

Foreword

In an era defined by the rapid advancements of technology, the integration of digital systems has become a paramount consideration for nations around the world. Amongst these nations, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) has emerged as a trailblazer, tirelessly working towards the seamless integration of digital technologies across its member states. It is with great pleasure that I present this remarkable book, 'ASEAN's Digital Integration: Evolution of Framework Documents,' which comprehensively explores ASEAN's journey towards digital integration. Authored by Ikumo Isono, Senior Economist at the Economic Research Institute for ASEAN and East Asia (ERIA), and Hilmy Prilliadi, Research Associate at ERIA, this book provides a transformative journey into the world of digital integration within ASEAN. As the President of ERIA, an institution committed to fostering regional cooperation and sustainable economic development, it is an honour to introduce this pivotal work to you. The pages that follow unravel the complexities, challenges, and possibilities of digital integration in ASEAN, while also tracing its development since the adoption of the ASEAN Vision 2020 in 1997.

I am pleased to note that this book aligns with the objectives of ERIA's Digital Innovation and Sustainable Economy Centre (DISC), which serves as a hub for collaboration amongst policymakers, businesses, academics, and organisations, aiming to generate knowledge and promote sustainable economic growth in the East Asia Summit (EAS) region. Through cutting-edge research and capacity building, DISC provides evidence-based recommendations that support ASEAN-wide initiatives, including the crucial ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA), e-commerce, data governance, and cross-border data flows. This book offers insights into key areas of digital integration in ASEAN, making it an indispensable resource for identifying critical areas that need attention and underscoring the tremendous value that digital integration brings to the region.

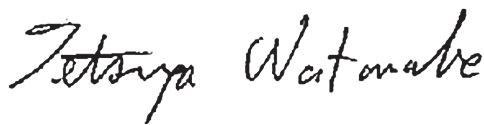
Before diving into the contents of this book, allow me to share a story that underscores the relevance and significance of ASEAN's digital integration journey. Imagine a bustling and secure marketplace in the heart of a vibrant city, where people from diverse backgrounds can easily access and converge to exchange goods, services, and ideas. Amidst the sounds of merchants haggling and the vibrant tapestry of languages, there is a palpable energy — a shared purpose to connect, collaborate, and prosper. Now, transpose this scene into the digital realm, where borders are dissolved, and connections are made with a mere click. This virtual marketplace, which ASEAN aspires to foster, transcends geographical boundaries, empowering individuals, businesses, and economies. It is a realm where the promise of digital integration lies, offering enhanced interoperability, innovation, and sustainable growth opportunities. However, the path towards digital integration within ASEAN is a complex and multifaceted one. Therefore, this book meticulously examines key areas of focus, ranging from the ASEAN Single Window and interoperability of e-payment systems to competition policy, submarine cables, data localisation, digital identity, AI, fintech, and beyond. These topics, which have been discussed in ASEAN framework documents, receive comprehensive analysis, offering readers invaluable insights into their evolution and potential impact on the region.

Digital integration has become an imperative for nations around the world, and ASEAN is no exception. The rapid advancement of digital technologies presents both opportunities and challenges for the region. ASEAN's digital integration efforts have evolved to encompass a wide range of objectives, including enhancing interoperability, developing robust digital infrastructure, fostering digital innovation, nurturing human resources, supporting member states, and contributing to the growth of existing industries, livelihoods, and national economies. Since the adoption of the ASEAN Vision 2020 in 1997, ASEAN has taken significant strides to facilitate digital integration. It has formulated numerous documents, frameworks, agreements, and action plans, creating a roadmap that guides the region towards a more integrated digital ecosystem.

This book highlights the significant role played by ASEAN in addressing the challenges posed by the global COVID-19 pandemic. It uncovers the region's resilience and adaptability in establishing initiatives that mitigate the impact of the crisis, resulting in a multi-layered list of endeavours. These initiatives exemplify ASEAN's commitment to leveraging digital integration as a strategic tool for recovery, resilience, and sustainable development. Furthermore, the authors examine the next important milestones in ASEAN's digital integration journey — the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) and the Post-2025 Agenda. These crucial milestones will shape the future trajectory of digital integration in ASEAN, ensuring its adaptability to technological advancements.

I invite you to embrace a transformative journey through the pages of 'ASEAN's Digital Integration: Evolution of Framework Documents.' The authors' policy recommendations offer a comprehensive guide for policymakers and stakeholders, ensuring a prosperous and inclusive digital ecosystem for the ASEAN region.

I extend my heartfelt appreciation to the authors for their exceptional contributions in crafting this valuable book. Their meticulous research, expertise, and commitment to the region's digital integration development have yielded work that will undoubtedly shape the future of digital integration in ASEAN. May this book inspire policymakers, researchers, industry leaders, and stakeholders to actively engage in fostering ASEAN's digital integration, creating a prosperous and inclusive digital ecosystem that empowers individuals, businesses, and communities alike. Together, let us seize the opportunities of the digital age and build a resilient and equitable future for all in the ASEAN region.



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