ENDORSED
As of 14 January 2025

TERMS OF REFERENCE FOR
ASEAN WORKING GROUP ON ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE GOVERNANCE (WG-AI)

INTRODUCTION

1 The ASEAN Digital Masterplan (ADM) 2025, endorsed at the 1st ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting (ADGMIN) in 2021, envisions ASEAN as a leading digital community and economic bloc, powered by secure and transformative digital services, technologies, and ecosystem. As part of setting up regional infrastructure and frameworks to facilitate the adoption of AI technology, Enabling Action (EA) 2.7 of the ADM2025 notes the importance of governing emerging technologies such as AI and states that ASEAN should adopt a regional policy to deliver best practice guidance on AI governance and ethics.

2 In February 2023, the ASEAN AI landscape study report was endorsed at the 3rd ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting (ADGMIN) in Boracay, the Philippines. The landscape study reviewed a selection of AI Governance frameworks and publications across the globe, in consultation with ASEAN Member States (AMS) and relevant industry stakeholders. The findings of the landscape study were used as a basis for the recommendation on the principles and guide for AI governance in ASEAN as well as initiatives that policymakers can undertake for ASEAN to fully benefit from the potential AI brings.

3 In February 2024, the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics was endorsed at the 4th ADGMIN in Singapore. The Guide provided both regional-level and national-level recommendations to ensure responsible design, development, and deployment of AI systems. A key regional-level recommendation in the Guide was to set up an ASEAN Working Group on AI Governance to drive and oversee AI governance initiatives in ASEAN.

4 In March 2024, the ASEAN Working Group on AI Governance (WG-AI) was established, following the endorsement of its Terms of Reference at the 1st ADGSOM-ATRC Leaders' Retreat of 2024 in Cambodia.

5 On 4 October 2024, ASEAN Secretary-General Dr Kao Kim Hourn wrote to ADGMIN and the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Science, Technology and Innovation (AMMSTI) proposing for ADGSOM to be the key sectoral body overseeing and coordinating AI work in ASEAN, with other sectoral bodies seeking the ADGSOM's views, input or technical advice for initiatives related to AI development and adoption. Dr Kao further proposed that the Terms of Reference (TOR) of the WG-AI should be updated to reflect these expanded roles.

6 As the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025 nears completion, and the ADGSOM is preparing its implementation report, AI will form a significant part of this process, as well as the subsequent iteration of the Masterplan.

7 The revised TOR of the WG-AI was endorsed at the 5th ADGSOM in Thailand in January 2025.

OBJECTIVES

8 The main objectives of the WG-AI are to:

(a) Facilitate ADGSOM's role as the overall lead ASEAN sectoral body coordinating and advising on all AI matters in ASEAN;

(b) Lead regional discussions on the technical and operational implementation of AI governance action plans in the region, as well as on other initiatives related to AI policy development and framework, AI governance and ethics, AI safety, AI laws and regulation, AI-related standards, public-private dialogue and collaboration, and the implementation of AI roadmaps;

(c) Lead development of initiatives towards a competitive, resilient, sustainable, and inclusive AI ecosystem in ASEAN—including initiatives under the recommendations laid out in the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics and subsequent policy documents, such as creating a pool of resources and shared platforms for regional AI talent, research and development (R&D) and innovation ecosystem;

(d) Provide implementation guidance for ASEAN countries who wish to adopt components of the Guide and subsequent policy documents including but not limited to the development of implementation guidelines and frameworks;

(e) Lead ASEAN's efforts to engage ASEAN Dialogue and Development Partners as well as other relevant stakeholders in furtherance of international cooperation on AI; and

(f) Facilitate regional multi-stakeholder discussions on emerging issues relating to the global evolving development and local adoption of AI technologies (e.g., generative AI), for the purposes of building awareness and alignment among ASEAN Member States.

SCOPE

9 The WG-AI shall focus on, but not limited to, the following:

(a) Serve as the ADGSOM's focal point and coordinator for engagements on AI within ASEAN as well as with Dialogue and Development Partners and other relevant stakeholders, including industry players within and beyond ASEAN.

(b) Serve as ADGSOM's focal point for advising other ASEAN sectoral bodies on initiatives related to AI development and adoption, including but not limited to those that affect AI policy development, governance, laws and regulations, standards, and direct contact with industry players within and beyond ASEAN;

(c) Develop and implement regional tools for AI governance and ethics, including but not limited to regional frameworks, principles, standards and best practices to complement the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics, and develop monitoring mechanisms as well as regular assessments to evaluate the effectiveness of these regional tools;

(d) Expand the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics to include the governance of generative AI, and promote awareness of the Guide within ASEAN;

(e) Provide support and recommend policies to nurture AI talent and upskill workforce across ASEAN;

(f) Provide support and recommend initiatives to support a competitive, resilient, sustainable, and inclusive AI ecosystem in ASEAN and promote investment in regional AI start-ups and MSMEs empowerment, contribute to closing the digital divide in the region, as well as create a level playing field amongst providers, in light of fairness and equity principles of AI;

(g) Encourage cross-pollination of ideas between the AI research and development community and ASEAN;

(h) Keep abreast of new developments in the AI space (e.g., generative AI and its risks including misinformation and disinformation) and related emerging technology and provide recommendations to update ASEAN's AI governance frameworks and tools in light of these developments;

(i) Develop clear implementation roadmaps for the initiatives included in this TOR that would enable accountability and effective implementation; and

(j) Establish regional platforms for knowledge sharing that will enhance cooperation among ASEAN member states.

ACTIVITIES FOR COOPERATION

10 To implement the above-listed scope of work, the WG-AI may facilitate the following list of non-exhaustive cooperative activities:

(a) Develop regional frameworks, principles, standards and best practices;
(b) Develop regional industry-specific assessments for trustworthy and ethical adoption of AI tools, with focus on key sub-industries within the digital economy such as e-Commerce and FinTech;
(c) Exchange information and experiences e.g., in AI talent and capacity building efforts;
(d) Conduct joint research and studies e.g., develop new AI use cases or technologies and measure impact on ASEAN livelihoods, research on multi sectoral AI implementation;
(e) Organise workshops, forums and expert meetings amongst relevant agencies and across sectoral bodies in ASEAN;
(f) Organise capacity-building activities to assist AMS in developing their AI capabilities;

(g) Engage ADGSOM Dialogue and Development Partners as well as other relevant stakeholders.

CHAIRMANSHIP

11 The WG-AI shall be chaired and vice-chaired by ASEAN Member States.

12 The Chair and Vice Chair may be rotated among AMS every two (2) years in alphabetical order or on a voluntary basis.

13 The Chair is responsible for reporting the proceedings of the previous Meetings and/or any current activities to ADGSOM.

MEMBERSHIP

14 The WG-AI shall comprise at least one (1) relevant official representative from each ASEAN Member State.

15 The WG-AI may invite the participation of other ASEAN working groups or sectoral bodies, and/or non-ASEAN experts or consultants.

MEETING ARRANGEMENTS

16 The WG-AI shall meet at least once a year, or when deemed necessary as directed by ADGSOM.

17 The WG-AI shall, as much as possible, hold their meetings back-to-back with other established relevant ASEAN meetings calendar.

18 The WG-AI shall invite industry or industry associations, academia, research and civil societies to participate in workshops or support projects and draw on the expertise and resources of ASEAN Dialogue and Development Partners, as well as international and regional organisations (where appropriate) to organise workshops or develop guidance.

19 Funding for projects and activities proposed by the WG-AI shall be submitted to ADGSOM for endorsement and approval following procedures as established by ADGSOM.

REVIEW OF TERMS OF REFERENCE

20 The terms of reference of the WG-AI shall be subject to review by ADGSOM, on a regular basis.