

STIMSON

REPORT

Asia & Indo-Pacific

Southeast Asia

Mekong-U.S. Partnership Track 1.5

Policy Dialogue

Mekong-U.S. Partnership Track 1.5 Policy Dialogue on Digital Economy Summary Report



September 2025



The Mekong – U.S. Partnership promotes the stability, peace, prosperity, and sustainable development of the lower Mekong sub-region. It further reinforces the strong and longstanding relationship among the United States, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Thailand, and Viet Nam. The Partnership builds upon 11 years of cooperation and progress from 2009-2020 through the Lower Mekong Initiative (LMI) to expand collaboration in the face of new challenges and opportunities. The Partnership supports the implementation of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and is an integral part of support and cooperation between the United States and ASEAN.

Find more about the Partnership at mekonguspartnership.org/.

Note: This report reflects the combined analysis and recommendations of participants in the Policy Dialogue event. The views expressed within do not necessarily represent the views of the Department of State or the U.S. government.



The Stimson Center promotes international security, shared prosperity, and justice through applied research and independent analysis, deep engagement, and policy innovation. For thirty-five years, Stimson has been a leading voice on urgent global issues. Founded in the twilight years of the Cold War, the Stimson Center pioneered practical new steps toward stability and security in an uncertain world. Today, as changes in power and technology usher in a challenging new era, Stimson is at the forefront: engaging new voices, generating innovative ideas and analysis, and building solutions to promote international security, prosperity, and justice. More at stimson.org.

The **Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam** provides strategic analysis in international relations and foreign policy, undergraduate and post-graduate degrees, and training of mid-career officials for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.



The **US-ASEAN Business Council** was established in 1984 as a non-profit organization. On behalf of its members, the Council conducts research and analysis of economic, environmental, financial, political, and social, conditions in the 10 countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam comprise the 10 nations of ASEAN. The Council utilizes the results of its research and analysis to assist its member companies by providing educational programs, technical information for product innovation, and trade and investment related activities. Through its foundation, the Council provides support for humanitarian efforts, community engagement, and educational scholarships. The Council has become the leading voice of the U.S. private sector in promoting mutually beneficial trade and investment relationships between the U.S. and the 10 countries of Southeast Asia. More at <https://www.usasean.org/>.

ABOUT THE POLICY DIALOGUE SERIES

This summary report provides an outline and recommendations derived from discussions on needs and gaps in the Mekong region related to digital economy, held as part of the Mekong-U.S. Partnership Track 1.5 Policy Dialogue series. The Policy Dialogues are a series of eleven conferences taking place between 2021 and 2025 that are generously supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of State’s Mekong-U.S. Partnership. Cross cutting principles of inclusivity, resilience, and collaboration are applied to all conferences in this series.

The U.S. Government launched the Mekong-U.S. Partnership in 2020 to expand cooperation with the five countries of the Mekong sub-region on strategic challenges and shared priorities under the Partnership’s four areas of cooperation (non-traditional security, natural resources management, economic connectivity, and human resource development). The Mekong-U.S. Partnership builds on the strengths of the Lower Mekong Initiative’s development-focused agenda by cooperating on strategic sub-regional issues and challenges. Each area of engagement under the Mekong-U.S. Partnership is supported by a flagship project. The Partnership’s Track 1.5 Policy Dialogue series serves as the flagship program of the Mekong-U.S. Partnership’s human resources development area of engagement

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KEY ACRONYMS

| | |
|--------------|---|
| AI | ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE |
| ASEAN | ASSOCIATION OF SOUTHEAST ASIAN NATIONS |
| CBDF | CROSS-BORDER DATA FLOWS |
| CSO | CIVIL SOCIETY ORGANIZATION |
| DEFA | DIGITAL ECONOMIC FRAMEWORK AGREEMENT |
| GASA | GLOBAL ANTI-SCAM ALLIANCE |
| ICT | INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY |
| IT | INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY |
| LLM | LARGE LANGUAGE MODEL |
| MUSP | MEKONG-U.S. PARTNERSHIP |
| MSMES | MICRO, SMALL, AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES |
| NGO | NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATION |
| PPP | PUBLIC-PRIVATE PARTNERSHIP |
| RAN | RADIO ACCESS NETWORK |
| SEAMEO-RIHAD | SOUTHEAST ASIAN MINISTERS OF EDUCATION ORGANIZATION REGIONAL CENTRE |
| SMES | SMALL AND MEDIUM ENTERPRISES |
| TCO | TRANSNATIONAL CRIMINAL ORGANIZATIONS |
| UNESCO | UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC, AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION |
| USF | UNIVERSAL SERVICE FUNDS |
| WG-AS | ASEAN WORKING GROUP ON ANTI-ONLINE SCAMS |
| YSEALI | YOUNG SOUTHEAST ASIAN LEADERS INITIATIVE |

A NOTE FROM THE CONFERENCE CHAIRS

The eleventh Mekong-U.S. Partnership Track 1.5 Policy Dialogue on Digital Economy was held in Bangkok, Thailand from August 13-15, 2025. The Policy Dialogues are a series of eleven conferences that took place from 2021 to 2025 and explored solutions to key policy and development challenges in the Mekong sub-region. This eleventh and final Policy Dialogue focused on digital economy in the Mekong sub-region and ASEAN, with particular focus on data governance, digital platforms, e-commerce, artificial intelligence, cyber resilience and online scams, and training a digital-ready workforce.

Seventy experts participated throughout the three days of the Policy Dialogue in Bangkok. Approximately 54% of the attendees came from one of the five Mekong countries, with 17% coming from the United States and the remainder coming from other countries in ASEAN and Timor-Leste. Government institutions (33% of attendees) and private sector (33%) were both robustly represented, with additional participants coming from NGOs (18%), academia (14%), and intergovernmental organizations (2%). A third of the speakers and participants were rising experts under 40.

We deeply appreciated support from the U.S. Department of State and the Mekong-U.S. Partnership for the Policy Dialogue series. The team would like to thank Katie Jo Younkins, Kevin Rutigliano, and others at the U.S. Department of State Bureau of East Asian and Pacific Affairs who helped with clearing the agenda and speakers. We also appreciate the support from Robert Hannah and Caratlux Liumpetch with the U.S. Embassy in Bangkok. We owe special thanks to Mario Masaya of the U.S. ASEAN Business Council, Maya Crowden with the U.S. ASEAN Business Council, Nathchaya Pongakkarawat from the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society of Thailand, and Lena Le of Vietnam National University for networking support and outreach to speakers. And finally, we owe particular thanks to our co-host organizations: the Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam, including conference co-chair Nguyen Manh Dong and his support staff Tran Hai Yen and Nguyen Tra My, as well as the U.S. ASEAN Business Council's Max Knight, Praab Pianskool, Bella Afifa, and Nguyen Minh Duc, for their support in arranging and running the conference.

All of these and others contributed to an interactive and impactful Policy Dialogue. While this dialogue wraps up the Policy Dialogue series, the Stimson Center will continue to engage on related topics through ongoing work with the Southeast Asia and Cyber programs to address cyber resilience and online scam operations, as well as broader institutional work on artificial intelligence.

Sincerely,

Courtney Weatherby
The Stimson Center Southeast Asia Program
Co-Chair

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The eleventh Mekong-U.S. Partnership Track 1.5 Policy Dialogue took place on August 13-15 in Bangkok, Thailand to explore gaps, challenges, and opportunities in digital economy across themes including data governance, e-commerce and digital payments, ICT infrastructure, artificial intelligence, cyber resilience and online scams, and training a digital workforce.





Th digital economy in Southeast Asia has grown rapidly since the COVID-19 pandemic — between 2019 and 2022, its value doubled to over \$200 billion and is on track to more than double again through 2030. This Policy Dialogue was a deep dive into needs and gaps in the Mekong sub-region related to the digital economy’s rapid expansion, with a particular focus on opportunities related to e-commerce and digital trade, differences and challenges of data governance, digital trust and cyber fraud, artificial intelligence, ICT infrastructure, and upskilling for a digital workforce. This builds on our [July 2022 Policy Dialogue focused on human resources](#) needs for key industries, which discussed broader gaps between workforce needs and education, as well as the [October 2024 Policy Dialogue, which focused on cyber scam compounds](#) and laid the ground for a deeper dive at this Policy Dialogue into implications of damaged digital trust and the role of artificial intelligence (AI) in online scams and fraud. Participants explored policy challenges, best practices, and case studies from the Mekong sub-region, ASEAN, and the United States. Participants’ policy recommendations include:

- **Mekong and ASEAN governments should incentivize modern and renewable energy across the value chain through regulatory clarity and, as appropriate, grants and tax rebates for priority energy infrastructure.** The significant amount of energy required to expand data centers and AI is a real constraint on rapidly growing regional energy systems. Global tech companies should consider greater adoption of on-site processing by local devices to improve energy efficiency. Mekong governments should identify gaps between planned energy supply and potential demand from AI and data centers, and provide targeted grants or rebates to ensure sufficient energy stock.
- **Mekong national governments should bolster the enforcement of pre-existing cyber security frameworks.** Despite recent work promoting cybersecurity cooperation, there is no coordination of a single cybersecurity framework for all of ASEAN, and eliminating disparities would promote digital integration. Law enforcement, digital, and cyber security agencies should enhance enforcement levers and distinguish compliance capabilities of different players. Countries that have a centralized Anti-Scam Center or similar agency should share lessons learned with countries that do not.
- **Mekong and ASEAN governments should simplify the procedures and regulations for small and medium enterprises (SMEs) through harmonization of policies, consolidation of information and access, and support for the adoption of digital transformation tools.** Regulatory complexity remains the biggest challenge for businesses operating across jurisdictions. Ministries of industry and commerce should simplify the guidelines, regulations, and protocols for cross-border trade. E-commerce platforms, banks, and SME associations should support an onboarding process with safety and security measures for SMEs and merchants seeking to engage in cross-border trade.
- **Government agencies and private companies should work together to standardize data collection processes, and ethical AI training data should be representative of local languages and communities, with respect to national laws and limitations.** ASEAN Working Groups on AI and Data Governance should build guidelines and a guidebook for data interoperability. National telecommunications and information agencies should mobilize the ASEAN ICT fund for CSO-led capacity building efforts on AI. International partners should fund dialogue between CSOs, governments, and the private sector on ethical data collection and AI training approaches.

AGENDA FOR OPENING MEKONG–U.S. PARTNERSHIP TRACK 1.5 POLICY DIALOGUE

| DAY 1 August 13, 2025, from 8:30 AM - 4:45 PM Bangkok, Thailand | | | |
|--|---|--|---|
| 8:30–10:00 am | <p>Opening Plenary</p> <p>Opening Remarks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Courtney WEATHERBY, Stimson Center Conference Co-Chair ● Michael RONNING, Section Head, Regional Strategic Assistance Section, U.S. Embassy ● NGUYEN Manh Dong, Vice President, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam ● Praab PIANSKOOL, Chief Country Representative for Thailand, Laos, and Myanmar, US-ASEAN Business Council <p>Plenary Panel: Emerging Trends in Digital Economy</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Mohamed Soleh IRAWAN, Digital Economy Division, ASEAN Secretariat ● Salsabil (Bella) AFIFA, US ASEAN Business Council ● Seow Hiong (SH) GOH, Executive Director, Global Policy & Government Affairs, Asia Pacific at Cisco ● Rachel COLEMAN, Google | | |
| 10:00 - 10:30 am | Coffee and Tea Break | | |
| <p>CONCURRENT SESSIONS</p> <p>10:30 am–12:00 am</p> | <table border="1"> <tr> <td> <p>Digital Trade Track</p> <p>A1: Trade Facilitation (SMEs)</p> <p>Moderator: Dr. NGUYEN Anh Tuan, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Viengsavang THIPPHAVONG, National University of Laos ● Valerie TAN, Mastercard ● Nathchaya PONGAKKARAWAT, MDES </td> <td> <p>Digital Governance Track</p> <p>B1: Data Governance</p> <p>Moderator: Philomling VILAY, UNDP Laos</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Miriam STANKOVICH, ASEAN US Partnership Program ● NGUYEN Minh Duc, US ASEAN Business Council </td> </tr> </table> | <p>Digital Trade Track</p> <p>A1: Trade Facilitation (SMEs)</p> <p>Moderator: Dr. NGUYEN Anh Tuan, Diplomatic Academy of Vietnam</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Viengsavang THIPPHAVONG, National University of Laos ● Valerie TAN, Mastercard ● Nathchaya PONGAKKARAWAT, MDES | <p>Digital Governance Track</p> <p>B1: Data Governance</p> <p>Moderator: Philomling VILAY, UNDP Laos</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Miriam STANKOVICH, ASEAN US Partnership Program ● NGUYEN Minh Duc, US ASEAN Business Council |
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| 12:00 - 2:00 pm | Lunch | | |
| <p>CONCURRENT SESSIONS</p> <p>2:00 PM - 3:30 PM</p> | <table border="1"> <tr> <td> <p>A2: Digital Payments/E-Commerce</p> <p>Moderator: Dr. Papawadee TANODOMDEJ, Chulalongkorn University</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Indra SUPPIAH, Visa ● Huntsathon WANNASOPA, Bank of Thailand ● Lilyana DA CRUZ, YSEALI Alumna and Business Staff at Mosan </td> <td> <p>B1: Data Governance</p> <p>Moderator: Gunn JIRAVUTTIPONG, Thailand Development Research Institute</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Thao GRIFFITHS, Meta ● Narun POPPATTANACHAI, Office of the Council of State, Thailand ● Dr. NGUYEN Quynh Trang, Vietnam National University </td> </tr> </table> | <p>A2: Digital Payments/E-Commerce</p> <p>Moderator: Dr. Papawadee TANODOMDEJ, Chulalongkorn University</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Indra SUPPIAH, Visa ● Huntsathon WANNASOPA, Bank of Thailand ● Lilyana DA CRUZ, YSEALI Alumna and Business Staff at Mosan | <p>B1: Data Governance</p> <p>Moderator: Gunn JIRAVUTTIPONG, Thailand Development Research Institute</p> <p>Speakers:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Thao GRIFFITHS, Meta ● Narun POPPATTANACHAI, Office of the Council of State, Thailand ● Dr. NGUYEN Quynh Trang, Vietnam National University |
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| 3:30 - 4:45 PM | Coffee and Tea Break and then Interactive Wrap-Up | | |

DAY 2

August 14, 2025, from 8:45 AM - 5:00 PM
Bangkok, Thailand

| | | |
|---------------------|---|---|
| 8:45 - 10:15 am | Plenary Session: Connectivity and IT Infrastructure Moderator: Brian EYLER, Stimson Center (moderator) Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Pisal CHANTY, Digital and Innovation Policy Research Center, Cambodia Academy of Digital Technology• Adrian CHIEW, Qualcomm• Dr. Malaykham PHILAPHONE, Department of Micro, Small, and Medium Enterprises, Ministry of Industry and Commerce Lao PDR• Taveesak SAENGTHONG, Oracle• Seow Hiong (SH) GOH, Cisco | |
| 10:15 am - 10:30 am | Coffee Break | |
| 11:00 am - 12:00 pm | C1: Strengthening Cyber Resilience in ASEAN Moderator: Deserack TESO, Microsoft Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Nabila HUSSAIN, Cloudflare• Galuh WULAN, ASEAN U.S. Partnership Program• LE Cuong, Chongluadao | D1: Mekong Region's AI Opportunity Moderator: Mark MANANTAN, Pacific Forum Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Saliltorn THONGMEENSUK, Thailand Development Research Institute (virtual)• Putri ALAM, Google (virtual)• Thao GRIFFITHS, Meta• Austin MENYASZ, SAP (virtual) |
| 12:00 - 2:00 pm | Lunch | |
| 2:00 - 3:30 | C2: Countering the Surge of Online Scams in ASEAN Moderator: Courtney WEATHERBY Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Rajeshpal SINGH SANDHU, Global Anti-Scam Alliance (virtual)• Moon Nguyet PHILLIPS, Tools for Humanity• Rachel COLEMAN, Google• Nor Halimatan SA'ADIAH, Bank Negara Malaysia | D2: Mekong Region's AI Opportunity Moderator: Peerapat CHOKESUWATTANA-SKUL, Chulalongkorn University Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Miriam STANKOVICH, ASEAN US Partnership Program• Bryan YEOH, MyDigital• Lei MOTILLA, AI4GOV |
| 3:30 - 4:00 pm | Coffee Break | |
| 4:00 - 5:00 pm | Plenary Session: Training a Digital Workforce Moderator: Elina NOOR, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace Speakers: <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Cindy CHAW KHIN KHIN, Myanmar Computer Corporation• Twarath SUTABUTR, Office of Knowledge Management and Development (Thailand)• Phonesavanh SITTHIDETH, Lao Academy of Social and Economic Science | |

DAY 3

October 18, 2024 from 8:30 AM - 1:30 PM ICT
Bangkok, Thailand

| | |
|---------------------|--|
| 8:30 am - 11:30 am | Synthesis Workshop: Key Takeaways Polling & Discussion <i>This session included an interactive Mentimeter poll where participants ranked the top challenges identified during Days 1 and 2. They then moved into breakout groups for a facilitated, participatory discussion and group work to identify potential solutions, policy recommendations, and key actors in addressing their chosen theme's challenges.</i> |
| 11:30 am - 12:15 pm | Closing Plenary Panel |
| 12:00 - 1:30 pm | Lunch |

Photo: Synthesis workshop activities at the Policy Dialogue in Bangkok, Thailand on August 15, 2025.. Photo courtesy of Courtney Weatherby.



THEMATIC AREAS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The key concerns and recommendations related to the thematic categories discussed in this report are the result of an interactive workshopping process conducted with Dialogue participants during a synthesis workshop on Day 3. Throughout the conference on Days 1 and 2, the organizing team took detailed notes on the specific concerns, challenges, and gaps that were identified during session presentations and discussions. Key problems were identified across six cross-cutting thematic categories covered during the conference sessions: data and digital platforms; SMEs and cross-border trade; ICT Infrastructure; online scams and digital trust; artificial intelligence; and digital workforce.

Attendees ranked the top problems in each category through an interactive Mentimeter poll and then split into self-selected thematic breakout groups to collaboratively identify and draft policy recommendations involved in addressing the top issues identified in the poll. The breakout groups collectively drafted policy recommendations and solutions for 17 individual issues and presented them to the group for a final voting process. The top recommendations for each theme, as determined by the participants through this voting process, are included in this summary report.

Photo: Synthesis workshop activities at the Policy Dialogue in Bangkok, Thailand on August 15, 2025. Photo courtesy of Courtney Weatherby.





DATA AND DIGITAL PLATFORMS

Data underpins the digital economy, and the governance landscape around personal data protection, data sharing, and management varies significantly across national borders. The result is a fragmented regulatory regime across the Mekong region and ASEAN. Many countries such as Thailand and Vietnam have adopted data localization or security requirements, which can clash with how data processing often works with data center hub locations and cloud computing processes. Digital platforms — including e-commerce platforms as well as social media platforms — are also subject to these considerations. The fragmented regulatory approach requires companies to develop different processes for each locality and inhibits ASEAN economic integration. The barriers and fragmentation have particularly strong impacts on SMEs, which often have limited capacity to manage different requirements across multiple regulatory structures and for which digital platforms are key for accessing and scaling up activities in new markets.

While data and digital platforms came up during numerous sessions at the Policy Dialogue, one track of sessions on Day 1 focused explicitly on these topics. Session B1 on Data Governance included an overview of the regional data governance landscape, explored implications of existing policies, and considered international best practices. Key takeaways on data governance include the tensions between data sovereignty and localization (which is enshrined in many existing laws) versus the desire for growth, which requires interoperability; the need for harmonization of how different types of data are classified; challenges of enforcing existing data provisions; and the challenges involved with trusting corporations, governments, and AI models to handle data appropriately. Session B2 on Digital Platforms explored efforts to promote government-industry collaboration on digital platforms, with particular consideration of recent regulatory responses which were passed or are under consideration regarding incentives, licensing, or content moderation or take-down requirements. Key takeaways included the need for champions within government to support artificial intelligence and digital platform adoption, the complexities of regulating digital platforms given the multitude of interested parties, the need for open-source models given limited budgets in developing economies, and the importance of capacity building and training for SMEs.

PARTICIPANTS' PRIORITY ISSUES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. Stakeholders in Mekong government agencies, local civil society organizations (CSOs), and others need to proactively train to understand how data systems and platforms work to institutionalize data governance structures.** Existing data governance structures and processes are fragmented, often complex, outdated, and either in need of update or actively going through revision. Capacity building is necessary to ensure that data custodians and workers know how systems work and can track updates and changes to legal frameworks.
 - International organizations such as the International Telecommunications Union Academy should work with government agencies responsible for digital economy as well as CSOs to collaboratively develop toolkits and use them to scale up training and capacity-building efforts.
 - Capacity-building training programs should target points of contact and officials in charge of making and implementing laws on data and platform management.
 - Chambers of commerce and public-private-partnerships should organize a series of national and regional capacity-building workshops to help employees understand data systems and legal requirements.
 - Intergovernmental organizations like UNESCO, policy institutes, national training centers, and ASEAN's Digital Economy Division should support capacity-building events on data management that target the public and private sector, CSOs, and development agencies.
- 2. Government agencies should create and support public-private partnerships for identifying best practices in digital platform licensing schemes.** Traditional licensing schemes and regulations to differentiate trusted and untrusted actors aren't effective ways to regulate the digital space, as many actors are abroad, and most digital platforms and services are not directly managed by the government. Public-private partnerships with major platforms and standard-setting organizations can identify best practices adopted in other markets, help with verification and trust determination by key private sector platforms, and avoid government overreach. This can help improve digital trust while eliminating existing obstacles to private sector innovation.
 - Mekong and ASEAN governments should support a regulatory sandbox approach wherein companies can innovate within specific timeframes without complying with existing regulations and laws to identify opportunities for efficiency and growth.
 - Government agencies and regulators should ensure small merchants, start-ups, online creators, and micro, small, and medium enterprises (MSMEs) are included in public-private partnerships to ensure that their needs are accounted for alongside big tech firms.
 - CSOs and digital platform companies should provide training on content safety and consumer protection for community moderators and online creators for key platforms.
- 3. Mekong country governments should develop a clear accountability structure for data classification and seek to harmonize standards at the national and regional levels.** To support cross-border access and use of digital tools including AI models, harmonizing the rules and regulations on how countries define and classify data is key.
 - Mekong and ASEAN government agencies such as national statistics offices and the Ministry of Digital Economy and Society (Thailand), Ministry of Science and Technology (Vietnam), and equivalents should appoint a chief data official to coordinate across line ministries and harmonize standards domestically and work to harmonize standards across national borders.
 - Independent research institutions should implement data quality statistics stock-taking activities to review existing datasets, identify discrepancies, and work with government agencies to identify low-hanging fruit for standardization.
 - AI companies and data-intensive firms can engage with governments on the value of harmonizing standards across national borders for development and deployment of AI models.
 - Agencies that collect data should strengthen national data governance standards.



SMEs AND CROSS-BORDER TRADE

Small and medium enterprise (SMEs) form the backbone of ASEAN’s regional economy and are integral to economic development, with more than 70 million micro, small, and medium enterprises across ASEAN that make up 92%-99% of all businesses in the region, produce nearly 85% of regional jobs, and contribute 44% to regional GDP. Even as digitalization drives expansion, due to their size, SMEs often have limited human and technical capacity, which can inhibit their ability to quickly expand into new markets with differing e-commerce regulations or other regulatory requirements, access new opportunities like digital payment platforms or artificial intelligence, and adopt cyber security or IT best practices. The Digital Economic Framework Agreement (DEFA) currently under negotiation in ASEAN seeks to support harmonization for data flows and e-payments and — once finalized and implemented — should provide clear avenues to reduce friction for SMEs and help scale up cross-border trade. If adopted, DEFA could double the value of ASEAN’s digital economy from \$1 trillion in 2030 to \$2 trillion.

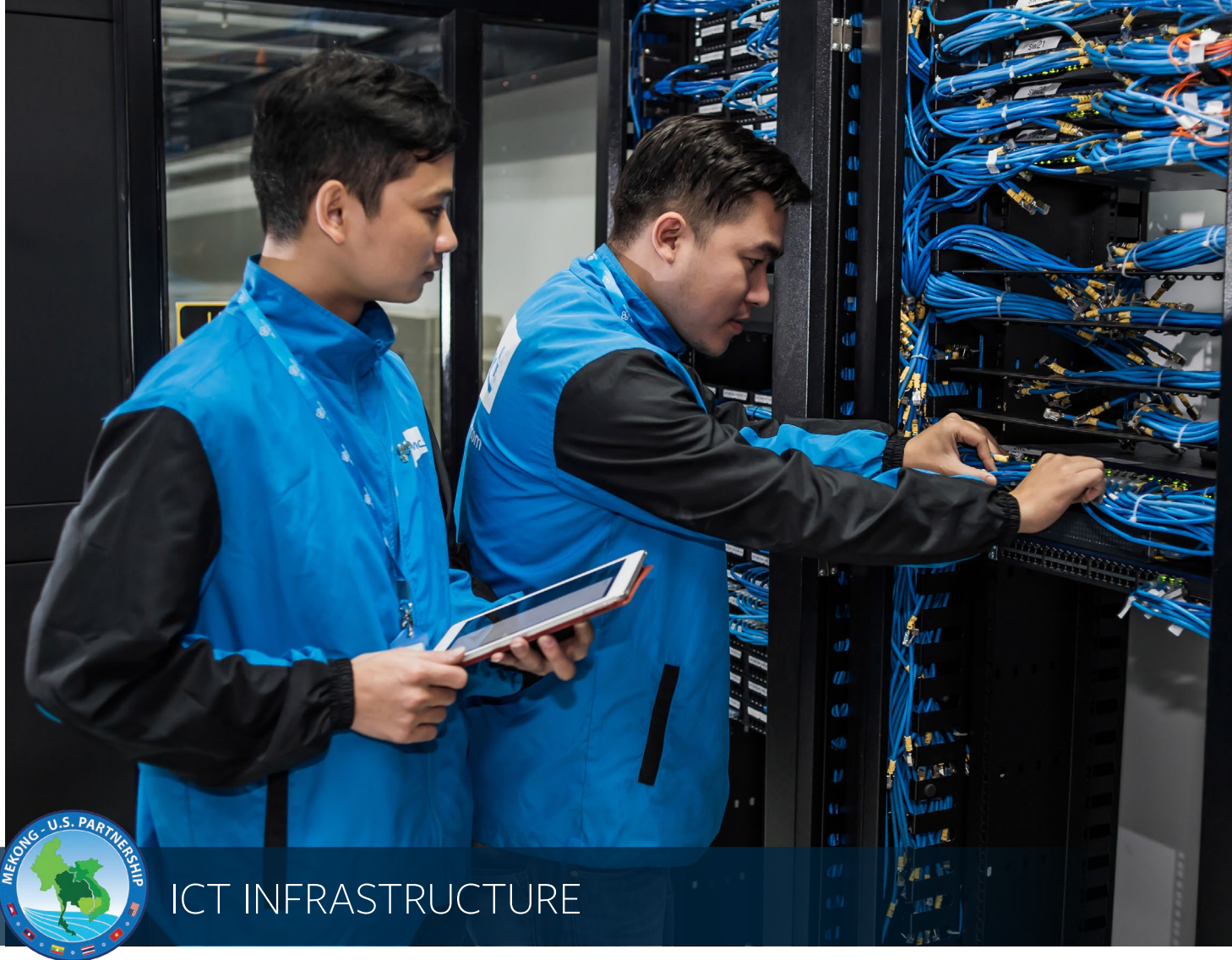
SMEs play a major role in regional economies and thus were mentioned in nine of the 10 sessions at the Policy Dialogue. Almost all topics — artificial intelligence, data and regulatory regimes, cyber security, infrastructure, and workforce skills training — have relevance for SMEs. However, one session on Trade Facilitation focused specifically on the implications for SMEs, exploring digitalization of markets, cross-border data flows, ICT infrastructure developments, efforts to streamline e-commerce, and how these each present opportunities or obstacles for SMEs. Some key takeaways from the discussion included the vital role that SMEs provide in regional economies, the relatively high dependence on key digital commerce platforms including Facebook and Google, a rural-urban digital divide in terms of access to internet services and expertise, and obstacles posed by regulatory complexity for MSMEs.

Photo: SGQR NETS pay at Liho Tea in Queensway Shopping Centre, Singapore (2025), courtesy of Wikimedia user Chainwit and used under a creative commons license.

PARTICIPANTS' PRIORITY ISSUES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Mekong and ASEAN governments should simplify the procedures and regulations for SMEs through harmonization of policies, consolidation of information and access, and support for the adoption of digital transformation tools.** SMEs face difficulty in compliance with the variance of e-commerce regulations among different import countries, and regulatory complexity remains the biggest challenge for businesses operating across multiple jurisdictions. Harmonized and clear rules and standards are needed to improve regional interoperability and integration to support e-commerce.
 - Ministries of industry and commerce and other relevant government agencies should simplify the guidelines, regulations, procedures, and protocols (forms) for cross border trade.
 - Tech companies and e-commerce platforms should harmonize best practices in order to support a shared ecosystem across national borders.
 - E-commerce platforms such as Shopee and Lazada; commercial banks; chambers of commerce; and SME associations should support an onboarding process with safety and security measures for SMEs and merchants seeking to engage in cross-border trade.
 - Consumer welfare organizations, IT providers, and NGOs should support consumer-protection training activities and policy measures.
 - With support from the ASEAN Secretariat, Mekong government agencies should prioritize harmonization of rules and regulations for cross border data flows (CBDF), developing a digital ecosystem that is consistent across borders.

2. **National digital transformation agencies, departments of SME promotion, and champions of commerce and industry should incentivize SMEs to engage with public-private partnerships through creation of toolkits and improved accessibility of financial resources.** SMEs have limited resources and capacity to take advantage of cross-border trade opportunities, often due to a lack of IT and cyber security skills, limited trust and use of international payment gateways, lack of information about how to access global markets, and a limited budget for ads.
 - IT service providers, social media companies, banks, and financial institutions should create toolkits and training on how to access credit and utilize international payment gateways.
 - NGOs should partner with trade associations, financial institutions, and tech companies to provide targeted training and capacity-building assistance to small business owners.
 - ASEAN Secretariat should partner with SME agencies in ASEAN member states to support monitoring and tracking successes of capacity-building efforts to identify what works well and where gaps emerge for business owners on day-to-day operations.
 - Banks and national regulatory agencies should consider alternative records and scores for SMEs to help them access credit that is often necessary to invest in business expansion.
 - Thailand's Ministry of Commerce, Ministry of Digital Economy and Society, and relevant partner agencies should share lessons learned from SME digital capacity building and training approaches with universities and college programs to scale up adoption.



ICT INFRASTRUCTURE

Digital economy growth relies on two underlying support structures: one is the policy and regulatory clarity that allows for investment, innovation, and expansion, and the other is the necessary information and communication technology (ICT) infrastructure to support rapid digitalization. Ensuring reliable, secure, affordable, and up-to-date internet access is crucial to ensure that both consumers and enterprises can take full advantage of digital transformation and particularly artificial intelligence. ICT infrastructure is evolving rapidly and is deployed unevenly, with some localities in Southeast Asia already fully connected with 5G while an estimated 30% of the 670 million people in Southeast Asia don't yet have reliable internet access. The three ASEAN countries with the lowest internet penetration are Cambodia, and Myanmar, where 35% or more of the populations remain disconnected. This creates a major digital divide that will limit digital economy growth unless remedied. Addressing this gap requires ongoing investments in physical infrastructure such as subsea cables or fixed wireless access to meet rapidly rising internet demand, as well as modern power generation and transmission infrastructure to reliably supply data centers and rapidly expanding use of digital and internet connected equipment across all sectors

While references to infrastructure gaps came up in numerous panels on Day 1, the kickoff plenary session on Day 2 of the conference was a deep dive into needs and challenges for key ICT infrastructure including cloud infrastructure, energy infrastructure, undersea cables, data centers, and various elements of internet access and infrastructure such as 5G/6G access and OpenRAN. Speakers highlighted challenges including access to high-quality internet, particularly rural areas and remote communities; the need for high-quality internet to enable AI to its fullest potential; high investment costs for infrastructure and equipment upgrades; local skill gaps; and ensuring critical infrastructure is protected against cyber threats. The most popular policy recommendation from the overall Policy Dialogue is related to the underlying energy infrastructure that powers the region's digital transformation.

Photo: Data Center của CMC Telecom [Data center for CMC Telecom], used under Creative Commons license courtesy of Wikimedia user Daoducquan..

PARTICIPANTS' PRIORITY ISSUES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Mekong and ASEAN governments should incentivize modern and renewable energy across the value chain through regulatory clarity and, as appropriate, grants and tax rebates for priority energy infrastructure.** Southeast Asia is already projected to see a one-third rise in energy demand through 2035, and thus, the significant amount of energy required to support expanding data centers and AI is a real constraint for ASEAN states. Most multinational companies also have internal commitments to renewable or clean energy targets, which determine where they invest. This can help drive power generation investment in modern and clean generation and transmission but also requires cross-agency coordination as the region expands its overall power supply.
 - Global tech companies including cloud services providers, artificial intelligence developers, and device designers should consider greater adoption of on-site processing by local devices (edge AI) rather than remote processing to improve energy efficiency.
 - Mekong and ASEAN energy and investment ministries should provide policy and regulatory clarity to allow data centers to sign direct power purchase agreements with local energy providers that meet corporate requirements.
 - Energy producers and national utilities should partner with global tech companies to adopt AI and big-data solutions to improve efficient management of the power system.
 - Mekong governments and the ASEAN Secretariat should establish technology-neutral green economic corridors to facilitate energy reliability and meet clean energy demand from the tech sector.
 - Mekong governments should identify gaps between existing and planned energy supply and potential demand from AI and data centers, and provide targeted grants or tax rebates to producers, prosumers, and consumers to ensure sufficient energy stock.
2. **National government agencies should ease regulatory burdens for vessels engaging in subsea cable construction and repair.** Subsea cables have been transformative for data storage and are the arteries for global collaboration on artificial intelligence. While submarine cables have high investment costs, more cables need to be built to meet rapidly rising data consumption and address reliability and bandwidth issues related to shared telecommunications infrastructure.
 - Development banks and international development partners such as the United States should facilitate new financing mechanisms to support cable construction given the clear economic benefits of improved connectivity.
 - Major tech firms, artificial intelligence companies, and national telecommunications companies should co-invest in fiber pairs of existing cables to reduce high costs associated with new construction.
 - Regional initiatives strategizing plans for expansion of undersea cables should include Lao PDR, given the need to extend connectivity through land connections.
 - Cable-laying companies and vessels should utilize advanced fiber cables that require less energy.
3. **Internet service providers should advance an open interconnection ecosystem that is based on settlement-free peering to improve access and affordability of internet access.** Given high costs of last-mile internet connectivity using traditional cable technologies to expand internet access to the 30% of the population who are currently disconnected, use of new technologies will be crucial to address that gap. Settlement free peering — agreements between separate service providers to exchange traffic without monetary payment — can help expand access and internet quality when separate networks have similar scope and market size.
 - National telecommunications agencies and officials overseeing universal service funds (USF) should strengthen efficient deployment through the use of new and emerging technologies to expand access to underserved communities and unlock further digital economic growth.
 - National and provincial authorities should establish digital villages through fixed wireless access, open RAN, and edge AI solutions to facilitate agri-tech expansion.
 - Telecommunications and internet service providers should facilitate efficient public-private partnership (PPP) collaboration with national regulators through agreed vision, strategy, and coordination efforts, and national regulators and relevant agencies should provide clear policy incentives.



ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

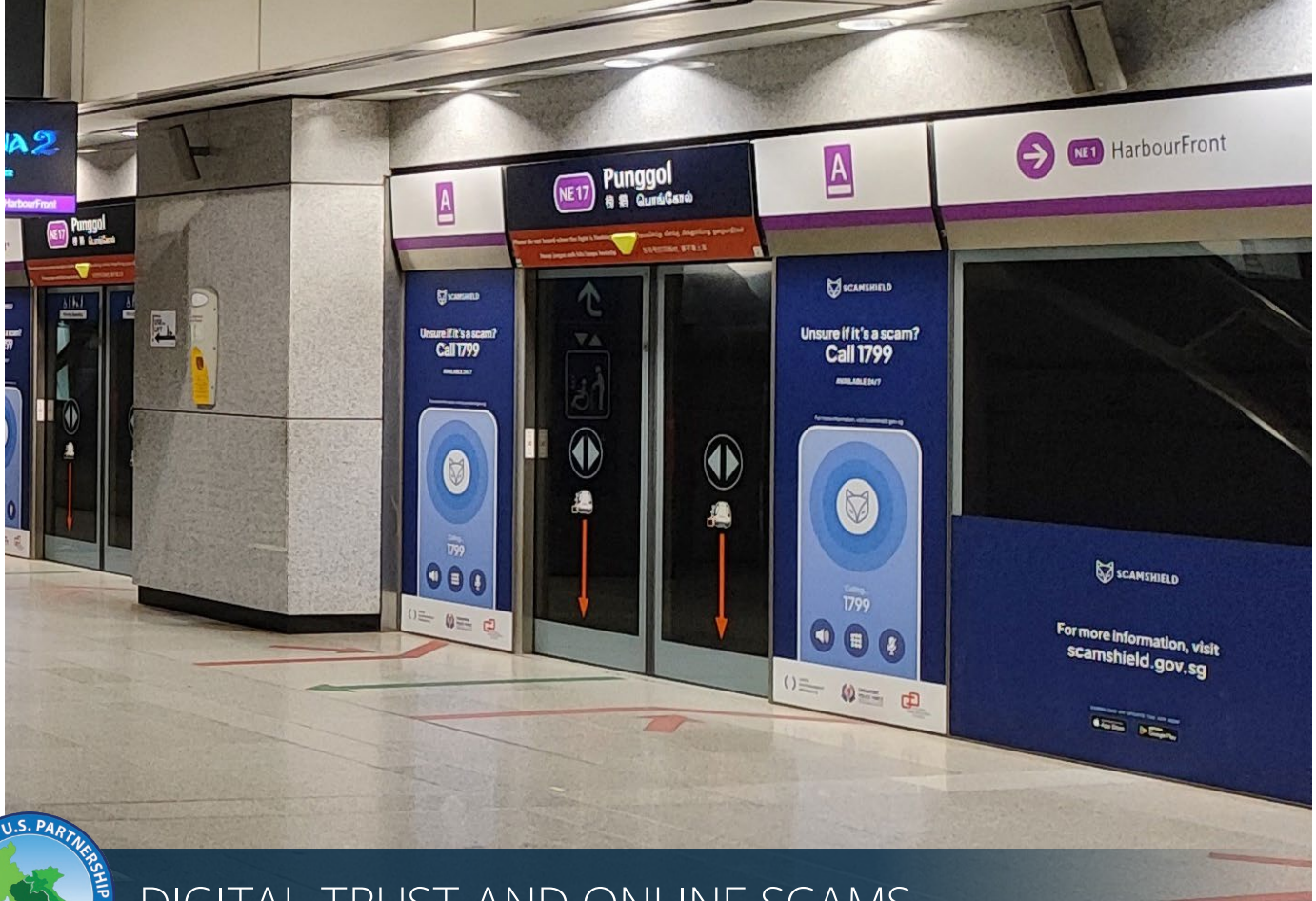
Artificial intelligence had a rapid rise as a driver of global interest and use cases. The ASEAN region is an emerging artificial intelligence hotspot, with significant investment flowing in three regional markets — Singapore, the Philippines, and Malaysia, which are among the top 10 global markets most interested in artificial intelligence. A survey of over 200 business leaders across the region shows early adopter firms are already exploring how some forms of AI can improve efficiency, with use cases across fintech, healthcare, and agri-tech sectors showing early returns on investment. ASEAN is also ahead of the curve in considering AI governance, having released an ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics to provide a framework for adoption. The region is intimately aware of both the significant economic opportunities that AI can bring as well as the challenges, particularly in the form of its use by bad actors in cybercrime and online scams.

AI came up in most conference sessions, with two dedicated sessions. The session on the Mekong region's AI opportunity included insights into the opportunities for AI adoption and integration to boost income and increase efficiency; that Mekong populations and regulators have a pro-digital mindset but are slower than neighboring countries to adopt and integrate AI due to resource and infrastructure gaps; and that pathways to promote PPPs on AI and data availability for AI remain unclear. The session on foundational enablers for AI highlighted the value of a regulatory sandbox approach; that upskilling of citizens is key to ensure widespread adoption and effective integration; and that existing large-language models (LLMs) are often trained in non-local languages and thus are not suited for day-to-day application by regional officials or other users. A broad regulatory shift away from AI safety was also flagged as a concern. Finally, AI came up numerous times during the digital trust sessions given the use of AI by bad actors, utilization of AI within screening and security systems to respond, and the need for some type of “proof of human” approach to differentiate between human actors and bots in digital spaces.

PARTICIPANTS' PRIORITY ISSUES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. Government agencies and private companies should work together to standardize data collection processes, and ethical AI training data should be representative of local languages and culture, with respect to national laws and limitations.** Currently data availability is incomplete, non-standardized, and seen as sensitive by governments. This leads to data silos, where information is available but not shared between ministries or across borders, and efficiency losses, as datasets require significant additional processing to use or are not compatible across national borders, and can pose a challenge for first movers given the need to navigate government sensitivities. A lack of LLMs native to the local language and culture also limits their day-to-day use in many sectors, as they translate from English or Chinese rather than working directly in the local language.
 - The ASEAN AI Working Group, ASEAN Working Group on Data Governance, and ASEAN AI Safety Network should build guidelines and a guidebook for data interoperability across national borders.
 - National telecommunications and information agencies should mobilize the ASEAN ICT fund for CSO-led capacity building efforts on AI.
 - International partners should fund an ASEAN dialogue platform between civil society organizations, governments, and the private sector on ethical data collection and AI training approaches.
- 2. Countries must develop a risk-management approach to open-source models for AI.** Countries with limited resources have limited funding, technical expertise, and human capacity to develop their own AI models, so they can only adopt open-source tech. Because open-source models utilize public data, there are risks of bad data inputs being used for training and reference, which could inhibit the reliability of outputs.
 - A network of AI researchers in Southeast Asia should independently audit AI models for risk, bias, and data gaps or oversights.
 - Sectoral regulators should collaborate with the International Electrotechnical Commission to develop regular, technical audits of open-source models for compliance with ISO42001 standards.
 - ASEAN member states should create peer-to-peer partnerships through MOUs and targeted collaborative projects in the interest of shared development.
- 3. Company leaders and institutional heads should set clear guidelines to ensure that AI is used in a manner that is compliant with organizational standards.** Openness to using AI varies between countries and organizations; in cases where leadership is open to AI integration, there is often still limited capacity to understand its use or risks.
 - Regulators — particularly in sectors such as banking or health that handle sensitive personal information — should establish clear guidance and guidelines for appropriate use of AI.
 - AI companies should develop a management and compliance training toolkit that companies and agency leaders can adapt to provide clear guidelines for individual institutions.

Photo on Opposite Page: Photo of ChatGPT answering a query on business strategy on a cell phone, courtesy of Courtney Weatherby.



DIGITAL TRUST AND ONLINE SCAMS

Digital trust is necessary to ensure that stakeholders trust the digital platforms, payment systems, and other information flows that support digital economy growth. Online scams have become a major scourge to the global economy in recent years, with the rapid proliferation of industrial scale online scam operations by transnational criminal organizations (TCOs) operating out of under-governed areas in the Mekong region and targeting Americans and Southeast Asians alike. These TCOs take advantage of weak governance and regulation, particularly of the crypto and virtual asset industries, to steal and launder funds at a massive scale. The FBI estimates that of \$9.3 billion lost by American citizens to cryptocurrency fraud in 2023, \$5.8 billion of that was from crypto-investment schemes employed by TCOs. Fraud and scams are rampant in Southeast Asia as well: A 2025 Global Anti-Scam Alliance (GASA) survey reveals that nearly 80% of adults in Southeast Asia experienced a scam within the last year and that 32% of victims report becoming more distrustful of digital tools and platforms as a result of being scammed. Scammers have a wide repertoire of approaches ranging from investment to employment to romance to government impersonation, and their ability to adjust and respond to crackdowns is enhanced through the use of artificial intelligence.

Scams and cyber marketplace fraud were raised over 150 times and cybersecurity over 50 times during the Policy Dialogue, with two sessions focusing specifically on the challenges they pose to digital trust and implications for the digital economy. Most conversations on cyber security considered the need for international coordinated action by governments as well as collaboration with the private sector; challenges of digital literacy among the populace; and the catalyzing role that AI is playing in this space. Two sessions focused explicitly on digital trust and cyber resilience. A few key takeaways from these sessions focused on the impact of AI as both a threat enhancer and response tool: AI allows bad actors to rapidly scale up and adapt scam campaigns, making traditional blacklist approaches insufficient; AI is improving the quality of scam efforts, making them harder to distinguish by the average citizen, necessitating changes to system security approaches; and AI can also be used to rate risk or identify security threats. Beyond AI, the basics of cyber security also require attention: Cyber resilience varies significantly among ASEAN countries, with some countries having robust frameworks and cyber security capacity and others still developing basic legal frameworks and institutions. As attack vectors increase along with digitalization, ensuring that protection is built into the internet system, digital operating systems, and even hardware is increasingly crucial.

PARTICIPANTS' PRIORITY ISSUES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 1. Mekong national governments should bolster the enforcement of pre-existing cyber security frameworks.** While ASEAN has coordinated on cybersecurity through the ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy and the ASEAN Working Group on Anti-Online Scams (WG-AS), there is no coordination of a single cybersecurity framework for all of ASEAN. Eliminating disparities among countries that have strong national frameworks and operational capacity (Vietnam and Thailand), countries with limited capacity (such as Myanmar and Lao PDR) and those where cyber security frameworks are still under development (Cambodia) would promote further digital integration.
 - Law enforcement, digital, and cyber security agencies should enhance enforcement levers and distinguish compliance capabilities of different players.
 - Singapore, Thailand, and countries that have a centralized Anti-Scam Center or similar agency should share efficient practices and lessons learned in government-private sector collaboration with countries that do not yet have a centralized agency.
 - Government agencies, central banks, and industry associations should enforce existing regulations and reward compliance and best practice leadership with public recognition.
 - Industry associations should educate foreign players opening services in local jurisdictions about local regulations to support best practices.
- 2. Private sector and government agencies should build a trusted channel of communication to discuss pros and cons of security measures.** Building security into platforms or systems often includes adding layers of security (which may cause friction for users), detecting patterns (which could require collection and processing of private data), and taking other measures that could impact the openness of the system. As security is an increasing concern and is increasingly requested by consumers and government agencies, there should be clarity among all sides about what that means in terms of trade-offs.
 - Industry associations should establish more regional avenues for digital platforms, banking institutions, and private companies to offer insights and recommendations to government stakeholders, building on existing efforts such as the U.S. ASEAN Business Council's coordination with the WG-AS.
 - Government agencies and law enforcement agencies should continue public consultations ahead of new implementation of requirements, including relevant government stakeholders.
 - External actors such as think tanks, intergovernmental agencies, and industry associations should convene the private sector and government to support dialogue on trade-offs, work towards drafting a mutually accepted framework for managing them, and create sector-based guides that lay out proportional risk and response of security efforts.
- 3. Ministries responsible for education and digital economy should strengthen digital literacy programs by boosting collaboration between key stakeholders, both in individual countries and across the region.** Digital literacy rates are low across the board. Within the context of combatting fraud and online scams, the region largely lacks digital literacy training materials or programming. Given the evolving nature of the problem, it is necessary for the entire ecosystem — regulations, enforcement, industrial practices, and consumers — to collectively act to mitigate risks.
 - National government agencies should establish clear, whole-of-government messaging to combat scams and coordinate inter-agency responses.
 - Educational institutions, tech companies, and cyber education platforms such as Cyberjutsu should present digital literacy in a way that is engaging and accessible, such as through gamification.
 - Government agencies, cyber security organizations and research institutions should identify stakeholders currently working on digital literacy and inventory their activities to identify best practices.
 - NGOs should convene cyber security agencies, tech companies, educational institutions, and digital literacy content creators across sectors and borders to ensure coordination and avoid duplication.
 - Major digital platforms including social media, payment providers, and digital banking platforms should be proactive about cautionary messages to consumers on identifying common scams.

Photo: Scamshield advertisements in Singapore metro station. Photo NE17 Punggol MRT used under creative commons and courtesy of Wikimedia user ZKang123.



DIGITAL WORKFORCE

Digitalization is rapidly transforming the global economy and presenting both significant opportunities in the form of new skilled jobs as well as challenges for workers who need education and training to keep up with a changing economy. Internet access has risen rapidly, with growth accelerating during the COVID-19 pandemic, and this has provided massive economic growth but also highlighted skill gaps ranging from a lack of IT and cybersecurity skills to digital literacy gaps to limited understanding and utilization of cloud services, digital payment gateways, and artificial intelligence. Mekong countries are building in upskilling or reskilling of workers as targets into national AI strategies or digital development plans to respond to industry demand, and some companies — including major tech leaders such as Meta and Google — have developed training programs and guidance to support local adoption. However, these often have yet to penetrate university, vocational, or high school education systems.

One plenary session on Day 2 was dedicated to exploring gaps and needs related to digital economy growth, exploring the gaps and mismatches between existing educational initiatives and private sector needs, considering ways to develop AI talent pipelines to ensure effective adoption and integration as the technology matures and proliferates, and considered cybersecurity training needs to manage vulnerabilities as various sectors increasingly digitize. Speakers on this session provided national policies and case study overviews, highlighting that most countries in the region have or are putting out guidelines, roadmaps, and/or targets for AI literacy and training. Broad takeaways include the need to ensure that university programs adapt to incorporate work placements or industry insights into curriculum to ensure that graduates' skills are up-to-date and matched to market needs; that cybersecurity and AI skills are not picked up organically and require training support, even for digital natives; that lifelong learning support for training and certification is key to avoid generation gaps; and that critical thinking and social skills must match technical skills to ensure effective application of new technologies.

Photo: Digital Content Creator course, Bangkok, Thailand, used under creative commons license courtesy of ILO Asia-Pacific.

PARTICIPANTS' PRIORITY ISSUES AND POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS:

1. **Governments and businesses in digitally developed countries should establish partnerships to cooperate and share digital literacy efforts with government agencies, industry associations, and local businesses in countries still expanding digital access.** Digital economy growth depends on a workforce that is ready to adopt, expand the use of, and innovate with digital platforms, artificial intelligence, and other tools. Digitally developed countries have years or decades of experience developing digital literacy in the workforce that provide a wealth of effective approaches and techniques.
 - Government agencies related to ICT, industry, education, and digital affairs should establish partnerships with comparable agencies in digitally developed countries to share effective approaches to digital skilling.
 - The private sector — particularly digital giants such as Meta, Google, NVIDIA, and cloud and AI companies — should partner with local educational organizations and NGOs to develop basic learning tools and training, contextualize and localize the programs for Southeast Asian communities, including for SME users.
 - Domestic companies in Mekong countries which have successfully adapted digital tools to support their business model should highlight those successes to inspire further attention and investment in digital skills.
 - Government agencies for digitalization, education, and industry should provide support for vocational skills and SMEs in building capacity to utilize digital platforms, targeting training and resources towards underserved areas with the most growth potential.

2. **Industry associations should develop professional standard schemes to show qualification in the digital workforce.** Much like electricians, engineers, and other professions require certification in key skills, professional standards schemes need to be developed to show qualifications for a digital workforce. Ensuring these standards are shared across national borders supports workforce mobility.
 - National ministries of education, regional educational associations like SEAMEO RIHED, and industry associations should build common standards across national borders for qualification and certifications on AI, cyber security, and other digital skills
 - Educational platforms and universities should identify ways to maintain and update the certification through lifetime learning, including through workforce training programs that don't require students to be full-time.
 - Government and industry associations which provide certifications should identify needed competencies and identify and target specific groups of workers who would benefit from certification.
 - Companies should provide relevant training program incentives for digital skills, including partial reimbursement or flexible scheduling to support workers seeking lifelong learning opportunities.



The Policy Dialogues were originally designed to include an additional series of side events featuring engagement with rising scholars and students in the host country alongside each of the core dialogues to expand on the in-person workshops. Given the innovative nature of digital economy and the benefits of digital natives, this Policy Dialogue had a larger-than-usual contingent of rising experts and voices under 40, including 11 attendees who were alumni of the Young Southeast Asia Leadership Initiative (YSEALI) and who brought a breadth of expertise ranging from start-up founders to government workers seeking to adopt e-wallets.

To build on the YSEALI discussions at the Policy Dialogue, rather than hold an in-person event gathering of college or university students, the team chose to instead host a virtual webinar inviting additional YSEALI alumni working in digital economy spaces and who had expressed interest in attending the Policy Dialogue to call in and hear about some of the key takeaways. On September 18, 2025, five YSEALI attendees and other Policy Dialogue speakers shared insights and key takeaways from the Policy Dialogue with eight YSEALI alumni working in the digital space, with particular attention to the recommendations related to artificial intelligence, digital trust, cyber security, online scams, and training a digital workforce. Participants engaged in an interactive discussion to share their own experiences working in this space, with particular focus on digital upskilling and awareness-raising about security measures.

Photo: Group photo of YSEALI attendees taken at the Policy Dialogue's synthesis workshop on August 15, 2025. Photo courtesy of Courtney Weatherby.

FEEDBACK

Thirty-six of the 70 attendees shared feedback in a survey following the Policy Dialogue, and most attendees indicated that the dialogue was a positive and productive experience. Key takeaways from the anonymous evaluation surveys include:

- 100% of attendees indicated that they learned some or a lot of new information through participating in the Dialogue, with 81% indicating they learned a lot of new information.
- 91% indicated that they would definitely or probably use the knowledge gained in their work.
- 97% said they gained insights into policy or human resource challenges facing the region.
- 89% of attendees said they had already reached out to or planned to reach out to panelist or other participants for follow-up, and 94% said the Dialogue helped them identify a US-based stakeholder with whom they shared common interest
- 97% felt the synthesis workshop was valuable as a wrap-up exercise to identify recommendations.

Many survey respondents shared that they benefited from learning case studies from other countries and industry representatives, with 14 respondents emphasizing the value of networking with experts from other industries and countries who are outside their usual network. Participants particularly valued insights into the needs and approaches to ensuring that new technologies and platforms are accessible for SMEs, as well as the concrete steps and practical approaches taken to address the growing challenges posed by online scams and the evolution of new technologies like AI. Many participants particularly valued that the Policy Dialogue was outcome focused and provided significant opportunity for interactivity. Over a fifth of attendees flagged that their favorite session was on Countering the Surge of Online Scams, with another 17% particularly valuing the ICT Infrastructure panel.

A couple of areas were identified for improvement. Four respondents indicated that they thought more non-government or civil society organizations should have been in the room or more present at the conference. Three respondents indicated that they would have liked more interactivity through longer Q&As or through more interactive sessions. Two respondents indicated that it was difficult to choose between sessions and would have preferred either no parallel sessions or to have readouts shared immediately after for reference. Many participants indicated that they hoped to see some clear follow-up in terms of sharing contact information for other participants, passing along copies of presentations (which did occur post-Dialogue), and working to implement the recommendations and takeaways in existing activities such as ASEAN Working Groups or industry dialogues. One respondent noted that they think this should not be the final Policy Dialogue, as this type of gathering is a critical forum for the region, and numerous respondents suggested topics that they think would be worth considering for future Dialogues if further support becomes available

NEXT STEPS

This was the eleventh and final Policy Dialogue planned in this Mekong-U.S. Partnership Track 1.5 Policy Dialogue series. The Policy Dialogues have served as an opportunity for stakeholders from the Lower Mekong sub-region, the United States, regional governments, relevant NGOs, and development partners to identify lessons-learned, build collaborative partnerships, transfer best practices, and suggest joint-pathways to meeting policy needs over the last five years from 2021-2025. While this set of activities is concluding, the Stimson Center, U.S. ASEAN Business Council, IUCN, and other local partners and participating organizations will be able to reference the key takeaways and insights for other ongoing activities across the wide range of topics.



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ABOUT THE POLICY DIALOGUE SERIES

This summary report provides an outline and recommendations derived from discussions held as a part of the Mekong-U.S. Partnership Track 1.5 Policy Dialogue series. The Policy Dialogues are a series of eleven conferences taking place between 2021 and 2025 that are generously supported by a grant from the U.S. Department of State’s Mekong-U.S. Partnership. Cross cutting principles of inclusivity, resilience (including climate), and collaboration will be applied to all conferences in this series.

The U.S. Government launched the Mekong-U.S. Partnership in 2020 to expand cooperation with the five countries of the Lower Mekong sub-region on strategic challenges and shared priorities under the Partnership’s four areas of cooperation (nontraditional security, natural resources management, economic connectivity, and human resource development). The Mekong-U.S. Partnership builds on the strengths of the Lower Mekong Initiative’s development-focused agenda by cooperating on strategic sub-regional issues and challenges. Each area of engagement under the Mekong-U.S. Partnership is supported by a flagship project. The Mekong-U.S. Partnership’s Track 1.5 Policy Dialogue series serves as the flagship program of the Mekong-U.S. Partnership’s human resources development area of engagement.