

Chapter 19

Monitoring the ASEAN Economic Community: Towards a New Approach

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Monitoring the ASEAN Economic Community: Towards a New Approach Post-2025

Aladdin D. Rillo, Philippe De Lombaerde, and Tomy Waskitho

1. Introduction

It has been observed on a number of occasions that the development effectiveness and impact of regional economic cooperation or integration policies crucially depends on the implementation and uptake of regionally agreed policies, and that monitoring, including indicator-based monitoring, can be an important part of the policy puzzle (Schiff and Winters, 2003; World Bank, 2005; De Lombaerde, Estevadeordal, and Suominen, 2008; De Lombaerde, Saucedo Acosta, and Vida, 2017).

In the case of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), monitoring systems to accompany the regional integration process include the ASEAN Community Progress Monitoring System initiated in 2000, and the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) Scorecard, developed in 2008 in response to the signing of the AEC Blueprint in 2007.¹ The blueprint was updated in 2018 as the AEC 2025 Consolidated Strategic Action Plan (CSAP).

The creation of the AEC, with a 2020 target date, was proposed at the Heads of Government Meeting/the 8th ASEAN Summit in Phnom Penh in November 2002. The AEC was agreed in principle at the October 2003 ASEAN Summit in Bali (Plummer, 2006). The AEC is essentially conceived as a common market, taking into account the specific institutional *context* of ASEAN. Its legal situation has been considered as complex because of the absence of a treaty base, a *hard* definition of the common market, and a court (Pelkmans, 2024). The AEC consists in practice of a set of building blocks of a common market, some of which were already operating before the announcement of the AEC.

¹ For an earlier proposal for an indicator-based monitoring system for ASEAN, see Dennis and Yusof (2003), in the context of the ASEAN–Australia Regional Economic Policy Support Facility.

Trade liberalisation was initiated in 1992 with the ASEAN Free Trade Area, characterised by gradual tariff reductions or eliminations through the Common Effective Preferential Tariff scheme. The ASEAN Trade in Goods Agreement (ATIGA) was signed in 2009 and entered into force in 2010.² In addition to expanding the scope of the Common Effective Preferential Tariff, the ATIGA included provisions on the codification and reduction of non-tariff measures, rules of origin, trade facilitation, and sanitary and phytosanitary measures. A new institution was also created: the Coordinating Committee for the Implementation of the ATIGA.

Trade in services was first dealt with through the ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS), in force since 1998. The AFAS has made gradual progress through a sequence of packaged liberalisation commitments, especially since the AEC Blueprint (2008–2015). The ASEAN Trade in Services Agreement was signed in 2020 as the new legal instrument for the integration of the services market. With the ASEAN Trade in Services Agreement, the commitment schedules under the AFAS, which are based on a positive list approach, will be transformed into schedules of non-conforming measures, based on a negative list approach in combination with time frames. For air transport, telecommunications, and financial services, separate routes are explored. For air transport services, the ASEAN Single Aviation Market was proposed in 2007, and open skies protocols have followed.

Liberalisation and regulation of financial services and capital movements are guided by the 2018 CSAP but are generally less ambitious in terms of market integration. The outlier here is intra-ASEAN foreign direct investment, which has been liberalised with few exceptions. Foreign direct investment policies are guided by the ASEAN Comprehensive Investment Agreement, which took effect in 2012, consolidating and building on two pre-existing agreements: the Framework Agreement on the ASEAN Investment Area and the ASEAN Investment Guarantee Agreement. Meanwhile, for the movement of skilled labour, the provisions are guided by Mutual Recognition Agreements (MRAs), which allow for the skills, accreditations, and experience of skilled workers to be recognised outside their home country. Current MRAs encompass six sectors: engineering, nursing, architecture, medicine, dentistry, and tourism. Two framework agreements are in place – surveying qualifications and accountancy services (ASEAN, n.d.).

This chapter is organised as follows: in section 2, the current AEC monitoring framework is assessed. Section 3 presents international mapping and benchmarking of indicator-based monitoring experiences worldwide, with a focus on their aims and scope. Building on the two preceding sections, section 4 presents guidance on how to adapt the AEC monitoring system for the future.

² For an evaluation of the ATIGA, see ERIA (2021).

2. Assessment of the AEC Monitoring Framework

The evolution of the AEC monitoring approach from the first (2008–2015) to the second (2016–2025) blueprints highlighted significant advancements in the approach to monitoring ASEAN economic integration. Initially developed in 2008, the so-called ‘AEC Scorecard’ served as a compliance tool to measure the implementation of the AEC blueprint and track countries’ adherence to their commitments. This scorecard focused on four elements: a single market and production base, a highly competitive economic region, equitable economic development, and full integration into the global economy. However, it primarily ensured compliance rather than evaluating the impact of these measures (Rillo, 2017). The AEC Scorecard’s monitoring and reporting initially followed a biennial cycle, covering the periods of 2008–2009, 2010–2011, 2012–2013, and 2014–2015 (ASEAN, 2015a).

In the first AEC Blueprint (2008–2015), monitoring was done through simple reporting and updating of measures by various working bodies responsible for implementing the measures in their respective areas. In calculating the implementation rate, a measure was considered as implemented only when all the activities under the said measure were fully completed by all ASEAN Member States (AMS). Country-specific measures to be implemented by individual AMS were not counted as measures for ASEAN, but these measures were counted for the country scorecard.

The Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA) also conducted a series of studies to monitor the implementation and compliance status of selected AMS in relation to the scorecard from 2009 to 2014.³ ERIA found that the AEC Scorecard indicated a positive development in trade facilitation, and the results of the scorecard exercise by ERIA showed that Singapore was making good progress on the ASEAN standards and conformance roadmap for priority investment sectors such as automotives, cosmetics, electrical and electronics equipment, medical devices, and pharmaceuticals (Lim, Aw, and Loke, 2015).

The AEC Blueprint 2025, adopted at the 27th ASEAN Summit in November 2015, reflects a more comprehensive and dynamic approach. Covering 2016–2025, the blueprint expands its focus to five characteristics: (i) a highly integrated and cohesive economy; (ii) a competitive, innovative, and dynamic ASEAN; (iii) enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation; (iv) a resilient, inclusive, people-oriented, and people-centred ASEAN; and (v) a global ASEAN. This iteration emphasised not only compliance but also the strategic implementation of measures across various sectors through detailed sectoral work plans.

Furthermore, the transition from the 2008 to the 2016 version of the AEC monitoring approach represented a shift from a compliance-centric approach to a more holistic and strategic framework. This evolution underscored the need for a broader and deeper evaluation of ASEAN economic integration, encompassing both compliance and the tangible impact of integration efforts on the region’s economic landscape.

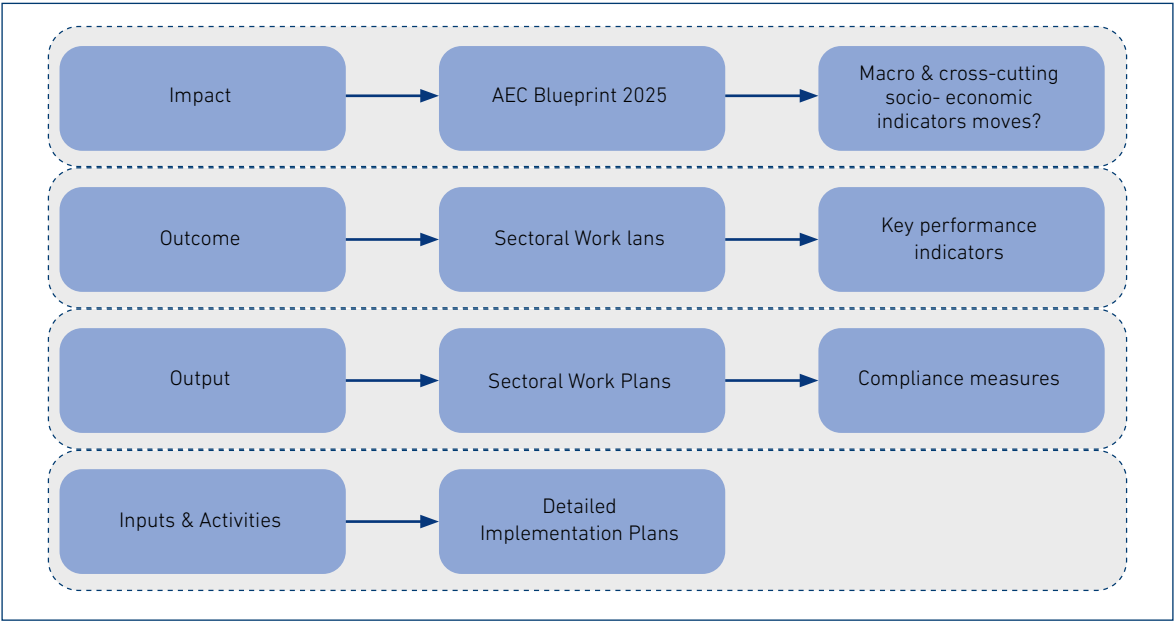
³ For further details, see Aldaba et al. (2010); Intal, Narjoko, and Simorangkir (2011); and Lim, Aw, and Locke (2015).

To support this enhanced monitoring framework, the ASEAN Secretariat's ASEAN Integration Monitoring Directorate (AIMD) played a critical role in ensuring the effective implementation and oversight of regional commitments and policies. The AIMD's mandate includes leading regional surveillance and economic integration monitoring; providing policy and technical advice; shaping economic research and policy analysis; ensuring effective communication and reporting on economic integration; and offering capacity development for monitoring, analysis, and research.⁴

AMS, recognising that regional economic integration is a dynamic ongoing process as economies as well as domestic and external environments are constantly evolving, adopted the AEC 2025 Blueprint. The AEC 2025 Blueprint was envisioned to provide a comprehensive strategy towards achieving deeper integration and economic resilience. With the new five characteristics of the 2025 blueprint, ASEAN needed to review its implementation and monitoring approach, to one that was more holistic, strategic, and impact focused.

Figure 19.1 details the current monitoring approach towards the 2025 AEC.

Figure 19.1. AEC 2025 Monitoring and Evaluation Framework

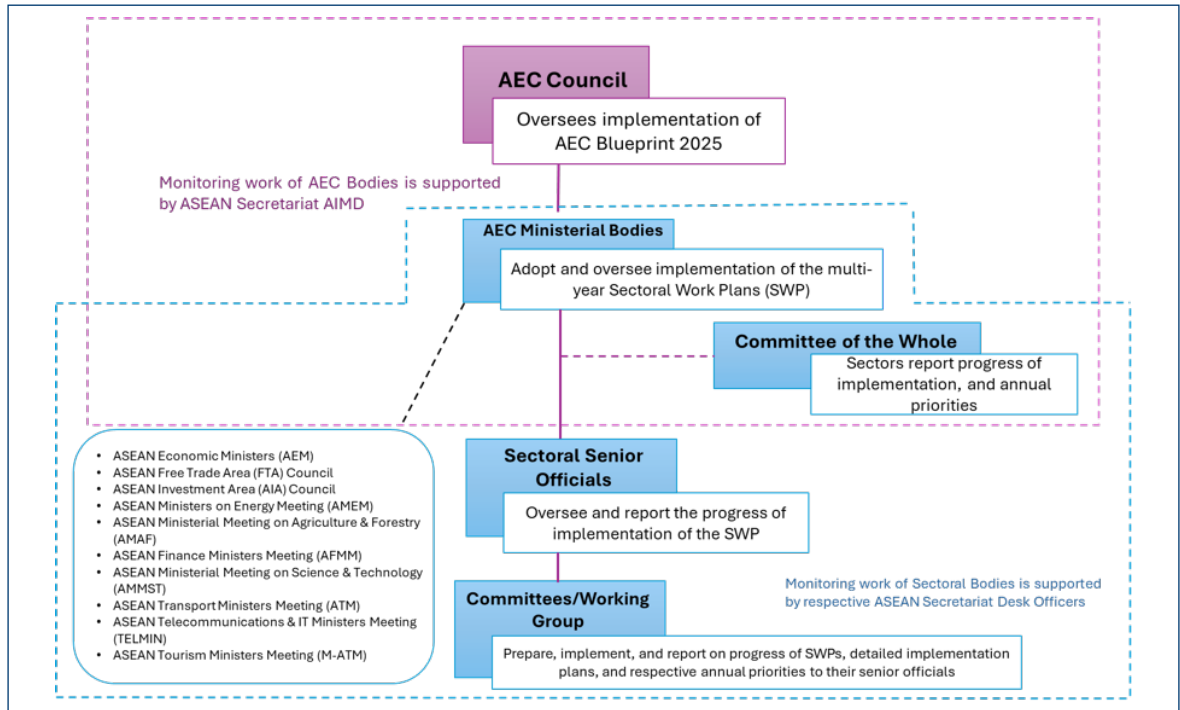


AEC = ASEAN Economic Community, ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations.
Source: ASEAN (2017b).

Figure 19.1 details the shift from compliance monitoring to outcome evaluation in the new AEC 2025 Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) Framework. Figure 19.2 presents an overview of the roles of AEC bodies and sectoral bodies in monitoring the implementation of the AEC Blueprint 2025 at the aggregate level and the sectoral work plans (SWPs) at the sectoral level and of the ASEAN Secretariat, which shows that monitoring now involves more stakeholder participation.

⁴ For further details, see ASEAN (2017b).

Figure 19.2. Roles of AEC Bodies and Sectoral Bodies in Monitoring the AEC



AEC = ASEAN Economic Community, AIMD = ASEAN Integration Monitoring Directorate, ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations, IT = information technology, SWP = sectoral work plan.

Source: ASEAN (2017b).

The Mid-Term Review (MTR) on the AEC 2025 Blueprint provided a pivotal opportunity to assess the AEC's performance over 5 years, identify areas for improvement, and adjust strategies towards the 2025 vision. The MTR covered 23 SWPs, 1,700 action lines, and 370 key performance indicators. It included external studies and surveys targeting businesses operating within ASEAN, alongside consultations with the ASEAN Business Advisory Council and research institutions (ASEAN, 2021). ASEAN must take into consideration emerging and cross-cutting issues. Therefore, the MTR opened up opportunities to calibrate new approaches and initiatives moving forward, which may be continued towards a post-2025 ASEAN.

The AEC 2025 M&E process has three components: compliance monitoring, outcome monitoring, and impact evaluation. Compliance monitoring in the AEC tracks the implementation of key outputs aligned with the strategic goals of the AEC Blueprint 2025 and relevant SWPs. Enhanced from its 2015 predecessor, the M&E framework now includes outcome monitoring and impact assessment, providing a more comprehensive approach to progress tracking. The AEC 2025 CSAP compiles key action lines from all SWPs, serving as the primary guide for ASEAN's economic integration from 2016 to 2025. These action lines are reviewed periodically through an annual prioritisation process, setting intermediary milestones and ensuring the timely execution of initiatives across sectors (ASEAN, 2017b).

Meanwhile, outcomes monitoring in the AEC assesses progress towards the strategic goals outlined in the AEC Blueprint 2025 and relevant SWPs. This process uses key performance indicators (KPIs) to measure changes in sectoral and economic indicators resulting from the blueprint's implementation. Regular monitoring of these KPIs provides essential feedback to stakeholders, helping guide decisions on the prioritisation, sequencing, or even phasing out of initiatives. Examples of KPIs include the utilisation rate of ATIGA preferential tariffs, intra-ASEAN trade, and foreign direct investment flows. Data sources for these KPIs range from ASEAN statistics to external databases and inputs from various organisations.

Furthermore, impact evaluation goes beyond monitoring by assessing how regional economic integration strategies and goals impact the broader socio-economic environment of AMS, using empirical research and studies. As part of the AEC 2025 M&E process, impact evaluation is essential for testing the effectiveness of integration approaches on socio-economic development. This evaluation provides valuable insights for policymakers and stakeholders, enabling them to review and refine existing initiatives. Feedback from stakeholders, including private sector engagement and business councils, plays a vital role in verifying the impact of integration efforts. Additionally, AIMD country visits and independent assessments help ensure compliance and assess the national implementation of regional initiatives, providing further verification of regional economic integration progress.

ASEAN's monitoring approach has evolved from a compliance-based system to a more strategic, impact-driven framework under the AEC Blueprint 2025, focusing on outcomes, cross-sectoral cooperation, and deeper economic integration. Whilst improvements have been made from the earlier version, ASEAN could still improve and learn from the experiences of other regions regarding monitoring in the context of regional organisation, as will be further explained in the following section.

3. What Can Be Learned from Monitoring Experience of Other Regions?

Monitoring in the context of regional organisations (and of the underlying regional integration processes) covers multiple instruments, corresponding to a diverse range of monitoring mandates in diverse institutional contexts. The instruments range from descriptive annual reports to sophisticated indicator-based monitoring systems (De Lombaerde, Estevadeordal, and Suominen, 2008). The ambition and complexity of regional institutions is typically reflected in the sophistication of the monitoring instruments.

If we narrow the focus to indicator-based regional integration monitoring systems, broadly speaking, three categories of such systems can be considered: The first group of indicator systems focuses on the implementation of regional integration policies and measures, i.e. the process of regional integration, rather than the outcomes and impact. They are essentially scoreboards or scorecards. The AEC Scorecard, which tracks the compliance of AMS with the commitments listed in the AEC Blueprint, is an example of such systems (ASEAN, 2010; Rillo and dela Cruz, 2016; Rillo, 2017).

The historical example of this category of systems is the European Commission Single Market Scoreboard, launched in 1997, which was renamed the Internal Market Scoreboard in its eighth edition in 2001 (European Commission, 1997, 2001; Fernández Moriana, Vida, and De Lombaerde, 2017). The scoreboard generated quite some impact in the framework of the construction of the European Union (EU) common market. Although the scoreboard initially focused on reporting the transposition of single market directives in a series of annual reports, it has evolved towards an online platform, covering the performance of EU member states on other governance tools, and in its more recent iterations it has included de facto regional integration indicators.

On the African continent, the East African Community (EAC) Common Market Scorecard was launched in 2014 to monitor EAC member state compliance with the obligations derived from the EAC Common Market Protocol and related instruments (World Bank EAC Secretariat, 2014; Ombudo K'Ombudo, De Lombaerde, and Borda, 2017). More recently, the African Multidimensional Regional Integration Index was launched in 2020 by the African Union Commission in collaboration with regional economic communities (African Union, 2020). It has a somewhat broader remit than the previous cases. It monitors the implementation of the Abuja Treaty and, more specifically, the implementation of the African Economic Community, as well as Agenda 2063 and its focus on structural and socio-economic transformation.

The second group of indicator systems does not take treaty obligations or policy commitments as the main point of departure, even if they can be part of them but have a broader scope and feature indicators of de facto regional integration (reflecting the importance and evolution of intra-regional trade, investment and people mobility, and macro-economic convergence), i.e. these systems focus on outcome and impact indicators, sometimes combined with process indicators. The ASEAN Community Progress Monitoring System is an example of such a more general indicator system (ASEAN, 2012, 2017a, 2017b; Rillo, 2017).

In the Asian context, several indicator systems fit this category, though they do not necessarily focus on a specific regional organisation. They include the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UNESCAP) Index of Asia-Pacific Regional Integration Effort (Ye and Mikic, 2016); the Asian Development Bank (ADB) Asia-Pacific Regional Integration Index (Huh and Park, 2017, 2018); and more recently, ADB's Asia-Pacific Regional Cooperation and Integration Index (and the related Enhanced Framework) (Park and Claveria, 2018; ADB, 2021). The Eurasian Development Bank (EDB) also developed its System of Indicators of Eurasian Integration (De Lombaerde, 2009; Vinokurov, 2010, 2014; EDB, 2012, 2017, 2019; Vinokurov, Libman, and Pereboyev, 2017).

In an African context, the Assessing Regional Integration in Africa Index of the United Nations Economic Commission for Africa (UNECA) (Tanoe, 2017) and the Africa Regional Integration Index (AU, AfDB, and UNECA, 2016a, 2016b, 2019a, 2019b, 2019c) should be mentioned. Other proposals for indicator systems in this category include the EU Integration Index (König and Ohr, 2013; König, 2017) and the Latin American and Caribbean Economic System (SELA) Integration Index for Latin America and the Caribbean (SELA, 2016).

The third group of indicator systems is one where regional integration indicators are incorporated into monitoring systems with a broader scope. In an Asian context, these include the UNESCAP Digital and Sustainable Regional Integration Index 2.0, which is part of UNESCAP's Regional Integration and Value Chain Analyzer; the United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Western Asia (UNESCWA) Arab Economic Integration System of Indices (UNESCWA, 2006–2009, 2014, 2015, 2018, 2021), in which a limited number of de facto regional integration indicators (i.e. trade, investment and remittances) is part

of a large set of more than 100 indicators, covering 'potentialities', 'policies', and 'outcomes', including globalisation indices; and the Asia–Europe Meeting Sustainable Connectivity Indices (Becker et al., 2019a, 2019b), in which interregional connectivity is also covered and where the system includes a three-dimensional sustainability sub-index. In an African context, the African Union Development Agency–New Partnership for Africa's Development Dashboard should be mentioned, in which African integration corresponds to a subset of (continental) performance indicators on Agenda 2063 (Aspiration 2), in addition to Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) performance indicators (NEPAD, n.d.).

Over the last decades, indicator-based monitoring systems have become more sophisticated, thanks to technological advances as well as increased data availability. However, the reported efforts have not necessarily been sustained over longer periods of time, which points to the fact that the governance of such systems is not always adequate and/or there is not always a consensus amongst stakeholders (including technocrats and member states) about the underlying methodology and/or the interpretation of the monitoring results.

It is also clear that adequate monitoring goes hand in hand with (regional) policy implementation and the involvement of interest groups and citizens more broadly in the regional integration process. Composite indices are thereby not essential ingredients.

4. Towards a New Approach to Monitoring the AEC

The evolution of AEC monitoring from the 2008–2015 to the 2016–2025 blueprints shows significant improvements in tracking regional integration. The initial AEC Scorecard (2008–2015) focused on compliance, measuring the implementation of the blueprint's four pillars – single market, competitive region, equitable development, and integration into the global economy – through a binary system. Meanwhile, the AEC Blueprint 2025 introduced a more comprehensive framework that emphasises both compliance and the broader impact of integration across five interrelated and mutually reinforcing characteristics: (i) a highly integrated and cohesive economy; (ii) a competitive, innovative, and dynamic ASEAN; (iii) enhanced connectivity and sectoral cooperation; (iv) a resilient, inclusive, people-oriented, and people-centred ASEAN; and (v) a global ASEAN (ASEAN, 2017a).

The current M&E framework, led by the AIMD, includes outcomes monitoring and impact evaluation to measure adherence and tangible socio-economic effects. The framework involves regular stakeholder engagement, including private sector feedback, and country visits to verify compliance and assess real-world implementation. This marks a more strategic and inclusive approach to ASEAN's economic integration, ensuring measurable and impactful progress.

If a new AEC blueprint is agreed for the post-2025 period, a new monitoring system will be needed, adapted to the new circumstances. The various chapters in this book provide ideas and scenarios for shaping the post-2025 AEC. These can be taken as a point of departure for reflecting on an adequate monitoring system.

The suggested ideas include those that further develop and deepen sectoral agenda, as discussed in the previous chapters:

- In goods trade, new ambitious targets are proposed for trade facilitation, including targets for the implementation of digital technologies and for intra-ASEAN convergence in this area; digital connectivity should be strengthened to support well-functioning global value chains in which ASEAN participates; non-tariff barriers to digital trade should be made transparent and/or reduced; and a clear sustainability strategy should be incorporated in trade policy.
- In services trade, progress is possible in reducing barriers to trade, regulatory convergence, and institutional performance amongst AMS, as well as in the protection of service-related intellectual property rights.
- Regarding the negotiation or upgrading of trade agreements, recommendations include the upgrading of bilateral (i.e. member state) free trade agreements (FTAs) to ASEAN-level FTAs; the alignment of the substantive commitments of ASEAN in FTAs and the AEC objective; the negotiation of digital trade provisions; and the adoption of a proactive stance on gender and economic inclusion provisions.
- In the area of energy, a proactive strategy to protect and consolidate energy security is proposed that acts on four axes (4A framework): availability of energy resources, technological applicability of harnessing energy resources, societal acceptability of using energy resources, and affordability of using energy resources.
- The connectivity agenda, as outlined in the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, needs updating: requiring regulatory harmonisation, strengthened digital dimension, strengthened funding mechanisms, strengthened regional institutions, and capacity building; and freer flows of data should be accompanied by measures to build trust and cybersecurity.
- Competition policy needs further strengthening in the face of a (possibly) increasing market power trend.

A new monitoring system can contribute to strengthening information sharing mechanisms within the AEC, and thus contribute to economic policy coordination.

New sectoral commitments, in terms of policy measures or outcomes, can form the basis for the new monitoring system, especially if they are clearly formulated and quantified. These can include formula-based flexibilities and (revised) transition periods.

The ideas also include the consolidation or strengthening of transversal agendas, again as highlighted in previous chapters, including:

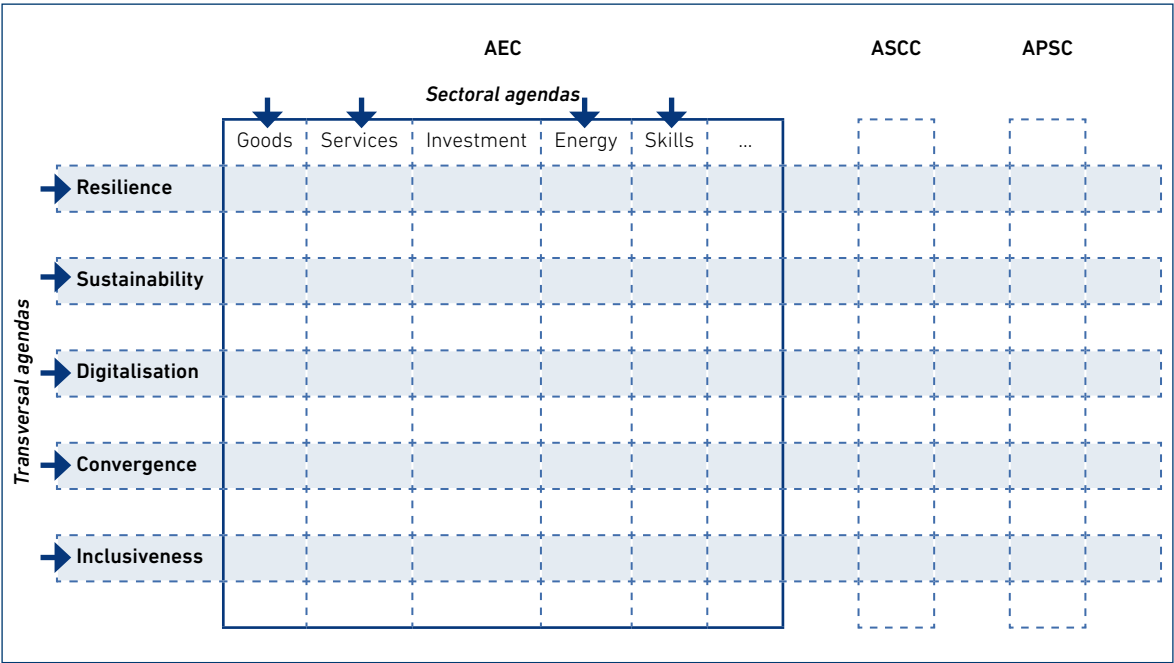
- consolidating the *convergence agenda*, in place since the 2000 Initiative for ASEAN Integration;
- formulating a coherent *sustainability agenda*, which should imply the alignment of ASEAN's objectives with the globally defined SDGs;
- introducing a *resilience agenda* as a strategic tool to help achieve the ASEAN Community Vision 2045;
- upgrading the *digitalisation agenda*, moving from the existing nine frameworks (2016–2023) with an emphasis on digital trade, not only towards a deepening of this agenda but also towards a broadening of the agenda in the direction of an ASEAN Digital Community 2045; and
- formulating an *inclusiveness agenda*.

These transversal agendas can build on guidelines developed by ASEAN sectoral bodies over the last years, as in the case of sustainable development where mainstreaming sustainability across sectors has been attempted.

These transversal agendas are not only cross-sector (within the AEC framework) but are likely to extend beyond the AEC pillar into the other two pillars (Figure 19.3). The convergence agenda is, for example, connected to ASEAN strategies on economic integration, physical connectivity, institutional connectivity, and people-to-people connectivity. The inclusiveness agenda is connected to poverty reduction strategies as part of the AEC but is also connected to the inclusiveness criterion in the ASEAN Socio Cultural Community Blueprint, 2016–2025. The gender equality and women’s empowerment agenda in the AEC is clearly connected to the Socio Cultural Community, which plays a leading role in this area, and the ASEAN Political Security Community, so far supported by the ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework, 2021–2025. Likewise, it is recommended to roll out a digitalisation strategy across all pillars, covering elements such as data governance, value-added enhancement, improved digital connectivity, and digital inclusivity.

The transversal agendas are also overlapping to some extent. In Chapter 9 by Simon Feeny, for example, the overlap between the convergence and resilience agendas is pointed at when referring to the importance of building and monitoring the resilience of lower-income AMS and vulnerable populations in general. There is also overlap between the digitalisation agenda and the inclusiveness agenda. The multidimensional 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development also connects these transversal agendas (see, for example, chapter 7 by Anbumozhi, et al.)

Figure19.3. Holistic Approach to Monitoring in ASEAN



AEC = ASEAN Economic Community, APSC = ASEAN Political Security Community, ASCC = ASEAN Socio Cultural Community, ASEAN = Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

Source: Authors.

For the further development of the AEC monitoring framework, various scenarios are available. ASEAN stakeholders will have to take decisions spanning various aspects, translating to a more (or less) ambitious monitoring system. The following questions about the monitoring system will need to be answered:⁵

- Should the monitoring system essentially monitor compliance with regional policy commitments (e.g. commitments to eliminate specific barriers to trade in services) or be a broader system including outcome and impact variables (intra-regional trade in services, convergence in terms of service delivery performance, etc.) – in other words, should it cover *de jure* regionalism, *de facto* regionalisation, or a combination of both?
- Should the monitoring system be centralised or decentralised?
- Should the monitoring system mainly have internal purposes (i.e. serving the ASEAN Secretariat and AMS) and/or external purposes (i.e. serving observers, civil society, citizens, and extra-ASEAN actors)?
- Should the monitoring system be limited to providing an indicator dashboard or also involve analytical work to identify causalities between regional policy implementation and outcomes (as suggested in chapter 9 by Simon Feeny, and chapter 20 by Bernard Hoekman)?
- Should the monitoring system be limited to providing an indicator dashboard or a system that also includes the computation of composite indices?
- Should the monitoring system adopt a logical framework for its organisation (distinguishing between inputs, process, output, outcome, and/or impact indicators; see also chapter 11, Shepherd) or not?
- What technology and what data sets should power the monitoring system?

An effective monitoring system will also have to provide clarity on a number of conceptual issues. These include establishing a common standard and definition of intra-ASEAN development gap(s) as reference points for the operationalisation of convergence policies (chapter 9, Feeny); conceptualising resilience as a multidimensional concept with both technical and political aspects (chapter 18, Tijaja and Park), in addition to basic requirements such as making the logical structure of the system explicit; and distinguishing between *de jure* regionalism and *de facto* regionalisation.

Likewise, a number of measurement issues will have to be addressed. Maximum use should thereby be made of existing measurement efforts in other international organisations such as ERIA, the World Bank, the United Nations Trade and Development (UNCTAD), and the International Trade Centre, e.g. on non-tariff measures (see chapter 20, Hoekman). Measurement issues are also related to the measurement of (aspects of) convergence, resilience, and sustainability performance and impacts. Measurement challenges are, finally, present in the digitalisation agenda, although one can build on existing efforts, including the ASEAN Digital Integration Index.

The monitoring system should also be accompanied by institutional innovations. The capacity of the AIMD could be strengthened, for example (see chapter 7, Anbumozhi et al.). At the same time, the new monitoring system will have to reflect any other institutional adjustments or experimentation within the ASEAN institutions. For the cross-cutting strategic agendas, for example, task forces have been suggested with clear terms of reference and reporting obligations, which would undoubtedly benefit from adequate indicator systems to support their monitoring activities. Likewise, multilevel domain-specific platforms that bring together epistemic communities have been suggested to make ASEAN more effective in reaching its goals (whilst respecting its essential member-driven intergovernmental characteristics).

⁵ See also De Lombaerde (2024).

5. Conclusion

Effective goal-achieving regional policies require monitoring systems as catalysts for policy implementation, accountability, and participation. This is not different for the post-2025 AEC.

The current monitoring apparatus will have to be adjusted or rethought for that purpose, taking into account the level of ambition that the AMS agree on for the AEC. Various proposals for the post-2025 period are suggested in this volume. When rethinking the monitoring system, ASEAN can learn from its own experiences with monitoring for over 20 years, as well as experiences in other regions and regional organisations worldwide. Although the latter do not necessarily offer a very clear direction to follow in the design of monitoring systems, they offer a wide array of useful references and experiences and some interesting recent developments in this field.

Smart choices will have to be made regarding various aspects of this new monitoring framework for the AEC. These aspects are related to scope, centralised versus decentralised, inward versus outward-looking, compliance-oriented versus outcome-oriented, various technical options, etc. In addition, the new framework will have to be able to speak to sectoral and transversal agendas simultaneously. The latter include convergence, sustainability, resilience, digitalisation, and inclusiveness.

The choices that have to be made regarding the new monitoring framework require time and consultations with the various stakeholders. It is recommended to create a steering committee, with representatives from the ASEAN Secretariat, AMS, and external experts, to accompany this process.

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