) companies are also on the rise globally. Singapore and Indonesia are leading the fintech revolution in Southeast Asia – with about 50 per cent of the fintech firms in the region.<sup>18</sup> In Europe, constructive interaction and mutually beneficial relationships between banks and fintech companies are yet to be established, even if fintech companies in Europe had an unprecedented year in 2020, especially thanks to the COVID-19 pandemic. Disruptive innovation is more marginal in Europe compared to in ASEAN, owing to Europe's strong traditional financial industry, which has started to integrate fintech companies or their solutions.<sup>19</sup>

While the focus of fintech companies in Europe is primarily on making all kinds of services more transparent, faster and cheaper, in Southeast Asia fintech attracts much venture capital investment to cut the costs of financial intermediation. For example, fintech companies have drastically cut the high frictional costs of cross-border remittances. This is of great value to the many overseas workers in and from ASEAN who send money to their families at home. While the individual amounts sent are generally small, frictional costs are high – ranging from more than 1 per cent of GDP for Indonesia to 6 per cent for Cambodia and more than 10 per cent for the Philippines.

The EU can engage with the ASEAN region to smoothen regulatory hurdles – which would be complementary to overcoming differences in digital business regulation and data governance. In addition, the EU and ASEAN could facilitate greater private-sector cooperation between their regions in the area of fintech. The EU has a booming fintech landscape but widespread use of fintech is still limited. The ASEAN countries offer vast market opportunities for European start-ups to scale up. As ASEAN's fintech hub, Singapore can be used as an

entrance point. Moreover, European fintech companies – which are active in sectors such as mobile banking, mobile cross-border payments and investing – could learn from ASEAN counterparts about their best practices, regulatory sandboxes to test innovations and how to operate effectively across different foreign financial markets, and vice versa. Finally, Singapore is an interesting reference point for governments in Europe, which have for many years outsourced tech-related knowledge and now struggle to develop expertise.

### Conclusion and next steps

The EU Connectivity Agenda, now rebranded the Global Gateway, with the digital domain as a key focus, can be seen as the EU's indirect response to two of the most pressing international shifts since the end of the Cold War. The EU is reviewing its strategy and tactics in the light of clashing capitalisms (mostly between the EU's market-based and China's state-guided systems) and global geopolitical power shifts. China plays a key role in both trends, seeking to increase its influence through the Digital Silk Road. The Global Gateway is set to give countries in Southeast Asia (and beyond) an alternative that will still meet the digital infrastructure and development needs of states in the region. Projects will not only have a positive economic impact for both Europe and its partners, but they will also seek to reinforce democratic and liberal values in these partner countries by presenting an alternative to Chinese investment and by addressing the needs of the public, thereby winning popular support.

Whether the EU can be successful in implementing this agenda in the Indo-Pacific will depend on its ability to adopt a needs-driven approach and to work with partners in the region and the United States. Considering the differences in strengths, foci and interests of these partners in the digital domain, bilateral engagement is a pragmatic way to enhance mutual understanding and to identify opportunities for synergies and coordination in projects and regulation that is needed to make the most of limited resources. Multilateral approaches are preferred in principle to ensure region-to-region interoperability and to manage supply chains of high-end critical technologies. Countries like Japan, Australia, South Korea, Taiwan and Singapore have been setting up capacity-building projects to improve cybersecurity, government and business digital infrastructure, healthtech and norms in ASEAN member states.<sup>20</sup>

<sup>17</sup> [e-Economy SEA 2021](#), report by Google, TEMASEK and Bain & Company, 2021.

<sup>18</sup> [FinTech in ASEAN: Get, Reset, Go!](#), UOB, PWC and SFA, 2020.

<sup>19</sup> [The Geopolitics of Digital Financial Technologies: A Chance for Europe?](#), Clingendael Institute, 18 January 2022.

<sup>20</sup> See [Promoting open and inclusive connectivity: The case for digital development cooperation](#), Research in Globalization, August 2021.

ASEAN's central position in the Indo-Pacific region and its increased interest in digital cooperation with like-minded partners have added urgency and momentum to the longstanding EU-ASEAN relationship. Building on this, the EU proposed the idea of an EU-ASEAN approach to digital connectivity in its 2021 Indo-Pacific strategy. A digital partnership agreement would be a next step towards deeper and broader cooperation that is more formal, but still not legally binding. Forward-looking responses are needed to exploit the opportunities and deal with the disruptions that accompany the digital transition.

Digital infrastructure, digital regulation and the digital economy and fintech are three promising areas for deepening and further developing a mutually beneficial relationship between the two regions, and also between EU and ASEAN member states individually.

When it comes to digital infrastructure, a shift towards fixed broadband complemented by a 5G wireless network in urban areas and 5G fixed wireless access in rural areas will be necessary to meet internet speed demands for hybrid work models and smart-city development. European companies such as Nokia and Ericsson could assist ASEAN countries in this, including by partnering with national network providers to help educate ASEAN citizens on 5G. In addition to investments in hardware, digital skills must be elevated through digital training programmes to allow more people to participate in and contribute to the e-economy. Tools to identify the needs and gaps in the digital economy and society are invaluable to narrow the digital divide, pointing to a need to enhance awareness and use of the ASEAN Digital Index.

In the field of data governance and digital trade regulation, the EU and ASEAN need to enhance their cooperation on data governance to improve much-needed interoperability and shared standards between their countries. Multi-stakeholder dialogues, digital agreements and enhanced cooperation in the G20 and other international fora can contribute to this purpose. In addition, technological knowledge among policymakers must be enhanced to facilitate discussions on what areas digital regulation should cover and what is conceived as public or private data.

Lastly, the digital economy and particularly financial technology (fintech) hold great promise for practical business-to-business cooperation and public-private partnerships between the EU and ASEAN. Enhanced awareness and use of digital indicators and greater cooperation between companies in various

sectors can contribute to governments strengthening development, the digital economy and governance.

Enhanced synergies, coordination and cooperation between the EU and ASEAN, and between the EU and Japan with ASEAN in the digital domain are feasible, despite significant differences in economic and social development levels, and the influence of governments in the digital domain. The EU and Japan bring longstanding experience with regulatory issues and cross-border cooperation, while ASEAN boasts a vibrant digital ecosystem and the largest and one of the fastest-growing internet user bases in the world.

Improved synergies between partners that share European concerns about creeping digital authoritarianism in the Indo-Pacific, including in ASEAN, are needed in order to make the most of the relatively limited funds and action that each actor can bring to the region. Coordinated action and synergies will also contribute to more convergence vis-à-vis standards. Going forward, needs-driven approaches, fact-based policymaking and mutually agreed shared objectives are requirements and instrumental to the development of a joint approach to digital connectivity and to strengthened cooperation between like-minded partners.

## The Global Governance Programme

*The Global Governance Programme (GGP) is research turned into action. It provides a European setting to conduct research at the highest level and promote synergies between the worlds of research and policy-making, to generate ideas and identify creative and innovative solutions to global challenges. The Programme is part of the Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies of the European University Institute, a world-renowned academic institution. It receives financial support from the European Commission through the European Union budget. Complete information on our activities can be found online at: [globalgovernanceprogramme.eui.eu](http://globalgovernanceprogramme.eui.eu)*

## EU-Asia Project

*The EU-Asia project is a research and educational initiative within the Global Governance Programme. It is designed to contribute to mutual understanding and exchange between Asia and Europe at a time of unprecedented change in international politics and global governance. The project also aims at an ambitious academic programme on EU and Asia, with a particular focus on Japan.*

## Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies

*The Robert Schuman Centre for Advanced Studies (RSCAS), created in 1992 and directed by Professor Erik Jones, aims to develop inter-disciplinary and comparative research on the major issues facing the process of European integration, European societies and Europe's place in 21<sup>st</sup> century global politics. The Centre is home to a large post-doctoral programme and hosts major research programmes, projects and data sets, in addition to a range of working groups and ad hoc initiatives. The research agenda is organised around a set of core themes and is continuously evolving, reflecting the changing agenda of European integration, the expanding membership of the European Union, developments in Europe's neighbourhood and the wider world.*

[www.eui/rsc](http://www.eui/rsc)



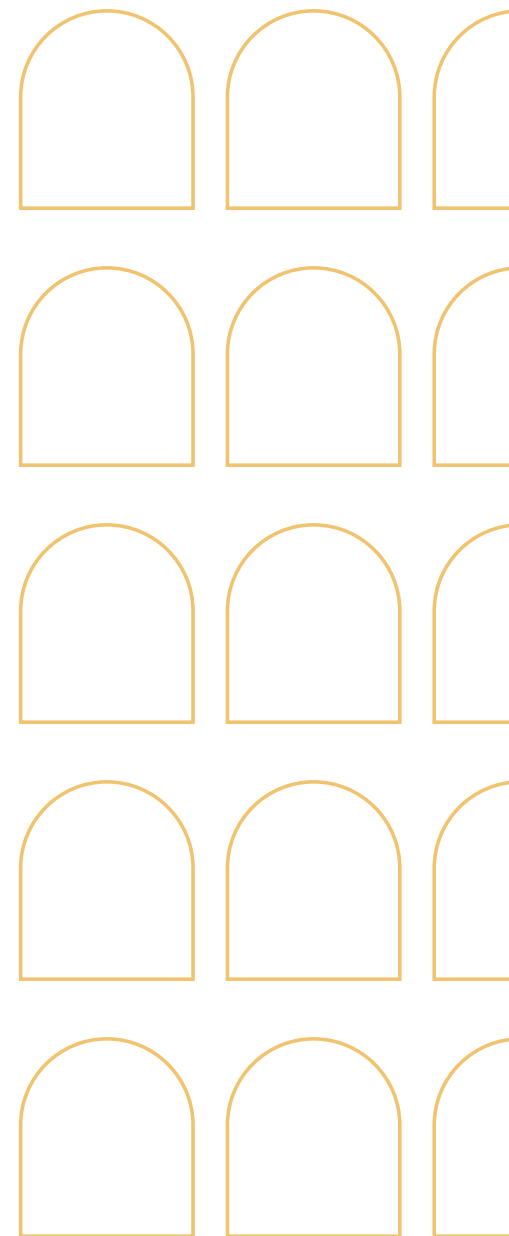
Co-funded by the  
Erasmus+ Programme  
of the European Union

© European University Institute, 2022  
Editorial matter and selection © Maaïke Okano-Heijmans, 2022

This work is licensed under the [Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 \(CC-BY 4.0\) International license](https://creativecommons.org/licenses/by/4.0/) which governs the terms of access and reuse for this work. If cited or quoted, reference should be made to the full name of the author(s), editor(s), the title, the series and number, the year and the publisher.

Views expressed in this publication reflect the opinion of individual authors and not those of the European University Institute.

Published by  
European University Institute (EUI)  
Via dei Roccettini 9, I-50014  
San Domenico di Fiesole (FI)  
Italy



doi:10.2870/48572  
ISBN:978-92-9466-214-9  
ISSN:2467-4540  
QM-AX-22-038-EN-N