

The ASEAN



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ISSUE 22
2022

ANNIVERSARY ISSUE
2ND

Children first in a post-pandemic world



ISSN 2721-8058



9 772721 805228

THE INSIDE VIEW

ASEAN Addresses Safe
School Reopening and
Learning Loss

CONVERSATIONS

With Children on the
Pandemic, Education, and
Climate Change

SNAPSHOTS

The ASEAN
Artists Residency
Programme



Ministerial Bodies

*) takes guidance from and reports to both AMCA and AMRI

AMRI-ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Information

AMCA-ASEAN Ministers Responsible for Culture and Arts

AMMY-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Youth

ASED-ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting

AMMS-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Sports

AMRDPE-ASEAN Ministers on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

AMMSWD-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development

AMMW-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Women

ALMM-ASEAN Labour Ministers Meeting

ACCSM-The Heads of Civil Service Meeting for ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters

AHMM-ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting

AMMDM-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Disaster Management

COP-AADMER-Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Disaster Management and Emergency Response

AMME-ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Environment

COP to AATHP-Conference of the Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution

SOMCA-Senior Officials Meeting on Culture and Arts

COCI-The ASEAN Committee for Culture and Information

SOMRI-Senior Officials Meeting Responsible for Information

SOMY-Senior Officials Meeting on Youth

SOMED-Senior Officials Meeting on Education

SOMS-Senior Officials Meeting on Sports

SOMRDPE-Senior Officials Meeting on Rural Development and Poverty Eradication

SOMSWD-Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development

ACWC-ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children

ACW-ASEAN Committee on Women

SLOM-Senior Labour Officials Meeting

SOM-ACCSM-Senior Officials Meeting on ASEAN Cooperation on Civil Service Matters

SOMHD-Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development

ASOEN-ASEAN Senior Officials on the Environment

COM to AATHP-Committee under the Conference of Parties to the ASEAN Agreement on Transboundary Haze Pollution

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August 2022

Children first in a post-pandemic world



The ASEAN

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ISSN 2721-8058

Cover illustration by Alvin
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Layout by Foxidia Digital
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Note from the Editorial Team

Across the region, the ASEAN Member States are working to reopen schools safely and help children ease into face-to-face learning. However, after almost three years of school closures, there has been a significant loss in learning for millions, particularly the very young. While health risks remain, experts say children must return to school and catch up on missed education to improve their general well-being.

UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Director Debora Comini contributes an article on lost learning and reiterates the call for government action to help children recover almost two years' worth of education.

ASEAN's education sector is responding with measures to support the safe reopening of schools and improving educational systems that can withstand another disruption of this magnitude.

Lao PDR Minister of Labour and Social Welfare and Chair of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (AMMSWD) Baykham Khattiya stresses that ASEAN's goal is to protect children's rights and development and prioritise their health and education. She cites ASEAN's significant accomplishments in shielding children from various forms of violence.

During the pandemic, children suffered the most, according to Hou Nirmita, Cambodia's Under Secretary of State for Women's Affairs and Chair of the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of Women and Children (ACWC). Many did not have access to nutritious food from school meal programmes and were affected by their parents' loss of income.

In this edition, we delve into how ASEAN addresses children's health and well-being, nutrition, forced labour, and risks of abuse, exploitation, and violence—concerns that existed before the pandemic but have been exacerbated by the crisis. In addition, we highlight future challenges that children will face, including more extreme weather, disasters, and environmental degradation.

ASEAN is also working towards children's more meaningful participation in policymaking. Children must have a say in decisions that will ultimately protect their rights and create a more sustainable future for them.

For this edition's Conversations section, *The ASEAN* posted an invitation in June for children in the region to share their thoughts on the pandemic's impact on their lives, the challenges of online learning, the threats of climate change and how they can help to stop it. We received several submissions, and their candid replies give us pause for reflection.

We were delighted to discover three young children who wrote and illustrated story books for children during the pandemic. Their published books talk about coping with loss and reaching for your dreams, experiences that are all too familiar for many of our children.

ASEAN is celebrating its 55th anniversary this year, and the theme, "Stronger Together" embodies the spirit in which the region has responded to the current crisis. On the road to recovery, the welfare and interests of ASEAN's younger generations must come first.

Related Issues:



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Issue 12-13
April-May 2021



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Issue 15-16
August-September 2021

THE INSIDE VIEW

“ASEAN recognises that children have a fundamental right to be protected against violence, abuse, and exploitation, and that children’s rights to survival, development, health and education must be prioritised when allocating resources.”

- Baykham Khattiya, Lao PDR Minister of Labour and Social Welfare and Chair of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (AMMSWD)



ASEAN Children-led Change



Chusana Han, PhD

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Jacel Paguio

Senior Officer, Poverty Eradication and Gender Division

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department



“**A child shall have the right to freedom of expression; this right shall include freedom to seek, receive and impart information and ideas of all kinds, regardless of frontiers, either orally, in writing or in print, in the form of art, or through any other media of the child's choice.**

- Article 12, Convention on the Rights of the Child

All ASEAN Member States are signatories to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and are duty bound to honour these rights. Articles 12 and 13 of CRC, in particular, assure that children can express their views freely in all matters affecting them.

Children have the right to think for themselves and form opinions about solutions to problems. They also have the right to be protected from harm if they express criticism, challenge the views of those in positions of power, or take action to promote and protect their human rights.

Adults are responsible for recognising and respecting children's rights to participate, listening to them, taking their views seriously, supporting their initiatives, and ensuring their protection and safety.

ASEAN believes in developing the self-esteem and autonomy of children and young people and nurturing their capacity to communicate views and opinions. The strong commitment of ASEAN towards children has been enshrined in several declarations and actions.

The ASEAN Ministers of Social Welfare and Development adopted the **Declaration on the Commitments for Children in ASEAN** (2001) to reaffirm ASEAN's commitment to promoting children's rights and improving their vulnerable conditions. The coverage highlights children in poverty and those belonging to indigenous groups, encourages mutual sharing of information on the child's rights by ASEAN members, and takes into account children from different religious, cultural and social backgrounds.

On October 28, 2010, the ASEAN Leaders adopted the **Ha Noi Declaration on the Enhancement of Welfare and Development of ASEAN Women and Children**, which created a groundbreaking avenue for children's voices. The declaration helped establish the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), and marked

Photo Credit: © Rachaphak / Shutterstock

a regional milestone for children's right to participation.

ASEAN views children as not only beneficiaries but also partners in achieving goals for their well-being. Thus, the strategies for their survival, protection, and participation are outlined in the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Blueprint. The Blueprint has paved the way for the development and implementation of strategies and broad platforms towards this endeavour.

The ASEAN Children's Forum

The ASEAN Children's Forum (ACF) is a regional meeting of children organised to promote children's rights and provide a platform for them to share their thoughts and suggestions on issues that affect them. The ACF is a biannual regional platform hosted by a Member State on a rotational basis. It is held before the Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD) for that year. Indonesia is the forum's host in 2022.

The first ACF was held in the Philippines from 19 to 22 October 2010. Thirty-two children delegates aged 12 to 18, representing the 10 Member States of the ASEAN, participated in the first forum. Seven of the delegates were children with disabilities.

Adult chaperones served as mentors and translators for the children during the event to adhere to child protection policies. The children were given ample time to speak about various concerns, such as HIV/AIDS, online communication and internet use, the environment, poverty, child labour, opportunities for children with disabilities, and children's participation.

The ACF consolidates the children's concerns and recommendations, which are then presented to the SOMSWD and AMMSWD for consideration.

In the last ACF convened by Cambodia in 2020, discussions revolved around the theme, "Impact of COVID-19 and the Current Situation of Children." The delegates were able to voice concerns about the disproportionate impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on their generation. In addition, they discussed the pandemic's effects on children's well-being, particularly their physical and mental health, education, and their families' livelihoods.

The forum provided the ASEAN children with an opportunity to propose recommendations on providing support for children, especially the most vulnerable ones, and put forward the children's best interests during the pandemic and beyond. The proposals were addressed to their fellow children, parents, communities, schools and educators, government officials, and non-governmental organisations.

Indonesia is leading the conduct of the 7th ACF under the theme, "Building a Digital Resiliency for ASEAN Children," through a series of events with children from August through November this year. With the support of the ASEAN Secretariat, the outcomes of the forum will be shared with other relevant ASEAN Sectoral Bodies, particularly the Senior Officials Meeting on Youth (SOMY), ASEAN Commission on the Promotion of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC), ASEAN Committee on Women (ACW), and Senior Officials Meeting Responsible for Information (SOMRI), among others, for information sharing, coordination, and support in promoting and protecting children's rights in the virtual world.

Meaningful participation and challenges

In addition to the ACF, children and youth's participation in developing the Regional Plan of Action on Implementing the Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration (RPA CCM) was noted at the 38th and 39th ASEAN Summits in 2021. Under the leadership of ACWC Thailand, it was presented at the Side Event of the International Migration Review Forum from 17-20 May 2022.

The vigorous implementation of the Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of All Forms of Violence Against Children (RPA EVAC) under the leadership of ACWC and SOMSWD is another crucial milestone for ASEAN. However, there is a growing concern about the migration and displacement of children within the region. Children on the move and those left behind by migrant parents are at greater risks and increased vulnerabilities. They face stigma and discrimination, causing profound harm to their well-being and prohibiting them from achieving their fullest potential.

ASEAN children performed an important role in the drafting of the RPA CCM. The

ACWC provided the forum for the children and youth's dialogue throughout the whole process of the RPA CCM development. In the International Migration Review event in 2022, children and youth expressed that their involvement has stimulated their feeling of ownership and kept the vibrancy in its implementation.

Children should be treated with dignity. Their views should be listened to and respected in the same way as those of adults. Children often want to participate but are usually not allowed to by adults due to cultural and social perceptions of children lacking skills and inability to express their thoughts. There is also a fear that children may become too independent and disrespectful of adults.

Way forward

Involving children in planning activities for their well-being and getting adults to examine their roles concerning children are crucial first steps to ensure the quality of children's participation.

ASEAN dialogue platforms develop positive relationships with children, beginning with fun activities that allow opportunities for light-hearted interaction to create shared memories. Allowing space for meaningful conversations will enable children and adults to improve the quality of their relationships. Children cannot respond meaningfully to social issues unless they are first allowed to learn about and understand them.

Essential to empowering children's participation—to realise their rights and build their future resilience—is developing the capacities of social workers and the broader social service workforce, especially the pandemic frontliners, to promote this participation. ASEAN robustly pursued the Roadmap for the Implementation of the Ha Noi Declaration on Strengthening Social Work Towards a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community, with the children's best interest at the heart of its implementation.

Led by SOMSWD and ASEAN Social Work Consortium, ASEAN is developing the Regional Guidance on the Role of Social Work and Social Service Workforce Strengthening in different settings for notation at the 40th and the 41st ASEAN Summits this year. It will enable policymakers and practitioners to gain deeper insights into delivering quality programming and service, including efforts to promote children's participation.

Viewpoint

Baykham Khattiya

Minister of Labour and Social Welfare,
Lao People's Democratic Republic

Chair, ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on
Social Welfare and Development

Minister Khattiya provides an overview of ASEAN's goals and strategies for upholding the rights and advancing the well-being of children in the region. She talks about the progress made in terms of protecting children from violence and increasing access to education. She also cites ongoing challenges, such as poverty and inequality, that affect children's welfare.

Can you describe ASEAN's vision and goals for children in the ASEAN region?

Minister Khattiya:

ASEAN aims to build a community that accelerates economic growth, social progress, and cultural development, and promotes active collaboration among different stakeholders, both at national and regional levels. The ASEAN Community Vision 2025 forged commitments towards a people-oriented, people-centred community where the ASEAN people enjoy human rights, fundamental freedoms, the benefits of community building, and leaving no one behind.



ASEAN recognises that children have a fundamental right to be protected against violence, abuse, and exploitation, and that children's rights to survival, development, health and education must be prioritised when allocating resources. ASEAN also believes that every child in the region has an equal opportunity to participate, express their opinions, and organise themselves to promote their interest and define their needs. At the core, ASEAN aspires to ensure the realisation of children's rights, as demonstrated by the ratification of the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) by all 10 ASEAN Member States.

ASEAN's efforts to intensify interventions that amplify children's voices and invest in children have been enforced through the ASEAN Ministerial Meetings on Social Welfare and Development (AMMSWD) and the Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD) and later, the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC). These ASEAN Sectoral Bodies have been at the forefront of fostering regional cooperation and commitment, and ensuring the attainment of the children's rights to survival, development, participation and protection against all forms of abuse and discrimination.

What progress has been made by ASEAN to achieve these goals?

Minister Khattiya:

ASEAN has pioneered collectively the development and implementation of the **ASEAN Declaration on the Elimination of**

Violence Against Women and Violence Against Children, adopted in 2013. This was followed by the adoption of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children, two years later.

ASEAN also highlights the need to address emerging concerns, in particular online child protection, to prevent the institutionalisation of children without parental care, and to adopt strategies to inform and empower children, including how to combat bullying and cyber bullying.

In partnership with ACWC, SOMSWD has developed and endorsed the **Declaration on the Protection of Children from all Forms of Online Exploitation and Abuse in ASEAN**, **ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration**, and the **Joint Statement on Reaffirmation of Commitment to Advancing the Rights of the Child in ASEAN**. The ASEAN Leaders adopted these three documents at the 35th ASEAN Summit in 2019. The regional action plans to implement both declarations have also been submitted to the ASEAN Leaders for notation at the 38th and 39th ASEAN Summits in 2021.

These key regional instruments will accelerate ASEAN's comprehensive actions to end all forms of violence against children in accordance with the UN CRC.

In advancing ASEAN efforts to promote the culture of prevention to uphold the rights of children, SOMSWD has forged its commitment to build an inclusive, cohesive, and responsive ASEAN Community through the adoption of the **Bandar Seri Begawan Declaration on the Importance of the**

Family for Community Development and Nation-Building in 2021.

To fulfil ASEAN's commitments to the promotion and protection of the rights of children, the implementation of the **Ha Noi Declaration on Strengthening Social Work Towards a Cohesive and Responsive ASEAN Community** and its Road Map are an urgent priority of the region. Furthermore, the impact of quality service provision delivered by a stronger social service workforce in the region would benefit the people most in ASEAN, especially children at higher risk to vulnerabilities.

Can you cite specific examples of how this progress has made an impact on ASEAN Member States?

Minister Khattiya:

In 2019, the Mid-term Review of the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence Against Children (2016-2025) highlighted the significant efforts by all the ASEAN Member States to introduce legal reforms that improve the protective environment for children. These included amendments to existing laws to clarify definitions and remove ambiguities to the enactment of new regulations that better protect children from various forms of violence. In addition, seven Member States have introduced or strengthened coordination mechanisms to respond to violence against children in emergency situations. All Member States have implemented programmes to raise awareness about violence against children and lay the groundwork for changing harmful behaviours.

Promising developments in new areas, such as the protection of children from violence online, were also identified. Four Member States, for instance, have dedicated national strategies or programmes to address violence against children online, while some Member States are developing national road maps on online child protection. Education programmes on online safety are also being implemented in eight Member States and six Member States have scaled up industry engagement to prevent violence against children online.

In terms of access to education, the 2019 report, *Children in ASEAN: 30 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child* by ASEAN/UNICEF, states that nearly all ASEAN Member States increased adjusted net enrolment of children in pre-primary and primary education and reduced the out-of-school children rate at the primary level, between the year of 2000 and 2017. Access and participation rates have also improved across ASEAN at the lower and upper secondary levels. It was observed that several Member States have made efforts to ensure that girls and boys do not drop out of education by establishing various national programmes to promote the participation of children in education.

What are the critical roles of ASEAN to ensure better outcomes for the well-being of children in view of their rights to survival, development, protection, and participation?

Minister Khattiya:

The critical roles of ASEAN in promoting and protecting the rights and well-being of children to build a safe, friendly and inclusive community, include, among others:

- Promoting the implementation of evidence-based child-related policies in ASEAN and its Member States;
- Harmonising national policies on child-friendly child-friendly and inclusive environment, and heightening the

commitment to creating a regionally consistent and strengthening coherent policy frameworks for certain practices related to children;

- Aligning institutional mechanisms to demonstrate a collective will and implement consistent regional management practices. ASEAN also supports the roll-out of regional initiatives that promote a holistic response to the multi-disciplinary needs of children and improve access to education, health and protection systems; and
- Supporting the implementation of capacity-building initiatives for the Member States and different stakeholders to formulate, implement, monitor and review policies on children at regional, national and local levels, using various methodologies that engage children's participation.

How far has ASEAN attained child-related SDG targets? ASEAN and its Member States need to address what barriers or gaps to achieve these targets? What urgent actions need to be taken by ASEAN to address these gaps and challenges?

Minister Khattiya:

While progress in eliminating violence against children has been observed, much more work needs to be done due to the compounding impact of extreme poverty and other global challenges. Some challenges include combating discrimination and inequality among children, particularly those in vulnerable situations, such as children with disabilities, children in the context of migration, children in conflict with laws, children in the worst form of child labour, and trafficking in children, among others.

Member States have taken strides toward eliminating gender-based violence.

Nonetheless, gender inequalities remain a challenge in the region. This can be seen, for instance, from the level of attendance and completion of education that is still dominated by boys. Access to education will heighten the opportunity for children to ingress 21st-century skills, which is important to ensure the robust intersections between education and labour market demands.

In the *ASEAN Gender Outlook: Sustainable Development for All, Leaving No Woman and Girl Behind*, it is revealed that in the ASEAN region, child marriage rates are among the lowest in the world, but efforts are needed to eliminate violence and harmful practices fully, as 16 per cent of girls still marry before turning 18.

ASEAN needs to continue its efforts in sustaining the current levels of progress. There are indeed some key areas to be strengthened by the Member States to accelerate the fulfilment of children's rights, such as i) promoting the regional and national implementation strategies to strengthen national policies and laws on children; ii) enhancing budgetary allocation and sustaining public financing, and promoting resource mobilisation to ensure the effective implementation of national policies at all levels; iii) strengthening data collection and research initiatives on violence against children and examining the social norms that can shed light on issues that still remain largely undocumented, and looking at its interlinkages with violence against women; and iv) optimising the benefits from the use of digital technology to develop children's potentials, enhance their sense of self-worth, and protect them from violence.

This collective goal of promoting a child-friendly and inclusive environment can be achieved through strong partnerships with different stakeholders and with the meaningful and effective participation of children.

Viewpoint

Hou Nirmita

Under Secretary of State, Ministry
of Women's Affairs, Cambodia

Cambodia's Representative for
Women's Rights

Chair of the ASEAN Commission
on the Promotion and Protection
of the Rights of Women and
Children (ACWC)

ACWC is a consultative body that supports the work of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development. ACWC Chair and Cambodian Ministry of Women's Affairs Under Secretary Hou Nirmita talks about the role of the Commission in securing the rights of women and children in the region.



What led to the establishment of the ACWC in 2010, and can you explain its mandate, composition, and specific function?

Mdm. Hou Nirmita:

At the 10th ASEAN Summit held in November 2004, the ASEAN Leaders adopted the Vientiane Action Programme 2004-2010 (VAP), which among others, called for the establishment of an ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children (ACWC). Significantly, the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2009-2015 reiterated the mandate for the establishment of the ACWC. The ACWC was inaugurated on 7 April 2010 in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, on the occasion of the 16th ASEAN Summit. It was established “to promote and protect the rights of women and children to ensure their equitable development in the region”. ACWC, as a consultative ASEAN body, is able to monitor other ASEAN objectives as they relate to the rights of women and children.

The ACWC is a crucial ASEAN regional mechanism because it is specifically mandated to develop policies, programmes, and innovative strategies to promote and protect the rights of women and children. Its creation is in line with the goal to uphold the rights contained in the Convention on the Elimination of Violence Against Women (CEDAW) and the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) through its implementation of the 5-year Work Plan.

Apart from implementing the work plans, the ACWC has been actively engaged in cross-sectoral and inter-pillar cooperation across the ASEAN Community. The areas of cooperation prioritise the elimination of violence against women and children, trafficking-in-persons (TIP), and promoting gender equality and the empowerment of women and girls, among others.

ACWC is composed of representatives for women's and children's rights from governments, civil society organisations, and the academe, as selected by the respective appointing authorities in the ASEAN Member States. The representatives serve on a voluntary and part-time basis. In addition, the ACWC reports to and supports the work of the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (AMMSWD).

What mechanisms or approaches does ACWC use to ensure that the rights contained in the Convention on the Rights of the Child and Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women are upheld by the Member States?

Mdm. Hou Nirmita:

Adopting a collaborative approach with the ASEAN Member States and multiple stakeholders, ACWC conducts various training, regional workshops, seminars, and consultative meetings continuously. The training creates opportunities for government officials, civil society organisations, professionals, and other stakeholders to participate, exchange views, and share their knowledge with one another. Furthermore, they strengthen commitments by learning theoretical strategies and implementing them for practical purposes. The research results are used to develop more responsive policy and regional guidelines. These are all aimed to ensure that the rights of women and children are truly provided and guaranteed in real settings.

The ACWC also initiated strong advocacy for mainstreaming women and child rights as an organisational imperative. In so doing, the ACWC reinforced it by developing strong guidelines and tools that make programmes and practices within ASEAN gender-responsive and child-sensitive. A few examples are the guidelines for the frontline responders who safeguard the rights of TIP victims, and the guidelines on non-gender stereotyping in curriculum and textbook writing for higher education level in collaboration with ASEAN Commission on Women and the Senior Officials Meeting for Education.

The approach also covers awareness raising campaigns and efforts to push for stronger protection of the rights of women and children, such as campaigns in support of Elimination of Violence Against Women-Regional Plan of Action, and the Bohol TIP Work Plan that focuses on the prevention of the gender-based workplace exploitation among migrant women.

Attention is now directed towards the deepening and long-term impact of the pandemic on children. Can you tell us about ACWC's initiatives and partnerships to reverse the devastating impact of COVID-19 on children and young people?

Mdm. Hou Nirmita:

The ACWC is facing a horizon that is fraught with much uncertainty considering that the world is far different from when the commission was established. The promotion and protection of the rights of women and children have to contend with a world that is becoming smaller and connected but still divided and unequal. It is more flawed with the breakdown of societal structures caused by the harmful and deepening effects of the COVID-19 pandemic, with vulnerable groups suffering disproportionately. Technological advances and the burgeoning digital world are also changing the challenges to realising the rights of women and children. And as the ongoing global COVID-19 pandemic has unearthed and even exacerbated threats to the rights of women and children in the ASEAN region, the need to address and remedy the catastrophe is even more urgent.

The COVID-19-related crises have exacerbated existing gender and socioeconomic inequalities, meaning women are at greater risk as frontline workers, family caregivers, and are more likely to face gender-based violence. In addition, a higher number of children are out of school. In 2021, the ACWC worked with the ASEAN Commission on Women to develop the *ASEAN Gender Outlook*, a pioneering publication that monitored and documented the progress of Sustainable Development Goals through gender statistics. It revealed that the pandemic rolled back some of SDG progress. Under the current ACWC Workplan, this is research that the Member States can study, such as the linkages between the pandemic and violence against women, especially migrant women workers. There was also a regional conference where the information was shared to help accelerate recovery and build people's long-term resiliency in planning and coping with future crises.

“The children’s only concern at this age should be their education, not earning an income to support their families.”

What are the most pressing issues related to children’s rights and welfare that may have been neglected during the pandemic? What do ASEAN Member States need to do to address these issues?

Mdm. Hou Nirmita:

Among the countless issues that involve children’s rights and welfare nowadays, especially during the pandemic, are the lack of access to education and nutritional needs. During COVID-19 pandemic, schools and other educational institutions were closed. Many children were unfortunately forced to drop out during this time to work and help support their families. Although some schools have begun to reopen, the numbers of returning children are still low. Overall, extreme poverty affects not only their education but their health as well, both physically and mentally. Some children also rely on supplementary feeding programmes in school to receive proper breakfast. This has been disrupted by the pandemic. Without access to school and their dependence on food support, many children were left without proper nutrition. These issues are of course still ongoing.

ASEAN Member States need to strongly address these pressing matters. Access to education should be provided for all children equally, no matter their family income. The children’s only concern at this age should be their education, not earning an income to support their families. This means making sure their parents or guardians have enough means to provide for them, allowing them to focus on their schooling. We must also

ensure that they are eating properly and getting proper nutrition. Some schools have already started providing free breakfast for their students, which should be more common across the countries. Snacks sold in schools should also be closely monitored to make sure our children do not have access to unhealthy food.

Can you share with us some of the successful outcomes of ACWC initiatives? What have been the remaining gaps or challenges in promoting national policies and programs towards the promotion and protection of children’s rights?

Mdm. Hou Nirmita:

There are 18 thematic and 17 regional project areas under the ACWC work plan 2012-2016. For the 2016-2020 plan, ACWC covers 16 thematic areas of work for up to 48 regional projects. Recently, through various consultation meetings among members and relevant stakeholders, the ACWC Work Plan 2021-2025 was developed. It covers four outcomes and various outputs that are envisioned to contribute to the achievement of the ASCC Blueprint 2025.

The accomplishments that ACWC has successfully completed include:

- i. established itself as a highly specialised and credible ASEAN body with expertise in promoting and protecting the rights of women and children;
- ii. fulfilled an increasingly significant role in setting the policy agenda of ASEAN on women and children’s rights;

- iii. trailblazed the path in shedding light on emerging issues;
- iv. led pioneering action research that has contributed to evidence-based policy and programme development;
- v. built and continues to strengthen capacities;
- vi. increased awareness on the necessity of promoting and protecting the rights of women and children by expanding its public outreach;
- vii. amplified the voices of women and children by engaging various ASEAN bodies; and
- viii. steered development cooperation with ASEAN’s partners towards the promotion and protection of the rights of women and children.

Additionally, ACWC has also officially set the policy agenda of ASEAN on women and children’s rights. The agenda for programme development covers strategies that would alleviate the emerging issues based on strong evidence-based research. The plan also aims to strengthen human resources and their capacities continuously. It aims to increase awareness on these pressing matters and the necessary actions need to be taken.

Women and children should be able to participate and express their real concerns. The goal is to focus on real-life issues rather than the presumptions of what those issues are. Hence, their participation is very critical. Moreover, amplifying the voices of women and children is essential to advance cooperation with ASEAN’s partners.

At a glance

CHILDREN IN ASEAN

Eight ASEAN Member States, except Brunei Darussalam and Viet Nam, define children as persons under the age of 18. For Brunei Darussalam, a child is any person under the age of 14, while for Viet Nam a child is any citizen under 16 years old.



Source: *Children in ASEAN: 30 Years of the Convention on the Rights of the Child*, UNICEF and ASEAN, <https://www.unicef.org/eap/media/4281/file/Children%20in%20ASEAN.pdf>

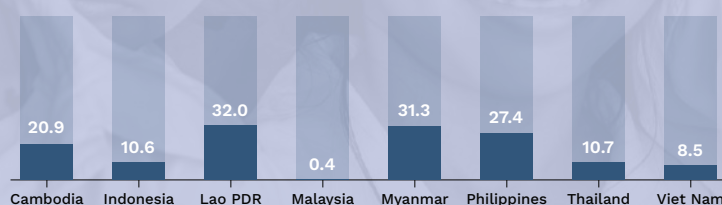
Population under age 18 (in '000), as of 2021

	Female	Male	Total
Brunei Darussalam	57.60	61.80	119.41
Cambodia	2,807.84	2,948.63	5,756.47
Indonesia	40,497.66	42,689.87	83,187.53
Lao PDR	1,343.63	1,395.40	2,739.02
Malaysia	4,514.93	4,795.60	9,310.53
Myanmar	7,854.73	8,270.39	16,125.12
Philippines	19,992.91	21,447.94	41,440.85
Singapore	418.16	442.22	860.38
Thailand	6,681.55	7,082.58	13,764.13
Viet Nam	12,453.84	13,729.28	26,183.12



Source: Generated from the UNICEF Data Warehouse, https://data.unicef.org/dv_index/

Children living in households with income below the national poverty line (as a % of all children), as of 2020



Source: Generated from the UNICEF Data Warehouse, https://data.unicef.org/dv_index/

Proportion of children covered by social protection, as of 2020



*Data as of 2019

Source: Generated from the UNICEF Data Warehouse, https://data.unicef.org/dv_index/

Legal Identity of Children

Birth registration is provided for by national laws in all ASEAN Member States. In general, birth registration is mandatory and, excluding the Philippines and Viet Nam, it is provided free-of-charge.

	Year (latest available)	Percentage of children under age 5 whose births are registered
Indonesia	2021	77
Lao PDR	2017	73
Myanmar	2016	81
Philippines	2017	92
Singapore	2020	100
Thailand	2019	100



Source: *Legal Identity of All Women and Children in ASEAN: A Regional Synthesis*; ASEAN, UNCHR, and MOLISA, <https://asean.org/book/legal-identity-of-all-women-and-children-in-asean-a-regional-synthesis/>



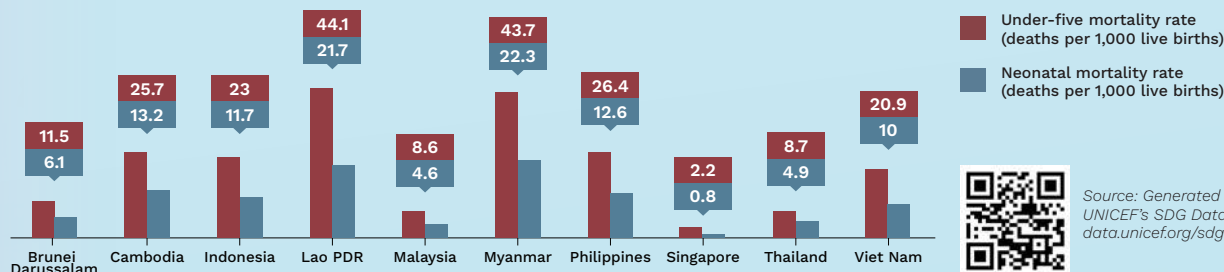
Note: No data available for Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Malaysia, and Viet Nam

Source: Generated from the UNICEF Data Warehouse, https://data.unicef.org/dv_index/

At a glance

HEALTH AND WELL-BEING

Child Survival Indicators, as of 2020



Health issues affecting children in Southeast Asia prior to COVID-19



The region faces a double burden of malnutrition, i.e., stunting and obesity



Almost a third of children in the region have stunted growth due to chronic malnutrition, leading to cognitive and physical impairment



Adolescents' mental health and well-being, growing incidences of self-harm, and high suicide rates are of increasing concern in the Southeast Asia and Pacific region

Top five cause of death among adolescent boys and girls aged 15-19 in East Asia and the Pacific, 2019



Road Injury



Tuberculosis



Drowning



Suicide



Interpersonal violence

Source: The State of the World's Children 2021: On My Mind—Promoting, Protecting and Caring for Children's Mental Health, UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/media/114636/file/SOWC-2021-full-report-English.pdf>



Source: Situation Analysis on the Effects of and Responses to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Asia, UNICEF and UNESCO, <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/16436/file/Regional%20Situation%20Analysis%20Report.pdf>

Impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on routine childhood immunisation

Routine immunisations to protect children from common diseases fell to their lowest levels in **30 years**

In 2021,

25 million infants

missed out on one or more doses of diphtheria, tetanus, and pertussis (DTP3) vaccine

18 million of them

did not receive a single dose of DTP, the majority of whom live in India, Nigeria, Indonesia, Ethiopia, and the Philippines

6.7 million children

missed the third dose of polio vaccine

24.7 million children

missed their first measles vaccine dose

14.7 million more

did not receive their second measles vaccine dose



Source: World Health Organization, <https://www.who.int/news/item/15-07-2022-covid-19-pandemic-fuels-largest-continued-backslide-in-vaccinations-in-three-decades>

Conversations

COVID-19 Pandemic

Five children candidly share how the pandemic affected their daily lives, how it altered their views and attitudes, and what lessons they learned from the experience.

Kao Taieang, 17 Cambodia

During the pandemic in Cambodia, everyone had to stay at home without going anywhere if it was not necessary. Numerous lives were taken by the devil we call “COVID-19”. It seemed as if everyone was living in a jail without bars, which led to a drastic change in everyone’s lives, including mine and my family’s.

The pandemic has impacted me a lot in terms of my mental health. Lives were being taken as each day passed due to COVID-19 pulled me into a pit of anxiety. “What if the devil took my family away from me?” Tears fell every day, like waterfalls, as if the worries watered my eyes with those tears. Motivations also vanished into thin air. As online classes were implemented, I couldn’t concentrate, which led to laziness taking control over me.

Consequently, I did not study much, thus, my grades fell downhill, and my passion for writing was burned to a crisp. Those days were indeed arduous; however, I endured them. I survived them, which made me stronger than ever.

On the other hand, the pandemic also affected my family in terms of financial stability. My family ran a business; due to the lack of customers, their business has encountered great challenges in making profits. This reason has led us to the difficult point of not being able to afford expensive things, especially my education, and to this day, they are still fighting hard to climb up from the pit of financial instability.

Even though my family and I were greatly affected by the pandemic, our warrior spirits have fought hard, despite the difficult circumstances.



Rayyann Haron Alqadry, 14 Malaysia

It's all a blurry dream. I know it existed. I know I lived it, but I don't remember how it felt, except for a warm embrace and a sense of security. Then, in one day, the entire world fell apart. Suddenly, everyone, my friends, even my relatives, was a threat to my life. If you told me years ago that the simplest of status quos would be abolished, I'd like to think I wouldn't have believed you. A young boy like me couldn't have fathomed.

No one thought I would last long. A new virus enters the world, so what!? This has happened before, we are prepared now. But it didn't end then, did it? We weren't prepared.

For the longest time, I never left the house. From waking at 7 to waking at 11. From changing for school to not changing at all. From outing once a day, to outing never, any day. My parents had it worse. They had a school that was rarely used. They were losing students faster than they were gaining new ones. They were trying to cope with a situation they had never prepared for; everyone was not prepared.

However, with every seemingly disastrous situation, often comes unexpected positive opportunities. With the closure of physical gathering sites, congregations moved online, opening them to multitudes, more people than before. For example, via the "Together at Home" series of performances, I managed to watch Paul McCartney live! The pandemic has also brought my family closer, with more frequent conversations and (online) meets.

Life places obstacles everywhere, and while this pandemic was a BIG one, it was still one we could overcome. All we can do now is reflect and plot our course for the future. That is, until the next pandemic, in which case, let's hope we're prepared.



Salsalina Larasati, 17 Indonesia

The pandemic may have been tough for everyone. Job terminations, limited human interactions, and transitions led us to live in a new normal. As someone who enjoys social interaction, staying at home can be challenging.

Hence, I go out of the house once in a while to buy groceries with my family. But, even if it is just for purchasing groceries, we see people on the streets still striving for a living; hoping for donations through their street performances; selling products, whether it is food or items, but with fewer buyers so they probably go without food for days.

Gratitude is crucial as it teaches us to be responsible for the number of blessings we have. Our blessings do not last forever, and anything could happen in the blink of an eye. A blessing that we deem small could be immense to someone.

We realise our privilege of staying at home with abundant food, clean water, continuous studies, and other countless blessings. The challenges of the pandemic for people can be from various aspects—mentally, physically, spiritually, and economically. Despite this, my family and I learned to be more expressive of our gratitude, as not everyone has the same blessings.



Ariadne Alcantara, 11 Philippines

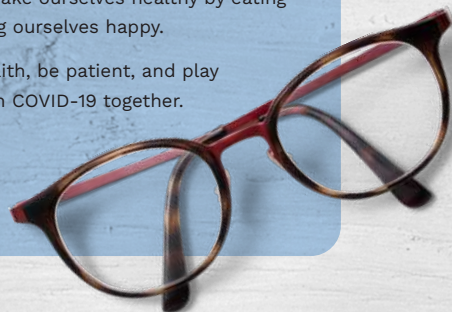
The COVID-19 pandemic has drastically impacted our lives. Masks and social distancing have become the “new normal.” Even my family has not been spared from getting infected. It was a very scary experience, but we were able to recover and learned some very important life lessons.

The first thing we learned was to trust God more. God is the one who gave us life and He has a reason why everything happens. We trusted God that He will heal us from our sickness, and He did. We must continue to trust Him at all times but still work hard to accomplish our mission in life, and that is to be a kind and loving person to others.

Next, we learned to be patient about our situation. Everything in life goes at a certain pace, from growing plants to recovering from a sickness. Patience can help us see our problems more clearly, make proper decisions, empathise with others, and be thankful for life despite its problems. We took it a day at a time, and before we knew it, we were on the way to recovery.

Lastly, we learned to always be careful and vigilant so we will not get infected again and protect others, too. Properly wearing masks, social distancing, and sanitising should be done by everyone. And, of course, get the vaccine when it is available. We should also make ourselves healthy by eating well, exercising, and keeping ourselves happy.

If we all continue to have faith, be patient, and play our part, we will get through COVID-19 together.



Sabila Hasya Hardiandtina, 16 Indonesia

The good thing about learning from home is there is no need to wear buttoned shirts, no need to wake up early, no need to rush to school, and I can instantly change clothes after (classes are) done.

I don't like buttoned shirts because it's uncomfortable. School uniforms are buttoned shirts. At least I don't have to wear it for a long time. I like knee-length shorts because they are short. When using Zoom, I wear a uniform on top, and my shorts that were covered by the desk.

Before, school started at 07.00 AM so I had to wake up at 05.30 AM to eat breakfast, take a bath and get ready for school. Now, I just wake up at 06.30 AM.

I don't need a car. I don't like the smell of gasoline; it makes me dizzy. No need to rush to school and it only takes 20 seconds to get to my desk. Before, when school was done, I had to wait until my parents picked me up, but no need for that now.

The bad thing about learning from home is time feels slower. It also makes me more shy when meeting people. Time feels slower because of the boredom. I have several friends at my regular school, but now I don't like meeting people I don't know.

Note: The children featured in this section submitted their written responses and photographs to *The ASEAN* with the consent of their parents/guardians. The submissions were received between June-July 2022 and edited lightly for clarity.

ASEAN Addresses Safe School Reopening and Learning Loss



Roger Y. Chao Jr., PhD

Head, Education, Youth, and Sports Division

ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Department



As a result of the COVID-19 pandemic, ASEAN Member States have seen school closures impacting more than 152 million children in the Southeast Asian region (Thomas, 2022). School closures and the sudden transition from face-to-face to digital modalities have resulted in significant learning loss and socio-emotional challenges for teachers and learners.

ASEAN Member States' education systems have undertaken innovative ways of addressing the learning crisis that has been exacerbated by the pandemic. Schools adopted the use of radio, television and other learning platforms and deviated to a mix of synchronous and asynchronous teaching and learning. However, the sudden shift required to address school closures left teachers unprepared, especially in ensuring the quality of teaching and learning in these new delivery mechanisms.

ASEAN's commitment to the United Nations 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda, which covers inclusive quality education for all, is clearly manifested in several key documents. These include, but are not limited to, the **Bali Declaration on the Enhancement and Participation of Persons with Disabilities in ASEAN Community** in 2011, the **ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out of School Youth and Children** in 2016, and the **ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025: Mainstreaming the Rights of Persons with Disabilities** in 2018. Furthermore, inclusiveness and equity dimensions not limited to education are also reflected in most, if not all, ASEAN declarations and key policies, including the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025, the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Framework, and the ongoing development of the **ASEAN Declaration on Digital Transformation of Education Systems in ASEAN**.

ASEAN has taken steps to support ASEAN Member States in addressing safe school reopening and learning loss. These include developing the *Reopen, Recover, and Resilience in Education: Guidelines for ASEAN Countries* and organising a ministerial roundtable on Recover Learning and Rebuild Education in the ASEAN Region. The roundtable produced a policy brief with critical recommendations for the ASEAN Member States to consider in addressing challenges related to school reopening and the learning crisis.



Launched in Bangkok on 6 June 2022 at the 2nd Asia Pacific Regional Education Ministers Conference, the *Reopen, Recover and Resilience in Education: Guidelines for ASEAN Countries*, highlights the need to maintain children and adolescents' learning process and ensure their right to education and recover learning losses, and contribute to strengthening the resilience of education systems including the need for cross-sectoral cooperation. The guidelines were developed by the ASEAN Secretariat under the leadership of Cambodia and with support from UNICEF East Asia and the Pacific Regional Office (EAPRO).

The guidelines offer medium to long-term strategies to cope with future shocks and disruptions in education, immediate strategies to address the urgent need for safe school reopening, learning recovery and continuity in education, and proposed performance indicators to monitor and evaluate the progress and results of undertaken strategies and initiatives. Some of the key recommendations presented in the guidelines are: emphasise the equity principle and inclusion of the most vulnerable and marginalised populations in all strategies; prioritise pre-primary education and early learning with holistic support for young children; make learning recovery an urgent priority strategy; ensure the return to learning and well-being for all students; build capacity in teaching at all levels of education, and strengthen education systems resilience to cope with the current pandemic and future shocks and disruptions.

On 16 March 2022, under the leadership of Viet Nam, the ASEAN Chair for Education for 2022 and 2023, the ASEAN Secretariat in partnership with Cambridge Partnership for Education, took stock of the ASEAN Member States' national initiatives on safe school reopening and learning recovery at the Ministerial Roundtable on Recover Learning and Rebuilt Education in the ASEAN Region. Inputs from the ASEAN Member States informed the development of a policy brief which put forward nine key recommendations (Thomas, 2022) including: address learning loss as a holistic challenge that goes beyond knowledge and skills loss; prioritise addressing learning loss for the groups most at risk; and take the opportunity to rethink national curricula.

Under the leadership of the Philippines and with support from UNICEF EAPRO, the ASEAN Secretariat is currently developing the ASEAN Declaration on Digital Transformation of Education Systems in ASEAN, which is expected to be adopted in November 2022 at the ASEAN Summit in Cambodia. It builds on the **ASEAN Joint Statement on the Digital Transformation of Education Systems throughout ASEAN** which includes the key focus on fostering digital literacy and developing transferable skills, promoting access to safe digital learning opportunities for all, engaging the private sector including in the provision of innovative digital learning solutions, and collaborating with stakeholders on open education resources and open access learning. The adoption and eventual implementation of the above-mentioned declaration will drive the comprehensive transformation of ASEAN Member States' education systems and contribute to increasing access and inclusiveness to quality education, and enhance the resilience of ASEAN education systems to the future pandemics, shocks and disruptions.

Each ASEAN Member State has been addressing the challenges of safe school reopening and the need for learning recovery. With lessons learned from their challenges on a national level, ASEAN Member States, the ASEAN Secretariat and partners are building back better. The ASEAN community is committed to ensuring schools reopen and stay open, children recover learning loss and increase resilience to face future challenges.

Download the reference materials from the following links:

Reopen, Recover, and Resilience in Education: Guidelines for ASEAN Countries



<https://asean.org/book/reopen-recover-and-resilience-in-education-guidelines-for-asean-countries/>

ASEAN Policy Brief on Safe School Reopening, Learning Recovery, and Continuity



<https://asean.org/book/asean-policy-brief-on-safe-school-reopening-learning-recovery-and-continuity/#:~:text=This%20policy%20brief%20aims%20to,as%20any%20future%20emergencies%20disruption>

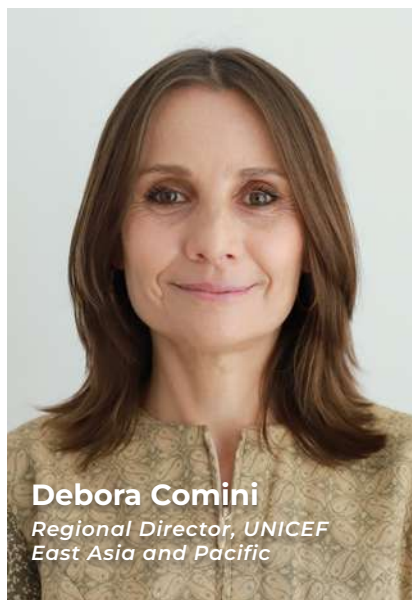
Addressing Learning Poverty in East Asia and the Pacific

1.1 trillion hours of in-person learning lost

The COVID-19 pandemic, now in its third year, has resulted in the largest disruption of education systems in history. In Asia-Pacific, we were the first hit and became the first responders to tackle its challenges.

Even before the pandemic, more than half of 10-year-olds in low- and middle-income countries were unable to read or comprehend a simple story. As a result of the education disruption, learning poverty or being unable to read and understand a simple text by age 10, has worsened and is estimated to be now close to 70 per cent.

In Asia and the Pacific, 1.1 trillion hours of in-person learning were lost. Education inequality deepened. Younger children are among the most seriously and worst affected, as they miss critical development opportunities. Measures to contain COVID-19 produced major detrimental effects on the health and well-being of children and adolescents, particularly the most vulnerable.



Debora Comini
Regional Director, UNICEF
East Asia and Pacific

Accelerating learning recovery—a call to action

To tackle this learning crisis, every child should receive the support they need, so they can return to school safely and catch up on lost learning as quickly as possible.

Recognising the need to accelerate learning recovery with urgent, at-scale action, UNICEF with UNESCO and the World Bank have been taking stock of the measures being implemented by countries in Asia and the Pacific to mitigate learning losses. Based on this knowledge, we are calling on governments and education partners to take RAPID action by:

- Reaching and retaining every child in school
- Assessing learning levels
- Prioritising teaching the fundamentals
- Increasing catch-up learning and progress beyond what was lost
- Developing psychosocial health and well-being so every child is ready to learn

There are successful examples of the RAPID framework. In Indonesia's Papua province, for example, the Ministry of Education has demonstrated that by empowering primary school teachers to assess better and teach the fundamentals, we can improve overall learning. Thailand achieved excellent results in Pattani province (in the far south) to improve foundational learning through a comprehensive mother-tongue-based multilingual education programme that is

ready to be adapted in other parts of the country, especially targeting children from linguistic minority communities.

2nd Asia-Pacific Regional Education Minister's Conference

This call to action was made at the 2nd Asia-Pacific Regional Education Minister's Conference (APREMC-II) held in Bangkok from 5 to 7 June 2022. APREMC-II was jointly organised by the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Bureau for Education and the UNICEF Regional Offices for East Asia and the Pacific and South Asia. It was co-hosted by the Royal Thai Government with generous support provided by the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology of Japan and the Equitable Education Fund of Thailand.

The conference was an opportunity for participants to learn from each other about successful initiatives, challenges, opportunities, and innovative ideas to accelerate actions for all learners. Participants reflected together on how to successfully facilitate a safe return to school, recover from learning loss and address learning crises, while aspiring to transform education and its systems with resilience in the long term.

APREMC-II concluded with the adoption of the Bangkok Statement 2022, which sets out two priority actions: i. Safe School Reopening, Learning Recovery and Continuity of Learning; and ii. Transforming Education and Education Systems. The statement was shared at the Sustainable Development Goal-4 Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee meeting in July 2022 and will inform the Transforming Education Summit in New York this September.

Reopen, Recover and Resilience in Education: Guidelines for ASEAN Countries

Across the ASEAN countries, at least 140 million children and adolescents saw their schools closed for an average of 30 weeks. An estimated 35 million learners had no access to their schools for almost two full academic years. Many more millions of the most disadvantaged children and adolescents lost learning opportunities due to the digital divide, as well as

other negative impacts of the pandemic. Tremendous inequity and learning losses are now looming over the ASEAN community.

Schools should be the last to close and the first to reopen, particularly for younger learners. Reopening schools may pose safety challenges, but the risks attached to keeping schools closed are far greater and more detrimental to children's learning and overall well-being.

We commend the efforts made by the Ministries of Education across the ASEAN member states to mitigate the challenges of school closures and ensure learning continuity.

The *Reopen, Recover and Resilience in Education: Guidelines for ASEAN Countries* launched at the Conference, developed by the ASEAN Secretariat with the leadership of the Cambodian Ministry of Education, Youth, and Sports, will further assist member states in their endeavours to recover learning and build stronger education systems. The guidelines will inform policy decisions on safe school reopening, mitigating learning loss, and enhancing the resilience of education systems for future shocks and emergencies. The guidelines are aligned with the RAPID framework.

Transforming education systems

Education systems are often strained. Many countries have strong policies that lose their impact on children's learning because

they are not adequately implemented at the classroom level. Or are implemented inequitably, inefficiently or without sufficient quality. Unimplemented policies are an obstacle to change. Moreover, our education systems are often not sufficiently linked and coordinated with other sectors. This means that opportunities are lost to meet children's learning needs. Countries must invest in transforming education systems to make them more inclusive and effective at nurturing learning. We need to:

- Systematise the innovations put in place during the learning recovery phase; for example, remedial learning and catch-up opportunities should be maintained in the longer term to continue to support struggling learners
- Accelerate digital transformation of our education systems to address the digital divide affecting millions of children in Asia
- Make education systems more resilient to future shocks, including climate change and disasters
- Ensure the safety and well-being of children and teachers

The world is looking to Asia and the Pacific

The Asia and Pacific region has been a pathfinder in the response to COVID-19, and the world is looking to us. We have three key messages:

- i. *Equity.* The most marginalised children must be the core target of all learning recovery and system transformation work.

- ii. *Scale.* We know what works: let us translate the successful programmes into results at scale.
- iii. *Invest.* The time to invest in children's education is now. Reduced spending on education would be the most expensive decision, with a devastating and irreversible impact on children's future.

Every child has the right to reach their full potential. We cannot sit back and allow a generation of children to miss out on their learning and full development. We must act now. UNICEF is committed to working with the Ministries of Education and education partners across Asia-Pacific to do everything we can to protect children from learning loss, especially the most vulnerable and marginalised, and help them realise their right to thrive. This is part of our commitment to building a strong ASEAN community for the future.

For further information, please contact: Shima Islam, Regional Communication Specialist, UNICEF East Asia and Pacific, ssislam@unicef.org

Reopen, Recover and Resilience in Education: Guidelines for ASEAN Countries is available at the following link:



<https://www.unicef.org/eap/reports/reopen-recover-and-resilience-education>

Conversations

Online Learning

One hundred fifty-two million students in the region were forced to shift to remote and online learning when the COVID-19 pandemic led to prolonged school closures.

Eight children share how they coped with this abrupt transition and what they liked or disliked about their virtual classes.



Arkin Yeshua B. Aznar, 15
Philippines

“Eskwela” is the Filipino term for school. Education is a vital part of our lives since, through education, we can enhance our knowledge, enrich our skills, and make ourselves ready to overcome future hurdles life may bring. However, the traditional “eskwela” suddenly turned into an “e-skwela.”

Before, I usually woke up at five in the morning to prepare myself for a whole day of learning at school. Then, from 7 AM to 5 PM, I would attend classes, have lectures and tests, and spend time with my friends. Right now, here I am, in front of my laptop all day long, attending video conferences, having online tests, and doing my requirements. It was hard to adapt to it at first, but as time went by, I adapted to online learning.

Online learning helped me learn things at my own pace. Also, we have more access to information about the different

topics we need to learn. However, distractions are inevitable while learning in our homes. No or slow internet connection, insufficient electronic gadgets, background noise, a lack of resources and a dedicated study area are the most common concerns that hinder a smooth online learning experience. Lastly, we miss our friends, our teachers, and the joy of physical learning.

In the Philippines, we are starting to have physical classes after two whole years of online learning. As physical classes return, I hope that they can be mixed with the advancements of online learning. I wish that more students would go to school, enrich their skills, enhance their wisdom, and continue to dream for a better future.



Heni Putri Lestari, 15 Indonesia

I must admit that online learning does have its pros and cons. As a student, I know how it feels to attend online learning. Maybe, for some of the students, they enjoy doing it. But there are also a few who don't.

What I like about online learning is that I can access my assignments everywhere, as long as I've got the internet. Also I can do other things such as eating at the same time because if it's offline, we can't eat in the class, right?

However, I still don't like a few things about online learning. I easily get distracted when I'm not interested in the topics, and also it's online learning, I can get bored, so I don't pay attention to the class. I also get distracted when the (internet) signal is bad because I can't hear the teachers clearly. Meanwhile, if it's offline, I can be more focused because I pay attention to the teachers. Even for the topics I don't like, I still try to focus.

During the pandemic, I can only attend online classes and other school and extracurricular activities are restricted.

Extracurricular activities can be one of the best places for me and my friends to spend time together while improving our skills based on interests.



Belinda Averina Jasman, 17 Indonesia

What I really like about at-home learning is that I do not get myself exhausted, and the same thing goes for my parents. I have a weak immune system and gastric problems. I have a tight schedule outside school as a ballerina and performer, so I always get invitations to perform, and also I am learning to be a ballet teacher. I cannot drive a motorcycle yet, so my parents are the ones who drive me often to school and to my ballet studio. They are getting old, so with at-home learning, I can help them as much as I can. I have a little brother who has Down Syndrome. So, when my parents are super busy taking care of our motorcycle workshop, I help them with house chores, taking care of my little brother, and workshop stuff.

Now, what I do not like about at-home learning is I cannot concentrate on the lessons while helping my parents and taking care of my little brother because housework will always keep coming. Then, I don't get to see my friends, although we can call each other through WhatsApp. The social interaction does not feel "real" because we cannot meet up with each other physically and I cannot meet my teachers physically.



Vazkya Kayyisa Dachlan, 10 Indonesia

My life changed since the COVID-19 pandemic started in Indonesia at the beginning of March 2020. The school closed during the pandemic. Our class shifted to virtual classes, and the school hours were shorter. It made me sad as I loved school very much. During the pandemic, I could not see my teachers nor play with friends, and I stayed at home most of the time. The pandemic forced us to wear a mask and carry hand sanitiser when going outside the home.

However, virtual learning also has a brighter side. For example, I did not have to wake up early in the morning for school. As a result, I had more time to do homework and play with my baby brother at home.



Beverly Pray Manurung, 12 Indonesia

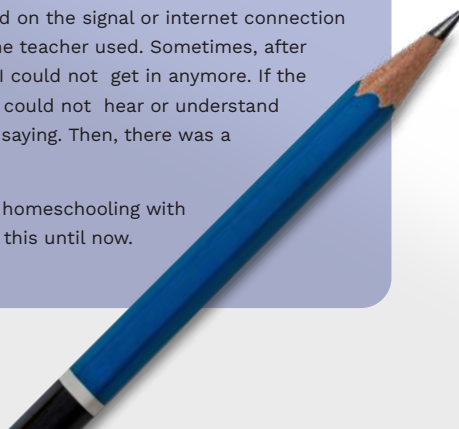
The pandemic lasted a very long time, and when it started, I was still ten years old. From March to July 2020, I was still in formal school and still studied with the teacher, but at home and online. We called it PJJ (*Pembelajaran Jarak Jauh*) or long distance learning.

What I like about doing formal school at home is that I have more free time, no extracurriculars, and I don't need to worry about being late for school. I have more free time to do things that I love, like riding my bicycle, playing with the cat, and using gadgets.

All the extracurricular was dismissed during PJJ, so I don't have to do the dance-extracurricular. I never have to come late to school. I usually wake up at 5 AM every day, get ready and go to school at 6 or 6.15 AM, because I don't want to be late. On PJJ, school still started at 7 AM, so I don't even have to wake up so early anymore.

What I dislike about formal school at home is whenever there was a lag sometimes on Zoom or Google Meet, I couldn't understand what the teacher was saying. About the lag, maybe it depended on the signal or internet connection that I used, or what the teacher used. Sometimes, after getting disconnected, I could not get in anymore. If the connection was bad, I could not hear or understand what the teacher was saying. Then, there was a lot of homework.

In July 2020, I started homeschooling with my mother and we do this until now.





Gloria Skolastika, 9 Indonesia

The coronavirus cannot be seen by humans, humans are afraid of the coronavirus. But many have recovered from the coronavirus disease, that's because doctors and nurses have helped us.

Because of the coronavirus, we can't go anywhere. Every time we leave the house, we must wear a mask, wash our hands and keep our distance. If we have the coronavirus disease, we have to stay at home. Because of coronavirus now, we have to go to school and do all activities at home.

All countries on this earth have been fighting the coronavirus disease since the beginning of 2020 until now. This coronavirus, it seems that it will continue and coexist with humans around the world. This is what is called the new normal, where we must avoid crowds, wear masks and wash hands.

I am in grade 3 doing school activities through Google Meet and there are always problems when schooling at home. At home school, the internet always cuts off, and school at home is very boring and I couldn't focus. Assignments must also be taken with photos or videos and I cannot play with friends. In the end, I play games and watch YouTube more than play with friends.

My hope is that with the vaccines, I hope that coronavirus will pass quickly, so that we can go to school as usual again, and all humans will not be exposed to the virus and everyone in this world can live normally like before.



Abraham Kenoly Blezz Manurung, 10 Indonesia

The good thing about learning from home is there is no need to wear buttoned shirts, no need to wake up early, no need to rush to school, and I can instantly change clothes after (classes are) done.

I don't like buttoned shirts because it's uncomfortable, school uniforms are buttoned shirts. At least I don't have to wear it for a long time. I like knee-length shorts because they are short. When using Zoom, I wear a uniform on top, and my shorts that were covered by the desk.

Before, school started at 7 AM so I had to wake up at 5.30 AM to eat breakfast, take a bath and get ready for school. Now, I just wake up at 6.30 AM.

I don't need a car. I don't like the smell of gasoline; it makes me dizzy. No need to rush to school and not it only takes 20 seconds to get to my desk. Before, when school is done, I had to wait until my parents pick me up, but no need for that now.

The bad thing about learning from home is time feels slower. It also makes me more shy when meeting people. Time feels slower because of the boredom. I have several friends at my regular school, but now I don't like meeting people I don't know.

Siti Nur Khasanah, 16 Indonesia

The thing that I liked about online learning is that using cellphones or laptops makes it easier for students to send assignments because they only need to press the send button, and assignments can be sent to the teacher. Students have more free time to do assignments, which means they can study optimally without having to be in a hurry because they have a lot of time at home.

Students can explore information related to lessons at school through references or sources available on smartphones. Students can set their own learning model that is appropriate (for them). For example, watching educational videos or animated videos related to subject matters at school makes it easier for students to learn.

There are students who don't like the online learning system. Sometimes, some students don't have smartphones or laptops, so online learning is not fun for them.

In certain areas, they also experience network connection problems that can have a bad impact on online learning. Online learning also causes a decrease in students' social activities because most of them prefer to leave online classes, perhaps by watching movies or playing games. Very few students actively ask the teacher if there are difficulties in understanding the lessons, or consult the teacher if there is a problem.

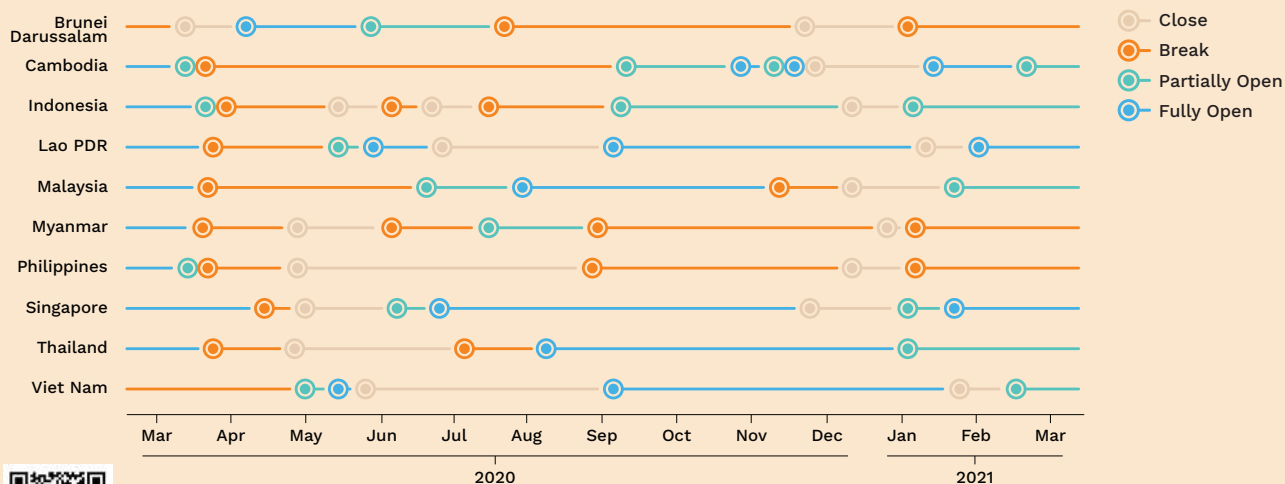
Everything in the world has its good and bad. Likewise, with online learning. As the nation's next generation, we must be able to learn lessons from online learning because it is a government policy that must be obeyed so that we can stop the spread of COVID-19. So, keep the spirit and follow health protocols.

Note: The children featured in this section submitted their written responses and photographs to *The ASEAN* with the consent of their parents/guardians. The submissions were received between June-July 2022 and edited lightly for clarity.

At a glance

LEARNING LOSSES

Overview of School Closures and Reopening in Southeast Asia



Source: Situation Analysis on the Effects of and Responses to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Asia, UNICEF and UNESCO, <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/16436/file/Regional%20Situation%20Analysis%20Report.pdf>

1.5 years of effective learning lost on average due to school closures.

3.2 trillion US dollars estimated loss in lifetime earnings.

33% more learning loss incurred by the poorest students compared to the richest students in developing Asia.



Source: Falling Further Behind: The Cost of COVID-19 School Closures by Gender and Wealth, Asian Development Bank, <https://www.adb.org/sites/default/files/publication/784041/ado2022-learning-losses.pdf>

80 million students (20%)

from pre-primary to upper secondary schools in East Asia and the Pacific cannot be reached by digital and broadcast remote learning programmes to counter school closures because of a lack of policies supporting digital and broadcast remote learning, or a lack of household assets needed to receive digital or broadcast instruction.



Source: COVID-19: Are Children Able to Continue Learning During School Closures?, UNICEF, <https://data.unicef.org/resources/remote-learning-reachability-factsheet/>

According to a model developed by the Brookings Institute, if learning in grade three is reduced by 3 months because of school closure, it will result in:

- **1 year** of learning loss by Grade 10 if no remediation is in place
- **half a year** of learning loss by Grade 10 if 1 year of remediation is provided
- **over a year** of learning gain by Grade 10 if 1 year of remediation is combined with sustained instruction reorientation



Source: Situation Analysis on the Effects of and Responses to COVID-19 on the Education Sector in Asia, UNICEF and UNESCO, <https://www.unicef.org/rosa/media/16436/file/Regional%20Situation%20Analysis%20Report.pdf>



Over 1.5 billion children have been affected by school closures, with **80%** of children saying that they learnt little or nothing at all during the pandemic.



As a result of being stuck at home, **two-thirds of girls** are doing more chores around the house and over half reported spending more time caring for siblings.



Being out of school can be a driver of increased violence against children. Violence in the household was reported by children at over double the rate when schools were closed (**17%**) compared with when schools were open and the child was attending in person (**8%**).



Source: Protect A Generation: The Impact of COVID-19 on Children's Lives, Save the Children, https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/pdf/vr59-01_protect_a_generation_report_en_0.pdf/



Viewpoint

Luu Quang Tuan

Director General, International Cooperation Department, Ministry of Labour, Invalids and Social Affairs, Viet Nam

Senior Officials Meeting on Social Welfare and Development (SOMSWD) Viet Nam Leader



Bullying of children is becoming a pervasive concern in the region. Director General Luu Quang Tuan shares with The ASEAN, some of the initiatives started by ASEAN to protect children from bullying, both online and offline.

In October 2021, ASEAN issued a declaration to eliminate bullying of children. Why was it important to issue this declaration, and what specific actions is ASEAN taking to protect its children and youth from this form of violence to children?

Director General Luu Quang Tuan:

Schools are expected to provide a safe and comfortable learning environment to support the full development of a child. However, there are several factors that can create barriers to this development, one of which is bullying in schools that commonly stems from peers.

According to *U-Report 2019* of UNICEF, one in three young people in 30 countries said they have been a victim of online bullying, with one in five reporting having skipped school due to cyberbullying and violence. Given the advancement of technology today, bullying is evident not only in school grounds but also in social media and through the use of electronic mobile gadgets. “Cyberbullying” has become so rampant because children are highly engaged with information and communication technology in their daily lives. This form of child violence happens

in the digital space. Hence, it is often undetected by parents, guardians, and educators, who may not be equipped to identify the signs of cyberbullying affecting a child.

Often, cases of cyberbullying are only addressed when the impact to the child’s psychosocial well-being is already severe, and the child’s life is in peril because parents and educators lack an understanding of the dynamics of cyberbullying. Many families are left unaware or at a loss on how to handle their children in situations of cyberbullying in the context of their values, culture and traditions. Given this growing problem, there is a need for comprehensive and multi-sectoral responses that address the needs of the cyberbullying child victims, and the underlying causes that allow and encourage bullying. Most often than not, child bullies have also experienced bullying or other forms of violence in their lives.

With around 35 per cent of region’s population under the age of 19 (2017), ASEAN has been mindful of the impacts of bullying at schools, especially cyberbullying, in recent years. It has pushed to develop preventive measures against violence in cyberspace through these initiatives and declarations:

- ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on the Elimination of Violence against Children (RPA-EVAC) (2016–2025). The RPA-EVAC directs the ASEAN Member States to develop preventive measures against violence in cyberspace, such as bullying and sexual exploitation, and ensure that these measures are extended to all settings, including homes, schools,

communities and the business sector. The measures can be done through laws and policies, educational programmes, and industry engagement.

- The **Declaration on the Protection of Children from all Forms of Online Exploitation and Abuse in ASEAN**, which the ASEAN Leaders adopted at the 35th ASEAN Summit in 2019, reaffirms ASEAN’s commitment to the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and the United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (2015). The commitment includes achieving these sustainable development goals or SDGs by the year 2030: “Eliminate all forms of violence against all women and girls in the public and private spheres, including trafficking and sexual and other types of exploitation” (SDG 5.2); and “end abuse, exploitation, trafficking and all forms of violence against and torture of children” (SDG 16.2).
- ASEAN endeavours to leverage its political will in creating a shared ASEAN identity that promotes tolerance, inclusivity and equality through dialogue and cultural exchange, based on inter-religious and inter-cultural respect. This initiative is translated into high-level political commitment documents, including the **ASEAN Declaration on Culture Prevention for a Peaceful, Inclusive, Resilient, Healthy and Harmonious Society** (2017) that highlights the need to address sources of conflict and issues towards sustainable and inclusive development and resiliency in ASEAN.

For the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion of and Protection of the Rights of Children (ACWC) Workplan 2021-2025, Singapore, Viet Nam and Brunei Darussalam worked on the development of the Declaration on the Elimination of Bullying of Children in ASEAN as one of the key documents adopted by the ASEAN Leaders at the 38th and 39th ASEAN Summits in 2021.

The declaration reaffirms the commitment among ASEAN Member States to promote and protect children in ASEAN against all forms of bullying (verbal, relational, physical, and cyber) in order to ensure that their best interests and welfare are upheld. It underscores the approach of a culture of prevention through education and outreach to influence positive social norms and empathetic behaviors.

The declaration also paves the way for the sharing of best practices through regional learning exchanges; understanding the causes that drive bullying amongst children; and examining its impact on victims to render them support and assistance. These initiatives could be further explored through capacity building and raising the awareness of educators, parents and children, with the cooperation of government and civil society partners, and in accordance to the national contexts, cultures and values of their respective ASEAN Member States.

To further accelerate actions on ending bullying of children in the region, Singapore, Viet Nam and Brunei Darussalam are spearheading the development of a Road Map for the Elimination of Bullying of Children in ASEAN, for notation by the ASEAN Leaders during the ASEAN Summits.

Can you share with your readers Viet Nam's experiences in combating bullying of children, both online and offline? What strategies have been effective, and what have been the challenges so far?

Director General Luu Quang Tuan:

To prevent and combat bullying of children both online and offline, Viet Nam has passed and implemented Article 54 of Law, on Children (2016) on responsibilities for child protection on the network environment, and Article 29 of Law on Cyber security (2018) on child protection in cyberspace.

We have issued a number of decrees on regulating safe, healthy, friendly educational environment, and the prevention of and fight against school violence. There are existing decrees that stipulate sanctions against administrative violations in the fields of post, telecommunications, radio, information technology and electronic transactions.

Viet Nam is implementing a Safe, Friendly and Equal School project, which includes the development of materials for teachers on preventing bullying through electronic means.

There are programmes to increase awareness and build the capacity of teachers, parents and children to prevent bullying. The tools that are being developed include the digital handbook for parents. We have launched a communication campaign on child protection through multiple channels.

Viet Nam has mapped out these initiatives to advance the campaign to prevent bullying:

- Review and supplement provisions of laws and policies on the protection of children online
- Promote the coordination among ministries and agencies and the cooperation between Government and private sector to strengthen the protection of children in the Internet environment
- Develop a process for detecting, supporting and intervening in children abuse cases on the Internet
 - Increase the protection of children's privacy and data
- Strengthen the role of information and communication technology businesses in creating a safe network environment for children
- Improve overall child protection capacity and the ability to provide child protection on the Internet of authorities, businesses and communities (including arming them with information technology knowledge and skills to protect children in the Internet environment)
- Build tools and means to protect children on the Internet; monitor, collect, analyse and warn against the dangers and malware of cyberattacks related to child protection; deal with and overcome cyber attacks related to child protection

- Strengthen international cooperation, sharing experiences among countries in the region and around the world, the initiative to set up the safe internet for ASEAN children.

How has the COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the risks and vulnerabilities of children to bullying?

Director General Luu Quang Tuan:

According to an April 2020 report by UNICEF, increased time online can make children more vulnerable to online sexual exploitation, cyberbullying, riskier online behaviour, and potentially harmful content. Children can also fall prey to companies that inappropriately collect and use their private data. With the rush to implement long distance learning, schools, parents, and caregivers may lack the tools and knowledge to safeguard children online.

The report also says that while “not all the risks will translate to actual harm,” it is crucial that children are educated about these risks and are empowered with skills that allow them to use the internet safely.

What role do social institutions like the families, schools and media play in ending bullying of children?

Director General Luu Quang Tuan:

Families play an important role in preventing and responding to bullying. They are the first to recognise the warning signs that their child is involved in bullying. They should talk to the child if the child displays any behavioral or emotional changes. Many times, children will not ask for help, so it is important to know what signs to look out for. If the child is at immediate risk of self-harm or harming others, parents should seek help immediately. Behaviours are often learned from parents and caregivers, so they should be positive role models to their children.

Many children in the region are shifting back to offline learning, it is important that schools provide a safe environment for them. Principals, teachers, and other school personnel play a large role in dealing with bullying in schools. They should set clear definitions for bullying and enforceable rules to prevent it.

ASEAN CONTINUES TO FIGHT AGAINST CHILD LABOUR

Photo Credit: © Taira / Shutterstock

The call for impactful and sustainable actions to end child labour is more urgent now, as the world faces a protracted pandemic and an impending global economic crisis. For over a decade, ASEAN has joined forces to combat the worst forms of child labour as part of its broader vision of building an inclusive ASEAN Community.



Mega Irena

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According to ILO's latest global estimates, 160 million children were in child labour globally at the beginning of 2020, accounting for almost one in 10 children worldwide. In the same year, 48.7 million children in the Asia Pacific region were in child labour—around 67 per cent of whom were boys. While this is a substantial figure, it is lower than the number of children in child labour recorded in 2016 at 62.1 million. In terms of percentage, Asia Pacific's child labour rate had declined from 7.3 per cent in 2016 to 5.6 per cent in 2020.

In ASEAN, the prevalence of child labour remains significant despite the region's steady economic growth. ASEAN is the fifth largest economy in the world based on its total combined GDP of 3.2 trillion US dollars in 2019. Following the economic impact of the pandemic, its GDP still stood at 3 trillion US dollars in 2020. Total trade values increased in 2021, and ASEAN's economy was estimated to grow by 5 per cent this year (ASEAN, 2021). Still, poverty persists, especially in rural areas and is the root cause of various social problems, including child labour.

The pandemic has magnified the risks that children face, especially those from poorer families. For example, in 2022, the Asian Development Bank reported that 4.7 million people in the Southeast Asian region were pushed into extreme poverty due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

The *ASEAN Rapid Assessment: The Impact of COVID-19 on Livelihoods across ASEAN* conducted in 2020 noted that school-age children suffered from school closures and learning disruptions. For many of these children, school closures have resulted in them dropping out of school permanently. In the long run, this situation may increase the vulnerability of poor children to child labour.

Several ASEAN Member States have undertaken child labour surveys within the last 10-15 years (ASEAN Secretariat 2020). The result of the surveys showed the same pattern across the Member States: child labour incidence is much higher in remote rural areas than in urban areas, with the highest concentration in agriculture (including forestry and fishery), followed by the services and industry sectors. In sum, child workers are commonly found in the informal sector and are tapped for unpaid family work, keeping them out of school and depriving them of their right to education.

Acknowledging this situation, ASEAN and its Member States have prioritised eliminating child labour.

All ASEAN Member States have ratified ILO Convention 182 on the Worst Forms of Child Labour and ILO Convention 138 on Minimum Age. ILO Convention 138 sets the minimum age for employment at 15 years if the young person who wants to take up full-time work has completed compulsory education. Hazardous work is not allowed below the age of 18 years. Furthermore, all forms of slavery or practises similar to slavery against those below 18 years old are considered the worst forms of child labour and are prohibited.

Member States support the realisation of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) target 8.7 on the elimination of forced labour by 2030 and the elimination of child labour by 2025. Member States are also committed to the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights (UNGPs). Complementing these, the ASEAN Roadmap on the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour by 2016 was adopted by labour ministers more than a decade ago. The Roadmap was then renewed for completion by 2025.

Building upon achievements and lessons learned from the implementation of the 2016 ASEAN Roadmap and other relevant regional instruments, the 2025 Roadmap provides a region-wide framework of cooperation that reinforces Member States' actions against child labour at national and global levels. Joint initiatives are ongoing in three focus areas: prohibiting child labour practices and promoting good governance for the elimination of child labour; prevention of child labour practices; and protection of children.

ASEAN bodies' initiatives contributing directly or indirectly to eliminating the worst forms of child labour are consolidated in the Roadmap. Joint efforts on labour inspection, human trafficking prevention, social welfare, rural development, poverty eradication, education, protection of children's rights, and statistics, among others, were identified. The Roadmap is also supported by a monitoring framework that will enable ASEAN bodies to measure achievements by 2025.

The Roadmap is not a stand-alone document but is reinforced in other ASEAN commitments that, together, foster a holistic approach to addressing child labour issues, including:

- Vientiane Declaration on Transition from Informal Employment to Formal Employment towards Decent Work Promotion in ASEAN
- ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Education for Out-of-school Children and Youth
- ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Social Protection
- Declaration on the Elimination of Violence against Women and Elimination of Violence against Children in ASEAN
- Declaration on the Protection of Children from All Forms of Online Exploitation and Abuse in ASEAN
- ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration
- ASEAN Convention against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children

While its collective efforts to eliminate child labour have been very encouraging, ASEAN will not be complacent.

In the digital era, rapid internet penetration in the region comes with jobs and economic growth opportunities. However, it also presents challenges such as increased children's exposure to various forms of online exploitation. A 2016 study by the OECD or the Organization for Economic Cooperation

and Development states, “forced labour and child labour could—possibly unknowingly—be exploited in platform markets. While, to date, no evidence exists on this issue, buyers of digital services delivered over the Internet have difficulties in verifying who produces the service and under which conditions. Simple click-work, for example, could be performed by children, who might even be systematically exploited by intermediaries that organise “click factories.”

It is evident that there are still many more that could and should be done. Media campaigns to raise public awareness on ways to prevent child labour and protect children from such risks should continue. Alternative education models should be available in rural and remote areas. Access to inclusive social protection must be prioritised in the rural development agenda. Responsible business should continue to be promoted by registering small businesses in the informal economy. ASEAN is on track with the implementation of the Roadmap. Together, Member States can boost the resilience of this region against all forms of child labour.

References may be downloaded from this link:



<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1yVliHvubxFglUXYM06w8pxH6sDMrdKcy/view?usp=sharing>

Child labour

	Year (latest available)	Percentage of children (aged 5–17 years) engaged in child labour (economic activities)
Cambodia	2012	11.5
Lao PDR	2017	26.3
Myanmar	2015	8.1
Philippines	2020	1
Viet Nam	2021	5.4

Note: No data available for Brunei Darussalam, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, and Thailand

Source: Generated from the UNICEF Data Warehouse https://data.unicef.org/dv_index/



ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION FOR CHILDREN IN ASEAN



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Tri S. Saputro
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Environmental changes have been wreaking havoc on Southeast Asian communities.

Children are not spared from the adverse impact of these environmental changes. In fact, children are far more vulnerable to climate-related disasters due to their psychological, immunologic, and cognitive differences compared to their adult counterparts (Columbia University Mailman School of Public Health, 2018). They are also at a higher risk of exposure to smoke and haze caused by the region's seasonal forest fires, which can significantly increase cases of asthma and upper respiratory tract infections (Sahani, et al., 2014). Children are the cornerstone of ASEAN's sustainable future; thus, early attention and children's commitment to sustainability and environmental education are essential.

Given these considerations, regional efforts towards ensuring children's right to a healthy environment are among ASEAN's priorities. It is essential to educate and engage children to be agents of change for a better and more sustainable future. Environmental education could be an effective tool to improve the environmental knowledge, attitude, intentions, and behaviour of children and instil a sense of responsibility for their future. With children comprising a significant proportion of the ASEAN population, they can be vital assets in building long term solutions to cope with the future environmental challenges in our region.

At the regional level, all ASEAN Member States have made several important

commitments to protect the rights of children, including by ratification of three key Conventions: the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), the Convention on the Elimination of Violence against Women (CEDAW), and the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD).

Further, under the framework of ASEAN cooperation on environment, ASEAN Member States have taken concrete steps to include children in regional environmental initiatives and empower them to take care of the environment. The ASEAN Working Group on Environmental Education (AWGEE) was established in 2008 to institutionalise ASEAN's commitment to environmental education and public participation.

AWGEE has developed the *ASEAN Guidelines on Eco-Schools*, which set the regional standards for model environmentally friendly schools. The guidelines serve as the basis for choosing the winners of the ASEAN Eco-schools Awards, conferred every three years to schools in each Member State that carry out eco-friendly school policies and practices, integrate environmental education in the curricula, and conduct community outreach activities. The first ASEAN Eco-schools Awards was held in 2012 and have since been held twice (2015, 2019).

The *ASEAN Guidelines on Eco-Schools* is part of the ASEAN-Eco-School Programme, established to promote a green and eco-friendly culture in school communities. Under the programme, a range of initiatives to raise awareness on, protect and conserve the environment have been accomplished, such as mangrove planting, school gardening, energy conservation, rainwater harvesting, water conservation, and waste management training.

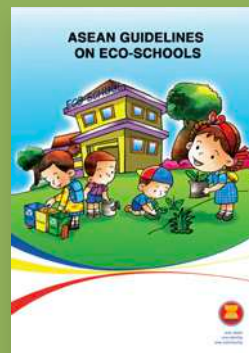
AWGEE also actively collaborates with development partners to conduct awareness-raising activities for children in the region.

The ASEAN Member States have their own programmes for educating and engaging children on environmental protection and sustainable practices. Through these, they show a strong commitment to ensuring children's inclusion, as articulated in the CRC, the **ASEAN Declaration on the Rights of Children in the Context of Migration**, and the **Joint Statement on Reaffirmation of Commitment to Advancing the Rights of the Child in ASEAN**.

ASEAN and its Member States will work more on environmental education and eco-school programme with children, including more field work to discern effective environmental education. Through these efforts, ASEAN can help young people transform into environmentally conscious and engaged stakeholders.



The *ASEAN Guidelines on Eco-Schools* is available at:
<https://asean.org/book/asean-guidelines-on-eco-schools/>



At a glance

LIVING ON A PLANET AT RISK

How climate change impacts children

Almost every child on earth is exposed to at least one of these climate and environmental hazards, shocks, and stresses: floods, droughts, tropical cyclones, heatwaves, pollution, water scarcity.



2.2 billion children

are exposed to at least two of these overlapping climate and environmental hazards, shocks, and stresses.

Key recommendations to create an environment fit for children:



Increase investment in climate adaptation and services for children



Reduce greenhouse gas emissions by at least 45 per cent by 2030



Equip children with climate education and green skills



Include young people in all national, regional, and international climate negotiations and decisions



Ensure that COVID-19 pandemic recovery is green, low-carbon, and inclusive



Source: UNICEF, <https://www.unicef.org/stories/impacts-climate-change-put-almost-every-child-risk>, <https://www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf>



Newborns in East Asia and the Pacific will experience:



2.5 times more drought,



3 times more river flooding,



8.2 times more heatwaves,



1.5 more wildfires, and



1.8 more crop failures

during their lifetimes compared to persons born in the 1960s.

Source: Save the Children, <https://resourcecentre.savethechildren.net/document/born-climate-crisis-why-we-must-act-now-secure-childrens-rights?go=2.187327144.1625160020.1660103910-1536721659.1658898547>



According to the Children's Climate Risk Index, seven countries in ASEAN are most at risk of the impacts of climate change:



The index measures children's exposure to climate and environmental hazards and shocks and their vulnerability to these hazards/shocks, based on their access to health, education, nutrition, and other social services.

Conversations

Climate Change

UNICEF says approximately one billion children are at an “extremely high risk” of the impacts of the climate change crisis. Research has shown that children born now will face much more extreme weather and other climate disasters than their grandparents experienced in their lifetimes.

The ASEAN asked children in the region about the impact of global warming on their families and communities and how they can help stop it.

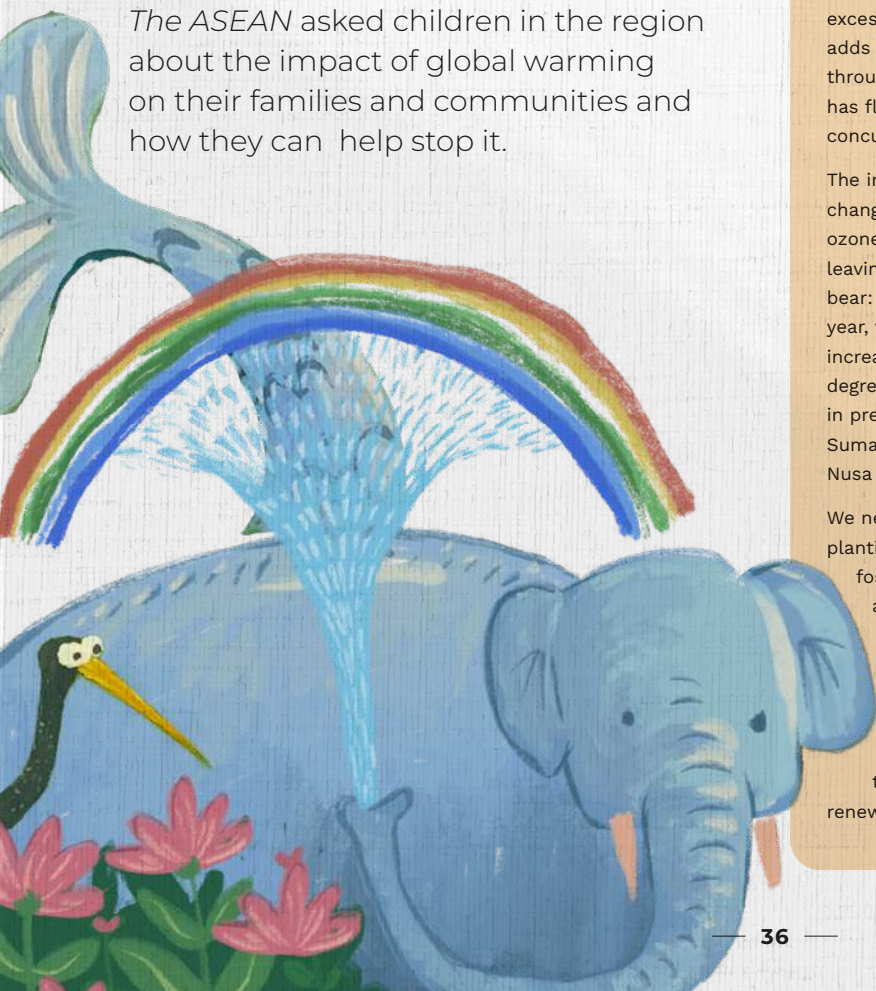


**Steven Ansel
Suhindra, 13**
Indonesia

Climate change has been drastically transforming our planet: from rapidly increasing the world's temperature to inducing the rise of sea levels and causing extreme weather. All of this has been due to the increasing levels of carbon dioxide within the earth's atmosphere, resulting from our excessive usage of fossil fuels, meat consumption that adds up to the methane gas released to the atmosphere through oxidation, the usage of air conditioners that has fluorocarbons that deplete the ozone layer, and concurrently, our habit of performing massive deforestation.

The increased level of carbon dioxide in our atmosphere changes the pattern of the earth's climate and depletes the ozone layer from the fluorocarbons air conditioners produce, leaving our community with substantial consequences to bear: the rising sea level in Jakarta by around 3.6 mm every year, worsening air pollution in Jakarta, forest fires, and increase in surface temperature in Indonesia by about 0.3 degrees every decade. The high temperature causes changes in precipitation patterns leading to wetter climates in Sumatra and Kalimantan but drier seasons in Java, Bali, and Nusa Tenggara.

We need to act quickly by stopping deforestation and planting more trees instead. We can also stop the use of fossil fuels and use alternative energy that doesn't affect our environment, like electricity, natural gas, biodiesel, dimethyl ether, and bioethanol. In addition to causing climate change, fossil fuels produce air pollution that can cause acid rain, damage crops and forests, and harm wildlife. Switching from fossil fuels to these safer alternatives is necessary because they don't affect the environment and are mostly renewable.





**Alfian Rasyiid
Widodo, 15**
Indonesia

The air quality is getting worse day by day, starting from the hot weather and excessive pollution. From there, I thought, “how can I reduce this”? Then I realised that to make a big change, we can start with small things. I discussed this with my family and they agreed to help me. I am part of a community at school where I invite all members to be aware of extreme climate changes. They all agreed with what I said, and from there, I saw a lot more awareness from my family and my community about climate change. They started using public transportation provided by the government, and reduced using private cars which causes more pollution. They lessened the use of plastic to protect the environment. My community often plants trees with local residents to remind them of the importance of protecting our planet.

Little by little, I see changes that are good for the environment. I realised that big changes can be made through simple ways, and everyone’s awareness of climate change greatly affects how we will live in the future.



**Kyle Oliver Alegre,
13**
Philippines

Climate change has greatly affected my community in Cavite. It brought about numerous strong typhoons that destroyed crops, houses, establishments, and the lives of many Caviteños. Numerous cities and municipalities here in Cavite experienced flooding when there was none before. In the past few years, strong typhoons that hit Cavite caused our classes to be suspended. It also indirectly affected our tourism because bad weather caused cancelled hotel reservations and vacations. Some businesses near us closed because strong winds and flooding damaged their establishments.

The extreme changes in weather patterns, whether El Niño (less rain) or La Niña (more rain), made it difficult for our farmers and livestock owners to sustain food production, thus, resulting in lesser food supply for the growing population in our country. There also have been several news reports about fish kills and red tide in some provinces.

Climate change did affect not only our agriculture but also our health. Higher temperatures cause heat stroke, dehydration and headache, and there are more pests like mosquitos that cause dengue and malaria. In 2019, one of



**Mahalakshmi El
Trinity Nirvana, 14**
Indonesia

The pandemic and quarantine have made me realise that our time on Earth is very precious. With online learning, all I’ve ever been at is at home. I would be busy with school, and my parents would be busy with work. Then in the magical afternoon, when cars would start to head home and birds chirp in unison, my parents and I would go to the garden. That’s when I realised there should always be time spent to save the Earth.

In the garden, we would plant corn, tomatoes, watermelon, durian, eggplant, melon, chilli, rambutan, betel nut, cabbage, carrot, and many other plants. I take care of our chickens roaming in the garden.

I have taken care of my environment and planet Earth by simply planting. Plants provide oxygen, serve as a food source for humans and animals, resist landslides, are a source of water, and a place for birds to live (my chickens!).

In our tiny backyard, my family has recently expanded our garden on a bigger piece of land. Our garden is home to many of our plants. It is our way of taking care of the planet Earth. When the plants bear fruits from our water and homemade fertiliser, we would eat a feast with our friendly neighbours. We would eat roasted corn in the chilly wind and share it with my chickens, too. Then as we sleep on our beds, my chickens rest on a branch of our planted tree.

The plan for our garden is to add a fishpond. Water from the pond can be used to fertilise the plants as well. So, our garden shall be home to many creatures indeed!

my closest friends got sick with dengue fever, but he quickly recovered from it.

In our country, fossil fuel is still being used as a source of energy. It contributes to the large amounts of carbon dioxide in the atmosphere that causes global warming.

To lessen the effect of global warming, I think the government should focus more on using renewable energy, like windmill turbines that use wind, instead of using minerals that produce toxic greenhouse gases. We can also use solar panels as another source of electricity. If one can afford it, buy electric vehicles as mode of transportation, or better yet, use a bicycle or walk if it is just a short distance.

As a teen, I think a simpler and easier way to help is to recycle and to stop using single-use plastic. We should also plant more trees or try to do urban gardening. I believe everybody should be more aware of the situation of our environment. In my opinion, nobody is too young to be educated about climate change and to help reduce its effects.

Note: The children featured in this section submitted their written responses and photographs to *The ASEAN* with the consent of their parents/guardians. The submissions were received between June-July 2022 and edited lightly for clarity.

15th ASEAN HEALTH MINISTERS MEETING AND RELATED MEETINGS BALI, 11 - 15 MAY 2022



ASEAN HEALTH SECTOR SEEKS FASTER PANDEMIC RECOVERY, More Resilient Regional Health System

**The ASEAN Editorial Team
ASEAN Socio-Cultural
Community Department**

**Health Division
ASEAN Socio-Cultural
Community Department**

Recovering swiftly from the COVID-19 pandemic and building a crisis-resilient regional health system remain the top priorities of the ASEAN health sector.

Indonesian Health Minister Budi Sadikin stressed this during his opening remarks at the **15th ASEAN Health Ministers Meeting (AHMM) and Related Meetings** held from 11 to 15 May 2022 in Nusa Dua, Bali.

Attended by health ministers and senior officials from across the region, the Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), and representatives from the World Health Organization, the meeting was the first major in-person event held by the sectoral body since the start of the pandemic. The main theme of the 15th AHMM, under the leadership of Ministry of Health-

Indonesia, as the ASEAN Health Sector Chair, was “Advancing the Achievement of ASEAN Health Development.”

Rapid and enduring recovery from COVID-19 pandemic

Vaccination remains one of the key strategies of ASEAN Member States to resume normalcy. At the meeting, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for the ASCC Ekkaphab Phanthavong shared that the ASEAN Secretariat had arranged with UNICEF the procurement and distribution of COVID-19 vaccine doses worth a total of 10 million US dollars, which various partners contributed through the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund. The allocated vaccine doses for ASEAN Member States, including ASEAN Secretariat, are equivalent to this financing cost.

To date, some ASEAN Member States have received either the allocated vaccines from UNICEF or the documents to process the delivery of these vaccines, said Deputy Secretary-General Phanthavong. The countries of Singapore, Malaysia and Indonesia have expressed the reallocation of their share to other ASEAN Member States, such as Myanmar and Lao PDR.

In the meeting, the health ministers also agreed on the mutual recognition arrangement of COVID-19 health certificates to enable ASEAN people to travel safely and securely to other ASEAN countries while upholding the prevailing laws and regulations on immigration and mandatory health protocols. The implementation of this mutual recognition through an ASEAN universal verification mechanism will be voluntarily rolled-out and can be embedded in the existing mechanisms of each ASEAN Member State.

The health ministers also adopted two regional mechanisms led by Indonesia. These include the health protocol for pandemic preventive measures in public places and cross-border contact tracing and rapid outbreak investigation. Health experts had been tapped to support Indonesia's Ministry of Health in the finalisation of these protocols.

Towards a resilient regional health system

With another possible pandemic looming on the horizon, the health ministers sought to fast-track the setting-up of the ASEAN Centre for Public Health Emergencies and Emerging Diseases (ACPHEED). Accordingly, the health ministers tasked its working arm, the Senior Officials Meeting on Health Development (SOMHD), to finalise the establishment agreement by September 2022.

The ACPHEED will further strengthen the region's public health emergency preparedness, prevention, detection, and response capabilities, towards becoming a centre of excellence and regional resource hub. The functions of this centre will be hosted by the countries of Indonesia, Thailand, and Viet Nam, with the main secretariat based in Thailand. The tasks of each will be based on the pillars of prevention, detection, and response.

Health Minister Budi Sadikin emphasised the importance of preparedness and prevention, noting, "And it is a matter of 'when,' not 'if,' the next pandemic or public health emergency occurs. As ASEAN Health Ministers, we are responsible for preparing and protecting our people and future generations by building regional health system resilience while accelerating COVID-19 recovery."

The health ministers also agreed to mobilise more resources for public health emergencies by exploring an expanded regional funding mechanism for COVID-19, turning it into an ASEAN Emergency Health Fund to support preparedness and prevention.

The health ministers also acknowledged the continuing role of existing regional mechanisms, such as the ASEAN Emergency Operations Centre Network for public health emergencies, ASEAN

Risk Assessment and Risk Communication Centre, ASEAN Plus Three Field Epidemiology Training Network, and the ASEAN BioDiaspora Virtual Centre, in detecting and responding promptly to public health crises.

Partnerships to address health system gaps

During the five-day event, the health ministers and senior health officials also held meetings with their counterparts from the Plus Three countries, People's Republic of China, the Republic of Korea, and the United States.

The dialogue partners expressed their support for the establishment of ACPHEED; the ongoing implementation and enhancement of regional and national capacities to assess risks and threats and to strengthen preparedness, prevention, detection, and response to public health emergencies; mitigation strategies to address current and future health threats; and efforts to increase access to vaccines, therapeutics, diagnostics, and other essential medical supplies.

They have committed to helping ASEAN bridge gaps in knowledge and capacity through technical assistance, training, and other capacity-building exercises in a wide range of areas, from universal health care to healthcare financing, and maternal and child health and medical services.

Details of agreements of the 15th AHMM may be found in the Joint Statement of the 15th AHMM, available at:



<https://asean.org/joint-statement-15th-asean-health-ministers-meeting/>

Other Joint Statements from the meetings with Dialogue Partners can also be accessed at the following links:



Joint Statement 9th ASEAN Plus Three Health Ministers Meeting
<https://asean.org/joint-statement-9th-asean-plus-three-health-ministers-meeting/>



Joint Statement 9th ASEAN-China Health Ministers Meeting
<https://asean.org/joint-statement-8th-asean-china-health-ministers-meeting/>



Joint Statement of the 1st ASEAN-Republic of Korea Health Ministers Meeting
<https://asean.org/joint-statement-of-the-1st-asean-republic-of-korea-health-ministers-meeting/>



Joint Statement of the ASEAN-U.S. Special Session Health Ministerial Meeting
<https://asean.org/joint-statement-asean-u-s-special-session-health-ministerial-meeting/>

Child

Undernutrition

Why it Matters



Joanne B. Agbisit

Associate Editor, The ASEAN

*ASEAN Socio-Cultural
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ASEAN's aspiration to produce a highly skilled and productive workforce to prop up economic growth may be in peril.

The ASEAN Food and Nutrition Security Report 2021 (Volume 1) notes that millions of children in the region—its future workforce—are suffering from malnutrition. Malnutrition traps individuals in the cycle of poverty, decreases labour productivity, and exacts a heavy toll on the economy.

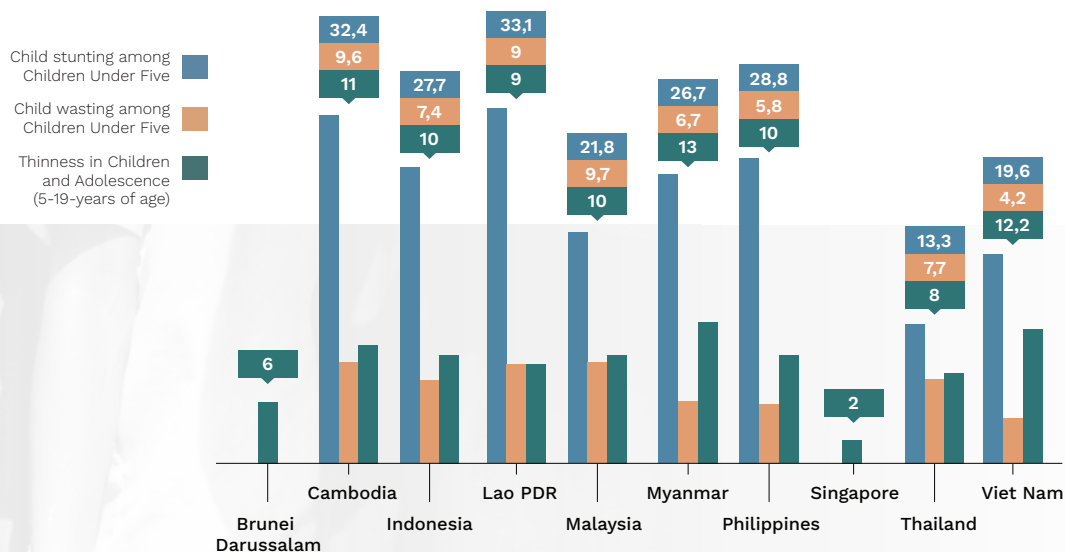
Of the various forms of malnutrition, stunting is the most widespread in the region. According to the *Report*, 15 million children under five are stunted or fall

below the age-appropriate height. Stunting affects almost all countries in the region, but is highest in Cambodia and Lao People's Democratic Republic and high in Indonesia, Malaysia, Myanmar, and the Philippines. It is also prevalent to some degree in Thailand and Viet Nam.

Wasting, another form of malnutrition, is also present in the region. The *Report* states that four million children under five are wasted or too thin for their height. They are spread across Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, and Thailand, and to some extent, Viet Nam.

Undernutrition persists into middle childhood and adolescence. "Prevalence of thinness hovers around 10 per cent in nearly all ASEAN Member States (with greater than 17 million adolescents affected)," the *Report*

Prevalence of Undernutrition in ASEAN (%)



Note: Data on child stunting and wasting are not available for Brunei Darussalam and Singapore
Source: ASEAN Food and Nutrition Security Report 2021

further says.

Undernutrition develops as a result of inadequate food consumption—both in terms of quantity and quality—and childhood diseases. These, in turn, are caused by household food insecurity, inaccessible health services, poor nutrition knowledge and practices, and unsanitary environments. Undernutrition is higher among children in poor families.

The costs of stunting and wasting

Stunting is particularly worrying since it is associated with an underdeveloped brain, with long lasting and largely irreversible consequences, according to UNICEF. Children afflicted with stunting have lower mental and learning capacity and typically struggle in school. When they become adults, they tend to have limited job prospects, underperform at work, earn less, and are prone to nutrition-related chronic diseases, such as diabetes, hypertension, and obesity.

Wasting is also a concern. “Wasted” children have weaker immune systems, which make them more susceptible to infections and diseases, often resulting in death. They are also more likely to experience developmental delays.

Child undernutrition increases a country’s spending on education and health care and impacts future productivity and economic growth. The World Bank estimates that some ASEAN countries lose between 2.4 per cent and 4.4 per cent of their GDP annually due to undernutrition.

Pre-pandemic estimates from World Bank and other sources put Cambodia’s annual losses at 400 million US dollars, equivalent to 2.5 per cent of its GDP (2014); Lao PDR at 200 million or 2.4 per cent of GDP (2013); the Philippines at 4.4 billion US dollars or 1.5 per cent of GDP (2015); and Indonesia at 2-3 per cent of its GDP (2015).

Commitment to end all forms of malnutrition

ASEAN’s commitment to curb malnutrition is articulated in the **ASEAN Leaders Declaration on Ending All Forms of Malnutrition** and the ASEAN Strategic Framework and Action Plan on Nutrition 2018-2030.

At the national level, each Member State had integrated nutrition into their national development strategies and crafted national nutrition plans and targets that align with their regional and international

commitments and the Sustainable Development Goals.

These national nutrition plans steer policy and programme interventions at national and subnational levels. Interventions typically follow the life-course approach (womb to tomb), starting with improving maternal, infant, and young child nutrition. Evidence shows that the first 1,000 days, from conception up to age two, are the most critical period in a child’s growth and development, and where nutrition interventions can create optimal impact. Other initiatives revolve around preventing and treating malnutrition among school-age children and adolescents, and creating a healthy food environment for population of all ages.

National-level interventions: Areas of progress

Member States have taken concrete steps to improve maternal nutrition. The *ASEAN Food and Nutrition Security Report 2021* notes that all countries have policies and programmes on nutrition counselling and promotion and micronutrient supplementation during pregnancy. Seven have modified their antenatal care policies, standards, or guidelines to meet the 2016

WHO recommendations, while five raised the number of recommended antenatal care visits to eight based on WHO standards.

Member States have also made substantial headway in infant and young child nutrition. According to the *Report*, all Member States advocate and have measures to support breastfeeding and complementary feeding. They all carry out programmes on child growth monitoring and promotion. Additionally, Member States have committed to stronger compliance with the International Code of Marketing of Breast-milk Substitutes to encourage breastfeeding and limit children's sugar consumption in early years.

To promote healthy eating and lifestyle and address malnutrition among school-age children and adolescents, Member States have introduced national or subnational programmes that are implemented through the school system. Eight have school feeding programmes, while seven are supporting the distribution of micronutrient supplements like iron. Almost all have initiatives to monitor children's growth in schools, include physical education in the school curriculum, and ensure that schools have safe drinking water and sanitation and hygiene facilities.

Partnerships on the ground: Some examples

Member States' policy and programme interventions are often supported and complemented by auxiliary initiatives from nongovernment partners as well as local or

subnational governments.

In Indonesia, for example, Nutrition International and Save the Children are working with the Indonesian government to tackle high stunting prevalence in two provinces, West Java and East Nusa Tenggara. Their Better Investment for Stunting Alleviation (BISA) project, launched in 2019, is designed to help 3.3 million people gain access to nutrition services and avert 6,300 stunting cases and 161,000 anemia cases.

"Nutrition International is focused on the health system aspect of addressing stunting, while Save the Children is focused on hygiene, sanitation, breastfeeding, and complementary feeding at the community level," says Donatus Marut, BISA's deputy chief of party.

"We promote the capacity building of district health offices and *Puskesmas* [community health centres]," he explains. "We also develop the capacities of the staff at the *Puskesmas* level in providing maternal and child nutrition and health services—how to provide counseling, education, and practical information to pregnant women, lactating women, and adolescents in school and out-of-school."

Nutrition International is also supporting the distribution of micronutrient supplements in schools. Its acting country director, Rozy Afrial Jafar, says the weekly iron-folic acid supplements given to adolescent girls is intended to break the cycle of intergenerational malnutrition in Indonesia. "Young girls who are unhealthy grow up to become mothers with unhealthy pregnancies," he says.

Likewise, the organisation has been supporting efforts of the government to strengthen its food fortification programme. Jafar notes that it was successful in advocating changes in the composition of fortified wheat flour in keeping with global standards. It has also been rendering technical assistance on initiatives to fortify rice.

In Lao PDR, Save the Children and its partner-NGOs are working with local health units to raise the nutrition levels of children under five, adolescent girls, and pregnant and lactating women in 14 districts in the provinces of Huaphanh, Luang Namtha, Luang Prabang, and Phongsaly.

This multiyear project, called Sustainable Change Achieved through Linking Improved Nutrition and Governance (SCALING), involves a range of interventions, including the development of nutrition plans at village and district levels; communication strategies to change the dietary, sanitation, and health practices of children, parents, and caregivers; and construction of water supply systems in select areas.

In the Philippines, community-based programmes are being undertaken side by side with national-scale programmes. An example is Malabon city's *Karindaria para sa Kalusugan ni Chikiting* (KKC), a programme launched in 2018 that involves providing mid-afternoon snack per day for 120 days to 24- to 59-month-old undernourished children, 6- to 23-month-old children, and nutritionally-at-risk pregnant women.

"We identified the *barangays* [communities] where there were pockets of malnutrition and then identified and screened



karindaria [food stalls] located within these communities that are capable of feeding at least 10 children, says Fidel Baltazar dela Cruz, manager of the KKC programme. “The programme has an added benefit of supporting the livelihood of small food businesses in the city,” he adds.

COVID-19 pandemic and malnutrition

While the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on malnutrition in the region has yet to be fully assessed, the *Report* says the decline in household incomes, broken food supply chains, and disruption of school feeding programmes have likely deprived more children of adequate and nutritious food.

ASEAN Member States, according to the *Report*, responded by using existing social protection programmes to “ensure that the most vulnerable households had the resources required to continue to feed their families.” Some launched campaigns to promote safe and healthy diets amidst the pandemic, stopped the distribution of donated unhealthy food products, and ensured stable food prices.

The *Report* says nutrition stakeholders in ASEAN need to do more to secure food and nutrition for the populace in case of future emergencies. Improving the quality of existing social protection schemes is one way of enhancing the responsiveness of each country.

Nutrition International’s Jafar suggests incorporating nutrition into the social welfare programme to address food insecurity arising from the pandemic. In

the case of Indonesia, for example, he says government can ensure that the vouchers distributed to poor households under its welfare programme, *Program Keluarga Harapan*, are used to access not just any kind of food, but nutritious, fortified food.

The race to turn the tide

Progress towards curbing the levels of undernutrition in the region is still inching along despite many laudable policy and programme interventions. The *Report*, citing data from the *2020 Global Nutrition Report*, notes that only two Member States are “on course” to achieve the global target for reducing childhood stunting, and none at all are set to hit the target for childhood wasting reduction.

To bring down undernutrition rates at a more accelerated pace, the *Report* recommends a number of measures that can be undertaken by Member States, including:

- Increase in government expenditure on nutrition programmes (found to be remarkably low in four Member States);
- Scaling up of proven nutrition interventions, such as access to antenatal care for pregnant women, breastfeeding support for mothers, age-appropriate complementary feeding for children starting at six months, and micronutrient supplementation;
- Expansion of social protection schemes to help poor households access food and health services;

- Collection of disaggregated data to understand nutrition inequalities and identify groups and communities that require the most support;
- Fortification of staple food and condiments, such as grains, salt and oil, to address micronutrient deficiencies;
- Control in the marketing of junk foods and sugary drinks, front-of-pack labelling for food products, and provision of incentives for healthy products and behaviours; and
- Strengthening of health care providers’ ability to conduct health and nutrition research and surveillance, and deliver nutrition services.

Urgent action is also needed to address emerging nutrition trends and challenges in the region. One is the rising prevalence of overweight and obesity among school-age children. Another is the worsening hunger and food insecurity brought about by the post-pandemic economic downturn and the impact of climate change on food systems.

ASEAN Member States have a narrow window of opportunity to act on these measures and turn the situation around. The stakes are simply too high for inaction.

The *ASEAN Food and Nutrition Security Report 2021 (Volume 1)* may be accessed at the following link:



https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/04/Digital_ASEAN_FNSR_Volume-1_21-4-2022_FINAL.pdf

The Care Economy

Creating jobs, bringing ASEAN closer to SDGs



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The care economy is important to ASEAN's resilience. The demand for care workers in the region will continue to grow rapidly, especially with an ageing population and increasing demand for care.

Demand for care is intensifying. Demographic developments in ASEAN are driving the rising demand for care infrastructure and services. Falling birth rates and increasing life expectancy will exacerbate labour shortages and heighten the need for elder care and general health care. Almost 40 per cent of all projected job opportunities in emerging professions—in childcare, eldercare, nursing, therapy, and well-being—will be created in the care sector (World Economic Forum, 2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic also shines the spotlight on social inequalities and the fragility of the care economy. Women bear a heavier workload than men during the pandemic, and there is an overall increase in unpaid care and domestic work during the health crisis (Asian Development Bank, 2022). The gender gap in unpaid care and domestic work affects women's ability to engage in labour markets and aggravates the disparities that hinder women's economic empowerment in the region (UNESCAP and ASEAN Secretariat, 2021).

Infusing more funds and resources in the care economy can alleviate inequalities and help meet multiple Sustainable

Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030—on education, including formal childcare, health and long-term care, along with gender equality and decent jobs. These additional investments can potentially increase total care and care-related indirect employment to a total of 475 million workers (International Labour Organization, 2019). “This is why it is vital to advance the Care Economy in ASEAN,” said Minister of Culture, Youth and Sports of Brunei Darussalam, Dato Haji Aminuddin at the ASEAN Business and Investment Summit in 2021.

“Increasing investments in the care economy can alleviate inequalities and help to meet multiple Sustainable Development Goals

The ASEAN Comprehensive Framework on Care Economy (ACFCE) was developed during Brunei Darussalam's ASEAN Chairmanship in 2021 to guide ASEAN's response to complex crises and challenges, such as the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, changing demographics, the climate crisis; further sustainable development; and protect different segments of populations and sectors

through care work and the care economy. The ACFCE was adopted at the 38th and 39th ASEAN Summits on 26 October 2021.

The framework charts out the region's strategic priorities that address the challenges of sustaining investments in care in the region, and reframe more comprehensive, enabling and supporting ASEAN Care policies to build back better. It also aims to take advantage of the advancement of digitalisation and the opportunities brought about by the fourth industrial revolution.

To advance the implementation of the ACFCE and to discuss cooperation in promoting and implementing the care economy in ASEAN, the ASEAN Secretariat organised the 18th Coordinating Conference on the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (18th SOC-COM) on 24 May 2022. The Senior Officials' Committee for the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (SOCA), representatives of the Chairs of the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM) and the ASEAN Senior Economic Officials' Meeting (SEOM), sectoral bodies in ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC), and the Committee of Permanent Representatives to ASEAN attended the conference. Centres and institutions associated with ASEAN also

participated in the discussions. Invited speakers, experts and practitioners shared their field experiences and insights on the multi-sectoral aspects of the Care Economy agenda.

In his opening remarks, Ekkaphab Phanthavong, Deputy Secretary-General of ASEAN for the ASCC, highlighted, “the work ahead of us is immense despite the progress we have achieved in protecting different segments of the population and in enhancing the health, well-being, and welfare of our people in ASEAN. We need to consistently invest and continue to push policies and programmes that ensure a sustainable caring society and economy.”

To protect the sustainable development of different segments of populations and sectors, Hajah Nor Ashikin binti Haji Johari, Permanent Secretary from the Ministry of Culture, Youth, and Sports of Brunei Darussalam and SOCA Leader of Brunei Darussalam, underscored that “all countries need to work together to realise the ASEAN’s interest and confront challenges towards sustainability of the region.” She emphasised that strong partnership and cooperation remain crucial to ensure every effort is impactful to the people of ASEAN and the region.

According to leading experts and practitioners at the conference, the care economy is increasingly organised across value chains and production networks that span several countries worldwide. Sara Charlesworth, a professor of gender, work, and regulation at RMIT University, Australia, said that the ASEAN Member States and Australia share a common interest in strengthening their “local-global” care work chain to ensure the welfare and social protection of migrant care workers.

Care work is also increasingly needed as disaster impacts are magnified by climate change and other crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic. Vu Minh Hai of CARE International, Viet Nam, shared her organisation’s experience in supporting disaster management and care work in response to displacement of vulnerable groups and under conditions of food scarcity.

Countries in Southeast Asia are harnessing technology to respond to rising healthcare needs. Teh Pei Lee, professor and head of the Department of Management of Monash University, Malaysia, shared Malaysia’s experience in capitalising on technological innovations in dementia and elderly care.

She advised ASEAN to provide support to startups and entrepreneurs who can grow the region’s digital health innovation ecosystem.

The ASEAN Secretariat also presented the highlights of the UNESCAP-ASEAN study on unpaid care work and social protection in ASEAN and on potential platforms to anchor the ACFCE for greater socio-economic inclusion.

As the region recovers from the COVID-19 pandemic, new opportunities in programmes and partnerships will need to be leveraged. Harnessing these opportunities in areas of the care economy will help the ASEAN Member States reach their sustainability objectives and allow ASEAN to remain an attractive and conducive investment and partnership proposition to the world.

References are available at the following link:



https://drive.google.com/file/d/1pg-UbwcaXWE_rykAuNDGAvGdQNdqZVAm/view?usp=sharing

Key Policy and Sectoral Insights from the 18th Coordinating Conference on the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community

- Redefine spending on care as “investment” rather than “expenditure” in recognition of the long-term returns (including employment and fiscal benefits) of care that outweigh the costs
- Harness the support of the government, private sector, the community, as well as partners and stakeholders to ensure that SDG-related opportunities can bring tangible impact to the ASEAN people
- Develop sustainable funding and platforms to invest in care, including financial instruments that can channel resources to where it is needed most and ensure the care industry and jobs are adequate to meet societal needs
- Maximise sectoral coordination to mainstream the care economy framework into sectoral work plans, especially in priority areas such as rural development and poverty eradication
- Create or utilise central platforms or mechanisms that can follow up and review the ACFCE, including leveraging on existing ASEAN mechanisms that can collect regional data, monitor progress, and conduct capacity building
- Develop data collection and analysis capabilities to capture the complexities of the care economy, including monitoring and uncovering historically neglected care activities (e.g., unpaid care, temporary and migrant care workers, and their transitions in and out of care work)
- Improve the reputation of care work, care workers, and care systems to incentivise and promote care careers, create gender equity, and minimise overwork and stress; these systems of care should consider both paid and unpaid care, as well as the provision of their safety nets and social protection
- Recognise that climate change also requires investments in care work, and the care economy should include caring for the environment and promoting green jobs and activities supporting the circular economy
- Leverage on digital skills, digitalisation, and technology to develop inclusive care economy competencies and solutions for the future
- Mobilise alternative manpower resources for care organisations and institutions, e.g., non-traditional workers and informal workers such as volunteers and part-timers for delivery of high-quality care systems; also to maximise the role of households and community to care for older persons care systems



ASEAN DAY CELEBRATION

8 AUGUST 2022

55th ASEAN Day: Stronger Together

In its 55th anniversary, ASEAN celebrates the spirit of togetherness, reflecting on the importance of cooperation and partnership, especially in these trying times.

“Stronger Together” is a call for forward-minded people of ASEAN and supportive partners of ASEAN to create a sustainable, prosperous, and inclusive ASEAN Community.



ASEAN-India Friendship Year

Entering the Fourth Decade of Cooperation



2022 marks an important milestone in the long-standing relationship between ASEAN and India. This year is designated as the ASEAN-India Friendship Year, commemorating the 30th anniversary of ASEAN-India relations.

This milestone is being celebrated with a series of events throughout 2022. The ASEAN-India Logo Design and Tagline Contest was held to kickstart the commemorative year. Thailand's Bew Thanakorn Khumkhrua's entry was chosen as the winner from over 1,200 submissions from ASEAN and India. He used the tagline "Community of Values" and designed a logo with the number 30 and the infinity symbol, representing the 30 years of unity and relationship between ASEAN and India. The winning logo and tagline will be used for commemorative events and activities to mark the ASEAN-India Friendship Year 2022.

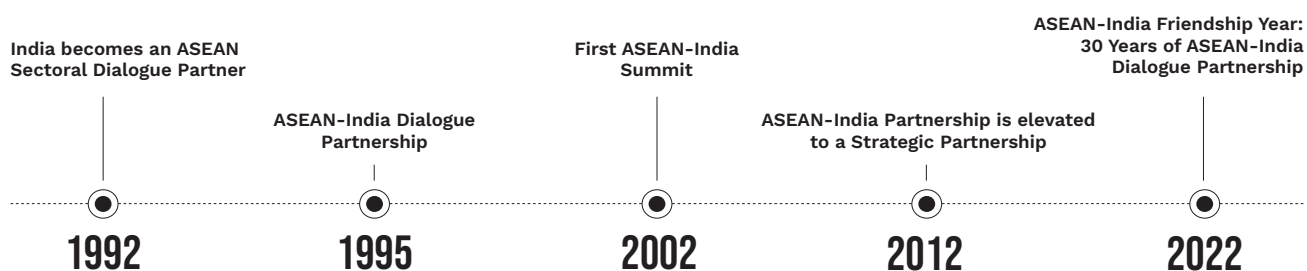
The Special ASEAN-India Foreign Ministers' Meeting was held in New Delhi, India, on 16 June 2022, to commemorate the ASEAN-India Friendship Year. It was chaired by India's External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar, and Singapore's Foreign Affairs Minister, Dr. Vivian

Balakrishnan. During the meeting, the ministers discussed key areas of cooperation, such as COVID-19 response and recovery, health, trade, and education, among others, as ASEAN and India enter the fourth decade of dialogue partnership. The foreign ministers unanimously adopted the Co-Chairs' Statement, reaffirming their commitment to deepen the partnership further and promote peace, stability, and prosperity in the region.

Southeast Asia and India relations are rooted in millennia-old historical and cultural linkages. Since becoming ASEAN's sectoral dialogue partner in 1992, ASEAN-India relations have grown rapidly. The relationship evolved to a full dialogue partnership in 1995 and important milestones have since marked each decade.

In 2002, the First ASEAN-India Summit was held in Phnom Penh, further strengthening the cooperation between ASEAN and India. An annual summit has been held since. In 2012, the ASEAN-India Partnership was elevated to a Strategic Partnership during the ASEAN-India Commemorative Summit in New Delhi.

ASEAN-INDIA DIALOGUE RELATIONS OVER THE YEARS



THE ASEAN ARTISTS RESIDENCY PROGRAMME

“Mothermap”

Artist: Ha Ninh Pham



Pricilia Putri Nirmala Sari

Officer, ASCC Analysis Division

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In recent years, Southeast Asia has become an emerging hub for a vibrant contemporary art scene. The rapid growth of the region's creative industries has given birth to many creative spaces and galleries, providing platforms for local artists to develop and showcase their work.

To nurture and support the region's young and upcoming artists, the ASEAN Secretariat initiated the ASEAN Artists Residency Programme (AARP) in 2018. In line with ASEAN's Strategic Plan for Culture 2016-2025, this flagship initiative aims to promote ASEAN identity and deepen mutual understanding across diverse regional cultures while cultivating young artists from the Southeast Asian region.

After the annual call for submissions, one artist is selected and awarded a month-long residency programme in Jakarta. The AARP provides the artist a studio to create one art piece that will be part of the ASEAN's Gallery's permanent collection. The

artist also gets other opportunities to join cultural exchanges, access public-education programmes, and gain exposure to other promotional activities.

In 2019, Thai artist Pannaphan Yodmamee was named the inaugural resident artist. Vietnamese artist Ha Ninh Pham was the chosen artist for 2020, however, the COVID-19 pandemic stalled the programme for almost two years. Ha Ninh finally took up his residency in June 2022, and on 27th June, the ASEAN Gallery unveiled his painting, entitled "Mothermap."

At the event, Deputy Secretary-General of the Corporate and Community Affairs

Department Tran Duc Binh, in his opening speech, stated that "the resumption of the AARP, an ASEAN Secretariat-driven flagship initiative, is to promote closer exchanges between regional art communities, using the ASEAN Gallery." He thanked Thai Beverage Public Company Ltd. for sponsoring the programme.

Philippine artist Eunice Sanchez and Malaysian artist Saiful Razman were selected for the 2022 AARP. Their residencies were hosted by Sharjah Art Foundation in the United Arab Emirates, and their artworks were added to the ASEAN Gallery's collection on 8th August, ASEAN's 55th year celebration.

Ha Ninh Pham

2020 ASEAN

Artist-in-residence

Growing up in Ha Noi, Viet Nam, Ha Ninh began his journey as an artist at the early age of 10. After his father discovered his penchant for drawing, he was sent to an art school and stayed the course ever since.

"I started drawing when I was 10 and continued until I was 18. That was a path that was already set by my father and my professor. Later on, I tried to break out (from arts) so many times, but because I started too early, this was the only thing that I could do. In 2014, I tried to do something else because I couldn't afford the lifestyle of an artist. I did not want to go back (into arts), but my father forced me."

“

I imagine in the future if the residency develops, we can have more community activities and interaction between artists and other creative people in the region.



Ha Ninh, who also teaches design at the Royal Melbourne Institute of Technology University Ha Noi, describes his early drawing lessons as linear. He started by learning cast drawing and familiarising himself with the socialist realism style favored by the government.

"I think that the lack of my freedom in my early years was a good thing because it disciplined me. I did not have many choices in terms of art styles, but at the same time, I can focus and really understand the depth of that style," explains Ha Ninh.

After completing his art degree in Viet Nam, he took a break; opened and managed his own coffee shop for two years. The artist in him eventually led Ha Ninh to Philadelphia, where he took up a master's degree in arts. However, studying in the US and Viet Nam was strikingly different for Ha Ninh, and he says he felt lost. The challenges of navigating through contrasting realities inspired him to embark on his map-making journey.

"I realised that I am lost, and when you are lost, what do you do? You get a map. So, mapping is my way to cope with being lost. By making a map, I don't have to make any decisions. I can put everything that I want on a map and it's a safe place for me to create whatever I want," he says.

This project eventually evolved from a map-making project into a world-building project, where Ha Ninh has created an alternate realm that has its own language, back

story, and what he terms as "experimental measurement devices." He has produced a series of paintings and also an 8-bit video game version of the map, which he dubbed, "Institute of Distance."

During the residency, Ha Ninh created "Mothermap," a watercolor, graphite, and acrylic on paper painting that he says reflects his current artistic and personal journey. The painting is the third rendition of Ha Ninh's Mothermap, which he renews every two years. He hopes that in the next 10 years, he could set up an exhibition with all the maps he created over the years, a look back to his journey as an artist. Ha Ninh sets a rule that elements on the map must not resemble any existing cultural elements nor reveal his identity. Interestingly, the project presents a paradox of Ha Ninh's quest for self-discovery. He muses that the more he tries to disassociate from his identity as a Vietnamese, the more he discovers it.

The residency programme has been an eye-opening experience for him, especially as this was also his first trip to another Southeast Asian country. He was mesmerised by the vibrant art scene in Jakarta and appreciated how much support the art community receives in Indonesia.

Ha Ninh also got the chance to share his experience with other young artists, delving into what it takes to be an artist for a living. "If we want to consider ourselves as professional artists, we need to have some sort of duties as well. People only fall in

love with the idea of becoming an artist, but don't want to sacrifice to become a professional artist. Being an artist, you have to make sure that you produce a tremendous amount of work, so that people can consider you as an artist. Try to take care of yourself because to practice art is a marathon, not a sprint. As an artist, you will never have your retirement. Move a little bit more steadily in your career."

For him, artists should innovate and create new values, and explore beyond the conventional boundaries of beauty and aesthetics. He hopes to see Southeast Asia become an art centre within his lifetime, and says that residency programmes like the AARP is one of the ways to achieve it.

"I imagine in the future if the residency develops, we can have more community activities and interaction between artists and other creative people in the region," Ha Ninh reflects at the end his residency.

Ha Ninh Pham's "Mothermap" is available in an 8-bit video game format titled "Institute of Distance. The game is available for download in both Google Play and App Store. Check out Ha Ninh Pham's website for his complete body of work.



www.haninh.com

STORY BOOKS

for Children by Children

Children relate their experiences and feelings in the most fascinating and amusing ways. But their stories are often insightful and profound, giving us a glimpse of how they view the world.

During the pandemic, the view for Hannah and Callum Goh and Zach Bautista was from the confines of their homes. They wrote, illustrated, and published books that deal with the complex topics of death and loss, of not losing hope and chasing one's dreams.



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The Magical Rainbow

by Sebastian Isaac “Zach” Bautista, 8
Philippines

Sebastian Isaac “Zach” Bautista is a book author at age eight. He was only four years old when he first created the story behind his book, *The Magical Rainbow*.

“It is about a boy patiently waiting for his dream, the rainbow, to appear. He wanted to see his dream, so he went outside and climbed a rock,” Zach tells *The ASEAN*.

Zach's mother, Lauren, says it all started as a bedtime story.

“He loves listening to bedtime stories. He would never go to sleep without asking mom or dad to read a story. When he was four, we literally ran out of story books to read! That prompted us into creating our own

bedtime story. Every night, Zach would add something to the story—new characters, new scenes, descriptions of characters, descriptions of scene settings,” explains Lauren.

But it was not until the COVID-19 pandemic that Zach and Lauren thought of writing down the entire story. “We finally made the magical rainbow story into a real book, and it took us two months to finish writing it because we needed to change some parts of it and make it longer,” says Zach.

“I want kids to remember to never stop dreaming, always be hardworking, and always be patient because your dream will come true as long as you are hardworking,” says Zach when asked about what message he wants readers to take from his book. “And always never forget to help other people,” he adds.

While Zach likes imagining and telling stories, he was not always fond of reading or writing. “I used to not like writing. But when I made my very own book, I started to like writing because it’s very fun. The things I like to write about are cars and racing,” says Zach. “The books I like to read are about science and adventure. I love to read *Geronimo Stilton* books, *Oliver Twist*, and *Adventures of Tom Sawyer*. I also like to read *The Magical Rainbow*.”

“I want kids to remember to never stop dreaming, always be hardworking, and always be patient because your dream will come true as long as you are hardworking

- Zach Bautista

Lauren adds that Zach has scribbled a few other stories in his notebook. “He has a short story about a school mentor who suddenly passed during the height of the pandemic when the kids were adjusting to online classes,” she mentions. “He wrote about how it broke his heart.”

Writing and publishing the book gave Zach and his parents a project to focus on during the pandemic lockdown and helped allay Zach’s negative feelings. “It was hard to not be with my friends, classmates, teachers, *lolo* (grandfather), *lola* (grandmother), *ate* (older sister/female relative), *kuya* (older brother/male relative), my baby cousin, and all my family members. It was so hard because I cannot be with them, doing fun activities with them, and being in the playground, eating together, and so much more,” he says.

Lauren notes, “Zach was very active before the pandemic. He trained for his school soccer varsity team twice a week. We had to be very patient in making him understand why he couldn’t go to school, go to soccer training, go out to see his *lolos* and *lola* and cousins. He would cry at night because he was scared that anyone from his family and friends might get sick and die of COVID-19. For a time, I’d say this project took his mind off his fears.”

Art also kept Zach preoccupied during the long confinement. He drew his version of a “magical rainbow,” which became part of the book’s back cover. He also completed four paintings and sold one of them so he could donate the proceeds from the sale to medical frontliners.

Lauren says the book has received very good feedback, but she laments the lack of response from local publishers. She says they had to self-publish the book. Lauren wishes children are given more opportunities to let their imagination run wild and write and share their stories with other children.

“As of now, copies have been sold in the Philippines, US, UK, and Australia through Amazon,” Lauren says. “We’re just happy that our dream of working together to write a book and ‘put it out there’ was finally realised. We were able to demonstrate proof of concept that anyone can publish a book, too, especially child authors. We hope that our experience will encourage other child writers to publish their own books.”



Steps to Heaven

by Hannah Goh, 12

Illustrated by Callum Goh, 9
Singapore

Death and coping with loss are difficult topics to tackle in a children's book, but 11-year-old Hannah Goh had a story to tell. Her first book, *Steps to Heaven*, was inspired by the experience of losing her beloved godmother to cancer a few years ago.

"She was so inspiring. I wanted to write a story about how people can live their last days gracefully like my godmother did. The story is about Gracie's *nai nai* (grandmother), who is still very cheerful and positive even when facing a tough illness," Hannah says.

She began by creating a collection of short stories for her godmother, whom she visited in the hospital. Hannah saw her godmother made the most of her remaining days by helping others, particularly people with autism. Hannah says her godmother showed her that death should not be feared.

"I think death is not always as scary as we might think. I want children to know that their loved ones are going to a better place. So, it was a simple storyline with repeating concepts. There are parts of the story that would be repeated. For example, when there was a change, Gracie would always ask her *nai nai* what was going on, and her *nai nai* would say, she was climbing the steps to a better place".



Photo Credit: © Hannah and Callum Goh

Hannah collaborated with her nine-year-old brother Callum on the book's illustrations. For Callum, who was then only seven, the challenge was visualising Gracie's *nai nai*'s deteriorating health and depicting the concept of heaven. "After we read the book, we started to decide how to draw it," he says. Callum finished the drawings in six months with his art teacher's guidance.

To make the book more engaging, Hannah and Callum hid an image of a mouse on every page so readers could try to find it. But, for most parts, Hannah gave Callum the freedom to interpret her words into drawings. "I think I like digital art, but I also draw with pencil or watercolours," says Callum when asked about his favourite medium.

Hannah believes writing from a child's perspective can be very helpful, especially when discussing a difficult topic. "Everyone can make a difference no matter how young they are," says Hannah.

"I think I want to write about problems that are real in life, and I try to find a solution for it in the stories so that when others read it, perhaps they can also be inspired to change. I also get inspired by my mother, who enjoys telling me different imaginative storylines," she explains.

Her mother, May, an occupational therapist, believes children should be free to read and write for pleasure. "When children learn about things in the world, they can use their imagination to write about it freely. Hopefully, their writing can be more for joy rather than to earn marks in exams," tells May.

The Gohs worked on *Steps to Heaven* during the pandemic, it was around the time when they lost other loved ones due to cancer. So, it became a family project that they hoped could help parents and children talk openly about the circle of life. "We are glad to hear that this book is being used as a conversation starter

for families and could help them in going through the difficult process of losing their loved ones," explains May. "If we think that children are too young to understand and hide from them or ask them not to ask, then it will be hard for them or they may become fearful."

Before meeting their current publisher, ChinKar Tan from Write Editions, Hannah's book was turned down by many other publishers, who were not keen to publish a book about death. "We have so many children's books written by adults, but what is important for us is how we can understand children from their world," ChinKar says. "Our philosophy in Write Edition is that if a book is good and can make a positive contribution to society, even if it doesn't make money, it is alright."

Nevertheless, ChinKar also wants to ensure that the children write the books for a greater purpose. In late 2021, Hannah wrote a letter to Singapore's Minister of Education and made a case for the broader distribution of books written by child authors. It worked. She received a reply supporting the use and reading of her book in schools. It is also currently available in national libraries.

Steps to Heaven is on sale and available on Amazon and Kinokuniya. As a homage to the children's grandmother, the Goh family donates proceeds from the sales to a hospice that cares for patients with cancer.

Hannah enjoys writing for fun and is not pressured to publish. She has also written several other short stories, including one that follows a ten-dollar bill as it travels and is passed from one owner to another around her native Singapore. Another chronicles the life of a water droplet. While she and Callum have no immediate plans for a second book, Hannah also hopes their book can inspire other children to keep reading and writing their own stories.

“An author is an author, no matter how small! Write about something you believe in and don't limit your creativity!

- Hannah Goh

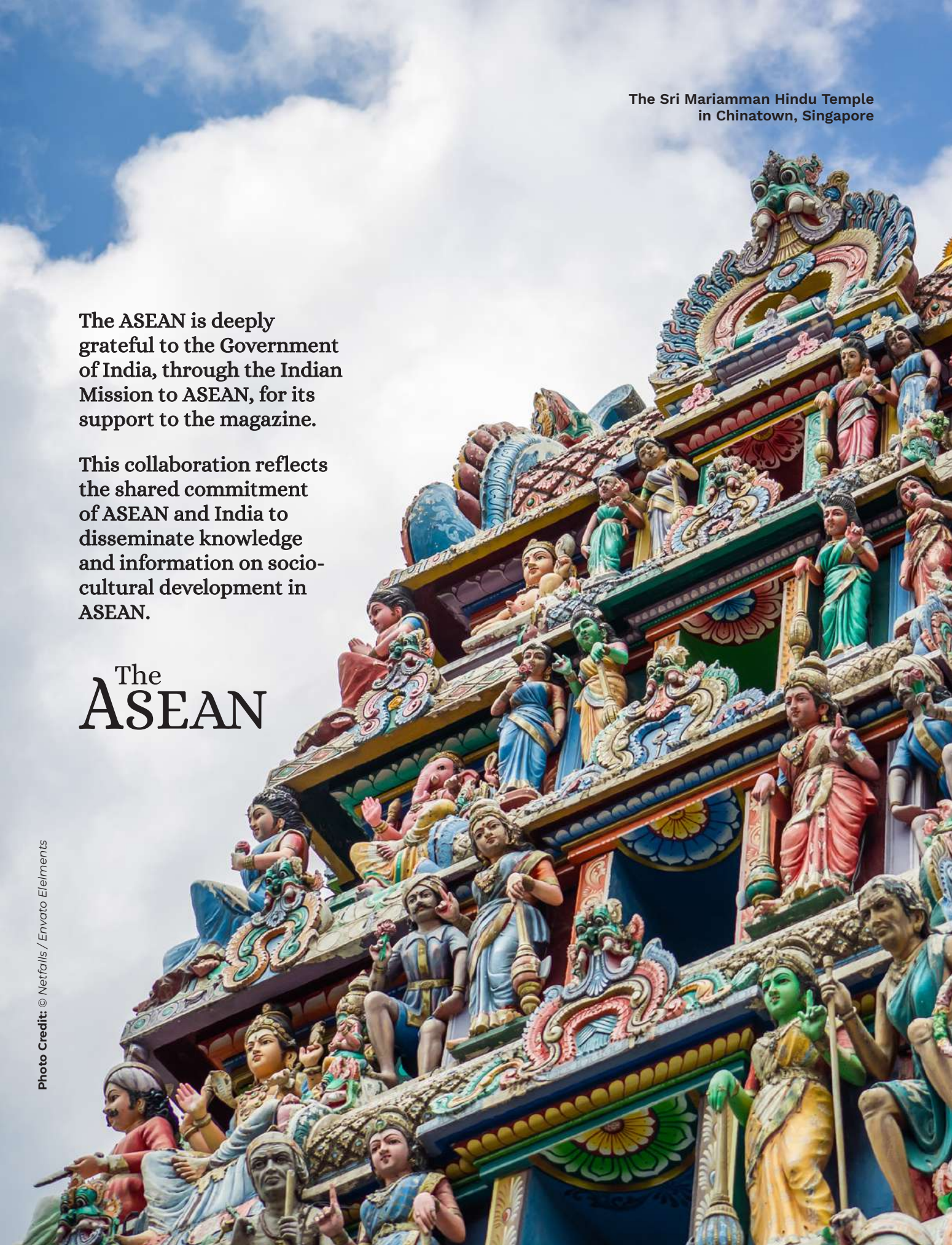


The Sri Mariamman Hindu Temple
in Chinatown, Singapore

The ASEAN is deeply grateful to the Government of India, through the Indian Mission to ASEAN, for its support to the magazine.

This collaboration reflects the shared commitment of ASEAN and India to disseminate knowledge and information on socio-cultural development in ASEAN.

The
ASEAN



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This publication was made possible with the support of:

The Government of India

