

Evaluation of the
ASEAN-Australian
Political Security
Partnership
FINAL REPORT

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List of Acronyms

AAR	After Action Report
ADMM	ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting
AFP	Australian Federal Police
AMS	ASEAN Member State(s)
ANCORS	Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security
APSC	ASEAN Political Security Community
APSP	ASEAN- Australian Political Security Partnership
ARF	ASEAN Regional Forum
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
ASEAN- IPR	ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation
ASPI	Australian Strategic Policy Institute
AUSTRAC	Australian Transaction Reports and Analysis Centre
CSIRO	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation
CSO	Civil Society Organisation(s)
CT	Counter-Terrorism
DFAT	Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade
DP	Development Partner
EOIO	End-of-Investment Outcomes
EQ	Evaluation Question(s)
FGD	Focal Group Discussion(s)
GEDSI	Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion
IR	Inception Report
ISM on MS	Inter- Sessional Meeting on Maritime Security
KI	Key Informant
KII	Key Informant Interview
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
OGD	Other Australian Government Departments
PMSP	Pacific Maritime Security Program
SOMTC	Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime
TAF	The Asia Foundation
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
UNCLOS	United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea
UNGGE	United Nations Group of Governmental Experts on Advancing Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace
WPS	Women, Peace, and Security

Executive Summary

This report presents the final evaluation of the ASEAN-Australia Political Security Partnership (APSP) program, a six-year initiative funded by the Australian Government and implemented primarily by The Asia Foundation (TAF). The APSP aims to enhance political and security cooperation between the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Australia by addressing a broad range of shared political-security challenges, including *inter alia* cybersecurity, maritime security, transnational crime, and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda.

The evaluation assesses the program's effectiveness, efficiency, relevance, sustainability, impact, and integration of Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI) considerations. Employing a mixed-methods approach, the evaluation includes a desk review of program documents, stakeholder consultations with 58 key informants, an online survey of 25 participants, observation of program activities, and two case studies. The evaluation encompassed program activities from May 2019 to June 2024, with consideration of ongoing activities through November 2024.

Findings

Relevance: The APSP effectively addresses regional political and security challenges within the ASEAN context. By aligning its objectives with ASEAN's pressing needs, the program tackles complex issues through coordinated strategies, enhanced cooperation, and engagement with external partners. This approach strengthens regional mechanisms and fosters a culture of collaboration.

The APSP aligns with the ASEAN Cybersecurity Strategy, the ASEAN Regional Forum Work Plan on Maritime Security, the ASEAN Plan of Action in Combating Transnational Crime and the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) Work Program and promotes the integration of the WPS agenda into ASEAN's political-security framework.

The APSP's four key target areas are well-aligned with both Australia's and ASEAN's policies and priorities, operating within ASEAN's strategic frameworks and reinforcing ASEAN's capacity without imposing external priorities. This non-intrusive support model in sensitive areas builds trust and positions the Australia as a respected partner.

This strong alignment strengthens the ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership and forms a sound basis for continued and future engagement.

Effectiveness: The program has significantly enhanced engagement between ASEAN and Australian agencies, though challenges remain in fully engaging a diverse range of Australian government departments (OGDs), which has somewhat restricted the diversity of perspectives and expertise available to ASEAN counterparts. The APSP nevertheless engages a growing range of agencies and organisations in both Australia and ASEAN, including sectoral bodies, the ASEAN Secretariat, institutes, and member states in leadership roles. It has facilitated collaboration with Australian agencies such as the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and academic institutions, enhancing mutual understanding. Participants recognise the reciprocal nature of learning and knowledge exchange, fostering operational and strategic benefits.

The APSP has been effective in enhancing dialogue and information-sharing among stakeholders. It emphasises mutual interaction, elevating Australia's visibility and strategic role within ASEAN. The program has strengthened diplomatic ties, operational networks, and provided platforms for knowledge exchange. It encourages ASEAN Member States and the ASEAN Secretariat to enhance

consultation and dialogue, integrating with ASEAN processes and sectoral bodies. By fostering cross-sectoral cohesion on sensitive issues such as WPS and leveraging established partnerships, the program supports collaborative initiatives.

Efficiency: The program has been largely efficient in resource allocation and management. Human and financial resources were appropriately utilised, with activities representing 62% of the total budget. Staff costs are reasonable, reflecting the professional skills required for effective implementation. Program management is effective, with proactive and timely actions addressing changing circumstances, including the COVID-19 pandemic. The partnership between the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and TAF has been instrumental, leveraging TAF's regional expertise and networks. Nonetheless, multiple factors have constrained efficiency, including the time needed to decide on topics with the ASEAN co-chair, obtaining internal approvals in Canberra, and addressing Myanmar engagement, prior to proceeding with the formal ASEAN endorsement steps.

Sustainability: The program has contributed to building institutional capacity and fostering enduring partnerships, and ASEAN stakeholders are likely to maintain consultation processes initiated under the program. The demand-driven approach and alignment with ASEAN strategies ensure continued relevance and acceptance among member states, and DFAT and other Australian government departments have opportunities to build on partnerships initiated under the program. Trust developed through the APSP lays the groundwork for future collaboration, though enhanced engagement with OGDs would be needed to maximise potential.

Impact: The program has positively contributed to regional stability and trust. Stakeholders note that the APSP strengthens ownership and effectiveness of policy instruments, enhances coordination among law enforcement officials, and promotes cross-sectoral linkages, contributing to regional security. There is a perceived increase in mutual understanding and trust between Australian and ASEAN stakeholders. The program supports ASEAN centrality and leadership on political-security issues, enhancing the partnership's depth.

GEDSI: The APSP has substantially mainstreamed GEDSI considerations. A detailed GEDSI strategy has been effectively implemented, focusing on integrating the WPS agenda into the political-security sphere, with gender and women's rights issues addressed under each program pillar. The program has reached a substantial number of women participants and encouraged cross-sectoral approaches to inclusion. There is however scope for further strengthening disability inclusion by involving more civil society organisations across ASEAN.

Future programming: Maintaining flexibility and adaptability will be crucial for the program to effectively respond to ASEAN's evolving needs and emerging threats. Continuing the demand-driven approach will allow for adjustments based on shifting regional dynamics, ensuring the program remains relevant and responsive.

Enhancing engagement with a broader range of Australian government departments will be essential to leverage diverse expertise and foster a more integrated approach. Clarifying structures and responsibilities, and demonstrating the strategic value of participation, could further strengthen the program's impact and provide a more holistic perspective on political-security issues.

While the current thematic pillars—cybersecurity, maritime security, transnational crime, and the Women, Peace, and Security agenda—remain highly relevant, integrating additional themes, such as environmental security, could enhance cross-pillar strategies and address emerging regional

challenges. This integration supports comprehensive approaches to security that reflect the interconnected nature of modern threats.

While ASEAN endorsement processes are internal matters, engaging with these processes more assiduously, and establishing consultative mechanisms to identify emerging issues, could significantly improve efficiency and effectiveness, by reducing delays and enhancing the ability to respond promptly to ASEAN's priorities.

Expanding partnerships with regional organisations and institutions could also enhance the program's impact and sustainability. Collaborating with entities such as regional think tanks, academic institutions, and law enforcement cooperation centres could foster deeper regional ownership and collaboration, strengthening the program's legitimacy and effectiveness.

Conclusions

Overall conclusion: The program successfully aligns with ASEAN's needs and priorities, enhancing mutual engagement and contributing positively to regional political security.

Relevance: The program effectively addresses ASEAN's political and security challenges by aligning its objectives with ASEAN's pressing needs in cybersecurity, maritime security, transnational crime, and the WPS agenda.

Effectiveness: The program has significantly enhanced engagement and knowledge exchange between ASEAN and Australian agencies, though increased involvement of Australian government departments would further strengthen this.

Efficiency: Resources have been efficiently utilised and the program is effectively managed, despite some procedural challenges in obtaining ASEAN endorsements.

Sustainability: The program fosters enduring partnerships and builds institutional capacity, with ASEAN stakeholders likely to maintain consultation processes due to trust and alignment with regional strategies.

Impact: The program positively contributes to regional stability and trust, strengthening policy implementation, coordination among officials, and mutual understanding between ASEAN and Australia.

GEDSI: The program effectively mainstreams GEDSI considerations, integrating gender equality and inclusion across all activities and promoting the WPS agenda within the political-security sphere.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Enhance engagement with ASEAN endorsement processes

Steps to be taken:

- Engage more directly with ASEAN Secretariat to support endorsement procedures, for example through proactive consultations.
- Propose clearer timeframes for each approval step.
- Develop a joint understanding outlining ASEAN endorsement processes, and how the project can better support these.

Responsible parties: DFAT, The Asia Foundation (TAF), ASEAN Secretariat

Recommendation 2: Enhance engagement with Australian Government Departments (OGDs)

Steps to be taken:

- Organise inter-departmental briefings on program objectives and benefits.
- Share preliminary work plans with OGDs several months ahead to facilitate budgeting and participation.
- Include OGDs in immediate planning stages to align activities with their priorities.
- Provide advance notice of upcoming activities.

Responsible parties: DFAT, TAF, OGDs

Recommendation 3: Maintain and enhance program flexibility and adaptability

Steps to be taken:

- Continue the demand-driven approach.
- Regularly review and adjust activities to align with emerging challenges.
- Establish mechanisms to identify and incorporate new themes.
- Develop tailored strategies to address varying capacities among ASEAN Member States.

Responsible parties: TAF, DFAT, ASEAN Secretariat

Recommendation 4: Consider the integration of additional thematic areas (e.g., environmental security)

Steps to be taken:

- Consult ASEAN stakeholders to identify priority areas.
- Develop plans to incorporate any new themes.
- Allocate resources and expertise accordingly.

Responsible parties: TAF, DFAT, ASEAN Secretariat

Recommendation 5: Strengthen and formalise partnerships with regional organisations

Steps to be taken:

- Identify potential regional partners (e.g., ASEAN-ISIS, JCLEC, regional universities).
- Initiate discussions.
- Plan for formal agreements and collaboration in the next program phase.

Responsible parties: DFAT, TAF, ASEAN Secretariat, potential partners

Recommendation 6: Further integrate disability inclusion

Steps to be taken:

- Engage with disability-focused CSOs in ASEAN.
- Include disability topics and representatives in activities.
- Develop initiatives targeting disability inclusion.

Responsible parties: TAF, DFAT, ASEAN Secretariat, CSOs

Recommendation 7: Establish a consultative mechanism for emerging issues

Steps to be taken:

- Propose forming a consultative committee with ASEAN and OGDs.
- Define mandate, membership, and schedule.
- Use the committee for planning the future program and identifying emerging issues.

Responsible parties: DFAT, TAF, ASEAN Secretariat, OGDs

Recommendation 8: Continue capacity building for ASEAN institutions

Steps to be taken:

- Identify capacity gaps within ASEAN institutions.
- Develop targeted capacity-building programs.
- Monitor and evaluate impact.

Responsible parties: TAF, DFAT, ASEAN Secretariat

Recommendation 9: Strengthen cross-pillar and cross-sectoral approaches

Steps to be taken:

- Design activities involving multiple sectors and pillars.
- Encourage diverse stakeholder participation, including civil society and marginalised groups.
- Facilitate cross-sector knowledge exchange.

Responsible parties: TAF, DFAT, ASEAN Secretariat

Recommendation 10: Improve Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) frameworks

Steps to be taken:

- Enhance M&E frameworks to include qualitative indicators and participant feedback.
- Collect and analyse data on long-term outcomes.
- Use findings to inform adjustments.
- Incorporate participant suggestions for practical applications and inclusivity.

Responsible parties: TAF, DFAT

Recommendation 11: Explore options for program restructuring to enhance sustainability and effectiveness

Steps to be taken:

- Assess potential benefits and challenges of different program structures (e.g., consortium model, strategic advisory roles for Australian institutions).
- Consult with key stakeholders, including ASEAN, TAF, Australian institutions, and potential regional partners.
- Develop a strategic plan outlining the preferred structure for future program phases.

Responsible parties: DFAT, TAF, ASEAN Secretariat, potential partners

Introduction

This report presents the final evaluation of the ASEAN-Australian Political Security Partnership (APSP/ the program), a program funded by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) and implemented primarily by The Asia Foundation (TAF). It outlines the scope, purpose and objectives and methodology of the evaluation, and provides a set of findings that answer the evaluation questions contained in the Evaluation Matrix (Annex 1). It concludes with a set of integrated conclusions and recommendations.

Purpose, Objectives and Scope of the Evaluation

The current evaluation forms an integral part of the APSP's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan and DFAT's investment. According to the evaluation Terms of Reference (ToR) (Annex 2), the [evaluation's objectives](#) were to:

- Contribute to evidence-based policy development, program improvement, and strategic planning in the field of political and security cooperation between ASEAN and Australia;
- Provide an in-depth analysis and assessment of the APSP's achievements and challenges against related DFAT's quality criteria; and
- Provide management responses to relevant program managers and policymakers in making informed decisions, adapting strategies, and allocating resources for the remaining period of the APSP and beyond.

Flowing from these overarching objectives, the [evaluation's purposes](#) are centred on contributing to the following DFAT objectives:

- *Accountability and Learning*
- *Evidence-Based Program Development*
- *Stakeholder Engagement and Communication*

The evaluation addresses the following DFAT's quality criteria:

Relevance: Relevance of APSP addressing regional transnational political security challenges within the ASEAN context; extent to which APSP objectives, activities and approaches align with the needs and priorities of ASEAN and Australia.

Efficiency: Efficiency of APSP's implementation (utilisation of resources, management practices, coordination mechanisms; cost-effectiveness of APSP in achieving its intended outcomes and outputs.

Effectiveness: Effectiveness of APSP in achieving its objectives and intended outcomes; extent to which APSP has contributed to strengthening ASEAN-Australia relationship and engagement, and ASEAN's ability to lead more coordinated, cohesive and inclusive to transnational political security challenges.

Sustainability: Sustainability of APSP's impacts and outcomes; extent to which APSP has fostered long-term partnerships within ASEAN and between ASEAN and Australia, built institutional capacity, and established mechanisms for ongoing cooperation and dialogue.

Impact: overall impact of APSP on regional political security environment and cooperation; APSP's contribution to addressing transnational political security challenges, promoting trust and understanding, and strengthening regional institutions.

Mainstreaming Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI): how APSP has sought to strengthen GEDSI in its development efforts; APSP's integration of GEDSI considerations in its activities, outcomes and impacts.

Evaluation questions: Based on the above criteria, a set of evaluation questions (EQs) were developed, with the accompanying Evaluation Matrix, as discussed at *Section 2.3 (Methodology)* below, which formed the structure and justification for the evaluation findings, conclusions and recommendations.

Evaluation scope: The evaluation was to encompass all program activities delivered from May 2019 through to June 2024, being the first five years of APSP. However, given that the current program continues through to end-April 2025, the evaluation team has taken into account ongoing activities through to November 2024, including through directly observing training that took place in Bangkok mid-September 2024 (see *Section 3 (Methodology)*).

Geographic scope: The evaluation has taken into account the program's applicability to each of ASEAN's ten Member States (AMS), as well as East Timor as an observer state, bearing in mind that APSP targets ASEAN sectoral bodies and mechanisms, in which all ASEAN Member States participate.

Intended users: The primary intended users of the evaluation results will include program managers, senior managers and senior executives of DFAT, particularly at Australian Mission to ASEAN; and the program manager, program team and senior executives of TAF. Other key users will include other Australian Government Departments (OGD), ASEAN stakeholders¹, and other relevant regional and national institutions. Furthermore, the evaluation report will be made available on the websites of DFAT in English to enable broad public access.

About APSP

Australia has cooperated with ASEAN since 1974 to promote a peaceful, stable, integrated and prosperous region. The ASEAN-Australia Political Security Partnership (APSP) is an AUD 10.5 million, six-year (1 May 2019 to 30 April 2025) investment of the Australian Government, aimed at enhancing political and security cooperation between ASEAN and Australia. The program encompasses outcomes and activities that contribute to strengthening regional stability, addressing shared challenges, and promoting cooperation among ASEAN Member States and between ASEAN and Australia in the political security landscape.

APSP was designed to provide flexible and demand-driven support to ASEAN and to promote ASEAN leadership and centrality in addressing regional political security challenges. With a broader goal of an improved security environment in the Indo-Pacific region, APSP intended to support stronger relationships between ASEAN and Australia, and to enhance ASEAN's ability to lead more coordinated, cohesive, and inclusive responses to transnational political security issues. The program therefore had the following end-of-investment outcomes (EOIO):

- *EOIO 1:* Stronger ASEAN-Australia relationships and engagement

¹ For the purposes of the current Evaluation, 'ASEAN stakeholders' includes ASEAN sectoral bodies and mechanisms; the ASEAN Secretariat, the ASEAN Institute, and ASEAN Member States that serve as chair or leader/lead shepherd in areas relevant to the APSP. Furthermore, all references to 'ASEAN' alone are to be construed as including all ASEAN stakeholders.

- *EOIO 2*: ASEAN is addressing targeted political security issues using increasingly effective cross-sectoral and/or multi-stakeholder approaches

APSP has focussed primarily on four policy areas of *maritime security, cybersecurity, women, peace, and security (WPS); and transnational crime*, and is open to supporting ASEAN in other political security issues as opportunity or demand from ASEAN arises. Activities of APSP have included workshops, seminars, training, and knowledge sharing sessions, among others, which engage relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies, ASEAN Secretariat and other entities associated with ASEAN. In addition, APSP has also administered policy papers and research, as well as support to the institutional strengthening of ASEAN. APSP has recognised that *gender equality, disability and social inclusion* (GEDSI) is critical for ASEAN to realise coordinated, cohesive and inclusive responses to transnational political security issues, and has thus integrated GEDSI throughout the program cycle.

Under overall management by DFAT, APSP has been implemented by TAF, with additional funds that were allocated for Australian OGDs to implement activities with ASEAN. APSP's *key partners and target beneficiaries* are ASEAN sectoral bodies, particularly those under ASEAN Political Security Community, ASEAN Secretariat, relevant ASEAN centres and entities, and AMS governments. Other stakeholders of APSP have included think tanks, academia, civil society organisations (CSOs), and other institutions that contribute to the program's objectives and activities.

Program design did not develop a formal theory of change (ToC), however, a preliminary review of internal documents suggested that the following ToC may be reconstructed as follows:

- *If (assumptions)*: Demand by ASEAN stakeholders and partners in specific areas of political security are met; Australian and ASEAN Member States governments are engaged; gender equality and diversity requirements are fulfilled; and engagement with think tanks and other NGOs is maintained;
- *And if (activities/program input)*: Engagement focuses on the following areas: Maritime security, cybersecurity, transnational crime, WPS and other emerging and cross-cutting issues;
- *Then (intermediate outcomes)*: Australian-ASEAN relationships and engagement are strengthened; and ASEAN stakeholders address targeted political security issues through cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches;
- *And then (goal)*: ASEAN's ability to lead more coordinated, cohesive and inclusive responses to transnational political security issues is enhanced, leading to (*broader goal*) an improved security environment in the Indo-Pacific region.

Evaluation Approach and Methodology

The ToR provided a detailed outline of the proposed approach and methodology, which was expanded upon by the evaluation team. A summary of the overarching evaluation phases, tasks, deliverables and timelines that were undertaken is provided in the diagram below:

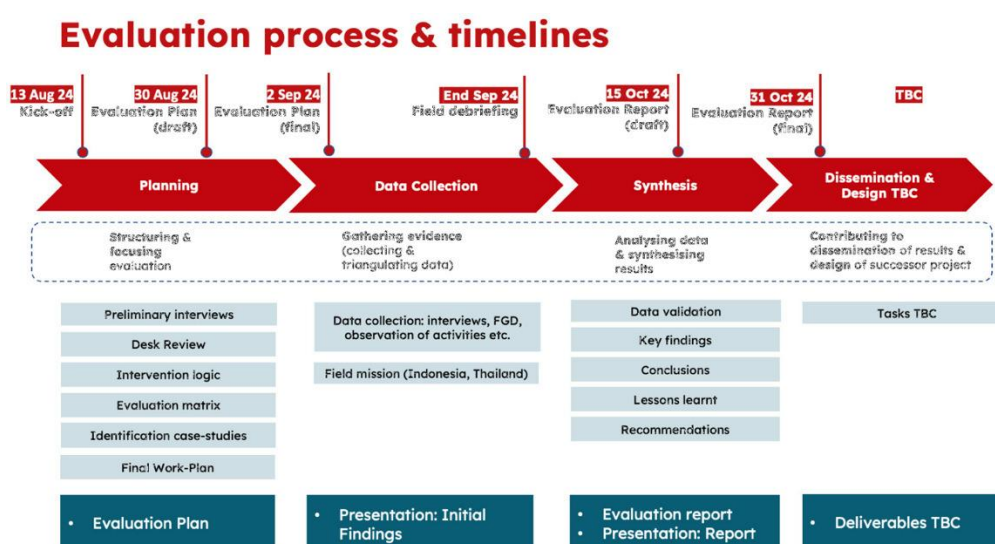


Fig. 1 Evaluation process and timelines. Source: Program documents/ evaluation team

Evaluation Phases

The ToR did not outline specific phases for the evaluation, which were inferred by the evaluation team. These phases were implemented in a flexible, overlapping manner, in order respect the evaluation timelines.

Planning Phase: The evaluation commenced on 13 August 2024, following which the evaluation team conducted a review and analysis of documents (see Annex 4), conducted preliminary interviews with TAF and DFAT staff, and participated in the APSP Semi-Annual Review. In consultation with TAF, a list of key informants (KI) to be interviewed was prepared (see Annex 3).

Furthermore, the evaluation team developed the Evaluation Matrix, Risk and Mitigation Matrix, outlined the data collection approach and evaluation Work-Plan, and prepared an Inception Note.

Data Collection Phase: The evaluation team sought additional information in the field to complement the Planning Phase data collection and analysis. This comprised in-country data collection and analysis, with 10 working days to spent in Bangkok and Jakarta from 16 to 27 September 2024, to observe a training activity, and capture additional data from key informants. This was complemented by remote interviews both before and after the field visit to the region.

Synthesis Phase: A draft Evaluation Report was prepared and shared with relevant DFAT and TAF staff for review and feedback. It includes final answers to the Evaluation Questions and related findings, conclusions, and recommendations. Subsequently, the final Evaluation Report, including an executive summary and all relevant annexes, were prepared and submitted to DFAT and TAF on 5 February 2025.

Dissemination and Design Phase: Given the evaluation's key objective of contributing to strategic planning in the area of political security in the region, the evaluation team may contribute not only to dissemination of the results of the evaluation, for example through an online presentation, but also to the design of a possible successor program to the APSP. The exact modalities of this phase will be clarified after completion and acceptance of the Final Report.

Evaluation Questions

The evaluation was undertaken in line with DFAT evaluation quality standards², and centred on the evaluation criteria outlined above. Based on the evaluation Terms of Reference and informed by the results of the analysis of the program's ToC, a set of Evaluation Questions and associated Judgement Criteria were developed. The Evaluation Matrix added indicators and sources of information that were to define the thematic scope of the evaluation. The accepted Evaluation Questions were as follows:

- **Relevance:** EQ1 – How well do the program objectives, activities and approaches address the regional, political and security challenges and priorities within the ASEAN context? EQ2 – Has the program provided opportunities for engagement and knowledge exchange between ASEAN and Australian agencies and organisations working on political-security issues?
- **Efficiency:** EQ2 – How well and efficient were the resources allocated to support ASEAN and Australia priorities and cross-sectoral and multi-sectoral approaches in program implementation?
- **Effectiveness:** EQ3 – To what extent were the program's activities and initiatives effective in enhancing dialogue mechanisms and information-sharing among stakeholders?
- **Sustainability:** EQ4 – To what extent has the program built ASEAN institutional capacity, fostered enduring partnerships and collaborations between ASEAN and Australia?
- **Impact:** EQ5 – What is the overall contribution of the program on regional political stability and security, as well as in promoting trust and collaboration in ASEAN?
- **GEDSI:** EQ6 – To what extent has the program mainstreamed gender equality, disability and social inclusion in its activities, outcomes and impacts?

Data Collection, Verification and Analysis

The evaluation employed a mixed-methods approach to gather data from various sources. Quantitative data was collected through a survey, and available data to measure program outcomes and assess the evaluation indicators. Qualitative data was collected through stakeholder consultations and two case studies. These approaches therefore comprised:

- **Desk Review:** A comprehensive desk review was conducted to gather and analyse relevant program documents and other relevant literature (see *Annex 4*).
- **Stakeholder consultations:** Stakeholder consultation adopted a blended approach, with key informants interviewed both remotely and during the field trip. Informants included DFAT staff, OGDs, TAF staff, ASEAN representatives, AMS, and other relevant stakeholders (see *Annex 3*). A total of **58** persons were interviewed by the evaluation team, whose profiles are disaggregated as follows:

² <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/dfat-design-monitoring-evaluation-learning-standards>

Gender				
Female		Male		Other/ Unknown
48%		52%		0%
Institution				
DFAT (Australia)	TAF	ASEAN Sec.	ASEAN body	ASEAN MS
26%	17%	19%	5%	14%
Aust. OGD	Aust. Institution	CSO	Other	
2%	12%	0%	5%	

- **Survey:** An online survey was developed containing questions that explored the evaluation criteria, and distributed to relevant stakeholders, whose valuable observations have been taken into account in the formulation of the findings. A total of 25 persons participated in the survey, whose profiles are disaggregated as follows:

Gender						
Female		Male		Prefer not to say		
40%		56%		4%		
Age						
18-25	26-35	36-45	46-55	66 and above		
4%	36%	20%	32%	8%		
Country						
Indonesia	Malaysia	Brunei D.	Timor Leste	Philippines		
8%	8%	12%	16%	20%		
Thailand	Australia	Cambodia	Vietnam	Lao PDR		
20%	4%	4%	4%	4%		
Role						
Ministry	Diplomat	Academic/ think tank	Law enforcement	CSO	Other	
16%	16%	20%	20%	12%	16%	
Involvement						
Participant		Resource person		Focal point		Observer
68%		24%		4%		4%

- **Program activity observation:** The evaluation team observed and participated in the APSP Semi-annual Review in August 2024, which provided real-time insights into the program's progress. Additionally, the evaluation team observed an ASEAN-Australia workshop in Bangkok on 17 and 18 September 2024.
- **Case studies:** The evaluators prepared two case studies on issues that highlight areas of relevance in the design of a future iteration of APSP. These case studies examine the following areas:
 - OGD component, focusing on how APSP commenced with a dedicated component on OGDs, with an adaptive approach in the latter program period of the program, focusing on how OGDs have responded to the approach and involvement in APSP;
 - WPS policy, focusing on how APSP works in a crowded and cross-sectoral space despite challenges related to engagement in the political security.

Evaluation constraints

The evaluation proceeded smoothly, with TAF and DFAT highly responsive to requests for information, and regular meetings held in order plan and implement each of the phases. Furthermore, key informants were largely highly available, and enthusiastic and forthcoming during interviews.

Several potential risks were identified in the Planning Phase, which *inter alia* identified a potential low response rate to the evaluation survey. Despite implementing the mitigation measures foreseen, out of 270 requests for feedback, only 35 participants responded, which was attributed to the considerable period of time that had elapsed since the activities in question. Nevertheless, the quality of responses was relatively high, with valuable insights provided by direct beneficiaries.

The risk matrix also highlighted the potential unavailability of KI; indeed, the meetings planned to be held in Jakarta with ASEAN officials were unexpectedly postponed, in order to allow further time for them to assess the proposed interview questions. These meetings were subsequently conducted online after the field mission but unfortunately extended the data collection phase by a number of weeks.

Findings

Relevance

EQ1 – How well do the program objectives, activities and approaches address the regional, political and security challenges and priorities within the ASEAN context?

JC1.1 The program is based on a sound understanding of ASEAN's needs and capacities in relation to political security.

Regional political security context

ASEAN and its member states face a complex array of political security needs and challenges that necessitate coordinated and comprehensive strategies, and holistic approaches that combines robust legal frameworks, enhanced cooperation among member states, and engagement with external partners, thus strengthening regional mechanisms and fostering a culture of collaboration. The APSP directly addressed key areas of concern with its focus on cybersecurity, maritime security, transnational crime, and the integration of the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda.

Cybersecurity: As ASEAN member states have increasingly embraced digital technologies, the region has become more susceptible to cyber threats. The ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy (2017-2020)³ was developed to enhance regional cooperation and strengthen information and communications technology (ICT) security. This strategy emphasises the importance of building robust cybersecurity frameworks and fostering collaboration among member states to address the evolving cyber threat landscape. Despite these efforts, challenges persist. The rapid evolution of cybercrime necessitates continuous updates to legal frameworks and the development of specialised expertise.

Maritime Security: Maritime security remains a critical concern for ASEAN⁴, and is guided by the ASEAN Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM), with maritime security policy captured in the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) and the ASEAN Maritime Outlook (AMO) and discussed at the annual ASEAN Maritime Forum (AMF).

The ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF)⁵ Work Plan on Maritime Security⁶ is an important complementary forum, which focuses on priority areas, including shared awareness and exchange of information and best practices; confidence building measures based on international and regional legal frameworks, arrangements and cooperation including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)⁷; and capacity building and enhancing cooperation in the region. Recent incidents, such as confrontations between Chinese and Philippine vessels, have heightened tensions in the region. These events underscore the need for ASEAN to develop effective mechanisms for conflict resolution and to uphold international maritime laws to ensure freedom of navigation and overflight.

Transnational Crime: Transnational crime, including terrorism, human trafficking, and drug smuggling, poses significant threats to regional stability. The ASEAN Plan of Action in Combating Transnational

³ <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/01-ASEAN-Cybersecurity-Cooperation-Paper-2021-2025final-23-0122.pdf>

⁴ <https://asean.org/our-communities/asean-political-security-community/peaceful-secure-and-stable-region/maritime-security/>

⁵ <https://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/about-arf/>

⁶ <https://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ARF-Workplan-on-Maritime-Security-Final.pdf>

⁷ <https://www.un.org/depts/los/conventionagreements/texts/unclos/unclose.pdf>

Crime (2016-2025)⁸ outlines strategies to enhance cooperation among member states in addressing these issues, emphasising information-sharing, legal cooperation, and capacity building to effectively combat transnational crime. The ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) Work Program (2022-2024)⁹ provides policy guidelines and proposed activities for the effective implementation of measures against various forms of transnational crime. This includes strengthening legal frameworks, enhancing law enforcement cooperation, and engaging with external partners to address emerging threats.

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS): The integration of the WPS agenda into ASEAN's political security framework is essential for promoting inclusive and sustainable peace. Since the adoption of the Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace, and Security in ASEAN in 2017¹⁰, ASEAN has set important milestones in implementing the WPS agenda through concerted multi-sectoral efforts and partnerships in order to mainstream gender perspectives in peace and security initiatives, recognising the vital role of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction. However, challenges remain in translating commitments into concrete actions, necessitating continuous advocacy and capacity building to ensure meaningful participation of women in peace and security processes.

APSP alignment with ASEAN needs

The APSP has addressed key priority themes for Australia and the region, with its focus on the selected key thematic areas in direct alignment with the needs and initiatives outlined above. The Program Strategy provided the intervention logic, with this having been regularly refined and strengthened, through stakeholder workshops, learnings, and analyses.

Crucially, the program was not only anchored in ASEAN needs, but also those of its member states, and of Australia itself. Specifically, the program was intended to focus on:

- Addressing gaps in multilateral cooperation and regional approaches, for example relative to cybersecurity concerns, where there is a clear need to establish regional mechanisms;
- Providing opportunities to support bilateral and multi-lateral dialogue, in order to address common concerns;
- Ensuring complementarity with other ASEAN and ASEAN Member State initiatives;
- Leveraging existing in-country knowledge and networks; and
- Establishing thematic 'watching briefs', to identify emerging concerns and opportunities in real time.

The APSP was therefore designed to address ASEAN's multifaceted security needs, with the focal areas aligned with ASEAN's security framework, and responding to the region's emerging threats. By recognising the diversity of ASEAN's member states and their unique challenges, the APSP has strategically positioned itself to provide relevant support while respecting ASEAN's sovereignty and non-interference principles. ASEAN's eagerness to engage with partners who bring technical expertise and experience is evident in observation of one ASEAN official that *'the member countries*

⁸ <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Plan-of-Action-in-Combating-TCAccepted-by-11th-AMMTC-on-20Sept17.pdf>

⁹ <https://www.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/4-SOMTC-WP-TC-2022-2024.pdf>

¹⁰ <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/8.-ADOPTIONJoint-Statement-on-Promoting-Women-Peace-and-Security-in-ASEANACWC-Endorsedrev2.pdf>

are eager to learn from experts from fellow member countries, and especially from dialogue partners, [who are] able to share best practices and experiences’.

The APSP’s development was grounded in a thorough analysis of ASEAN’s needs and strategic priorities, ensuring its alignment with existing ASEAN frameworks and action plans. This alignment was not static; instead, it evolved continuously as APSP engaged with ASEAN stakeholders through workshops, collaborative learnings, and stakeholder consultations. In particular, one ASEAN official acknowledged that *‘it’s not that ASEAN [itself] doesn’t have the capacity; [it is that they don’t] at the state level.’* APSP’s external support therefore assisted ASEAN in mobilising initiatives by examining work plans and proposing relevant activities, helping the organisation to bridge its strategic objectives with concrete action, and in turn fulfil its mandate relative to its member states, addressing capacity gaps where national resources or expertise may fall short.

One of the core strengths of APSP has been its attentiveness to the different capacities and readiness levels across AMS. This regional diversity, ranging from high-capacity, technology-driven Singapore to the Mekong region’s nations, which are still building their security capabilities, has necessitated a flexible, tailored approach from APSP. This was confirmed by one ASEAN official, stating that *‘some member states are very easy to deal with [whereas] some members did need a push, like in the Mekong countries.’* ASEAN member states also emphasised the responsiveness and timeliness of the program relative to their own specific needs, with for example an Indonesian ministry representative stating that *‘we reached out to the Australian Mission because of our needs as the Government of Indonesia to participate and contribute for the leadership of ASEAN in 2023. It’s only a once in a lifetime opportunity for us to show our contribution for Indonesia’s legacy. We reached out to the Australian Mission because we don’t have enough budget and the expertise to do what we wanted to do.’*

This underscores the complexity of addressing the diverse security capacities and needs across ASEAN, where APSP’s adaptable approach has been instrumental in providing customised support. This flexibility exemplifies the program’s nuanced approach that bridges the gap between ASEAN’s collective goals and individual member capabilities.

A key element of APSP’s operational model is its emphasis on fostering both bilateral and multilateral dialogues within ASEAN, with a specific focus on common political security challenges such as cybersecurity and transnational crime. This model has allowed APSP to integrate its support in ways that reinforce ASEAN’s broader security framework. ASEAN’s procedural framework outlines a meticulous, consensus-driven approach to partner engagement, beginning with ensuring that initiatives align with ASEAN frameworks, policies and work plans, followed by collaborative drafting and a multi-tiered review process. This structured engagement underscores APSP’s role in ensuring that all interventions are aligned with ASEAN’s collective priorities. This not only strengthens the APSP’s legitimacy within ASEAN but also ensures that its projects bolster ASEAN’s established security frameworks and are executed in a manner that respects ASEAN’s procedural rigor.

The program’s complementarity with ASEAN’s established frameworks has further solidified its role as a valuable partner, with APSP having supported ASEAN in a facilitative role rather than imposing external technical solutions. This has allowed AMS to engage directly on technical issues, while preserving ASEAN procedural autonomy. APSP has therefore operated in harmony with ASEAN’s decision-making structures.

In areas of heightened sensitivity, APSP has further demonstrated its value by adopting a non-intrusive support model. By establishing thematic ‘watching briefs’ and leveraging existing in-country expertise, APSP has remained responsive to ASEAN’s complex and sensitive security dynamics. The

APSP's engagement on maritime security highlights this sensitivity, with one TAF representative highlighting that APSP has *'deliberately focused on less contentious areas such as People-to-People relations, economic resilience, climate change, and environmental protection'* rather than military issues that might evoke sovereignty concerns. This 'soft' approach has enabled APSP to advance maritime security without touching on sensitive topics such as naval or coast guard operations, aligning its objectives with ASEAN's own approach to maritime security, which prioritises cooperation and stability over confrontation. By focusing on such entry points, APSP has succeeded in promoting regional resilience without infringing on national security concerns, thus creating a cooperative platform for maritime security that ASEAN member states can comfortably support.

Capacity-building has been another crucial aspect of APSP's alignment with ASEAN's needs, particularly in building the skills of ASEAN Secretariat staff, with an ASEAN official noting that the training provided by APSP has enabled staff to service member states and ASEAN sectoral bodies more effectively. This skill-building initiative has enhanced ASEAN's institutional ability to address politically security issues and underscores APSP's focus on building long-term, sustainable capacity within the organisation, thus empowering the organisation to manage its own security initiatives more independently and effectively.

This alignment with ASEAN's needs has not been without challenges, however, particularly in managing the sensitivities surrounding political security issues. ASEAN's approach to security often involves high-level Vision Statements, which underscore ASEAN's preference for consensus-driven goals, but which some ASEAN stakeholders observed can be difficult to translate into specific, actionable initiatives for both AMS and external partners. This highlights the delicate balance APSP must maintain in providing support that aligns with ASEAN's security objectives while avoiding politically contentious issues.

One area where APSP's support has been significant is in cybersecurity, where ASEAN has faced increasing threats from digitalisation, but has encountered hesitations around strict digital regulation. An Australian expert observed that *'initially, there was reluctance to engage in discussions around [digital] regulation because of concerns that this could potentially inhibit economic progress.'* Over time, however, APSP has helped ASEAN member states recognise that digitalisation presents a double-edged sword, with economic as well as social and community risks, illustrating how APSP's nuanced engagement has facilitated a more comprehensive understanding of cybersecurity risks across ASEAN. A key example was APSP's facilitation of a workshop supporting the UNGGE Norms of Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace, which supported ASEAN officials and experts to explore best practices tailored to their country and regional contexts. Such shifts in perception highlight APSP's role in bridging ASEAN's economic and security priorities, promoting a balanced approach to digital transformation that takes into account both security and economic development.

The APSP has also been instrumental in responding to the rising issue of online radicalisation and risks associated with emerging technologies, with an Australian government official observing that *'I go to these bilateral CT dialogs, everyone is talking about the same issues. Everyone is talking about online youth radicalisation, everyone is talking about the risk posed by generative AI, in terms of generating propaganda, aiding recruitment.'* This reflects APSP's coherence with the prevailing security discourse within ASEAN, ensuring that its initiatives remain relevant and aligned with crucial topics for ASEAN security stakeholders, by addressing both present and emergent threats.

The COVID-19 pandemic further underscored the interconnectedness of ASEAN's security landscape and the critical role of APSP's partnership in times of crisis. As highlighted by an Indonesian government official, the pandemic *'reflected our inability to handle [a crisis] when borders closed and*

we didn't have resources available to us domestically. That's when we turn to our neighbours.' This sentiment underscores ASEAN's reliance on regional cooperation in crisis scenarios, illustrating the role of APSP as a partner that can help ASEAN manage regional interdependencies more effectively. The pandemic has heightened ASEAN's awareness of the need for regional preparedness, a realisation that APSP has supported by sustaining regional security concerns, even amidst global disruption.

The program however has struggled to maintain the timeliness of its interventions, which would have served to maintain and increase its alignment with regional needs. While this was in part due to the effects of the pandemic, which restricted implementation in the early period, it was largely the result of the complex and lengthy internal procedural requirements necessary for ASEAN approval of each request presented by APSP. The implications and responses to this constraint are outlined at *Effectiveness* below.

Survey feedback

Survey respondents strongly consider that individual, institutional and regional needs and priorities were addressed by the activities in which they participated, as indicated by the table below:

Extent to which program responded to individual needs & priorities				
Addressed well	Addressed	Somewhat	Not addressed	N/A
36%	32%	12%	16%	4%
Extent to which program responded to institutions' needs & priorities				
Addressed well	Addressed	Somewhat	Not addressed	N/A
28%	36%	20%	12%	4%
Extent to which program responded to regional needs & priorities				
Addressed well	Addressed	Somewhat	Not addressed	
36%	12%	30%	20%	

The survey narrative feedback confirms this largely positive reception, with particular appreciation for the program's role in addressing foundational knowledge, networking opportunities, and technical preparedness concerning the specific thematic issues. Participants generally felt activities supported their individual and institutional needs, though certain areas for improvement emerged.

One participant highlighted the program's relevance to her work in implementing Timor-Leste's Ocean Law and Policy within the framework of UNCLOS. Her experience underscored the program's utility for individuals closely involved in governmental maritime initiatives.

However, not all aspects were seen as comprehensive. Another respondent acknowledged that while the program provided valuable insights into regional security challenges, it lacked concrete solutions and inclusivity for smaller nations and civil society. The participant also emphasised the need for clearer follow-up actions to ensure that knowledge gained could be effectively applied to address specific individual priorities.

Participants also noted the value of learning about gender perspectives in the context of peace and security, although some felt the training would have benefited from a more practical approach rather than focusing predominantly on theory. This feedback points to a need for tangible applications that could enhance the immediate usefulness of the content.

The program's focus on ASEAN and the Law of the Sea was seen as beneficial, especially as Timor-Leste prepares for ASEAN membership. Respondents appreciated the technical understanding they gained, which they saw as valuable for regional integration efforts. However, the complexity of the Law of the Sea prompted suggestions for dividing its content into more specific issues, making the material more manageable and targeted.

Additionally, some respondents expressed a need for the program to address cybersecurity and disinformation—areas they considered crucial but found inadequately covered. This gap suggested that capacity-building could be expanded to include more practical strategies for current and emerging digital threats.

Finally, a participant emphasised the value of understanding UNCLOS to manage complex maritime governance issues within ASEAN. They noted that this foundational knowledge supports government confidence in regional decision-making, indicating that the training's legal focus aligns with key governance priorities.

Overall, while APSP support effectively addressed core needs, participants recommended practical applications, targeted content on specific thematic issues, and an expanded focus on emerging cybersecurity challenges to enhance its relevance to both individual and institutional objectives.

JC1.2 The program, including its four target areas, is aligned with Australia's and ASEAN's policies and priorities.

Australia's program objectives, activities, and approaches align strongly with ASEAN's political and security frameworks, positioning both ASEAN and Australia to address emerging challenges collaboratively. Indeed, the strategic importance of Australia's support for ASEAN and AMS institutional capacities cannot be overstated, by supporting ASEAN's ability to lead on political security concerns and increasing Australia-ASEAN engagement on these issues.

Specific policy framework

Cybersecurity: ASEAN's Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy (2021–2025)¹¹ underscores the critical need for regional cyber readiness, coordinated policies, and an interconnected response to cyber threats. Australia's involvement aligns with these goals, advancing ASEAN's cyber resilience while bolstering bilateral ties on cybersecurity measures, with one DFAT official stating that *'this program has been essential to Australia's broader engagement with Southeast Asia, ensuring cyber norms are respected and enacted on a regional scale'*. Furthermore, through the ASEAN Digital Ministers Meeting (ADGMIN), the program enhances ASEAN's cross-pillar coordination by linking cybersecurity to digital economy initiatives. The ASEAN Coordinating Committee on Cybersecurity (ASEAN CyberCC), established to bridge digital ministers and cybersecurity, has also been central to cross-pillar dialogue.

Stakeholders emphasised the strategic importance of APSP working through ASEAN mechanisms and providing capacity building with the entirety of ASEAN member states, for example, through its support to an upcoming workshop on UNGGE Norms for Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace¹². Indeed, support for AMS adhesion to the UNGGE norms has been critical in elevating ASEAN's voice on global cyber policies, in particular given that *'ASEAN [was] the first regional*

¹¹ *Op. cit.*

¹² *Introduction and guidance on UNGGE Norms from an ASEAN perspective:* <https://www.aspi.org.au/report/un-norms-responsible-state-behaviour-cyberspace>

organisation in the world that subscribed to the norms back in 2018,' (ASEAN official), marking the region's commitment to global cybersecurity governance.

Future program support to cybersecurity would need to address emerging threats in misinformation and disinformation, with an ASEAN representative stating that '*ASEAN's ongoing focus on fake news and disinformation as priorities, emphasised in its digital strategies, remains a pressing concern*'. Australia's role in bolstering ASEAN's regional digital resilience in these areas is therefore crucial, especially given the growing impact of disinformation on political stability. *Interconnected approaches*, that emphasise digital resilience, preventive diplomacy, and the integration of WPS, would ensure continued relevance, aligning closely with ASEAN's and Australia's evolving priorities, and as emphasised by an ASEAN official, '*[thereby] reinforcing the mutual strategic benefits in tackling these issues.*'

Transnational crime: ASEAN's commitment to combatting transnational crime is centred on documents including the ASEAN-Australia SOMTC Work Plan¹³, which provides a formal basis for collaboration on transnational crime priorities, the ASEAN Plan of Action in Combating Transnational Crime, referred to above, and the ASEAN Document Series on Transnational Crime: Terrorism and Violent Extremism¹⁴, which outline ASEAN's objectives for addressing issues such as human trafficking, terrorism, and violent extremism, thus contributing to ASEAN's Political Security Community Blueprint¹⁵. Australia's active support in this area, particularly through its National Strategy to Fight Transnational, Serious, and Organised Crime¹⁶, allows for deepened collaboration across ASEAN, and in relation to which, as an Australian government official observed, '*APSP gives us a set of opportunities for working with ASEAN institutionally...on illicit drugs, on counter-terrorism, and on cyber.*'

The program's engagement relative to transnational crime has primarily been through SOMTC, as referred to above, which was described by an Australian government official '*a really good way to engage with ASEAN and with all ASEAN countries.*' Additionally, Indonesia's role as the voluntary lead shepherd for ASEAN's counterterrorism initiatives has strengthened the relationship with Australia on counterterrorism dialogue, illustrating a close ASEAN-Australia partnership, with an Australian government official emphasising that '*we announce these activities officially at the ASEAN-Australia CT Dialogue, which obviously then feeds into the SOMTC, elevating our relationship with ASEAN member states*'.

A key factor in Australia's approach is ensuring these programs remain relevant across ASEAN member states, including those with whom Australia has limited bilateral counterterrorism arrangements. The flexibility of these platforms provides Australia with strategic benefits and enables a broad reach across ASEAN, fostering trust and operational alignment, with an Australian official stating that '*working through ASEAN sectoral bodies has been a critical strength, allowing Australia to support capacity building and address regional security concerns at a multilateral level*'.

Maritime Security: Maritime security is a strategic focus for ASEAN, given the economic and political importance of secure waters in the region, in the broadest sense. ASEAN's maritime security priorities stem from the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP)¹⁷, with the ASEAN Regional Forum Work Plan

¹³ <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/08/4-SOMTC-WP-TC-2022-2024.pdf>

¹⁴ <https://asean.org/book/asean-document-series-on-transnational-crime-terrorism-and-violent-extremism-drugs-cybercrime-and-trafficking-in-persons/>

¹⁵ <https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/03/APSCBlueprint.pdf>

¹⁶ <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/nat-security/files/strategy-transnational-serious-organised-crime.pdf>

¹⁷ https://asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/ASEAN-Outlook-on-the-Indo-Pacific_FINAL_22062019.pdf

for Maritime Security (2022–2026)¹⁸ and Australia’s Civil Maritime Security Strategy¹⁹ both emphasising cooperation to manage threats such as piracy, illegal fishing, and environmental degradation. The APSP program has therefore provided Australia with avenues to support maritime security efforts directly, bolstering ASEAN’s capabilities and fostering joint approaches to issues of shared concern, like including marine pollution and cyber-related maritime threats.

Future support to maritime security could focus on strengthening the ASEAN Regional Forum’s preventive diplomacy. As one AMS government representative highlighted, while confidence-building activities within ARF have been ongoing, the forum has not fully achieved its conflict resolution mandate, stating that *‘maybe in terms of conflict resolution, Australia could channel some resources into moving the ARF to its next evolutionary phase,’* thus positioning it as a stronger diplomatic platform in the Indo-Pacific. This approach would directly support Australia’s and ASEAN’s joint goal of regional stability and confidence-building.

Women, Peace, and Security (WPS): The ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on Women, Peace, and Security²⁰ and the ASEAN Regional Forum Framework on Inclusive Processes for WPS²¹ represent a commitment to gender inclusivity within security and peace processes across the ASEAN community pillars. Australia’s National Action Plan on WPS (2021–2031)²² complements these efforts by prioritising women’s participation in peacebuilding and enhancing the protection of women in conflict-affected settings.

Australia’s WPS approach not only supports the meaningful inclusion of women in traditional peace processes but also encourages their participation in digital security and cybersecurity initiatives. In this way, the program aligns with ASEAN’s broader digital transformation goals, fostering a more inclusive and secure digital ecosystem.

Looking forward, the WPS agenda within the program could expand its focus on digital literacy and cyber capacity-building for women, responding to the need for resilience in both physical and digital spheres, with one Australian government representative stating that *‘future programs should integrate the WPS agenda with digital economy priorities to further empower women across ASEAN’*. Such inclusion would align with Australia’s strategic priorities, reinforcing ASEAN’s ability to address emerging cybersecurity challenges with a gender-sensitive lens, and providing vital cross-linkages across the program’s thematic areas of focus, and bolstering the program’s existing GEDSI approach.

APSP alignment with ASEAN and Australian policies and priorities

Australia’s engagement with regional political security issues focuses on mutual stability and resilience, underpinned by the ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership²³, and current Plan of Action 2025-2029. With strategic alignment across the program’s target areas, APSP not only bolsters ASEAN’s capacity, but also reinforces Australia’s ability to address its political security interests in the region.

¹⁸ <https://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2023/11/ARF-Workplan-on-Maritime-Security-Final.pdf>

¹⁹ <https://www.homeaffairs.gov.au/about-us/our-portfolios/national-security/civil-maritime-security>

²⁰ <https://asean.org/asean-regional-plan-of-action-on-women-peace-and-security/>

²¹ <https://aseanregionalforum.asean.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/09/ARF-Inclusivity-Framework-FINAL.pdf>

²² <https://www.dfat.gov.au/publications/second-australian-national-action-plan-on-women-peace-and-security-2021-2031>

²³ <https://asean.mission.gov.au/aesn/CSP.html>

The program's alignment with ASEAN's and Australia's policies reflects a strategically coordinated approach to address shared challenges in cybersecurity, transnational crime, maritime security, and the WPS agenda. The Strategic Partnership exemplifies a joint commitment to advancing regional stability and resilience, structured around well-defined policy synergies and collaboration mechanisms. This partnership illustrates Australia's responsiveness to ASEAN's regional security needs, supporting ASEAN's ability to lead on political security issues, through enhanced collaboration across ASEAN's political, economic, and security pillars.

In particular, the program's alignment within ASEAN's sectoral bodies and frameworks strengthens ASEAN's institutional capacity to independently address regional security threats. The endorsement from sectoral bodies and dialogue partners (external states or organizations having formal partnerships with ASEAN) provides a strong foundation for program relevance, with an Australian government official emphasising the need to *'put APSP in a bigger context of ASEAN and Australia cooperation'* to maximise its impact across various ASEAN initiatives. This integration across ASEAN structures allows the program to contribute substantively to cross-sectoral collaboration, a priority identified in ASEAN's Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy and other strategic frameworks.

Australia's long-standing support for ASEAN's political security pillar represents a shift from earlier years when development programs were largely limited to economic or social initiatives, with a DFAT official observing that *'our security work was quite ad hoc and fragmented,'* indicating a need to pivot towards a more cohesive security framework. The program has therefore filled a critical gap, with DFAT now leveraging its resources to strengthen ASEAN's security portfolio, particularly in countering transnational crime and strengthening maritime security. One stakeholder further observed that DFAT's robust security support has *'brought cohesion to ASEAN's portfolio, making the region more resilient and connected to Australian interests.'*

Another essential aspect of alignment lies in the program's responsiveness to emerging digital and cyber challenges, as highlighted above. Australia's 2023-2030 Cyber Security Strategy supports these efforts, ensuring that both countries share a cyber policy framework that addresses issues such as misinformation, digital resilience, and data protection. Australian government stakeholders emphasised the APSP's contributions to supporting capacity building with all AMS, thus to fostering digital security across the entire ASEAN community.

This alignment is reinforced by Australia's positioning as a key partner in regional security initiatives, especially through programs targeting cross-border crime and terrorism. The ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Transnational Crime (AMMTC) and SOMTC, as described above, enable Australia to foster shared responsibility for security in a way that bilateral programs alone might not achieve. As an Australian government official emphasised, *'APSP gives us a set of opportunities for working with ASEAN institutionally'*, indicating that institutional cooperation has amplified the program's outcomes.

The alignment is further validated by ASEAN's strategic focus on inclusivity, particularly in empowering women through the WPS agenda. By supporting the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on WPS, Australia contributes to the inclusion of women in peace and security. This approach is integral to ASEAN's long-term vision, with Australia's National Action Plan on WPS reinforcing the meaningful participation of women in peace and security processes. This aligns with Australia's strategic focus on promoting inclusive governance, which both strengthens ASEAN's resilience, and advances gender equality as a stabilising force.

As the program looks to the future, maintaining this overall alignment will likely depend on Australia's adaptability to ASEAN's evolving priorities. The program's demand-driven approach, as discussed

throughout the current report, would enable Australia to respond selectively to ASEAN's evolving strategic vision, allowing it to prioritise projects that enhance both regional security and Australia's own strategic interests. With new challenges continually emerging in the Indo-Pacific, this flexible strategy would allow Australia to align more closely with ASEAN's dynamic security landscape, enhancing its relevance and impact over time.

JC1.3 The program forms a sound basis for continued/future engagement with ASEAN and its partners.

A number of interrelated factors have established a strong foundation for the APSP and Australia to continue their engagement with ASEAN and ASEAN member states on critical political security issues.

Strategic alignment: The alignment between APSP's objectives and ASEAN's strategic frameworks ensures that APSP is well-positioned to engage ASEAN in a sustained manner. By supporting ASEAN's own regional plans, as described above, APSP operates within ASEAN's established security frameworks, reinforcing ASEAN's capacity without imposing external priorities. This alignment signals APSP's commitment to ASEAN's long-term goals and establishes it as a compatible partner for future engagement. Further, APSP's commitment to aligning with ASEAN's procedural norms, and its emphasis on multilateral as well as bilateral dialogues, enable it to encourage the collaborative environment that ASEAN values. Furthermore, the program's alignment with ASEAN's procedural framework ensures that its projects remain compatible with ASEAN's collective decision-making processes. This focus on cooperation and respect for ASEAN's autonomy strongly positions APSP for continued engagement on political security issues.

Alignment with ASEAN's security needs: APSP addresses critical security concerns for ASEAN, across the four selected themes, which are not only current but evolving, and which will likely persist in ASEAN's security landscape. In focusing on essential security areas, APSP supports ASEAN's objectives and lays a foundation for long-term cooperation, as ASEAN and its member states will continue to require support in addressing their shared priorities.

Integration with ASEAN's structures and priorities: APSP's alignment with ASEAN's existing frameworks underscores its capability to support ASEAN's unique procedural and decision-making norms. The program's design respects ASEAN's consensus-driven approach and non-interference principle. This integration with ASEAN's structures and respect for its operational culture fosters continuity and acceptance within the organisation, essential for building a sound basis for future cooperation.

Flexibility in engaging diverse member capacities: APSP's responsiveness to the different capacities and readiness levels across ASEAN member states reflects its adaptability, a core attribute for continued engagement. APSP's ability to tailor its support to different national contexts within ASEAN underscores its potential to remain relevant as AMS capacities evolve. The program's willingness to adapt to these varying needs positions it as a flexible partner capable of ongoing engagement with ASEAN as a whole.

Capacity-building as a long-term strategy: A major element of APSP's design is its focus on building ASEAN's institutional capacities, vital to ensuring ASEAN's internal resilience and capability to independently manage future security initiatives. This approach ensures that APSP's contributions embedded within ASEAN's internal structures, equipping them with the skills and resources necessary for sustained engagement. This in turn creates a sound basis for future cooperation, as ASEAN will increasingly be able to rely on its own capacities to engage effectively with APSP and other partners.

Responsiveness to emerging threats: APSP's attentiveness to regional security developments enable it to stay responsive to ASEAN's complex and shifting security environment, for example related to cybersecurity, as outlined above. This ability to respond to both traditional and emerging security issues highlights APSP's potential to evolve in step with ASEAN's needs, thus strengthening its role as a sustainable partner, capable of addressing both current and future needs.

Non-intrusive support model in sensitive areas: In areas of heightened political sensitivity, such as counter-terrorism and maritime security, APSP has taken a non-intrusive approach by focusing on non-contentious initiatives. This approach aligns with ASEAN's own principles of non-interference, allowing APSP to support ASEAN's goals without overstepping boundaries. This has fostered considerable trust, and positions APSP as a partner that respects ASEAN's political context, thus establishing a solid foundation for future cooperation in sensitive areas.

EQ2 – Has the program provided opportunities for engagement and knowledge exchange between ASEAN and Australian agencies and organisations working on political-security issues?

JC2.1 The program engages a growing range of agencies and organisations in Australia and ASEAN, including ASEAN sectoral bodies/mechanisms; ASEAN Secretariat; ASEAN institute; ASEAN Member States that serve as chair or leader/lead shepherd in areas relevant to APSP

Engaging Other Australian Government Departments (OGD), including other Australian Entities: The APSP and DFAT have faced considerable challenges in fully engaging a diverse range of OGD in its activities. Although DFAT was initially tasked with advocating for inter-departmental collaboration, efforts to involve additional Australian government agencies were often met with limited success. This limited engagement appears to stem from both organisational priorities and resource constraints. As one TAF representative noted, *'it's been difficult to involve other government departments of Australia; they're not really interested in doing anything with ASEAN. We usually conclude they lack the manpower to prioritise ASEAN, or have already set agendas that don't include ASEAN as a region'*.

The organisational structure of DFAT itself may also limit the effectiveness of its advocacy role relative to OGD. The APSP's original design incorporated a dual structure, with TAF responsible for the implementation of program activities, and DFAT responsible for engagement with OGD. However, in the initial stages of the program, a lack of dedicated staffing for APSP reduced DFAT's capacity to drive this engagement effectively. The absence of a dedicated First Secretary for APSP meant that responsibility for the program fell to a Development Counsellor, who was already managing other initiatives, which constrained their ability to prioritise APSP.

Unforeseen disruptions such as the COVID-19 pandemic and pre-existing international commitments of OGD further hindered these initial objectives. Strict ASEAN definitions of what constitutes an ASEAN activity complicated collaboration, often restricting OGD from participating in activities not perceived as directly relevant to their mandate.

For future any future program, clarifying structure and responsibilities could yield improvements in agency engagement and program outcomes. Furthermore, to enhance APSP's relevance and appeal to OGD, the program should consider introducing more flexible criteria for project eligibility, allowing them to participate in a wider range of ASEAN-centred activities, for example by allowing OGD to propose cross-cutting areas, such as cryptocurrency regulations, AI-driven disinformation, at the concept note stage to encourage broader OGD participation. Another key improvement would be to facilitate early involvement of stakeholders from ASEAN and Australia, securing regional buy-in by

collaboratively identifying project themes. As one AFP officer highlighted, *‘if we could be part of the discussions earlier... we could suggest themes for workshops or capability development, which would allow us to secure buy-in for programs like cryptocurrency training.’*

The challenges related to limited OGD engagement are furthered discussed at *Effectiveness* below and are fully explored in *Annex 6*.

One of APSP’s primary objectives has been to engage OGD to establish a strong foundation for collaboration on political security issues. The Australian Federal Police (AFP), for instance, has played a crucial role in building rapport and continuity in the region. The AFP’s strong reputation among ASEAN counterparts has helped bolster mutual trust and deepen the scope of security collaboration, as highlighted by their statement, with an AFP officer stating that *‘the AFP has a very good reputation in these countries, and it’s good for us to say ‘we’re here again supporting your activities’*’. This level of endorsement reinforces Australia’s credibility in ASEAN and lays a foundation for future, more complex collaborative efforts.

APSP has also worked to integrate Australian academic and institutional expertise into their partnership with ASEAN, including the Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security (ANCORS) within the University of Wollongong²⁴, and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)²⁵ bring years of research and field experience that can be adapted to meet ASEAN’s unique security needs. CSIRO partnered with APSP as a renowned Australian research institution to provide research and technical assistance on combating marine plastic pollution, aligning with broader maritime security and environmental sustainability goals in the ASEAN region. For its part, ANCORS has applied its Indo-Pacific experience to address issues of maritime security and resource management, underscoring the value of leveraging existing institutional strengths, with one representative emphasising that *‘ANCORS has worked throughout the Indo-Pacific region for many years; this is not new territory, and with our resources, it’s something we can tailor as needed’*. Expanding academic and institutional engagement within APSP not only strengthens technical expertise but also underscores Australia’s long-term commitment to the region, creating enduring educational and operational ties. Incidentally, academic and institutional engagement would also serve to showcase Australia’s growing education sector, a key national industry, particularly given its increasing presence in the Southeast Asian region.

Engagement with ASEAN Secretariat and sectoral bodies: The APSP’s engagement with the ASEAN Secretariat and sectoral bodies has proven instrumental in creating initiatives that ASEAN member states recognise as regionally relevant. For each proposed activity, APSP collaborates with an AMS co-chair, ensuring the topic aligns with both ASEAN-wide priorities and the co-chair’s national or sectoral objectives. By working within these established frameworks, APSP activities are formally acknowledged as ASEAN-led, lending them regional legitimacy and fostering a sense of shared ownership among member states. However, engagement through ASEAN mechanisms also introduces challenges. While some member states actively participate in sectoral activities, one DFAT representative indicated the risk that others may deprioritise these engagements due to differing national agendas or limited resources. Such reliance on ASEAN sectoral bodies highlights the necessity of aligning APSP initiatives closely with ASEAN’s evolving priorities, since those that resonate with ASEAN’s official stance are more likely to achieve robust engagement. Addressing

²⁴ <https://www.uow.edu.au/ancors/>

²⁵ <https://www.csiro.au/en/>

potential gaps would improve program continuity, potentially making APSP programs more attractive and ensuring the buy-in of all ASEAN member states.

Private sector engagement: For a number of political security sectors, there is considerable scope for increased engagement with the private sector. For example, cybersecurity has emerged as a particularly vital area for cross-sectoral collaboration. Given the dynamic and rapidly evolving nature of cyber threats, APSP will need to find ways to incorporate greater industry involvement, recognising that private sector insights and technical capabilities are essential for addressing cybersecurity challenges effectively. The AFP has advocated for enhanced industry engagement in cyber initiatives, indicating that they are actively exploring ways to outsource certain technical components and integrate leading-edge knowledge from Australia's top universities, stating that *'with cyber, industry engagement is critical, and we are considering outsourcing. Universities in Australia, like the University of New South Wales, are doing excellent work in this area.'* Expanding industry involvement in APSP initiatives could significantly enhance the program's impact in cybersecurity and other highly technical areas.

JC2.2 Australian and ASEAN participants recognise the reciprocal dimension of learning and knowledge exchange.

APSP has established itself as a significant platform for mutual engagement between ASEAN and OGD in the political security domain. By facilitating collaborative knowledge exchange, APSP not only strengthens operational expertise and regional security but also fosters a deeper understanding of shared challenges and solutions.

Operational and strategic benefits

One of the core strengths of APSP has been its ability to create a platform for reciprocal learning, where both Australian and ASEAN participants gain valuable insights. Stakeholders highlighted the operational benefits of the program, not only in terms of sharing Australian expertise but also in learning from ASEAN counterparts, thus reflecting the program's role in fostering two-way exchanges of knowledge that go beyond mere technical training, enhancing both operational efficiency and diplomatic relations.

The workshops and collaborative activities organised under APSP further illustrate how reciprocal learning fosters operational improvements on both sides, providing opportunities to understand diverse regional security challenges and solutions, adding a layer of practical and strategic insight to their work. These reciprocal benefits contribute to a more comprehensive and nuanced approach to regional security, as both Australian and ASEAN participants bring unique perspectives and experiences to the table.

Leveraging sectoral expertise

The APSP's engagement with specialised institutions, as indicated above, exemplifies how reciprocal knowledge exchange is achieved by leveraging sectoral expertise, allowing ASEAN members to benefit from Australia's specialised knowledge, while Australian representatives benefit from the opportunity to adapt their approaches based on ASEAN's unique security concerns and regional dynamics. As a key example, APSP facilitated two knowledge-exchange sessions between the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry (AWPR) and the Australian Civil Society Coalition on WPS in July 2023 and October 2024, offering valuable insights into implementing WPS in both regional and national

contexts. AWPR found the first exchange in July 2023 was very useful on sharing experiences and lessons learned in implementing the ASEAN RPA-WPS and NAPs-WPS. This was then followed up with a second exchange in Manila in October 2024. Through such iterative exchanges, Australian institutions also gain a deeper understanding of the regional security landscape, allowing them to tailor their approaches to the political and operational realities of ASEAN. This underscores the bidirectional nature of learning within APSP, where Australian expertise is shared, helping ASEAN members build capacity in critical areas, but also enhanced by insights gained from ASEAN participants.

Mutual recognition of strategic priorities

The reciprocal dimension of APSP is evident not only in technical and operational exchanges but also in the alignment of strategic priorities. APSP has focused on core issues that remain central to ASEAN's security framework, and by working collaboratively in these areas, Australian and ASEAN participants have been able to recognise shared priorities, strengthening the foundation for mutual capacity building. This alignment of priorities facilitates reciprocal knowledge exchange, as Australian participants gain insight into ASEAN's strategic direction, while ASEAN members benefit from Australia's experience in addressing these issues on national and regional levels.

ASEAN's convening power

ASEAN's convening power has added significant value to APSP by bringing together the right stakeholders for effective knowledge exchange. Through this role, ASEAN has facilitated discussions that allow Australian and ASEAN participants to engage with a broad range of security professionals, enhancing the scope and depth of reciprocal learning. ASEAN's role as a convener not only increases engagement opportunities but also provides a framework for addressing regional security concerns in a coordinated manner. This has been particularly valuable in areas like maritime security and cybersecurity, where regional collaboration is essential.

Challenges

The limited involvement of OGDs, as described above, remains an ongoing challenge in fully realising the reciprocal potential of learning and knowledge exchange, as it has somewhat restricted the diversity of perspectives and expertise available to ASEAN counterparts, and limited the scope of bidirectional learning, as ASEAN participants primarily interact with a narrower subset of Australian expertise (see also *Effectiveness* below and *Annex 6* (OGD Case-Study)).

Efficiency

EQ3 – How well and efficient were the resources allocated to support ASEAN and Australia priorities and cross-sectoral and multi-sectoral approaches in program implementation?

The program has been largely efficient, in the sense that TAF has made good use of APSP resources to pursue the program goals, and that its management of APSP (under the direction of the Australian Mission to ASEAN and in consultation with ASEC) has been responsive to changing circumstances,

and pro-active in engaging stakeholders. Overall, TAF's efficient management of the program constitutes added value for both DFAT and ASEAN in the pursuit of political security partnership.

JC3.1 The program makes appropriate use of human and financial resources in relation to both EOIOs in the program.

The table below summarises the broad areas of APSP expenditure, according to financial reports submitted by TAF to DFAT:

Period	TAF Staff	Consultants	Activities	TAF operations	Total
Cumulative to 07/31/24	1,635 29%	125 2%	3,051 54%	868 15%	5,679
Forecast 08/24 – 04/25	430 11%	0 0%	2,910 73%	631 16%	3,971
Sub-total as % of total	2,065 21%	125 1%	5,961 62%	1,499 16%	9,650

Figure 1 APSP budget (AUD thousands.) Source: TAF Monthly Updates

The following elements are observed:

- The APSP budget is AUD 9.5m. The total figure in the table (AUD 9.65m) includes AUD 114,000 in unscheduled activities. Some of the scheduled activities may not take place by April 2025 due to organisational delays;
- The total budget earmarked by DFAT for APSP is AUD 10.5m. Of this, AUD 1.0m is managed directly by DFAT and is therefore not included above (the budget managed by DFAT covers its participation in APSP activities, reported grant to CSIRO, etc.).

As the table indicates, APSP financial outlays until end-July 2024 have been allocated as follows, according to budget documents received:

- TAF staff costs: 29% of total expenditure till end-July 2024.
- Consultants: 2%
- TAF operational costs (overheads, etc.): 15%.
- Activities: 54%.

These proportions are expected to be somewhat different by the time the program is completed in April 2025:

- TAF staff costs: 21% of total expenditure.
- Consultants: 1%
- TAF operational costs: 16%.
- Activities: 62%.

The variance between the allocation of spending until July 2024 compared to the forecast overall budget can be explained by the many activities that will take place in the program's final months, while staffing remains stable. Activity costs therefore represent a higher proportion of program costs in these final months. At the time of writing, TAF foresees an overspend of about AUD 150,000,

compared to the AUD 9.5m budget, assuming that all proposed activities take place. In practice. In practice, ASEC or AMS co-chairs may not finalise endorsements in time for activities to be implemented before the program period ends, alongside other scheduling factors.

Consistency of budget allocation with program priorities

As the above table shows, financial reports distinguish between personnel costs, consultancies, TAF operational costs and the cost of activities; they do not break activities down by pillar. The program's overall budget therefore did not provide a separate allocation for each pillar (though a separate budget line existed for WPS). The table below reproduces the overall APSP budget as of September 2023.

Description	Budget from current agreement	Actual spending to date May19 - Jul23	Estimate Year 5 Aug23 - Jun24	Estimate Year 6 Jul24 - Apr 25	Total Revised Budget
	AUD	AUD	AUD	AUD	AUD
Component 1: Identify priorities and opportunities to support Australian-ASEAN security cooperation					
Consultants	104,011	59,092	0	0	59,092
TAF TH Technical Assistance	462,750	552,271	74,845	57,968	685,084
Travel	120,623	14,050	0	0	14,050
GESI	245,457	139,191	80,316	54,571	274,077
WPS	254,251	158,130	61,377	59,194	278,701
Total Costs	1,187,093	922,735	216,539	171,733	1,311,006
Component 2: Support formal ASEAN processes and complementary activities					
Committed Activities	975,739	1,093,415	1,283,596	926,525	3,303,535
Consultants	75,566	64,898	45,799	12,410	123,107
TAF TH Technical Assistance	476,399	590,037	461,232	346,454	1,397,723
TAF ASEAN Offices Technical Assistance	97,947	24,867	47,239	38,239	110,345
Travel	88,720	43,090	22,729	22,729	88,549
GESI	1,009,542	334,401	92,150	70,636	497,187
WPS	596,596	228,017	291,724	487,054	1,006,796
Total Costs	3,320,508	2,378,725	2,244,469	1,904,048	6,527,242
Program and Admin Support					
Program Management Support	91,767	83,412	30,501	25,031	138,945
Final Evaluation	74,873	0	0	38,986	38,986
Audit fees	14,546	0	0	15,910	15,910
Indirect costs	811,213	607,712	471,340	388,860	1,467,911
Total Costs	992,399	691,124	501,841	468,788	1,661,752
TOTAL	5,500,000	3,992,584	2,962,848	2,544,568	9,500,000

Figure 2: APSP budget as revised in September 2023. Source: Amendment 4 to Grant Agreement

The program being demand-driven, it made sense not to allocate specific amounts to each pillar, though it is clear that maritime security, cybersecurity and the transnational organised crime would take up the majority of funded activities, simply because these are key ASEAN priorities.

Costs in line with sector practice

Overall, the allocation of resources is fully in line with what would be expected in a program of this nature: activities represent almost two-thirds of the overall budget (62%), covering event organisation, travel, accommodation, etc. Staff costs (21%) are reasonable, considering the level of professional skills and expertise required for the effective implementation of the program. TAF operational costs/overheads are also reasonable and in line with development cooperation practice.

The evaluators did not verify the nature of reported expenditure – this is the task of auditors – but they did confirm with TAF and DFAT personnel that financial and narrative reports were in line with requirements and generally delivered on schedule. There have been no reports of disagreements between DFAT and TAF on the allocation of resources or on financial reporting.

The program may appear to be ‘expensive’ in comparison with other development cooperation activities, since logistical costs can be significant (for example for senior-level forums and urgent scheduling), however such expenditure is clearly justified by the nature of the activities undertaken, and of the professional skills and experience of the implementing team, and in particular given the high strategic value of ASEAN-wide engagement and regional stability. Meetings were generally held in ASEAN Member States’ capitals or major cities, taking account of the nationality of sectoral body chairs and of the rotating ASEAN leadership. Meetings have often been organised at relatively short notice, with accommodation appropriate to the seniority of participants, some of which register at short notice. These factors have contributed to costs, however TAF’s ability to respond to short-term requests has also contributed to ASEAN officials’ positive view of the program.

JC3.2 Program management is effective, in that pro-active and timely action was taken to address changing circumstances (including the pandemic), and M&E and management accountability processes are in use.

Program management

The program’s management contributed to its efficient implementation. Two factors in particular drove APSP’s sound management:

- An excellent working relationship between the Australian Mission and the DFAT team: In general terms, TAF manages event organisation, contracting specialists, and operational logistics, while the Australian Mission provides strategic diplomatic input, secures high-level buy-in, and ensures alignment with broader Australian–ASEAN foreign policy objectives. In this regard, a clear division of labour is evident, with considerable overlap however, in these roles, which contributes significantly to the project’s overall efficiency and effectiveness. Beyond this, the Mission clearly trusts the TAF team’s ability to engage sensitively with ASEAN officials and values its advice when building meeting agendas, identifying speakers, etc. Conversely the TAF team was very open to the Mission in relation to the day-to-day management of the program, ensuring for example that a representative of DFAT sat on recruitment panels for relevant TAF positions. There was clear evidence that TAF and the Mission were in virtually permanent contact – in sharp contrast to a ‘classic’ development cooperation model where implementing agencies report to donors but do not frequently consult them (see also Added Value of TAF below).
- The TAF team and its DFAT counterpart are highly motivated and clearly embrace the program’s goals. Staff on both sides have experience of working with ASEC (indeed, some previously worked in ASEC) and some TAF team members have also previously worked for DFAT.

The close working relationship between the Australian Mission and the TAF APSP team helped ensure that program management was responsive to changing circumstances and identified emerging needs, including to keep the program aligned with DFAT priorities and management practices. For example, a GESI (later GEDSI) advisor was added to the team in late 2021, and the structure of the program was revised in 2021 to incorporate the two current EOIOs.

Sound policies and strategies on MEL and GEDSI, combined with a clear strategy to seek engagement opportunities with ASEC, helped the program team steer APSP towards areas where ASEAN demand was strongest, and where Australian counterparts were able to deliver the most added value.

Nevertheless, areas for improvement could include instituting formal advance planning sessions with AMS co-chairs, adopting a structured risk management framework, and ensuring cross-team knowledge transfer to maintain continuity amid staff rotations.

Procedural concerns

The program's efficiency is however considerably constrained by a complex and lengthy procedure for obtaining ASEAN endorsement of each APSP activity request (see overview in *Sustainability* below). The following steps are generally required (might differ depending on discussion with the ASEAN co-proponent):

- Upon receiving a proposal, ASEC first checks whether it aligns with one of the ASEAN priority areas.
- APSP and ASEAN Member States then engage directly on the proposal. Activities must be co-chaired, co-organised and co-led by at least one ASEAN Member State.
- APSP and ASEAN Cooperate Points jointly draft the proposal.
- The relevant ASEC desk conducts a preliminary review of the draft proposal, focusing on format and adherence to ASEAN practices, providing input to the ASEAN Co-Proponent.
- The ASEAN Co-Proponent submits the draft and supporting documents to ASEC for review, assessment by the relevant sectoral body, and government approval.
- The ASEAN Co-Proponent leads the proposal through approvals at the sectoral level.
- The ASEAN Co-Proponent prepares and shares an implementation package for final review, aligning it with ASEAN practices before execution.
- ASEC decides its representative for events, ensuring compliance with ASEAN's guidelines and priorities throughout the process.

While the APSP program team has become adept at smoothing the way, thus contributing to the program's sustainability, the process remains cumbersome and prone to delays that limit its efficiency. It would be advisable therefore to contribute to enhancing the endorsement procedure, for example by setting time frameworks in consultation with ASEAN. The program initially anticipated the creation of a joint DFAT/ TAF program strategy and management mechanism, which subsequently proved unnecessary, largely since programming issues are addressed directly between DFAT and ASEC. Nevertheless, the establishment of a strategy consultation mechanism bringing together ASEAN, DFAT and other key stakeholders would be desirable (see *Recommendations*).

That said, it is accepted that delays can also stem from multiple factors prior to the formal ASEAN endorsement itself, which include identifying an AMS co-chair's priorities, completing Canberra-based approvals, and determining how to engage on Myanmar issues. In addition, different ASEAN co-proponents may follow slightly varied workflows, leading to different timelines and procedural requirements.

Accountability

The accountability structures are clear within TAF. Most TAF APSP team members are based in Bangkok and report to TAF's Thailand Country Representative, and to the APSP Regional Program Manager in relation to their APSP work. Other program staff based in Laos and Jakarta report administratively to their respective Country Representatives, and to the APSP Program Manager in relation to their APSP activities. The Regional Program Manager reports to the Thailand Country

Representative (the former Representative, under whose leadership APSP was initiated, is now a TAF Vice-President based in the USA; he maintains an overview of the program). No concern has arisen in relation to management processes and financial oversight and reporting mechanisms. The Australian Mission is able to communicate directly with TAF's APSP team members, with the Program Manager in copy.

Effectiveness

EQ4 – To what extent were the program's activities and initiatives effective in enhancing dialogue mechanisms and information-sharing among stakeholders?

The APSP program represents a distinctive diplomatic and operational initiative designed to foster stability, security, and robust political cooperation between ASEAN and Australia. Since its inception in 2019, APSP has sought to advance ASEAN centrality and leadership in addressing regional political security challenges by supporting ASEAN Member States (AMS) across critical issues related to maritime security, cybersecurity, Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), and transnational crime. APSP aims to enhance ASEAN's capacity for coordinated responses to transnational threats while strengthening ASEAN-Australia relations and promoting the resilience of ASEAN's political security mechanisms.

Designed to offer demand-driven and flexible support, APSP operates within ASEAN frameworks, engaging key institutions including the ASEAN Secretariat and sectoral bodies. Under the demand-driven model, an AMS or the ASEAN Secretariat identifies a need or priority area, formally submits it to APSP, and co-develops the concept note alongside APSP, ensuring alignment with ASEAN frameworks and national interests. APSP's demand-driven structure was intended to facilitate a whole-of-government approach, involving diverse Australian Government Departments (OGDs) to ensure multi-sectoral engagement, coherence, and sustainable impact, however in practice, OGD engagement proved somewhat challenging. The APSP implementing organisation, the Asia Foundation (TAF), has leveraged its expertise in ASEAN's socio-political context, supporting APSP's strategic goals through collaborative engagement.

Overall outcomes

The APSP was implemented and monitored in line with a set of Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), an overview of which is provided below:

Key Performance Indicators	
1	Progress in regular and ad hoc interface between ASEAN and Australian counterparts to exchange ideas to improve program implementation
1.1	Progress in number of programs / activities informed by well-targeted and valued expertise shared by Australia
1.2	Positive and prompt APSP support to the implementation of ASEAN-initiated activities
1.3	Progress in the involvement of ASEAN and Australian counterparts as a result of APSP activities
2	Improved understanding and awareness of ASEAN and stakeholders on GEDSI, cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches to political security
2.1	At least 75% of APSP activities have clear link and contribute to the implementation of ASEAN frameworks, including declarations and workplans.

Key Performance Indicators	
2.2	At least 75% of APSP activities demonstrate cross-sectoral and/or multi-stakeholder approaches to political security responses
2.3.	At least 75% of APSP activities have either mainstreamed GEDSI or are GEDSI-focused.
	At least 45% of the budget under TAF management is dedicated to GEDSI
2.4	At least 75% of positive assessment of APSP activities by ASEAN and Australian counterparts

TAF provided comprehensive Annual Reports that described the program’s cumulative and yearly outcomes, and Semi-Annual Reviews that outlined cumulative and six-monthly results (see *also Efficiency below*). The 2023 Annual Report outlined the program’s progress as of November of that year, with each EOIO considered to be on track. Considerable detail concerning the activities is provided, which collectively support the conclusion that the program has been achieving its Key Performance Indicators, however it is observed that the outcomes are described almost exclusively in quantitative terms, which are described as a ‘*quantitative testament of APSP’s success*’²⁶, are neither linked nor analysed directly in line with the KPIs, with the narrative containing little information concerning longer-term and more qualitative outcomes, relying largely on the results of participant feedback surveys provided at the time of each activity – which it is emphasised are very positive – without a ‘deeper dive’ regarding *inter alia* ASEAN partners’ perceptions. This strongly suggest the need for more rigorous strategic monitoring and reporting for the final phase of the program, and embedded into any future initiative.

Nevertheless, activity reporting is extremely thorough, and is frank and realistic in its assessment of constraints and projected workplan, and it is evident that the program has achieved considerable momentum despite its somewhat uncertain beginnings, as described below.

The program’s outcomes for the cumulative program period, with examples, is summarised below:

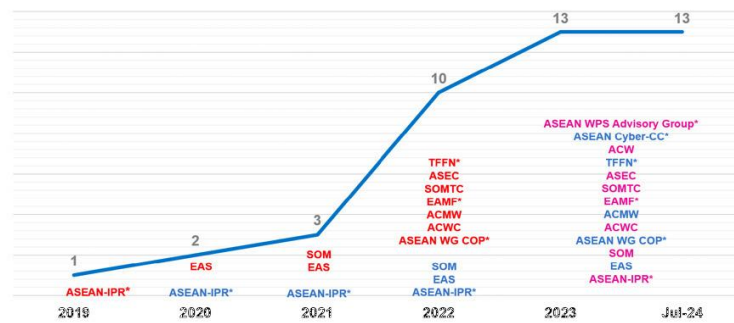
Outcome 1: Stronger ASEAN-Australia relationships and engagement

- Direct contribution to the implementation of ASEAN-Australia Plan of Action.
- Enabled Australia to work with ASEAN on sensitive issues or crowded areas (e.g. Track 2 Workshop on Conflict Prevention)
- Enabled Australia to be responsive to ASEAN requests, with timely follow-through on concrete activities (e.g. 3rd ASEAN Women Leaders’ Summit)
- Helped Australia broaden and/or deepen the relationship and engagement with 13 ASEAN partners and ASEAN-led mechanisms (6 of which were new partners for Australia) (e.g. Go-to partner for WPS, while helping Australia provide strategic support focusing on APSC pillar)
- Helped Australia promote and facilitate involvement of 14 OGDs and Australian actors with ASEAN, referring to the need for a change in strategy to promote OGD engagement.

The table below provides a cumulative summary of ASEAN partners and mechanisms that were supported by the program, which clearly demonstrates a significant increase in the level and diversity of support to ASEAN in the post-Covid-19 period:

²⁶ APSP Annual Rerpot, p.

ASEAN partners and ASEAN-led mechanisms supported by APSP (cumulative)



Asterisks (*) indicate ASEAN partners and ASEAN-led mechanisms that were supported for the first time by Australia through APSP; red font indicates new ASEAN partners or ASEAN-led mechanisms that were supported by APSP for the first time in the given year; and purple font indicates those who APSP has engaged on more than one activity.

Fig. 3: ASEAN partners/ mechanisms supported. Source: The Asia Foundation

Furthermore, the table below provides a cumulative summary of evolution of the level of engagement of OGD and other Australian entities, which also shows a similarly impressive post-Covid-10 upward trend:

OGDs and other Australian entities engaged to share their expertise and knowledge in APSP activities (cumulative)



Red font indicates new OGD and other Australian actor engaged in APSP for the first time in the given year; and purple font indicates those who APSP has engaged on more than one activity (including activity being prepared for implementation.)

Fig. 4: Engagement of OGD and Australian entities. Source: The Asia Foundation

Outcome 2: ASEAN is addressing targeted political-security issues using increasingly effective cross-sectoral/multi-stakeholder approaches

- All activities have clear and explicit links with ASEAN frameworks and priorities.
- Explicit effort in and contribution to promoting participation of, and exchange among representatives from diverse but relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies and other stakeholders (e.g. ASEAN-Australia Counter-Terrorism Workshop)
- Enabled Australia to engage academics and experts in the discussion on political security issues to inform government officials (e.g. Track 2 Workshop on Conflict Prevention)
- Support to Timor-Leste toward becoming 11th AMS, in line with the Roadmap
- Positive feedback from participants concerning the activities (content and logistics).

The following table provides an indication of the status of APSP's activities as of the August 2024 Semi-Annual Review:

APSP Activities Count		
	By Dec 2023	By August 2024
Completed	15	20
On-going	7	11
Approved for implementation	4	4
Under review & approval process	9	3
Removed		2
Total	35	40

Fig. 5 APSP Activities Count. Source: The Asia Foundation

The APSP is committed to completing program activities prior to its April 2024 end-date, however, as can be observed, the program has a total of 18 activities to complete, which appears somewhat ambitious. Nevertheless, APSP has established a structured workplan for the remaining program period, which appears generally feasible given the swift acceleration of outputs in the later period of implementation, as demonstrated above, and which is also confirmed by their Expenditure Forecast and overall efficiencies of activity implementation, as described at *Efficiency* above. The table below provides a summary of the on-going and planned activities for the remaining period:



On-going and planned activities for 2024 - 2025				
				
1. A Sustainable Forum: Building the Online Resources of the EAMF	6. Ideathon for ASEAN youth on fake news	10. Strengthening Institutional Capacity of AWPR through ASEAN-IPR	13. ASEAN-Australia Workshop on Safe Handling and Disposal of Illicit Drugs and Precursor Chemicals	15. ASEAN-IPR website (on-going)
2. A Sustainable Forum: Building the Research Capacity of the EAMF	7. ASEAN-Australia Workshop on Socialising the Guideline and Practices in Dealing with Fake News	• AWPR knowledge exchange meeting	14. 3 rd ASEAN-Australia Counter Terrorism Workshop	16. Culture of Prevention videos
3. 14 th AMF and 12 th EAMF	8. ASEAN-Australia Workshop on Norms for Responsible State Behavior in Cyberspace	11. Research on women leadership in armed force in ASEAN		17. Track 1.5 EAS Workshop on Conflict Prevention and the ASEAN-led Regional Architecture
4. 2 nd Law of the Sea Training for ASEAN Member States and ASEC	9. 2 nd ASEAN-Australia Cyber Capacity Building Workshop	12. Baseline on Women in the Security Sector		18. 3rd ASEC professional development
5. Policy brief on WPS and maritime security				

Fig. 6: On-going and planned activities. Source: The Asia Foundation

JC4.1 The program emphasises mutual interaction among Australian and ASEAN stakeholders.

The APSP has operated as a cornerstone of Australia's efforts to reinforce diplomatic and political security alliances within Southeast Asia. APSP's structured yet flexible approach has provided Australia with an instrumental role in ASEAN's political security framework, allowing it to address sensitive regional issues while building lasting relationships. In aligning APSP's objectives with ASEAN's strategic interests, as discussed at *Relevance* above, Australia has not only enhanced its visibility and engagement but also fostered an environment of trust, cooperation, and mutual benefit that underpins a stronger ASEAN-Australia partnership.

Increased Australian visibility and strategic role

Historically, Australia's involvement in ASEAN's political security sphere was relatively low-profile, limited to *ad hoc* engagements rather than integrated initiatives. However, APSP has effectively elevated Australia's role, establishing it as a prominent partner in ASEAN-led political security activities. Through APSP, Australia has positioned itself as a proactive actor in ASEAN dialogues and initiatives, reflecting a shift in both perception and participation. A former ASEAN Secretariat official highlighted this transformation, noting that *'back when I was in the ASEAN Secretariat, [Australia] wasn't one of the active players, but after the APSP, they're becoming even more active'*. This transition has enabled Australia to engage meaningfully with ASEAN on core security challenges, establishing Australia as an important contributor to regional stability.

The strategic integration of Australia into ASEAN's high-visibility platforms, such as the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, the Women for Peace Registry, and the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation, demonstrates APSP's capacity to align Australian objectives with ASEAN's primary concerns. These platforms allow Australia to showcase its expertise in areas where ASEAN has specific strategic interests, thereby reinforcing its diplomatic influence. For instance, in the context of the Expanded ASEAN Maritime Forum, Australia's contributions have centred on fostering maritime security, an area of critical importance in Southeast Asia's geopolitical landscape. As an ASEAN official reflected, *'Australia is becoming more visible in the eyes of ASEAN, which is positive for their foreign policy-making processes'*. This elevated visibility has not only improved Australia's diplomatic positioning within ASEAN but has also ensured that APSP's contributions are aligned with ASEAN's priority security agendas, further solidifying Australia's standing as a trusted partner.

Strategic thematic engagement

APSP has capitalised on its visibility by channelling resources into critical thematic engagements that address shared ASEAN-Australia concerns. The program's focus on issues counter-terrorism, transnational crime, and cybersecurity has enhanced Australia's credibility within ASEAN's security frameworks. By investing in these themes, APSP has delivered strategic benefits for both ASEAN and Australia, allowing the partnership to address issues of mutual concern while fostering knowledge exchange and capacity-building.

For example, APSP's engagement with the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC) has contributed to establishing Australia as a proactive partner in counter-terrorism and transnational crime prevention. The workshops supported by the program were not only well-received by ASEAN stakeholders but also provide ASEAN member states with practical tools and insights to address security challenges. This focus on practical, mutually beneficial outcomes was echoed in discussions surrounding APSP's workshops, where a DFAT representative highlighted the benefits of these activities: *'workshops and capacity-building sessions provide unique opportunities for building relationships and discussing shared topics, such as cybercrime, that participants may want to explore further'*. By facilitating such in-depth exchanges on critical security issues, APSP enables ASEAN stakeholders to apply lessons from Australian practices, while Australia gains valuable insights into Southeast Asian security dynamics.

Additionally, APSP has strengthened operational ties between OGD, such as the Australian Federal Police (AFP), and their ASEAN counterparts. The AFP's involvement in APSP activities, for example in drug disposal and counter-terrorism efforts, has provided ASEAN stakeholders with access to Australia's expertise, thereby reinforcing Australia's reputation as a credible operational partner. One

DFAT official emphasised the significance of AFP's presence in ASEAN, stating that '*AFP's regional presence and operational expertise provide practical and diplomatic benefits, especially in areas like drug disposal*'. The AFP's active engagement showcases Australia's capacity to contribute operationally to ASEAN's security frameworks, which not only strengthens ASEAN-Australia relations but also enhances Australia's diplomatic and security influence in the region.

OGD engagement challenges

While APSP has successfully elevated Australia's engagement within ASEAN, the program has encountered notable challenges in achieving a fully integrated 'whole-of-government' approach. APSP's initial vision was to involve a broad range of OGDs to support a cohesive, multi-sectoral Australian presence in ASEAN's political security space. However, strategic and other constraints have limited the scope of OGD participation, revealing structural gaps in APSP's ability to achieve full cross-government alignment. Comments from APSP stakeholders confirm these challenges, with one interviewee noting, '*it's been difficult to involve other government departments of Australia; they're not really interested in working with ASEAN*'. This divergence in priorities has limited APSP's capacity to fully leverage OGD expertise and political support within ASEAN and in the Australian capital, particularly in areas where inter-departmental collaboration could amplify Australia's impact.

The absence of a dedicated advocate within DFAT for APSP in the earlier stages of program implementation complicated efforts to integrate OGDs consistently into APSP activities, with an Australian government official noting that '*there wasn't a dedicated First Secretary position for APSP; the Development Counsellor managed multiple programs, whereas most programs had dedicated personnel*'. This reduced the program's ability to establish early and consistent cross-government cooperation.

While APSP's demand-driven structure allows it to respond flexibly to ASEAN's needs, as discussed below, the difficulties in engaging OGD support have hindered the program's capacity to provide the multi-departmental approaches that it initially targeted.

Flexibility and adaptability

Despite the challenges in achieving OGD engagement, APSP's flexible structure has enabled it to adapt effectively to ASEAN's shifting political security landscape. The program's demand-driven approach allows APSP to adjust its activities in response to evolving needs, ensuring that Australia remains a relevant and responsive partner. Indeed, the program demonstrated a strong ingrained flexibility, which characterises it more as an evolutive support 'mechanism,' than a classic fixed-activity 'project.' This adaptability has not only facilitated agile responses to ASEAN's demands but also positions APSP as a partner that can provide rapid turnarounds to such demand, in order to maintain momentum and motivation. This adaptability is a core strength of APSP's operational framework, allowing it to navigate political and other constraints and continue delivering impactful initiatives in a changing environment.

The Covid-19 pandemic, in particular, tested APSP's adaptability and resilience. While many regional programs were forced to suspend activities, APSP managed to sustain its engagements with ASEAN stakeholders, transitioning to virtual formats where necessary. This adaptability enabled APSP to maintain continuity, ensuring that the partnership's momentum was not lost, despite the pandemic's disruptive impact. One official reflected on APSP's response to the pandemic, stating that '*the*

program was beset by early challenges to implementation, including the dramatic impact of Covid-19, which slowed – but importantly did not stop – the conduct of activities.’ APSP’s ability to continue its operations during the pandemic underscores its commitment to ASEAN and further highlights the program’s capacity to respond to unforeseen challenges.

APSP’s flexibility is also supported by the Asia Foundation (TAF), whose regional expertise and strategic insight have been invaluable in navigating ASEAN’s complex political dynamics. TAF’s dual role as both an administrative implementer and strategic advisor enhances APSP’s capacity to respond to ASEAN’s needs with agility and precision. TAF’s regional experience allows it to *‘provide expert inputs, strategic advice, and leverage its own in-house expertise’* (APSP documents), ensuring that activities align with ASEAN’s priorities. This partnership with TAF exemplifies APSP’s strategic approach to implementing demand-driven initiatives that are both adaptive and impactful, cementing Australia’s partnership with ASEAN (see also *Added Value* below).

Strengthened diplomacy

The longer-term benefits of APSP are evident in the strengthened diplomatic ties and operational networks it has fostered between ASEAN and Australia. Through APSP’s thematic focus on critical areas of regional concern, the program has created sustainable platforms for knowledge exchange, capacity-building, and mutual understanding. These initiatives not only enhance ASEAN’s institutional capacity but also provide Australia with a clearer understanding of Southeast Asian security dynamics, positioning Australia as a stronger ally in the region’s security architecture.

APSP’s contributions to ASEAN’s cybersecurity initiatives, for instance, have enabled ASEAN officials to learn from Australia’s cybersecurity standards and practices, while also allowing OGD to gain insights into ASEAN’s unique security challenges. A former ASEAN official emphasised the reciprocal nature of these initiatives, commenting that *‘having this activity is giving them a lot of opportunity to improve these skills, because usually, especially at the SOM-TC level, Australia wasn’t one of the active players.’* These engagements foster mutual benefits, enhancing ASEAN’s capacity to address cybersecurity threats while reinforcing Australia’s influence as a trusted security partner.

JC4.2 The program encourages ASEAN Member States and/or the ASEAN Secretariat to undertake/enhance consultation and dialogue with Member States and other stakeholders active in the target political security areas.

A core objective of the ASEAN-Australia Political Security Partnership (APSP) has been to foster intra-ASEAN dialogue, consultation, and cooperation, supporting ASEAN’s own mechanisms for addressing political security challenges. APSP’s demand-driven and flexible approach, as outlined above, has allowed it to play a crucial role in encouraging ASEAN member states to work collectively on shared security issues, in the four thematic areas targeted by the program. The program’s emphasis on ASEAN centrality reflects a strategic commitment to supporting ASEAN’s leadership while enabling more cohesive intra-regional collaboration on complex security issues.

Integration of ASEAN processes and sectoral bodies

APSP’s success in fostering intra-ASEAN dialogue is evident in its consistent integration within ASEAN’s established processes and sectoral bodies. The program has engaged with various ASEAN entities, including the Senior Officials Meeting on Transnational Crime (SOMTC), which is situated under the ASEAN Political security Community (APSC) pillar, and also collaborates with certain

bodies in the socio-cultural and economic pillars when activities overlap with those domains, to ensure that its activities align with ASEAN's priorities and procedural requirements.

This integration is crucial, as ASEAN's consensus-based approach relies strongly on adherence to established protocols to maintain unity and legitimacy among member states. A DFAT official observed that *'working through ASEAN mechanisms, like ASEAN sectoral bodies, ensures involvement from all ten ASEAN countries. Without using ASEAN processes, however, activities may not be seen as officially ASEAN'*. By operating through ASEAN's own frameworks, APSP has bolstered its credibility, and positioned itself as a partner that respects ASEAN's operational structure.

APSP's engagement with sectoral bodies, such as SOMTC and APSC, has proven effective in addressing specific regional concerns and fostering inter-member state collaboration on issues such as transnational crime and counter-terrorism. These activities are often guided by existing ASEAN work plans and cross-sectoral action plans, which enhance APSP's relevance by ensuring that its initiatives directly support ASEAN's strategic goals. An ASEAN official emphasised the value of APSP's alignment with ASEAN's processes, noting that *'activities supported through SOMTC have been effective, aligning with and actively implementing the SOMTC-Australia work plan on transnational crime, with APSP funding well-channelled into this progress'*. This alignment underscores APSP's commitment to ASEAN centrality and illustrates its role in reinforcing intra-ASEAN cooperation by addressing pressing security challenges through established ASEAN frameworks.

Cross-sectoral cohesion on sensitive and emerging issues

A defining strength of APSP is its ability to facilitate cross-sectoral dialogue on sensitive issues that are often overlooked in traditional political security frameworks. The program's support for the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda within ASEAN is a prominent example of how APSP has encouraged AMS to incorporate gender considerations into security discussions, a priority area that previously lacked adequate attention within ASEAN. WPS is a critical but sensitive topic in the Southeast Asian context, as the concept remains relatively new and is often viewed as a 'soft' issue by political security actors. APSP's involvement in WPS has broadened ASEAN's understanding of gender security, providing a framework for AMS to engage in meaningful dialogue on the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict prevention.

APSP's role in advancing WPS within ASEAN has required a nuanced, multi-sectoral approach, as the issue intersects with both security and socio-cultural concerns. Initially, ASEAN's approach to WPS was situated within the socio-cultural pillar, which limited its impact on political security discourse. APSP's involvement has helped shift WPS into the political security sphere, fostering greater intra-ASEAN engagement on gender security. One TAF representative confirmed that *'engagement with political security actors on gender equality remains challenging, as WPS is often dismissed as a 'soft' topic'*. By advocating for WPS within ASEAN's political security framework, APSP has encouraged ASEAN members to consider gender perspectives in security planning, thereby enriching the discourse around inclusive security and enhancing the scope of intra-ASEAN cooperation on WPS.

The program's support for the ASEAN Regional Plan of Action on WPS has provided a unified policy framework that has enabled ASEAN member states to address WPS collectively. Since the adoption of the plan, APSP has driven its implementation by supporting various WPS activities, including research initiatives, capacity-building sessions, and projects focused on women's roles in peace and mediation. APSP's efforts have been well-received within ASEAN, with one official noting that *'APSP has facilitated inter-pillar dialogues across ASEAN's community pillars, enhancing strategic*

collaboration on WPS'. Such cross-pillar engagement underscores APSP's value in promoting a holistic approach to security that encompasses gender considerations, setting a precedent for AMS to integrate WPS into broader political security discussions.

Challenges of harmonising diverse Member State capacities and interests

Despite APSP's successes in promoting intra-ASEAN dialogue, the program has encountered challenges in harmonising the interests and highly-divergent capacities of ASEAN member states. Each AMS operates within a unique political, legislative, and security context, which creates complexities for region-wide initiatives on sensitive security issues. The diversity in ASEAN's regional landscape necessitates adaptable and carefully tailored approaches, as member states vary significantly in their willingness and capacity to address certain political security topics. An AFP official highlighted these challenges, noting that *'ASEAN member states vary widely in their legislative frameworks, capabilities, expertise, and engagement'*. This diversity often complicates efforts to foster a unified response to shared security challenges, requiring APSP to adopt flexible, context-sensitive strategies to accommodate varying levels of member state readiness and resource availability.

An example of this complexity was evident in APSP's counter-terrorism workshops, which have encountered varying levels of engagement depending on the specific national priorities and security capacities of each member state. Although APSP has fostered significant engagement through SOMTC, translating these high-level dialogues into tangible, country-specific outcomes remains challenging. An official from DFAT reflected on this issue, stating that *'translating these activities into policy change and tangible benefits is challenging, unlike bilateral programs where impact is more immediately visible'*. APSP's efforts to engage AMS in cross-sectoral discussions on counter-terrorism have been beneficial in raising awareness and building networks; however, the program must navigate complex political sensitivities and varying degrees of buy-in from member states to achieve concrete outcomes at the national level.

Demand-Driven approach

APSP's flexible, demand-driven structure has been instrumental in encouraging intra-ASEAN dialogue on emerging security issues, allowing ASEAN stakeholders to engage on sensitive topics in a way that respects ASEAN centrality and member state sovereignty. The demand-driven approach enables APSP to respond to specific requests from ASEAN, tailoring its activities to align with the priorities and comfort zones of AMS. By providing rapid turnaround support to ASEAN requests, APSP has built credibility and trust within ASEAN, which is essential for fostering meaningful, sustained dialogue. Indeed, program relevance has been enhanced by these approaches in its implementation, in particular by ensuring that all activities are firmly grounded in evidence-based analysis and that support is not only demand-driven but that such demand is generated according to identified needs and gaps.

This flexible approach has proven particularly effective in APSP's cybersecurity initiatives, where APSP has responded to ASEAN's growing concerns about digital security and cyber resilience. In response to member states' interest in enhancing cybersecurity capacity, APSP facilitated a workshop in Singapore, where top experts and ASEAN officials could exchange knowledge and best practices. An interviewee reflected on the success of the workshop, stating, *'the Singapore cybercrime workshop was impactful, bringing together top experts and an engaged audience eager*

for self-improvement'. By providing a platform for ASEAN officials to learn from Australian expertise in cybersecurity, APSP has encouraged intra-ASEAN dialogue on cyber resilience and supported ASEAN's efforts to implement international cyber norms. The demand-driven approach allows APSP to engage with ASEAN on emerging issues such as cybersecurity without imposing external agendas, reinforcing once again Australia's role as a partner that respects ASEAN's sovereignty and security concerns.

Leveraging established partnerships

A crucial component of APSP's strategy in fostering intra-ASEAN dialogue is its emphasis on leveraging established partnerships within ASEAN to support collaborative, multi-stakeholder initiatives. By working closely with entities such as the ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation and the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry, APSP has strengthened its role as a facilitator of cross-regional cooperation on peace and security. For instance, the Women for Peace Registry has served as a valuable platform for addressing WPS, allowing ASEAN member states to share experiences and strategies for integrating gender considerations into national security frameworks. APSP's support for these initiatives has encouraged ASEAN to adopt a more holistic, inclusive approach to security, particularly in areas where member states may have limited capacity or expertise.

Additionally, APSP's collaboration with influential AMS, such as the Philippines and Indonesia, has created critical entry points for intra-ASEAN cooperation on politically sensitive issues. By aligning APSP activities with the priorities of these key ASEAN members, APSP has fostered greater regional buy-in and facilitated joint action on transnational challenges. For example, APSP's close cooperation with Indonesia's counter-terrorism agency, which leads the SOMTC, has enabled smoother program approvals and strengthened APSP's role within ASEAN's counter-terrorism frameworks. One Australian official highlighted the significance of these established relationships, stating that *'working with Indonesia's counter-terrorism agency as the lead within ASEAN's senior officials meeting on transnational crime (SOMTC) has facilitated smoother processes, as established relationships have made approvals easier'*. This strategic alignment with key AMS has enhanced APSP's ability to engage on sensitive topics while reinforcing ASEAN's collective response to security threats.

Longer-term outcomes

APSP's focus on fostering intra-ASEAN dialogue has yielded long-term benefits by establishing sustained platforms for knowledge exchange and collaborative problem-solving on security issues, which have begun to establish long-term foundations, though further work in follow-on programs will be essential to fully realize sustained benefits. By building trust and encouraging transparency among AMS, APSP has contributed to a more cohesive regional response to transnational threats, reinforcing ASEAN's collective resilience. Through APSP-supported workshops, AMS officials have gained insights into regional security challenges, such as cybercrime and counter-terrorism, that go beyond bilateral concerns. This regionalised approach not only promotes consistency in ASEAN's security responses but also strengthens intra-ASEAN networks that can be mobilised in times of crisis.

For instance, APSP's initiatives in cyber capacity-building have empowered ASEAN officials to address cyber threats collectively, with workshops providing AMS with practical tools and frameworks for implementing cybersecurity protocols. These efforts have encouraged ASEAN member states to collaborate on developing unified responses to digital threats, enhancing ASEAN's

overall cyber resilience. One interviewee emphasised the value of these collaborative efforts, stating that *‘Australia is organising a capacity-building workshop to support ASEAN member states in implementing UNGGE norms for responsible state behaviour in cyberspace’*, endorsed by ASEAN in March 2024. By promoting international cyber norms within ASEAN, APSP has facilitated a shared understanding of responsible cyber behaviour, reinforcing ASEAN’s security architecture in the digital domain.

Survey feedback

Survey respondents strongly consider that the activities in which they participated provided considerable benefits by providing opportunities to share knowledge and establish professional connections, and the opportunity to gain insights from Australian expertise. Respondents responded very favourably concerning the issues encompassed by the activities, the types of activities provided and balance between theoretical and practical elements, and the quality of expertise and reference materials. These elements are confirmed in the table below:

The activity provided an opportunity to share knowledge				
Very satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat	Not satisfied	N/A
56%	24%	12%	4%	4%
The activity provided an opportunity to establish professional connections				
Very satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat	Not satisfied	N/A
64%	28%	4%	4%	-
The issues covered in the activity				
Very satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat	Not satisfied	N/A
56%	24%	12%	8%	-
The type of activity offered				
Very satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat	Not satisfied	N/A
52%	28%	16%	4%	-
The balance between theoretical knowledge and practical know-how				
Very satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat	Not satisfied	N/A
48%	24%	20%	8%	-
The quality of contributing experts				
Very satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat	Not satisfied	N/A
68%	16%	8%	4%	4%
The quality of reference materials received				
Very satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat	Not satisfied	N/A
48%	24%	16%	8%	4%
The opportunity to gain insight from Australian expertise				
Very satisfied	Satisfied	Somewhat	Not satisfied	N/A
60%	20%	8%	8%	4%

These viewpoints were confirmed by the survey narrative feedback provided, which indicated that the activities provided valuable foundational knowledge on the crucial political security issues, and fostered cooperation among ASEAN officials on key regional issues, including maritime security. Many participants felt that the activity addressed common challenges faced by UNCLOS member states, helping them understand how to apply the Law of the Sea within their countries and strengthen

collaboration across ASEAN. One participant commented that *‘there are no gaps from this activity’*, suggesting that the program was comprehensive in covering essential topics.

However, some respondents noted shortcomings. While activities facilitated discussion on regional security and transnational crime, several participants felt it lacked *‘concrete solutions and a clear roadmap for action,’* particularly in implementing strategies across ASEAN. Others pointed out that regional issues were not used as case studies, and only limited information on current developments was provided, which limited the program’s immediacy and relevance. There was also a call for inclusivity, emphasising the importance of involving all ASEAN members, civil society, and greater representation for women in regional security exercises to ensure holistic engagement.

Participants valued the insights gained from expert engagement and discussions, which contributed to a *‘more nuanced understanding’* of ASEAN’s strategic environment and transnational crime challenges, including piracy and maritime security. Case studies on issues such as oil spill response highlighted the need for collaborative efforts in maritime security. One respondent stressed the importance of ongoing cooperation through *‘inclusive exercises for all men and women of all UNCLOS member states,’* advocating for gender equity in maintaining regional peace and prosperity.

While the activities effectively addressed foundational regional challenges and cooperation, participants called for clearer action plans, case studies, up-to-date information, and more inclusivity, particularly regarding gender and civil society representation. These additions to future activities could further enhance their relevance and impact on regional political security.

Sustainability

EQ5 – To what extent has the program built ASEAN institutional capacity, fostered enduring partnerships and collaborations between ASEAN and Australia?

JC5.1 ASEAN stakeholders are likely to maintain consultation processes initially implemented under the program.

The program is likely to achieve a degree of sustainability, at ASEAN institutional and staff levels, and in terms of the partnership between Australia and ASEC. Future iterations could institutionalize these outcomes within ARF or other permanent ASEAN mechanisms, ensuring sustainability beyond the current APSP timeline. Survey respondents and ASEC interviewees who took part in APSP activities such as professional development sessions and workshops have also indicated that they have gained knowledge and skills as a result. The workshop observed by the evaluators, organised by APSP in September 2024 in Bangkok and hosted by the Royal Thai Police, was a case in point. The event focused on the handling of seized drugs and drug precursors, and brought together law enforcement officials from all ASEAN Member States (as well as Timor Leste) and ASEC representatives. Participants were highly engaged, peppering speakers with questions and sharing experience. Talking to the evaluators, several participants praised the practical, down-to-earth approach taken by the workshop’s organisers, allowing participants to draw their own conclusions and, review their country’s practices. The fact that senior academics and law enforcement experts from Australia attended and spoke at the workshop helped strengthen its relevance to participants.

It is of course impossible to know precisely to what extent recommendations from this workshop, and other similar APSP activities, result in practical changes in ASEAN Member States. However, anecdotal evidence provided by interviewees and survey respondents suggest that some of the skills and knowledge imparted through APSP activities have been used by participants, for example in

relation to developing action plan for the implementation of the UN Convention on the Law of the Sea, or advancing the WPS agenda at the national level. Responses to the survey suggest a mixed picture, with respondents recognising the importance of skills and knowledge acquired through APSP activities, but less positive about the extent to which their institution supported them in applying the acquired skills.

12. To what extent do you use the knowledge, skills and other benefits that you obtained from the programme activity?

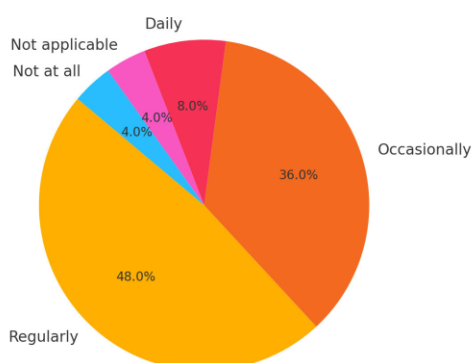


Fig. 7: Survey results Question 12

15. To what extent have you received support from your institution to apply your knowledge (leadership support, discussion and collaboration, time, facilities, funding, personnel, equipment, etc.)?

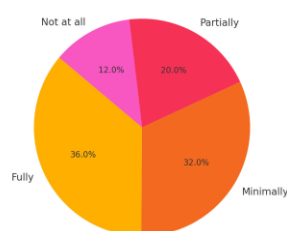


Fig. 8: Survey results Question 15

Emblematic comments by survey respondents in this respect include the following:

- *'I am currently taking the role of ADB policy officer in providing technical assistance for the Government of Timor-Leste to prepare its readiness to join all the ASEAN Economic Community pillars agreements defined under Timor-Leste Roadmap. In doing this, the knowledge and skills gained have benefited me in evaluating Timor-Leste post accession instruments related to maritime transport cooperation with ASEAN and I have also advised the maritime authority to understand about Timor Leste national Ocean policy document and the UNCLOS itself.'*
- *'I will leverage the networking opportunities to strengthen collaborations with regional counterparts on countering disinformation and cybersecurity threats, crucial areas for regional stability. Finally, I will advocate for increased Philippine involvement in regional security mechanisms, ensuring our nation plays an active role in shaping collaborative solutions.'*
- *'Internal barriers like bureaucratic processes and resource constraints, along with external challenges like the evolving regional security landscape, partially hinder the full utilisation of acquired knowledge and skills within my institution.'*

- *‘Our office has provided partial support in applying the knowledge gained. My boss encouraged my participation in the meeting and acknowledged its relevance to our work. I was granted time to attend and share my insights with colleagues. However, further support in terms of dedicated resources for implementing recommendations, such as funding for collaborative projects or personnel for specialised tasks, would be beneficial for maximising the impact of the knowledge gained.’*

As a more institutional level, the key factors that interviewees and reports have highlighted as driving APSP sustainability are the following:

- APSP is demand-driven. This means that activities implemented under APSP must receive the prior endorsement of ASEC, which itself requires consultations with Member States (as well as sectoral committees, lead shepherds and other relevant entities). The demand-driven nature of the program helps ensure the smooth implementation of activities and helps participants disseminate lessons learned in their respective country and institution. It is important not to underestimate the complexities that hide behind the ‘demand-driven’ adjective. One requirement is that each proposed activity be supported at the outset by a relevant ASEAN constituency such as a sectoral committee chair, a relevant Member State or ASEC Division, etc. (see process outline at *Efficiency* above). A diplomatic engagement by the Australian Mission may also be required to facilitate the process. Once agreed in principle, the specific contents of an activity are discussed between APSP and the ASEAN co-proponent – TAF’s organisational skills and its knowledge of ASEAN processes are important factors for the success of this design stage. The design stage is also the time when gender and other inclusion issues are considered, relevant experts contacted, and studies carried out if required to support the activity. Consultations between ASEC and Member States also occur during that period, leading up to the formal endorsement of the activity by ASEAN.
- APSP addresses specific areas of common ASEAN and Australian interest, and its approach is consistent with ASEAN strategies and action plans. A proposed activity must fall within the four APSP pillars, which bound the ASEAN-Australia political security partnership. Within those bounds, however, it is the role of the political/diplomatic dialogue between ASEAN and Australia to identify specific activities. This is typically done by matching a proposed activity with an existing policy agenda, action plan or political priority at ASEAN level. An additional consideration – key for sustainability – is that the activity brings clear added value to ASEAN, for example by enhancing knowledge, strengthening intra-ASEAN linkages, etc.

JC5.2 DFAT and other Australian government departments are able to build on partnerships and collaborations initiated under the program.

There is clear evidence from interviews with ASEC officials that trust has been built with Australia: several officials have noted that Australia ‘listens’ to ASEAN, does not seek to ‘impose’ its agenda, and ‘understands’ how ASEAN works. The role played by TAF behind the scenes as an organiser is also recognised, if implicit.

The relationship built between Australia and ASEC through APSP appears to contribute to Australia’s positive image among officials interviewed. The hope that APSP continues has been expressed virtually unanimously by interviewees, who each appear to see its added value in their own domain. It therefore appears that APSP has laid the groundwork for the development and maintenance of a trusting relationship between ASEC and Australia.

It is important to note that institutional capacity building is a long-term endeavour and that APSP, though technically a five-year program, only operated at scale since 2021, due to the pandemic: four years is a relatively short time in institutional capacity building terms. Nevertheless, the consultation processes initiated under APSP are now trusted within ASEC, and there is evidence from interviews that ASEC officials see benefits in perpetuating this partnership. The Australian Mission too has gained experience on which it can build to strengthen the partnership between ASEAN and Australia. It should also be noted that, while many other countries and groupings (such as the EU) have relationships with ASEAN in fields related to political security, APSP is the only long-term program embracing the four pillars. This unique character may not be *per se* an element of sustainability, but its loss – should APSP not go through a new phase – would most likely be felt; there is no obvious alternative partner able to fulfil the Australia's role.

Impact

EQ6 – What is the overall contribution of the program on regional political stability and security, as well as in promoting trust and collaboration in ASEAN?

JC6.1 Stakeholders within Australia, ASEAN and their regional partners identify actual or changes that the program is contributing to or otherwise encouraging.

Impact may be understood in broad terms as effects (changes) to which the program contributes through the achievement of its outcomes. When it comes to the regional political security environment, it is impossible to expect a partnership program to directly influence powerful geopolitical trends. However, some *elements of impact* may be identified, which stakeholders themselves attribute in part to the program. These include the following:

- Strengthening ownership and effectiveness of existing policy instruments. Several interviewees and survey respondents noted that activities such as training sessions on UNCLOS, cybercrime, or integration of the WPS agenda into policy, have contributed to national policy reviews and helped networking among ASEAN officials.
- APSP activities on cybersecurity and transnational organised crime are also said by some interviewees to contribute to developing coordination and cooperation among law enforcement officials across the ASEAN region. CSO representatives have also noted that APSP helps them open avenue of cooperation with law enforcement agencies on issues such as child protection and human trafficking.
- The program also appears to be changing participants' perceptions about the WPS agenda by highlighting the potential for linkages with strategies on maritime security and transnational organised crime.

16. To what extent the programme activity contributed to changing your own or your institution's policies and practices?

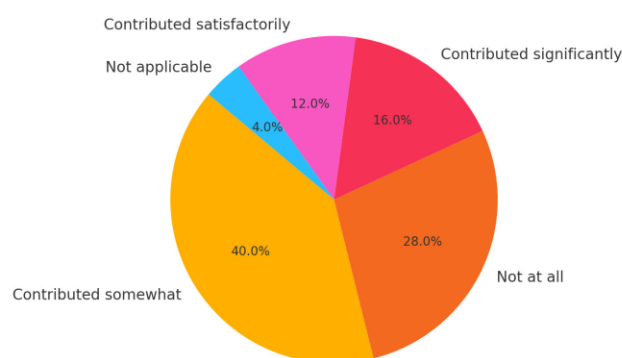


Fig. 9: Survey results Question 16

17. In your opinion, to what extent has the programme activity contributed to strengthening political security in the ASEAN region, and increasing mutual understanding and trust?

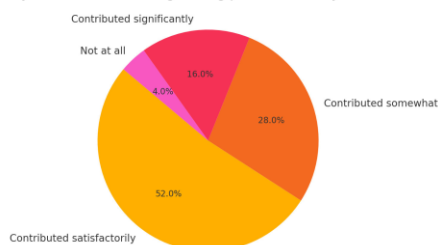


Fig. 10: Survey results Question 17

Similarly, in line with the above charts, survey respondents also identified elements of impact, including perceptions and policy approaches, and highlighted the value of cross-sectoral linkages encouraged by APSP:

- *'The activity contributed to changing our government's own policy on the importance of ratifying the Timor-Leste national Ocean Policy which have adapted the UNCLOS as its national document for line ministries to implements.'*
- *'Since I participated in the activity any discussion on GBV and women peace and security always include the dimension of transnational crime.'*
- *'ASEAN member States including Timor-Leste officials attending the activity were coming from cross-sectoral such as from different line Ministries stakeholders namely from the Ministry of Defence maritime authority officials, Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, maritime boundary officials, Ministry of Agriculture, Ocean and Fisheries. Women in Maritime Association of Timor-Leste and WIMA Asia, whom I also represent as its communication officer with many experts from Australia.'*

At the ASEC institutional level too, the program appears to be encouraging more cross-sector interactions, meetings and mutual invitations to workshops and other APSP events. The range of institutional and civil society actors involved in activities (often in relation to the GEDSI agenda) has also been noted positively by ASEC and ASEAN Member State officials. Many participants in APSP activities appear to recognise the value of cross-sectoral approaches in relation to political security. It remains, however, that the program has not yet reached a critical mass of stakeholders.

JC6.2 Australian and ASEAN stakeholders perceive an increase in mutual understanding and trust in relation to one or more of the target political security areas.

The program is clearly designed to enhance Australian-ASEAN engagement. This was described by an Australian official as follows: *‘It is a program that has political engagement as a focus, but in its end of investment outcomes, it is quite clear that it is still a development program, in that it is to support ASEAN and ASEAN’s ability to lead on political security issues [...] particularly its ability to look at them from a cross-pillar or cross-sectoral perspective. But that said, yes, it very much has the flavour of an engagement program, very much around increasing Australia/ASEAN engagement on political security issues.’*

Indeed, the program team and the Australian Mission have repeatedly made clear to ASEC and other ASEAN stakeholders that Australia is *‘a committed partner that is supporting the region on its own terms, on the region’s terms’*. In that sense, APSP is *‘designed to be very much about supporting ASEAN centrality and ASEAN leadership’* on political security issues. This Australian engagement has been assessed positively by many interviewees, including ASEAN diplomats who noted that APSP activity *‘show that it’s possible to work on challenging issues in a way that supports ASEAN leadership without trying to intervene with outside agendas’*. This view underpins the program’s sustainability, in the sense that the relationship developed through APSP with Australia helps ASEAN Member States maintain the momentum of policy issues as sensitive, for example, as the WPS agenda. According to an Indonesian official, Australia’s support for the ASEAN WPS summit provided an opportunity to Indonesia and the Philippines to showcase their WPS National Action Plans and encourage fellow Member States to develop similar plans.

GEDSI

EQ7 – To what extent has the program mainstreamed gender equality, disability and social inclusion in its activities, outcomes and impacts?

The program has made very substantial headway in implementing DFAT’s GEDSI agenda, which was recognised by participants and survey respondents alike. The program has a detailed GEDSI strategy (first issued in 2021, last updated in October 2023), summarised as follows:

‘The Strategy adopts a combination of a twin-track approach and an adaptive approach in pursuing GEDSI. While the twin-track approach ensures the due GEDSI consideration in APSP, the adaptive approach takes into account the underlining character of APSP as a demand-driven program that is responsive to ASEAN leadership and ASEAN-led regional cooperation.’²⁷

The implementation of the strategy leverages the numerous ASEAN commitments in relation to gender equality, implementation of the WPS agenda, prevention of gender-based violence, etc. Similarly, ASEAN has committed to disability inclusion, including in its Community Vision 2025.

In essence, APSP’s GEDSI approach has focused on moving the GEDSI agenda outside the socio-cultural sphere, towards the security (maritime and cyber) and law enforcement spheres. As one APSP remarked, it was important to connect the WPS agenda to the political security sphere because *‘if the political security actors don’t buy into it, it will never really become institutionalised’*. Part of the

²⁷ GEDSI Strategy, October 2023, p.7

GEDSI agenda was therefore centred on the provision of technical and strategic advice to ASEC, encouraging ASEAN to ‘bring in more and more political security actors’ in the WPS agenda.

GEDSI-focused activities

In addition to ensuring and documenting a degree of gender balance in activities (participants, invited speakers) the program has clearly ensured that gender and women’s rights issues are addressed under each APSP pillar. APSP’s GEDSI Coordinator noted that *‘there was a real willingness from the leaders of the women’s sector bodies at that point to engage’* on political security issues. In accordance with the GEDSI strategy indicators, which require at least one GEDSI-focused activity in each APSP policy area. This was done in relation to maritime security (link with WPS); transnational crime (workplace gender-based exploitation); cybersecurity (gender-specific sessions in SOMTC and ASEC cybersecurity activities, and of course in relation to the WPS agenda itself. Activities aimed at youth and persons with disabilities have also been implemented with a cross-sectoral approach. The GEDSI Coordinator stated that *‘we did a whole training on cyber security. We brought in an expert who is also a member of the ASEAN Women for Peace registry. So again, it was a very good way of linking our support for ASEAN WPS’* to the cybersecurity agenda.

In addition, the GEDSI strategy has been one of the driving forces behind the cross-pillar, cross-sector approach encouraged by APSP – linking for example WPS and climate security.

Survey responses

Survey respondents have generally been appreciative of the GEDSI agenda, and noted the effectiveness of its implementation. However, they also noted that gender equality remained insufficiently mainstreamed in ASEAN: APSP activities *‘should introduce elements on Gender into the training programs, to ensure that leaders in ASEAN and its partner countries may promote an inclusive program to achieve the continuous ASEAN region’s stability in order to reach prosperity for the entire ASEAN community.’*

19. In your opinion, to what extent did the programme activity integrate or discuss issues related to gender, disability and social inclusion?

21 responses

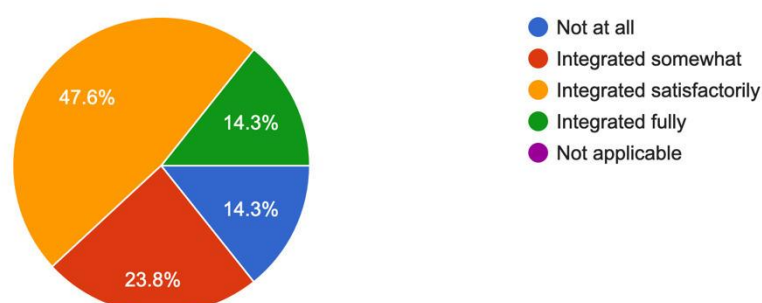


Fig. 11: Survey results Question 19

It is also to be noted that the program has reached out to a substantial number of women. The most recent APSP semi-annual report, covering the first half of 2024, included the two charts illustrating this point:

GEDSI KPI 3: At least 25% of participants in APSP activities are women

662 of registered participants to date were women.

Activity	% of women participants
ASEAN-Australia Cyber Capacity Building Workshop	31.53%
1st Professional Development Workshop for ASEAN Secretariat	60%
ASEAN-Australia Workshop to Exchange Practices on Community Resilience Programs to Counter Radicalisation and Violent Extremism	43.48%
ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Conference	74.32%
ASEAN WPS Summit: High-Level Dialogue	71.76%
APSP - AWPR Knowledge Exchange	83.33%

GEDSI KPI 3: At least 25% of participants in APSP activities are women

Activity	% of women participants
2nd Professional Development Workshop for ASEAN Secretariat	61.7%
Law of the Sea Training	50%
ASEAN-Australia Counter-Terrorism Workshop on Good Practice Approaches to Countering Violent Extremism, Hate Speech, and Disinformation Online	44.25%
Track 2 Workshop on Conflict Prevention and the ASEAN-led Regional Architecture	56%
Seminar for Timor-Leste on Political-Security Issues under Asean Political-security Community	32.86%
The 4th ACWC Partnership Conference 2023	*no sex disaggregated data (Not APSP-led activity)
Validation Workshop on Finalisation of the ASEAN Declaration on Strengthening Care Economy and Resilience Towards ASEAN Community Post-2025 And Related Meetings	78.24%
3rd ASEAN Women Leaders' Summit: "Strengthening Care Economy and Resilience Towards ASEAN Community Post-2025" and the Pre-Summit Events	85.16%

In relation to the inclusion component of GEDSI, targeting people living with disabilities and/or disabled people's organisations, substantial headway has been made, though to a lesser degree than in relation to gender equality. There is most likely scope for strengthening the disability inclusion aspect of the program by involving more civil society organisations across ASEAN, and their Australian counterparts.

Future Programming

The following section examines the options available for a future iteration of the APSP, and indeed looking further beyond any second phase. It explores the added value of TAF, possible themes and content for a future program, potential approaches, options for restructuring the program, and potential partners for future collaboration.

Added value of TAF

TAF's longstanding engagement with ASEAN has endowed it with a nuanced understanding of the ASEAN Secretariat's (ASEC) internal processes, protocols, and expectations. This expertise is crucial for navigating the complex bureaucratic landscape of ASEAN, which often involves lengthy lead times for activity endorsement and participant selection by member states. TAF's familiarity with ASEAN procedures has allowed for the efficient execution of APSP activities, minimising delays and ensuring well-coordinated events. Their ability to align APSP initiatives with ASEAN expectations has bolstered the program's reputation within the region, establishing its reputation as being Asian-centric rather than an external imposition.

The organisation's embedded presence in Southeast Asia provides APSP with unparalleled access to regional experts, institutions, and stakeholders. TAF's networks enable rapid identification and engagement of relevant parties, essential for addressing niche issues within ASEAN. The staff, including former ASEAN officials, facilitate smooth communication and foster trust with ASEAN stakeholders. This trust is crucial for the acceptance and success of APSP initiatives, as noted by a DFAT official who observed that TAF's responsiveness and understanding of ASEAN processes have lessened DFAT's workload significantly.

TAF and DFAT have developed a mutually beneficial division of labour that leverages each organisation's strengths. TAF handles the logistical and operational aspects, allowing DFAT to focus on strategic oversight and diplomatic relations. Despite the absence of formal role definitions, both parties have established a working relationship that enhances the program's effectiveness. TAF's operational focus and regional engagement capabilities enable DFAT to concentrate on overarching strategy, creating a streamlined approach that reinforces the APSP's image as a sophisticated partnership.

One of TAF's most significant contributions is its capacity to present the program as an ASEAN-aligned initiative. With a team predominantly composed of ASEAN nationals, TAF has mitigated potential biases against Western-led programs and fostered deeper trust and engagement from ASEAN stakeholders. This approach has been instrumental in building rapport with ASEAN officials, many of whom value programs that reflect ASEAN's cultural and political norms. TAF's representation of APSP as an 'Asian' initiative has solidified its reputation as a partner that respects ASEAN's values.

Furthermore, TAF's administrative capabilities are a cornerstone of APSP's operational success. Their proficiency in managing complex logistics ensures that events meet the high standards expected by ASEAN officials. TAF's responsiveness to unexpected changes, such as accommodating late registrations, underscores their commitment to seamless implementation. As one DFAT official noted, TAF provides practical support such as logistics and outreach to expert networks, which DFAT's smaller team couldn't manage alone.

Possible themes and content for the future program

The current thematic pillars—transnational crime, maritime security, cybersecurity, and women, peace, and security (WPS)—remain highly relevant to both ASEAN and Australia's strategic interests. Feedback from stakeholders indicates strong support for continuing these areas, as they align with ongoing regional challenges and priorities. Retaining these themes leverages existing relationships and builds on the progress made in previous iterations.

Adjustments within the existing themes could however enhance the program's impact. In transnational crime, for example, there is a growing emphasis on emerging issues such as cyber-enabled financial crimes, human trafficking linked to cyber activities, and disinformation campaigns. Entities such as the Australian Federal Police (AFP) highlight the need for cooperation on cybercrime and financial investigations, suggesting that these areas should receive increased focus.

In maritime security, the focus could shift towards unconventional security threats, including illegal fishing, marine environmental protection, and maritime domain awareness. Encouraging joint efforts among ASEAN member states on these issues could address potential flashpoints and enhance regional stability. Stakeholders suggested that providing parallel support to strengthening the ASEAN Regional Forum's (ARF) preventive diplomacy mandate could transform it into a proactive force in conflict prevention within the region.

Cybersecurity continues to be a critical area due to the rise of artificial intelligence (AI), deepfakes, and the integrity of online content. Addressing these emerging threats requires enhancing national frameworks and cooperation on cybersecurity norms, especially for member states needing additional support. The emphasis on combating disinformation aligns with ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Centre's (CyberCC) ongoing priorities.

Integrating the WPS agenda into ASEAN's digital economy goals was suggested as an area that could offer an opportunity for empowering women in security-related digital initiatives. Supporting women's involvement in digital security and leadership would strengthen ASEAN's overall resilience.

While the general consensus is that the existing program themes encompass the key regional priorities, some stakeholders suggested that introducing additional themes could further enhance its impact. One example provided was climate change and environmental security, which pose significant risks in Southeast Asia since environmental degradation and climate-related disasters can exacerbate conflicts and undermine regional stability. A stronger cross-cutting approach related to the environment could help support the APSP's commitment to an ASEAN cross-pillar approach.

Enhancing ASEAN's institutional capacity can improve the implementation of security initiatives. Strong governance structures are essential for addressing both traditional and non-traditional security threats. More extensive capacity-building programs for ASEAN institutions and support for policy development would be valuable additions.

Ensuring the program remains responsive to ASEAN's expressed needs is crucial. The demand-driven approach has allowed for adjustments based on shifting regional dynamics, ensuring continued relevance. Early consultation with ASEAN member states and other stakeholders, including OGD, can identify priorities and secure buy-in for activities.

Promoting broader participation from ASEAN member states and civil society enhances inclusivity and regional ownership. Ensuring a stronger implication of non-governmental actors would provide diverse perspectives and enrich policy development, whereas integrating marginalised communities

ensures that security initiatives are equitable and effective, and responsive to needs of AMS populations.

Options for restructuring the program

Maintaining the current structure by retaining TAF as the sole implementing partner, while making minor adjustments, is clearly a most attractive option. This approach leverages TAF's strengths in regional engagement and logistical expertise, maintains continuity, and builds on established relationships. However, it may not fully address the desire for broader partnerships and could leave potential political risks due to TAF's U.S. affiliation unmitigated.

Formalising partnerships with TAF's regional offices in Bangkok or Jakarta could be a further option. Contracting directly with these offices would reduce perceptions of U.S. influence, and emphasise the program's regional embedding. While this would require legal and administrative adjustments, it would serve to maintain TAF's operational efficiency, while alleviating political concerns.

Incorporating Australian institutions in a strategic advisory role offers another restructuring option. Partnering with Australian think tanks or universities would enhance the program's parallel 'Australian' identity and bring in specialised expertise, thus strengthening ties with Australian government departments. However, these institutions may lack the regional presence and networks that TAF offers, and there is a risk of diluting TAF's operational efficiency.

Adopting a consortium model by creating a group of multiple implementing partners, including regional organisations, could diversify expertise and resources. This approach could increase regional ownership and acceptance, but may introduce operational bottlenecks and complexity in coordination. Clear role definitions and management structures would be essential to avoid misaligned objectives.

Establishing a permanent facility or mechanism to supersede APSP presents a significantly more ambitious restructuring option. This long-term investment would provide structural longevity and stability, positioning Australia as a trusted, neutral partner in ASEAN. Creating a lasting facility embedded in ASEAN's structures would reinforce Australia's commitment to the region's stability and political security. However, this option would require significant investment and long-term commitment, and may face challenges in securing any required multilateral funding and support.

Regardless of the chosen structure, certain strategies can mitigate political risks and enhance effectiveness. Establishing partnerships or affiliations with other regional organisations, such as the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation (JCLEC) (see *below*) could enhance local credibility and reduce reliance on TAF for outreach and engagement. Collaborating with such entities would also underscore DFAT's commitment to ASEAN's security and development agenda.

Implementing structured management frameworks, such as establishing steering committees, advisory boards, and local engagement officers, would increase transparency and accountability. These structures would ensure alignment with ASEAN priorities and facilitate stakeholder engagement at various levels. For instance, a joint steering committee comprising representatives from DFAT, TAF, ASEAN, and potential partners would provide balanced governance, enabling strategic oversight and reinforcing the program's commitment to regional autonomy.

Assigning specific roles to each partner based on expertise would be crucial however, in particular in a consortium model. Clear role definitions would avoid overlap and ambiguity, ensuring that activities align with program goals rather than reflecting individual organisational interests. This approach

would allow APSP to benefit from a consortium's advantages and avoid risks of misalignment, without compromising operational coherence or political neutrality.

Two related elements also emerged from interviews, which could further improve the management of a future APSP phase, both related to the visibility of the program among Australian stakeholders, including OGDs, and their ASEAN counterparts. They concern forward planning and consultations on emerging issues:

- **Forward planning:** Some representatives of OGDs and civil society organisations noted that their institutions, which generally deal with ASEAN counterpart on a bilateral basis, do not necessarily understand the value to them of engaging with ASEAN, and in any case would benefit from advance notice of planned activities for budget planning purposes.
- **Emerging issues:** The management of a new phase of APSP could benefit from a process of consultation among Australian and ASEAN stakeholders, including Australian OGDs and academics, to identify emerging political security issues for APSP to address.

Potential partners for future collaboration

Engaging both Australian and regional institutions offers valuable expertise and perspectives that enhance APSP's alignment with ASEAN's strategic goals, and consideration should be given to expanding and formalising these relationships. In Australia, for example, the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) is a prominent think tank with extensive expertise in security, defence, and cybersecurity. Its involvement could bolster APSP's strategic offerings while addressing pressing ASEAN security concerns. As another example, The Lowy Institute, known for its research on Asia-Pacific policy and international relations, could offer research insights, organise high-level forums, and enhance diplomatic support. In addition, several Australian universities, including Monash University and the Australian National University (ANU), have departments that specialise in research and education focused on Southeast Asia. Collaborating even more strongly with academia could involve capacity-building programs, policy workshops, and academic exchanges, strengthening ASEAN and AMS institutional capacities.

Regional institutions, such as the ASEAN Institutes of Strategic and International Studies (ASEAN-ISIS) could provide unique insights into ASEAN's internal priorities and sensitivities. Collaborating more strongly with ASEAN-ISIS would allow APSP to access regionally relevant expertise, strengthen its credibility, and align more closely with ASEAN's diplomatic and strategic goals.

Several Australian stakeholders suggested increased ties with the Jakarta Centre for Law Enforcement Cooperation (JCLEC), a leading law enforcement institution founded through a partnership between the Australian Federal Police and the Indonesian National Police, and highly regarded in Southeast Asia. JCLEC's involvement in APSP could strengthen Australia's role as a crucial security partner, enhancing the program's regional acceptance and operational credibility.

Institutes such the Singapore-based Institute of Southeast Asian Studies (ISEAS - Yusof Ishak Institute) and the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) Jakarta also offer respected platforms for research and policy analysis. Collaborating with these or similar AMS institutions would deepen APSP's engagement with regionally respected scholars and policy analysts.

Conclusions

Overall Conclusion

The program has been successful in aligning with ASEAN's needs and priorities, enhancing mutual engagement, and contributing to regional political security. Its activities have been efficient and effective, fostering dialogue, building institutional capacity, and promoting trust. The program's integration of GEDSI considerations further strengthens its impact. Future programming should build on these strengths, addressing identified challenges to maximise its contribution to regional stability and collaboration.

Relevance

The program effectively addresses ASEAN's regional, political, and security challenges by aligning its objectives and activities with ASEAN's pressing needs in cybersecurity, maritime security, transnational crime, and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda.

- The program is grounded in a sound understanding of ASEAN's needs and capacities. It tackles the complex political security challenges faced by ASEAN and its member states through coordinated strategies, robust legal frameworks, enhanced cooperation, and engagement with external partners. This approach strengthens regional mechanisms and fosters a culture of collaboration.
- Aligning with the ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy (2017–2020), the program enhances regional cooperation and ICT security, addressing the evolving cyber threat landscape and the need for continuous updates to legal frameworks and specialised expertise.
- By focusing on the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF) Work Plan on Maritime Security, the program addresses critical concerns related to maritime security, including shared awareness, confidence-building measures, and capacity building in accordance with international laws like UNCLOS.
- The program aligns with the ASEAN Plan of Action in Combating Transnational Crime (2016–2025) and the SOMTC Work Program (2022–2024), enhancing cooperation among member states in addressing terrorism, human trafficking, and drug smuggling through information-sharing, legal cooperation, and capacity building.
- Supporting the integration of the WPS agenda into ASEAN's political security framework, the program promotes inclusive and sustainable peace, recognising the vital role of women in conflict prevention, resolution, and post-conflict reconstruction.
- The program's four target areas are well-aligned with both Australia's and ASEAN's policies and priorities. It operates within ASEAN's strategic frameworks, reinforcing ASEAN's capacity without imposing external priorities. This alignment strengthens the ASEAN-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership.
- The program forms a sound basis for continued and future engagement by fostering strategic alignment, integrating with ASEAN's structures and priorities, and being responsive to emerging threats. Its non-intrusive support model in sensitive areas builds trust and positions the program as a respected partner.

The program has significantly enhanced engagement and knowledge exchange, although challenges remain in fully engaging a diverse range of Australian government departments (OGDs).

- The program engages a growing range of agencies and organisations in both Australia and ASEAN, including sectoral bodies, the ASEAN Secretariat, institutes, and member states serving as chairs or lead shepherds. It has facilitated collaboration with OGD such as the Australian Federal Police (AFP) and academic institutions, enhancing mutual understanding.
- Participants recognise the reciprocal nature of learning and knowledge exchange. The program has established platforms for mutual engagement, fostering operational and strategic benefits. It leverages sectoral expertise and encourages mutual recognition of strategic priorities. However, limited OGD engagement has somewhat restricted the diversity of perspectives and expertise.

Efficiency

The program has been largely efficient in resource allocation and management.

- Human and financial resources were appropriately utilised, with activities representing 62% of the total budget. Staff costs are reasonable, reflecting the professional skills required for effective implementation.
- Program management is effective, with proactive and timely actions taken to address changing circumstances, including the pandemic. The partnership between DFAT and The Asia Foundation (TAF) has been instrumental, leveraging TAF's regional expertise and networks. However, procedural complexities in obtaining ASEAN endorsement have constrained efficiency, suggesting a need to streamline processes.

Effectiveness

The program has been effective in enhancing dialogue and information-sharing.

- The program emphasises mutual interaction among stakeholders, elevating Australia's visibility and strategic role within ASEAN. It has strengthened diplomatic ties, operational networks, and provided platforms for knowledge exchange. Challenges in engaging OGDs have limited a fully integrated approach.
- The program encourages ASEAN Member States and the ASEAN Secretariat to enhance consultation and dialogue. By integrating with ASEAN processes and sectoral bodies, it fosters cross-sectoral cohesion on sensitive issues such as WPS and leverages established partnerships to support collaborative initiatives.

Sustainability

The program has contributed to building institutional capacity and fostering enduring partnerships.

- ASEAN stakeholders are likely to maintain consultation processes initiated under the program. The demand-driven approach and alignment with ASEAN strategies ensure continued relevance and acceptance among member states.
- DFAT and other Australian government departments have opportunities to build on partnerships initiated under the program. Trust developed through the program lays the groundwork for future collaboration, though enhanced engagement with OGDs is needed to maximise potential.

Impact

The program has positively contributed to regional stability and trust.

- Stakeholders identify that the program strengthens ownership and effectiveness of policy instruments, enhances coordination among law enforcement officials, and promotes cross-sectoral linkages, contributing to regional security.
- There is a perceived increase in mutual understanding and trust between Australian and ASEAN stakeholders in the target areas. The program supports ASEAN centrality and leadership on political security issues, enhancing the partnership's depth.

Gender Equality, Disability, and Social Inclusion (GEDSI)

The program has substantially mainstreamed GEDSI considerations.

- A detailed GEDSI strategy has been effectively implemented, focusing on integrating the WPS agenda into the political security sphere. Gender and women's rights issues are addressed under each program pillar.
- The program has reached a substantial number of women participants and encouraged cross-sectoral approaches to inclusion. There is scope for further strengthening disability inclusion by involving more civil society organisations across ASEAN.

Future Programming

- **Flexibility and Adaptability:** The program's flexibility has been a key strength. Future iterations should maintain this adaptability to respond to ASEAN's evolving needs, including emerging threats like misinformation and cyber-enabled crimes.
- **Enhanced OGD Engagement:** Efforts should be made to increase engagement with Australian government departments to leverage a wider range of expertise and foster a more integrated approach.
- **Thematic Focus:** While current thematic pillars remain relevant, integrating additional themes such as environmental security could enhance cross-pillar approaches and address emerging regional challenges.
- **Structural Adjustments:** Streamlining activity endorsement processes and establishing consultative mechanisms to identify emerging issues can improve efficiency and effectiveness.
- **Partnership Expansion:** Expanding partnerships with regional organisations and institutions can enhance the program's impact and sustainability, fostering deeper regional ownership and collaboration.

Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Streamline activity endorsement process

Rationale: Procedural complexities have constrained efficiency and limited the program's timeliness.

Source: JC3.2 (Efficiency); JC1.3 (Relevance)

Steps to be taken:

- Initiate discussions with ASEAN Secretariat to review and streamline endorsement procedures.
- Propose clear timeframes for each approval step.
- Develop a joint agreement outlining the streamlined process.

Responsible parties: DFAT, The Asia Foundation (TAF), ASEAN Secretariat

Timeline: Within the next 2 months

Recommendation 2: Enhance engagement with Australian Government Departments (OGDs)

Rationale: Limited OGD engagement has restricted the diversity of expertise and perspectives, affecting program effectiveness.

Source: JC2.1 and JC4.1 (Effectiveness)

Steps to be taken:

- Organise inter-departmental briefings on program objectives and benefits.
- Share preliminary work plans with OGDs several months ahead to facilitate budgeting and participation.
- Include OGDs in immediate planning stages to align activities with their priorities.
- Provide advance notice of upcoming activities.

Responsible parties: DFAT, TAF, OGDs

Timeline: Initial meetings within 1 month; ongoing engagement and planning

Recommendation 3: Maintain and enhance program flexibility and adaptability

Rationale: Flexibility has been key to responding to ASEAN's evolving needs and emerging threats.

Source: JC4.1 (Effectiveness)

Steps to be taken:

- Continue the demand-driven approach.
- Regularly review and adjust activities to align with emerging challenges.
- Establish mechanisms to identify and incorporate new themes.
- Develop tailored strategies to address varying capacities among ASEAN Member States.

Responsible parties: TAF, DFAT, ASEAN Secretariat

Timeline: Ongoing throughout the remainder of the current program and into future programming

Recommendation 4: Consider the integration of additional thematic areas (e.g., environmental security)

Rationale: Incorporating new themes could enhance impact and address emerging regional challenges.

Source: Future Programming: Thematic Focus

Steps to be taken:

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consult ASEAN stakeholders to identify priority areas. • Develop plans to incorporate any new themes. • Allocate resources and expertise accordingly.
Responsible parties: TAF, DFAT, ASEAN Secretariat
Timeline: Consultations within next 2 months; integration in future program phase

Recommendation 5: Strengthen and formalise partnerships with regional organisations

Rationale: Expanding partnerships would enhance impact, sustainability, and regional ownership.

Source: *Future Programming: Partnership Expansion*

Steps to be taken:

- Identify potential regional partners (e.g., ASEAN-ISIS, JCLEC, regional universities).
- Initiate discussions.
- Plan for formal agreements and collaboration in the next program phase.

Responsible parties: DFAT, TAF, ASEAN Secretariat, potential partners

Timeline: Initiate partner identification and discussions within next 2 months; formalise partnerships in next program phase

Recommendation 6: Further integrate disability inclusion

Rationale: Scope exists to strengthen disability inclusion by involving more civil society organisations.

Source: *GEDSI Conclusion*

Steps to be taken:

- Engage with disability-focused CSOs in ASEAN.
- Include disability topics and representatives in activities.
- Develop initiatives targeting disability inclusion.

Responsible parties: TAF, DFAT, ASEAN Secretariat, CSOs

Timeline: Initiate within next 2 months; integrate into current and future activities

Recommendation 7: Establish a consultative mechanism for emerging issues

Rationale: A consultative body could enhance strategic planning and OGD engagement, to advise on emerging issues relevant to future programming

Source: *JC3.2 (Efficiency); Future Programming*

Steps to be taken:

- Propose forming a consultative committee with ASEAN and OGDs.
- Define mandate, membership, and schedule.
- Use the committee for planning the future program and identifying emerging issues.

Responsible parties: DFAT, TAF, ASEAN Secretariat, OGDs

Timeline: Establish within next 2 months; utilise for planning future program phase

Recommendation 8: Continue capacity building for ASEAN institutions

Rationale: Ongoing capacity building would ensure sustainability and long-term impact.

Source: *JC5.1 and JC5.2 (Sustainability)*

Steps to be taken:

- Identify capacity gaps within ASEAN institutions.

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop targeted capacity-building programs. • Monitor and evaluate impact.
Responsible parties: TAF, DFAT, ASEAN Secretariat
Timeline: Ongoing throughout the remainder of the current program and into future programming

Recommendation 9: Strengthen cross-pillar and cross-sectoral approaches

Rationale: Enhancing cross-sectoral collaboration addresses complex security issues effectively.

Source: *JC4.2 (Effectiveness); JC6.1 (Impact)*

Steps to be taken:

- Design activities involving multiple sectors and pillars.
- Encourage diverse stakeholder participation, including civil society and marginalised groups.
- Facilitate cross-sector knowledge exchange.

Responsible parties: TAF, DFAT, ASEAN Secretariat

Timeline: Ongoing throughout the remainder of the current program and into future programming

Recommendation 10: Improve Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) frameworks

Rationale: Enhanced M&E would capture qualitative outcomes and longer-term impacts.

Source: *Overall outcomes (Effectiveness)*

Steps to be taken:

- Enhance M&E frameworks to include qualitative indicators and participant feedback.
- Collect and analyse data on long-term outcomes.
- Use findings to inform adjustments.
- Incorporate participant suggestions for practical applications and inclusivity.

Responsible parties: TAF, DFAT

Timeline: Framework enhanced within next 1 month; ongoing analysis throughout remainder of program and into future programming

Recommendation 11: Explore options for program restructuring to enhance sustainability and effectiveness

Rationale: Considering different structural models could enhance the program's effectiveness and sustainability.

Source: *Future Programming; Added Value of TAF*

Steps to be taken:

- Assess potential benefits and challenges of different program structures (e.g., consortium model, strategic advisory roles for Australian institutions).
- Consult with key stakeholders, including ASEAN, TAF, Australian institutions, and potential regional partners.
- Develop a strategic plan outlining the preferred structure for future program phases.

Responsible parties: DFAT, TAF, ASEAN Secretariat, potential partners

Timeline: Initiate assessment within next 2 months; plan for implementation in next program phase

Next Steps:

- **Immediate Actions (within next 1-2 months):** Focus on initiating discussions, enhancing frameworks, collecting participant feedback, and organising meetings to address pressing recommendations that can impact the remaining program period.
- **Planning for Future Programming:** For recommendations that require longer-term implementation, efforts should concentrate on consultations, assessments, and preparing groundwork to ensure a smooth transition into the next program phase after April 2025.
- **Ongoing Initiatives:** Maintain momentum on activities that are continuous in nature, ensuring they are embedded into both the remainder of the current program and any future iterations.

Annex 1: Terms of Reference

Terms of Reference

Evaluation of the ASEAN-Australia Political Security Partnership (APSP)

I. **Background and Context:**

Since 1974, Australia has cooperated with Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) to promote a peaceful, stable, integrated and prosperous region. The ASEAN-Australia Political Security Partnership (APSP) is an AUD 10.5 million, six-year (2019-2025) investment of the Australian Government aimed at enhancing political and security cooperation between ASEAN and Australia. The program encompasses the outcomes and activities that contribute to strengthening regional stability, addressing shared challenges, and promoting cooperation among ASEAN Member States and between ASEAN and Australia in the political security landscape.

APSP began on 1 May 2019 and is currently ongoing until 30 April 2025. It is designed to provide flexible and demand-driven support to ASEAN and to promote ASEAN leadership and centrality in addressing regional political security challenges. Towards a broader goal of an improved security environment in the Indo-Pacific region, APSP intends to support stronger relationship between ASEAN and Australia and to enhance ASEAN's ability to lead more coordinated, cohesive and inclusive responses to transnational political security issues. The program has the following end-of-investment outcomes (EOIO):

EOIO 1: Stronger ASEAN-Australia relationships and engagement

EOIO 2: ASEAN is addressing targeted political security issues using increasingly effective cross-sectoral and/or multi-stakeholder approaches

APSP focuses primarily on four broad policy areas of 1) maritime security; 2) cybersecurity; 3) women, peace and security (WPS); and 4) transnational crime. In addition, APSP is open to support ASEAN in other political security issues as opportunity or demand from ASEAN arises. Activities of APSP include workshops, seminars, trainings, and knowledge sharing sessions, among others that engage relevant ASEAN sectoral bodies, ASEAN Secretariat and other entities associated with ASEAN. In addition, APSP also administers policy papers and researches as well as support institutional strengthening of ASEAN.

APSP recognizes that gender equality, disability and social inclusion (GEDSI) is critical for ASEAN to realize a coordinated, cohesive and inclusive responses to transnational political security issues. As such, APSP integrates GEDSI throughout the program cycle, from activity design to implementation, and monitoring and evaluation and learning.

Under overall management by Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT), APSP is implemented by The Asia Foundation (TAF). DFAT also allocates fund for other Australian government departments (OGD) to implement the activity with ASEAN.

APSP's key partners and target beneficiaries are ASEAN sectoral bodies, particularly those under ASEAN Political Security Community (APSC), ASEAN Secretariat, relevant ASEAN centres and entities, and ASEAN Member States governments. Other stakeholders of APSP include civil society organizations, think tanks, academia, and private sector entities that contribute to the program's objectives and activities.

II. Purpose of the Evaluation

The evaluation is an integral part of the APSP Program's Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Plan as well as DFAT's investment. The evaluation will cover the period from **1 May 2019 to 30 June 2024** or the first five years of APSP.

Overall, the evaluation will contribute to evidence-based policy development, program improvement, and strategic planning in the field of political and security cooperation between ASEAN and Australia. In particular, it will provide an in-depth analysis and assessment of the APSP achievements and challenges against related DFAT's quality criteria. It will provide management responses to relevant program managers and policymakers in making informed decisions, adapting strategies, and allocating resources effectively for the remaining period of APSP and beyond.

In keeping with the APSP MEL approach, the evaluation will be conducted for the **following purposes:**

- **Accountability and Learning:** The evaluation serves as a mechanism for accountability, ensuring that APSP is being implemented as intended and in line with its stated objectives. It provides an opportunity to assess the program's performance, identify strengths and weaknesses, and learn from past experiences. The evaluation will contribute to evidence-based decision-making and enable program managers to make informed adjustments and improvements for the remaining period of APSP and possibly a successor program. .
- **Evidence-Based Program Development:** The evaluation will assess the program's objectives and activities in addressing transnational political security challenges, while also identifying opportunities for refinement or expansion. It will identify areas for improvement and provide recommendations for enhancing its impact, taking into consideration the decisions for a possible successor program. The findings of the evaluation will guide future planning, resource allocation, and strategic decision-making within the program. Additionally, these evaluation results will inform decision-makers and stakeholders about the outcomes and impacts of APSP, supporting evidence-based policy development, strategic planning, and decision-making in the field of political and security cooperation between ASEAN and Australia. The ultimate goal is to contribute to the formulation of evidence-based policies and interventions that effectively address regional security challenges and promote peace and stability.
- **Stakeholder Engagement and Communication:** The evaluation process itself provides a platform for engaging stakeholders and fostering dialogue among key actors involved in APSP. It allows for the exchange of perspectives, experiences, and lessons learned, facilitating a shared understanding of the program's achievements, challenges, and potential areas for collaboration. The evaluation results will be communicated to stakeholders through reports, presentations, and dissemination activities, ensuring transparency and promoting dialogue on program effectiveness and impact. The evaluation report will also be made available on DFAT's website for public access.

The **primary users** of the evaluation results are program managers, senior managers and senior executives of DFAT, particularly at Australian Mission to ASEAN; and program manager, program team and senior executives of TAF. The evaluation report will be made available on the website of DFAT for public access.

III. Evaluation Scope and Questions

The evaluation of APSP will address the following DFAT's quality criteria:

- **Relevance:** Assess the relevance of APSP in addressing regional transnational political security challenges within the ASEAN context. Determine the extent to which the program's objectives, activities, and approaches align with the needs and priorities of ASEAN and Australia.
- **Efficiency:** Evaluate the efficiency of the program's implementation, including the utilization of resources, management practices, and coordination mechanisms. Assess the cost-effectiveness of the program in achieving its intended outcomes and outputs.
- **Effectiveness:** Assess the effectiveness of APSP in achieving its objectives and intended outcomes. Evaluate the extent to which the program has contributed to strengthening ASEAN-Australia relationship and engagement; and ASEAN's ability to lead more coordinated, cohesive and inclusive to transnational political security challenges.
- **Sustainability:** Examine the sustainability of the program's impacts and outcomes. Consider the extent to which the program has fostered long-term partnerships within ASEAN and between ASEAN and Australia, built institutional capacity, and established mechanisms for ongoing cooperation and dialogue.
- **Impact:** Assess the overall impact of APSP on regional political security environment and cooperation. Examine the program's contribution to addressing transnational political security challenges, promoting trust and understanding, and strengthening regional institutions.
- **Mainstreaming Gender Equality, Disability and Social Inclusion (GEDSI):** Evaluate how APSP has sought to strengthen GEDSI in its development efforts. Assess the program's integration of GEDSI considerations in its activities, outcomes, and impacts.

The evaluation will seek to answer the following **evaluation questions** to generate relevant information and insights. These questions are indicative and may be refined or further elaborated during the evaluation planning process.

Relevance:	How well do the program's objectives, activities, and approaches address the regional political and security challenges and priorities within the ASEAN context? Has the program provided opportunities for engagement and knowledge exchange between ASEAN and Australian agencies and organisations working on political-security issues?
Efficiency:	How well and efficient were the resources allocated to support ASEAN and Australia priorities and cross-sectoral and multi-sectoral approaches in program implementation?
Effectiveness:	To what extent were the program's activities and initiatives effective in enhancing dialogue mechanisms and information-sharing among stakeholders?
Sustainability:	To what extent has the program built ASEAN institutional capacity, fostered enduring partnerships and collaborations between ASEAN and Australia?

Impact:	What is the overall contribution of the APSP Program on regional political stability and security as well as in promoting trust and collaboration in ASEAN?
Mainstreaming GEDSI:	To what extent has the program mainstreamed gender equality, disability and social inclusion in its activities, outcomes, and impacts?

The evaluation will cover all activities under APSP from the start on **1 May 2019 to 30 June 2024**. The evaluation will take into account the operating context, both internal and external, of APSP and how APSP has evolved and adapted throughout the evaluation timeframe, which covers the Inception Phase (May – October 2019), First Implementation Phase (November 2019 – June 2020), Transition Phase (July 2020 – January 2021) and Second Implementation Phase (February 2021 onward).

The evaluation will also pay due consideration to interests, concerns, and relevance of various actors, partners and beneficiaries involved in the implementation of APSP.

IV. Evaluation Methodology and Approach

The evaluation will be conducted by an evaluation team under guidance and management of DFAT and TAF.

The evaluation will employ a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative and quantitative data collection methods. It will build upon existing monitoring and evaluation data of APSP in order to provide a comprehensive understanding of the program.

The specific and final methodology will be determined through consultations among the evaluation team, DFAT and TAF, and tailored to meet the evaluation's purpose, scope and available resources.

In addition, the conduct of the evaluation and all deliverables should adhere to relevant DFAT's evaluation standards (see: <https://www.dfat.gov.au/about-us/publications/dfat-design-monitoring-evaluation-learning-standards>)

The following provides a general outline of the potential methodology and approach:

- **Desk Review:** A comprehensive desk review will be conducted to gather and analyse relevant program documents, reports, policy papers, and other available literature. This review will provide a solid understanding of the program's design, implementation, and outcomes, serving as a foundation for the evaluation.
- **Data Collection and Analysis:** The evaluation will employ a mixed-methods approach to gather data from various sources. Quantitative data will be collected through surveys, questionnaires, and statistical analysis to measure program outcomes and assess indicators. Qualitative data will be collected through stakeholder consultations and case studies to explore stakeholders' experiences, perceptions, and narratives related to the program.

The stakeholder consultations will involve DFAT, TAF and relevant OGDs; key ASEAN partners and beneficiaries; and other relevant stakeholders of APSP. Consultation methods could be in forms of interview (virtual or in-person), focus group discussion (virtual or in-person), and structured survey to gather diverse perspectives and insights on APSP. The identification of key partners and beneficiaries and other relevant stakeholders will be done in consultation with DFAT and TAF.

- **Data Validation:** The evaluation will employ data validation techniques to ensure the reliability and validity of the collected data. This may include triangulation of data from multiple sources.
- **Reporting and Dissemination:** The report will present key findings and highlight actionable recommendations for program improvement, policy development, and strategic decision-making in line with DFAT's standards. The report will be submitted to DFAT and TAF who may request the presentation of findings. The final report will also be published on DFAT's website.

V. Evaluation Timeline and Outputs

The evaluation team will be accountable for producing the following deliverables:

Indicative timeline	Outputs by the evaluation team
By 24 June 2024	Draft evaluation plan
By 1 July 2024	Final evaluation plan
July 2024	Data collection, analysis and validation Presentation of initial findings (Aide Memoire)
By 9 August 2024	Draft evaluation report
By 31 August 2024	Final evaluation report
TBC	Presentation of the evaluation findings to DFAT and TAF

- **Evaluation Plan (no more than 15 pages, 5 days):** Based upon desk review and initial discussion with DFAT and TAF, the evaluation team will develop the evaluation plan. The evaluation plan, at minimum, will include evaluation questions, proposed methodology, sources of data, and data collection procedures for addressing each evaluation question. The evaluation plan will also cover a schedule of tasks, activities, and deliverables (including report outline). The evaluation plan serves as a basis for confirming a shared understanding of the evaluation between the evaluation team, DFAT and TAF and allows for clarifications and adjustments as necessary.
- **Data collection, analysis, and validation and presentation of preliminary findings (20 days):** Following the approval of the evaluation plan by DFAT and TAF (unless otherwise agreed), the evaluation team will commence comprehensive data collection (including stakeholder consultations), analysis and validation. Subject to the advice from DFAT and TAF, the stakeholder consultations may be conducted virtually or in-person. At the end of stakeholder consultations, the evaluation team will prepare an Aide Memoire and present preliminary findings against each evaluation criteria to DFAT and TAF.
- **Draft Evaluation Report (no more than 30 pages, excluding annexes) (8 days):** The evaluation team will develop a draft evaluation report based on a mutually agreed outline, that presents the findings, analysis, and conclusions of the evaluation. This report will address the evaluation questions and provide an assessment of APSP against the criteria. The draft report will also include actionable recommendations for program improvement, policy development, and decision-making. The draft evaluation report will be submitted to DFAT and

TAF who will have an opportunity to review and provide feedback to ensure that it meets the intended purpose and standards.

- **Final Evaluation Report (5 days):** Based on the feedback received during the review of the draft report, the evaluation team will finalize the evaluation report. The final report will incorporate any necessary revisions, improvements, and additional analysis. It will provide a comprehensive and evidence-based account of the evaluation findings, conclusions, and recommendations. The report will be structured in a clear and accessible manner, ensuring that it effectively communicates the evaluation results to the intended users.
- **Presentation of the final evaluation findings (upon request):** The evaluation team may be requested to provide presentation or verbal briefing of the findings to DFAT and TAF. In addition, the evaluation team may be requested to prepare evaluation brief that summarizes the key findings, conclusions, and recommendations of the evaluation in a concise and accessible format. The evaluation team may also be asked to participate in a knowledge sharing activity to present the findings.

All deliverables will be in English and be written in evidence-based manner.

VI. Qualifications of the Evaluation Team

Given the scope of the evaluation, a team of up to 2 members, including one Team Leader, will be recruited and selected by DFAT and TAF based on the following qualifications.

The Team Leader should have:

- Post graduate degree with a minimum of 10 years of relevant professional experience including conducting independent evaluations of regional development projects or programs. Experience in completing the evaluation of a project or program involving ASEAN is an advantage.
- Sound knowledge of ASEAN policies, architecture and systems. Knowledge of DFAT aid development and systems is also an advantage.
- Extensive knowledge of evaluation methodologies, including qualitative and quantitative data collection, desk review, stakeholder consultations and ability to apply suitable methodologies to answer the evaluation questions.
- Sound technical knowledge in evaluating regional or multi-country programs focusing on political security issues.
- Excellent interview and analytical skills. Proven experience in conducting data collection with government officials, including through interview or focus group discussion.
- Excellent verbal and written communication skills in English. Ability to write constructive reports and convey complex issues and ideas in easy-to-understand manner.
- Ability to lead the team toward high quality deliverables and within the agreed timeline.

Overall, the team should meet the following criteria:

- Demonstrate M&E skills including practical experience in monitoring and evaluation of regional or multi-country development programs.

- At least one member should have expertise in evaluating GEDSI aspect of the program. It is expected that the composition of the review team will reflect DFAT’s GEDSI values.
- Have a practical and realistic approach to program recommendations.
- Previous experience in the evaluation of the development programs of DFAT.
- No prior involvement in the implementation of APSP. Any potential conflict of interest must be disclosed at the time of application.
- Ability to ensure the team’s independence throughout the evaluation process to uphold the credibility and impartiality of the evaluation findings.

VII. Implementation Arrangements and Budget

The implementation of the evaluation of APSP will be jointly managed by DFAT (led by Australian Mission to ASEAN) and TAF (led by TAF Thailand). DFAT and TAF will jointly select the evaluation team and provide guidance to the evaluation team in the conduct of the evaluation. DFAT and TAF will jointly oversee and provide feedback to the outputs of the evaluation team.

The external evaluation team will be responsible for delivering the evaluation outputs.

The evaluation will be funded by APSP.

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Annex 2: Evaluation Matrix

Notes on judgement criteria (JCs)

- The judgement or assessment criteria are not questions, they are statements which, if they can be verified on the basis of evidence, allow for the EQs to be answered positively or negatively.
- The JCs should be understood to address GEDSI issues. Although cross-cutting issues are thereby mainstreamed within each evaluation criterion (relevance, effectiveness, etc.); they do not have to be reflected in every JC.
- An EQ may be answered even if not all corresponding ACs may be verified. Conversely, new JCs may emerge in the course of the evaluation, which help address individual EQs more effectively than those suggested here. These elements will be addressed in the evaluation report.

Notes on indicators

- Whenever possible, the evaluators rely on indicators that are included in the APSP MEL process, to the extent that these may help address each EQ and JC.
- The indicators we propose in this matrix are to be used to complement relevant indicators which appear in APSP's own MEL reports.
- Indicators are quantitative where possible, and qualitative where this is more illustrative of change fostered by APSP.

Evaluation Questions (EQs) / Judgement Criteria (JCs)	Indicators / Evidence	Sources of evidence
Relevance* * Taking into consideration APSP outcome EOIO and intermediate outcomes indicators: Indicator for EOIO 1: progress in regular and ad hoc interface between ASEAN and Australian counterparts to exchange ideas to improve program implementation Indicator for EOIO 2: improved understanding and awareness of ASEAN and stakeholders on GEDSI, cross-sectoral and multi-stakeholder approaches to political security		
EQ1 – How well do the program objectives, activities and approaches address the regional, political and security challenges and priorities within the ASEAN context?		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • APSP original proposal and subsequent revisions; independent reviews • Baseline studies, when available • Communications between DFAT and TAF • Annual, semi-annual progress reports • After Action Reports and assessments
JC1.1 The program is based on a sound understanding of ASEAN's needs and capacities in relation to political security.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Degree to which references are made in APSP documents to Government of Australia and ASEAN policies and political security goals 	
JC1.2 The program, including its four target areas, is aligned with Australia's and ASEAN's policies and priorities.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Existence of relevant ASEAN-Australia documents such as joint statements, plans of action, etc. 	
JC1.3 The program forms a sound basis for continued/future engagement with ASEAN and its partners.		

Evaluation Questions (EQs) / Judgement Criteria (JCs)	Indicators / Evidence	Sources of evidence
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Evidence of references to broader rule of law, GEDSI, human rights safeguards Evidence of ASEAN/partners interest in pursuing cooperation with Australia in relevant areas. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Activity reports by other ASEAN, Australian partners Strategy documents issued by other relevant development partners, UN agencies, development banks, etc.
EQ2 – Has the program provided opportunities for engagement and knowledge exchange between ASEAN and Australian agencies and organisations working on political-security issues?		
JC2.1 The program engages a growing range of agencies and organisations in Australia and ASEAN, including ASEAN sectoral bodies/mechanisms; ASEAN Secretariat; ASEAN institute; ASEAN Member States that serve as chair or leader/lead shepherd in areas relevant to APSP.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which APSP documents refer to good practices in security cooperation Extent of references to appropriate body of research in APSP publications, training curricula, etc. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Other APSP documentation (reports of visits, notes of management meetings, etc.) Documentation about activities (e.g. training curricula, public statements, news releases, etc.)
JC2.2 Australian and ASEAN participants recognise the reciprocal dimension of learning and knowledge exchange.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Extent to which APSP's theory of change reflects problem description Evidence of local partner selection based on this approach Evidence of stakeholders' buy-in for APSP's aims and objectives. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Research on political security topics by relevant national and international think-tanks Reports by human rights organisations Interviews with stakeholders Focus group discussions with relevant program stakeholders
Efficiency		
EQ3 – How well and efficient were the resources allocated to support ASEAN and Australia priorities and cross-sectoral and multi-sectoral approaches in program implementation?		As above, and:
JC3.1 The program makes appropriate use of human and financial resources in relation to both EOIOs in the program.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consistency between program priorities and budget allocation 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Financial reports Interview(s) with relevant TAF administrative manager(s)

Evaluation Questions (EQs) / Judgement Criteria (JCs)	Indicators / Evidence	Sources of evidence
JC3.2 Program management is effective, in that pro-active and timely action was taken to address changing circumstances (including the pandemic), and M&E and management accountability processes are in use.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of budget spent • Evidence that any over- or under-spending was justified • Evidence that costs are in line with general practices in the sector • Evidence of effective hiring, procurement and administrative procedures • Evidence that staffing levels and use of outside consultants were commensurate with needs and results • Evidence that APSP team members and managers are adequately accountable to TAF senior management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Interview with relevant TAF senior manager
Effectiveness** ** See also: KPIs listed in APSP MEL Plan reproduced below this table		
EQ4 – To what extent were the program’s activities and initiatives effective in enhancing dialogue mechanisms and information-sharing among stakeholders?		Sources as above, and: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, interviews with independent experts on ASEAN political security (academics, NGO experts, etc.)
JC4.1 The program emphasises mutual interaction among Australian and ASEAN stakeholders.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • % of planned results achieved • % of MEL indicators fulfilled 	

Evaluation Questions (EQs) / Judgement Criteria (JCs)	Indicators / Evidence	Sources of evidence
<p>JC4.2 The program encourages ASEAN Member State and/or the ASEAN Secretariat to undertake/ enhance consultation and dialogue with Member States and other stakeholders active in the target political security areas.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Quality of M&E systems as reflected from documents, interviews • Evidence that MEL outcomes were addressed as appropriate by program management • Evidence of lessons learned feeding back into program implementation • Evidence of appropriate targeting of vulnerable group members, male and female, in line with GEDSI requirement • Evidence of references to gender equality in program documents • Evidence of gender disaggregated data in program documents, reports • Extent to which there are references to socio-political context and legal changes in program reports, interviews • Evidence of gender and cultural awareness within APSP team • Evidence of references to on-going risk assessments (where relevant) in APSP documents 	
Sustainability		
<p>EQ5 – To what extent has the program built ASEAN institutional capacity, fostered enduring partnerships and collaborations between ASEAN and Australia?</p>		<p>As above, and:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, interviews with relevant ASEAN NGO representatives concerning
<p>JC5.1 ASEAN stakeholders are likely to maintain consultation processes initially implemented under the program.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evidence that skills acquired by staff at ASEAN Secretariat and other 	

Evaluation Questions (EQs) / Judgement Criteria (JCs)	Indicators / Evidence	Sources of evidence
JC5.2 DFAT and other Australian government departments are able to build on partnerships and collaborations initiated under the program.	<p>partner institutions are in continued use</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Expression of interest by ASEAN Secretariat and other partners to maintain consultation practices implemented under APSP• Evidence of integration of specific APSP results into other actors' strategies and plans• Evidence that APSP is influencing ASEAN and partners' organisational development• Recognition by relevant stakeholders of Australia's added value as ASEAN partner	attitudes toward GEDSI.
Impact		
EQ6 – What is the overall contribution of the program on regional political stability and security, as well as in promoting trust and collaboration in ASEAN?		Sources as above.
JC6.1 Stakeholders within Australia, ASEAN and their regional partners identify actual or changes that the program is contributing to or otherwise encouraging.	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Availability of reference to changes in policies, practices, attitudes, in APSP reports, interviews• Evidence of an increase in consultations with non-government actors in relation to political security, Track 2 approaches to potential/emerging conflicts, etc.• Evidence of references to program impact by other actors	
JC6.2 Australian and ASEAN stakeholders perceive an increase in mutual understanding and trust in relation to one or more of the target political security areas.		
GEDSI		
EQ7 – To what extent has the program mainstreamed gender equality, disability and social inclusion in its activities, outcomes and impacts?		Sources as above, and:

Evaluation Questions (EQs) / Judgement Criteria (JCs)	Indicators / Evidence	Sources of evidence
<p>Note: GEDSI is to be addressed as part of the discussion of each evaluation criteria. Nevertheless, it is important to also address GEDSI implementation as a standalone element of the evaluation, particularly by drawing lessons from GEDSI-related findings under each of the above EQ. The indicators listed here are the GEDSI-specific KPIs listed in the APSP MEL Plan, section 3.2</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • At least one GEDSI-focused activity in each policy area of APSP • GEDSI is fully taken into consideration in the conceptualisation and formulation of all activities of APSP • At least 25% of participants in APSP activities (workshops, training, dialogue, etc) are women • General positive feedback from women participants or other GEDSI-specific groups of APSP activities • Minimum of 45% of the total budget under TAF management is dedicated to GEDSI-specific and GEDSI-mainstreamed activities • Disability rights and/or inclusion are expressly addressed in the content of at least three APSP activities • Disability inclusion principles, including identifying and addressing barriers to inclusion and opportunities for participation, are taken into consideration in all activity implementation • Disability inclusion principles, including identifying and addressing barriers to inclusion and opportunities for participation, are taken into consideration in all activity participants 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • If possible, interviews with people living with disabilities who have been involved in APSP activities

Annex 3: List of Interviewees

Name	Role	Institution	M/F
The Asia Foundation			
Thomas Parks	Former Country Representative/Present Vice President for Strategic Partnerships	The Asia Foundation	M
Nur Ismi Hamid	Regional Program Operation Officer	The Asia Foundation – Indonesia	F
Alvin Kurnia Sandy	Regional Program Officer	The Asia Foundation – Indonesia	M
Carla Silbert	Program Advisor - Women, Peace and Security and Gender Equality and Social Inclusion Advisor for ASEAN	The Asia Foundation - Lao PDR	F
Mark McDowell	Acting Country Representative and Country Representative for Myanmar	The Asia Foundation – Thailand	M
Pitchanuch Supavanich	Regional Program Manager for Southeast Asia Regional Cooperation Programs	The Asia Foundation – Thailand	F
Benjamin Zawacki	Senior Program Specialist	The Asia Foundation – Thailand	M
Patthiya Tongfueng	Senior Program Officer ASEAN Programs	The Asia Foundation – Thailand	F
Sittitat Rujichok	Junior Program Officer	The Asia Foundation – Thailand	M
Suchada Sakulteera	Director of Finance	The Asia Foundation – Thailand	F
DFAT			
Amy Williams	Deputy Head of Mission	DFAT - Australian Mission to ASEAN	F
Neil Buckland	First Secretary - Political Security	DFAT - Australian Mission to ASEAN	M
Ruri Artiesa	Unit Manager	DFAT - Australian Mission to ASEAN	F
Olivia Fei Fei	Program Manager, Development - Political Security	DFAT - Australian Mission to ASEAN	F
Tiffany McDonald	Australian Ambassador to ASEAN	DFAT - Australian Mission to ASEAN	F
Lara Franzen	Counsellor (Development)	DFAT - Australian Mission to ASEAN	F
Mariam Diakite	First Secretary, Human Security	DFAT - ASEAN ACT	F
Chantelle Woodford	ASEAN and Regional Policy Branch	DFAT - ASEAN and Regional Policy Branch	F

Name	Role	Institution	M/F
Timothy Smith	Program Director	DFAT - Aus4ASEAN Future	M
Michael Costa	Program Director	DFAT - Aus4ASEAN Future	M
Will Nankervis	Assistant Secretary - Southeast Asia Economic, Communications and Analytics Branch and former Australian Ambassador to ASEAN	DFAT Canberra	M
Caroline Scott	Former Deputy Head of Mission, Australian Mission to ASEAN	DFAT Canberra	F
Dr. Helen Cheney	Former Development Counsellor (Involved in the development of APSP)	DFAT Canberra	F
Samuel O'Neill	Transnational Crime Section (TNC) and and DFAT Transnational Crime Section and Cybercrime Section	DFAT Canberra	M
Danielle Sever	Former First Secretary/Acting Counsellor who managed APSP in early years	DFAT Canberra	F
Other Government Departments			
Alexander Meyer	Counsellor	Department of Home Affairs	M
Australian agencies and institutions			
Federal Agent Luke Nasir	Liaison Officer Jakarta	Australian Federal Police (AFP)	M
Detective Superintendent Rachel Ball	Senior Officer Phnom Penh	Australian Federal Police (AFP)	F
Baden Shipp	Senior Registrar Sydney Property and Exhibit Registry, Eastern Command	Australian Federal Police (AFP)	M
David Letts	Associate Professor	Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security (ANCORS)	M
Bart Hogeveen	Deputy Director - Cyber, Technology & Security	Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI)	M
Britta Denise Hardesty	Senior Principal Research Scientist	Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO)	F
Ella Serry	Manager, International Engagement and Capacity Building	E-Safety Commission	F
ASEAN Secretariat and sectoral bodies			
Kartika Budhi Wijayanti	Project Management Officer	ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR)	F
Rif'at S. Fachir	Communication Officer	ASEAN Institute for Peace and Reconciliation (ASEAN-IPR)	M

Name	Role	Institution	M/F
Lim Puay Tiak (PT Lim)	Chairman & Honorary Treasurer	Chairman of ASEAN Disability Forum (ADF) & Honorary Treasurer, International Disability Alliance (IDA)	M
Raymund Joe Quilop	Assistant Director and Head	ASEAN Political Security Community Analysis and Monitoring Division	M
Thao Thi Thanh Nguyen	Assistant Director and Head	Political Security Cooperation 2 Division	F
Miguel Musngi	Assistant Director and Head	Poverty Eradication and Gender Division	M
Retno Astrini	Assistant Director and Head	Security Cooperation Division 1	F
Erica Paula Sioson	Senior Officer	ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Analysis Division	F
Arthur Glenn Maail	Senior Officer	Digital Economy Division	M
Pham Minh Thu	Assistant Director and Head	External Relations Division 1	M
Istaq Nadzril Abd Kader	Assistant Director and Head	External Relations Division 2	M
Noel Tan	Senior Officer	Culture and Information Division	M
Widia Librianti	Officer	Culture and Information Division	F
Lina Alexandra	Head	Department of International Relations	F
ASEAN Member States			
Jahzeel Abihail Cruz	Former Acting Director, ASEAN Political Security Community Division, Office of ASEAN Affairs	Department of Foreign Affairs, the Philippines	M
Dian Wulandari	Deputy Director for Economic, Postal and Information Cooperation	Ministry of Communications and Informatics, Indonesia	F
Bayunto Samba	Counsellor, Directorate of ASEAN External Relations	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia	M
Nanda Avalist	Political Security Directorate	Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia	M
Nani Dwi Wahyuni	Head of Cooperation Division	Ministry of Women's Empowerment and Child Protection, Indonesia	F

Name	Role	Institution	M/F
Andhika Chrisnayudhanto	Deputy for International Cooperation	National Counterterrorism Agency (BNPT), Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Indonesia	M
Pol.Lt.Col. Boonyanuj Pongisavaranun	Inspector	INTERPOL and Foreign Relations Region 1 Foreign Affairs Division, Royal Thai Police	F
Pol.Lt.Col. Athikun Indrasen	Deputy Superintendent	INTERPOL and Foreign Relations Region 1 Foreign Affairs Division, Royal Thai Police	M
Other stakeholders			
Adinda Koto	Former Regional Program Officer - ASEAN	-	F
Andrew W. Mantong	Researcher	-	M
Pieter Pandie	Researcher	-	M

Annex 4: Documents Reviewed

<i>Program Documents</i>
Original Program Proposal (plus Annexes)
APSP Amendment History
Investment Design Summary (plus Annexes)
Program Transition documents
Cost Extension
Work Plan and Identification of Opportunities and related documents
APSP MEL Framework and related documents
APSP GEDSI Strategy
APSP Key Performance Indicators (KPIs) from the APSP MEL Plan
APSP Reports to Donor: Annual Reports 2019 – 2023 and Semi-Annual Reviews 2019 – 2023
APSP Lessons Learned and Reflection and related documents
DFAT Internal Reports 2021 – 2024
APSP Factsheet
Participant Feedback Surveys
Activities in 2024
ASEAN Regional Plan of action on Women, Peace and Security
ASEAN-Australia Report 2024
ASEAN Gender Mainstreaming Strategic Framework
ASEAN Enabling Masterplan 2025
Work Plan of the ASEAN Plan of Action to Prevent and Counter the Rise of Radicalisation and Violent Extremism (2019 – 2025)
<i>ASEAN Documents</i>
ASEAN Cybersecurity Cooperation Strategy (2017–2020)
ASEAN Plan of Action in Combating Transnational Crime
ASEAN Document Series on Transnational Crime
ASEAN Political-Security Community Blueprint
ASEAN Regional Forum Work Plan for Maritime Security (2022–2026)
<i>Australian Government and Institutional Policies and Strategies</i>
Australian Civil Maritime Security Strategy
National Strategy to Fight Transnational, Serious, and Organised Crime
Australian Strategic Policy Institute (ASPI) Reports
<i>United Nations</i>
United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS)
United Nations Group of Governmental Experts (UNGGE) Norms on Responsible State Behaviour in Cyberspace

Annex 5: Case Study – Women, Peace and Security

Introduction

In this study we do not attempt to evaluate WPS activities – this is done in the main report. Instead, we hope to highlight aspects of the WPS approach that are relevant to APSP as a whole and to the next program phase. We therefore address the following four questions:

1. What are the pros and cons of including WPS in APSP?
2. How did TAF support WPS activities; what was the added value of its work?
3. How does ASEAN view the work done to date?
4. What lessons can be learned from WPS work in relation to the next program?

1. Why WPS? Pros and cons of inclusion in APSP

There were numerous grounds for including WPS in APSP, including:

- **WPS is an issue that – in principle at least – cuts across the other APSP target areas** (maritime security, cybersecurity, transnational crime): This cross-cutting dimension was not necessarily apparent to all stakeholders at the start of the program, but APSP explicitly sought to mainstream WPS into each of the other target areas.
- **ASEAN has made formal commitments in relation to WPS:** While WPS is not a treaty (it is often referred to in ASEAN documents as an ‘agenda’), it is based on UN Security Council Resolution 1325. ASEAN has agreed a WPS Regional Plan of Action (RPoA) and some countries have national PoAs. Australia also has a WPS PoA.
- **Potential strategic and policy benefits:** There was scope for WPS to strengthen strategy and policy development on political security by leveraging existing processes and initiatives within ASEAN – such as the ASEAN Women for Peace Registry (AWPR) – and Australian expertise on the issue.

There were also risks related to WPS advocacy:

- **Perceived interference in domestic affairs.** The WPS agenda could be seen as a threat by some countries if applied to underlying causes of domestic conflict. Some countries may view the WPS agenda as relevant to peacekeeping operations only.
- **Aspirations rather than specifics.** States may content themselves with adopting formulaic endorsements of WPS, without policy substance or impact. WPS may be seen as confined to ‘traditional’ women’s issues of welfare, care for the vulnerable, children support, etc.
- **A crowded space.** Many ASEAN bilateral and multilateral partners seek to address gender equality in general, and the WPS agenda in particular. There was a risk of duplicating efforts.

The program had identified these opportunities and risks. An APSP team member said: TAF on WPS: ‘There are other bilateral partners working on WPS. It’s both a crowded space and one in which work is not always strategic. There was a big task in working out how to best position APSP.’

It is important to note that the WPS component of the program was substantially strengthened – and became more strategic – in December 2021, after a dedicated WPS/GEDSI expert was recruited into TAF’s APSP team.

The new advisor helped mitigate the risks identified above, by:

- Ensuring that APSP highlights the positive contribution that the WPS agenda can make in relation to other ASEAN areas of interest. The WS/GEDSI advisor told the evaluators: ‘WPS was part of the agenda, and part of the talking points, but it hit a point where there was some resistance to it. [There was] a failure to understand its importance and impact, to understand that WPS isn't just a soft social inclusion approach, but that there are benefits from it. (...) APSP has been able to play a role in building understanding that there are human security issues that this WPS agenda is relevant for. We have been able to really engage as we brought in more and more cross-referencing of WPS with other issues, including cybersecurity and climate. Those [cross-references] bring in some of the ASEAN member states that haven't been as engaged in WPS.’²⁸
- Working to limit exposure to issues that may be perceived as interference in the domestic affairs of ASEAN Member States. ‘Quite a few activities now link climate security and WPS, and it's been appropriate. If we had focused, for instance, on conflict prevention, indigenous groups and land rights, we would have faced pushback from ASEAN partners’.

A key factor strengthening the WPS component of APSP was the engagement and expertise of Australian stakeholders: DFAT's Gender Branch was closely involved, especially in the early years of the program. According to an interviewee from DFAT: ‘Because we developed this partnership with AWPR, finding ways to link Australian women's civil society expertise on WPS became a priority. We worked with the Australian WPS civil society coalition, an Australian entity that DFAT funds to do WPS monitoring, accountability work in Australia. And I think it enhanced, broadened out the impact of Canberra having that type of civil society / government relationship. It's great that the [2023 WPS] summit provided a platform for the governments and CSOs to engage in a meaningful, very genuine participation in highlighting some of the issues in WPS.’

2. TAF's role

TAF helped ensure that WPS activities were prioritised to the extent possible. Between August 2021 and August 2024, APSP had spent AUD560,000 on WPS since 2021 (about 12% of spending in that period). However, it is unlikely that spending on WPS will reach the AUD1.6m level earmarked for WPS in the original budget (17% of total). Activities essentially fell within three categories:

- **Meetings:** ASEAN Women Leaders' Summit; ASEAN-Australia WPS Dialogues (two sessions); High-Level Dialogue (July 2023), etc.
- **Research and training:** regional study on WPS; AWPR knowledge exchange (three sessions); WPS training in Timor-Leste; (planned) workshop on WPS and fight against transnational criminality; etc.
- **Australian representation:** Australia joining ASEAN WPS Advisory Group; involvement of Australian Civil Society Coalition on WPS, Department of Defence representative at High-Level Dialogue

Beyond these specifics, APSP systematically ensured a degree of gender balance in all activities (invited speakers, participants, stakeholders in studies, etc.). The program also involved ASEAN and Australian CSOs and AWPR members in activities to the extent possible.

²⁸ In this case study as in the main report, quotes from interviews have been lightly edited for clarity and concision.

TAF's added value was recognised by DFAT interviewees, one of whom stated: 'Having a WPS advisor at TAF helps to lighten our [DFAT's] burden as well. We rely on her a lot because we wouldn't be able to cover all the activities. We rely on her to guide us on strategy we can use to engage ASEAN on WPS. We do rely on her to, in many senses, lead engagement with the various ASEAN ministries.'

See also Section 3.7 of the main report: the overview of TAF's added value in the implementation of APSP fully applies to the WPS component.

3. Reception by ASEAN

Overall, the WPS component has been mainstreamed with increasing effectiveness in ASEAN's political security activities. As one DFAT interviewee put it: 'We've really been able to reposition Australia as a partner to ASEAN on WPS. When APSP started, Australia was not included in the ASEAN WPS Advisory Group. We worked hard to get there. And we're now a part of that advisory group, and very much seen as a go-to partner on WPS.'

Several ASEAN stakeholders interviewed by the evaluators expressed positive views about APSP's support for WPS:

- 'APSP's work on promoting WPS, the value they bring in is linking WPS with the political security community. Through their support, there are platforms for dialogue between member states and sectoral bodies that don't usually talk to one another. They've been quite helpful at the strategic level.'
- 'In 2023 there was the ASEAN WPS high-level [dialogue]. There was a lot of interest from the AWPR because they wanted to know what their peers are doing, learn new things. The [Indonesian] CSO coalition got buy-in from the government of Indonesia to monitor the implementation of the national action plan on WPS.'
- 'The WPS agenda has been sort of isolated in ministries of women's affairs in the region, and it very rarely penetrated discussions with security agencies or in the political security sphere. So, we [ASEC] were able to find some openings and some opportunities, to present issues. We were able to find ways of inserting issues on gender and WPS.'
- 'Trust in APSP as a partner enables greater technical influence. APSP was able to be a penholder on WPS elements of the ASEAN Women Leader's Summit – partly thanks to the Lao Women's Union's trust in TAF and DFAT.'

Beyond this, it is important to identify changes in the way ASEAN approaches the WPS agenda, which may have occurred over the APSP implementation period. For an institutional, high-level and synthetic overview, we looked at the successive ASEAN Chairman's Statements, which are published after ASEAN summit meetings (see table appended to this case study). These statements differ from press communiques in that they are effectively short activity reports, which summarise ASEAN's policies and positions as they have evolved in the previous half-year or year (ASEAN summits normally take place every six months but most Chairman's Statements cover two sessions, i.e. a year).

We checked the statements for three elements:

- Number of references to women in general.
- Number of references to WPS and related issues such as security, conflict mediation, etc.
- Issues other than WPS associated to women.

We went back to 2018 (Chairman’s Statement following the 32nd ASEAN Summit), i.e. the year before APSP was designed (APSP’s implementation began in 2020 but the grant contract was negotiated and signed between DFAT and TAF in 2019). This approach has obvious limitations:

- Counting occurrences of particular words in statements is a superficial approach.
- Much of the text is formulaic, reflecting aspirations more than actions.

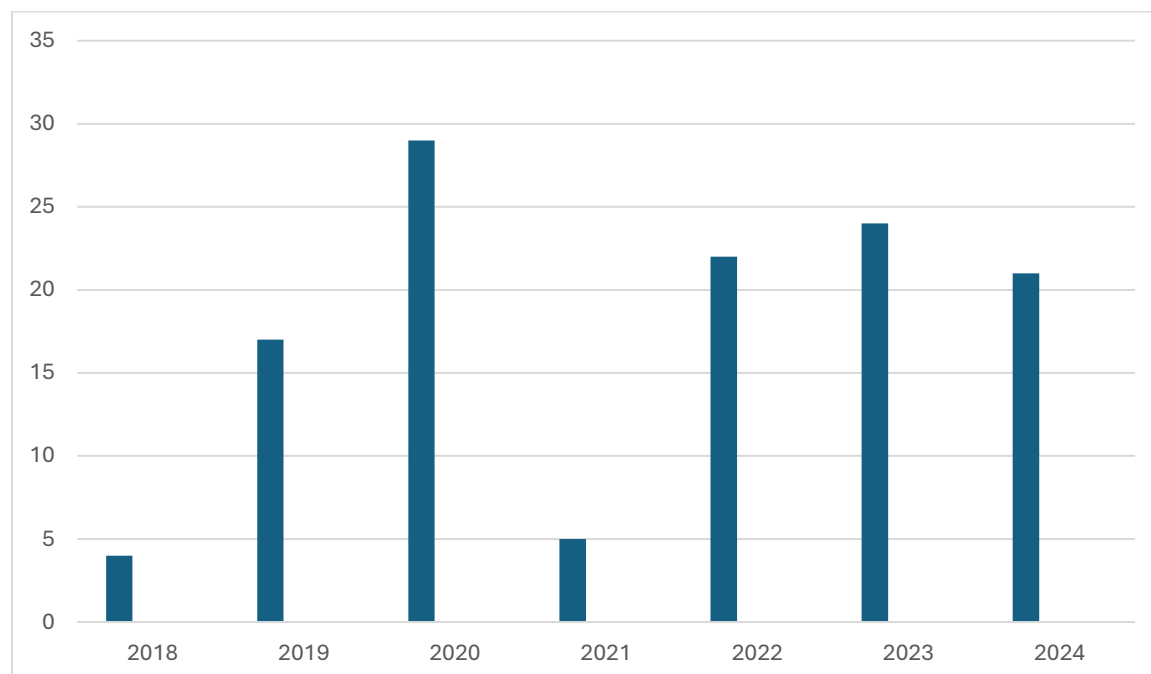


Chart 1: Number of occurrences of the word ‘women’ in ASEAN Chairman’s Statements following summits since 2018. Source: www.asean.org

The following trends appear:

- The number of references to women in Chairman’s Statements increased substantially in 2020 and may be stabilising since – with a dip in 2021, when the summits were short and held online.
- The context of the references to women reflects a conservative view of their position in society. Most references to women concern them as victims (of trafficking, gender-based violence, COVID, Gaza), in need of protection/relief, as vulnerable (like children or the elderly), or as carers.
- Some references give a more pro-active view: women as leaders, rights-holders, women involved in technology, entrepreneurship, farming, migration, etc.
- References to WPS are brief in 2019 despite the 2017 adoption of a Joint Statement on Promoting Women, Peace, and Security in ASEAN. Substantially more fleshed out references appear in 2022 and remain prominent in 2023 and 2024.
- In relation to WPS, the 2022 and subsequent statements refer to the ASEAN Defense Ministers’ Meeting, the Southeast Asian Women’s Peace and Mediation Network, the ASEAN Women’s Peace Registry, and the WPS Regional Plan of Action.
- The statements clearly acknowledge the cross-sectoral nature of the WPS agenda.
- Nevertheless, references to WPS remain aspirational: supporting plans and networks, but they do not yet reflect substantive action.

4. Conclusion: designing the next APSP phase

WPS

Two elements stand out from the review of WPS in APSP, which are relevant to the next phase of the program: [the importance of aligning expectations and the need to identify clear outcomes](#).

- [Expectations](#): The 2022 APSP Lessons Learned report stated: ‘Another issue relating to varying expectations is that when numerous stakeholders are involved in an activity, it needs to be recognised that each may have different expectations about what ‘success’ looks like. For example, for the WPS Dialogue, the DFAT ASEAN stakeholders felt that building relationships was a key desired outcome, whereas the DFAT Gender Equality Branch had very high expectations of quality and technical excellence. Clearly both points of view have merit but in some cases are misaligned.’
- [Clarity of outcomes](#): APSP’s 2023 GEDSI Strategy noted that while ‘WPS is the policy area of APSP that is most progressed in term of GEDSI (...) the WPS agenda in ASEAN has been driven primarily by ASEAN organs whose mandates are on women and gender issues (...) The implementation and mechanisms to bring and integrate the WPS agenda into that of political security and economic integration at ASEAN level remain unclear or ad-hoc, despite some encouraging developments.

Reinforcing both above aspects, the Regional Study on WPS also observed that most ASEAN Member States have no ‘formal mechanism to mainstream gender in peace and security deliberations’. The Study concluded that this was due [‘to the limited and diverse understanding on the WPS agenda as well as capacity to operationalise it’](#).

It will be important in the next phase of APSP to [ensure that expectations regarding the WPS component are aligned](#) among Australian and ASEAN stakeholders – this should be easier in 2025 than in it was in 2019-20 because the first phase of the program has laid the groundwork for mainstreaming WPS into the political security field. Two broad outcomes could be pursued by the next program:

- ASEAN Member States that do not yet have a WSP Plan of Actions should develop one.
- Civil society coalitions monitoring the implementation of the WPS agenda should be supported in as many ASEAN Member States as possible.

[‘Checklist’ for other APSP thematic areas](#)

The experience of the APSP’s work on WPS suggests that, should a new thematic area be required in the next phase, it should meet the following requirements:

- There is a UN treaty, regional policy or set of commitment concerning the issue.
- The issue has cross-pillar relevance.
- Australia has relevant institutional expertise.
- Relevant Australian stakeholders are willing to engage with ASEAN.
- There is scope to develop/implement an ASEAN policy or action plan.

Of the many issues that may meet these requirements, two stand out as being particularly relevant, and possibly draw ASEAN demand: Climate security and the fight against corruption.

- Climate: Paris Agreement; relevance to all aspects of political security; strong Australian expertise; existing ASEAN commitments.
- Anti-corruption: UN Convention against Corruption ratified by all ASEAN Member States; obvious relevance to political security; Australian National Commission against Corruption.

Online safety and conflict prevention are also thematic areas that meet most of the above requirements.

Summit # (year)	References to 'women'	References to WPS	Other 'women's' issues
44-45 (2024)	21	6 (RPoA, SEANWPM, AWPR, ADMM+)	Health Children Participation Care Rights GBV SDGs Gaza
43 (2023)	14	3 (ADMM+, SEANWPM, AWPR, high-level dialogue)	Gender Equality Rights GBV
42 (2023)	10	7 (ADMM+, AWPR, SEANWPM, high-level dialogue)	Trafficking GBV Participation
40-41 (2022)	22	7 (RPoA, AWPR, SEANWPM, ADMM+, peacekeeping, maritime security, counterterrorism, military medicine, mine action, cybersecurity, ARF, preventing diplomacy/conflict resolution)	Entrepreneurship Protection Participation Relief/Recovery Children Trafficking Farming Migration Empowerment Social protection Inclusion
38-39 (2021)	5	4 (AWPR, Regional Study on WPS)	Youth
37 (2020)	16	7 (UNSCR1325, AWPR, Regional Study on WPS)	Rights Empowerment Inclusion Econ. growth
36 (2020)	13	7 (UNSCR1325, AWPR, peacebuilding)	COVID Empowerment Trafficking Children Participation
35 (2019)	13	7 (AWPR, reconciliation, negotiation, PVE)	Rights Children, ppl w/ disabilities Technology

			Empowerment
34 (2019)	4	3 (RPoA, AWPR)	Empowerment
33 (2018)	4	0	Empowerment Trafficking GBV
32 (2018)	0		

Table 1: occurrences of references to women, WPS issue, other issues linked to women, in ASEAN Summit Chairman's Statements since 2028. Source: Chairman's Statements, as carried on ASEAN's website (www.asean.org)

Annex 6: Case Study – Other Government Departments

Integrating Australian Government Departments into the APSP

Introduction

The primary aim of the APSP was to enhance political and security cooperation between ASEAN and Australia, thereby strengthening regional stability, addressing shared challenges, and fostering cooperation among ASEAN Member States (AMS) and Australia in the political-security landscape. A critical component of the program's initial design was the integration of Australian Other Government Departments (OGDs) into its framework.

This integration was envisioned to leverage the diverse expertise and resources of various Australian agencies to support a cohesive, multi-sectoral Australian presence in ASEAN's political-security sphere. However, the program encountered significant challenges in effectively engaging OGDs. This case study examines the initial design of the APSP, with a dedicated component on OGDs, and the challenges experienced in engaging them, and explores the adaptive approaches adopted in the latter program period, with suggested approaches for future engagement.

1. OGDs in APSP Design

The APSP was conceived to offer flexible and demand-driven support to ASEAN, emphasising ASEAN leadership and centrality in addressing regional political-security challenges. With the overarching goal of enhancing the security environment in the Indo-Pacific region, the program sought to bolster stronger relationships between ASEAN and Australia, and enhance ASEAN's capability to lead coordinated, cohesive, and inclusive responses to transnational political-security issues.

To achieve these objectives, the APSP focused on four primary policy areas: maritime security, cybersecurity, women, peace, and security (WPS), and transnational crime. The program remained open to supporting other political-security issues as opportunities or demands from ASEAN emerged, however as can be seen in the main Final Report, the program maintained its focus on the originally-selected themes. Its activities included workshops, seminars, training sessions, knowledge-sharing events, policy papers, research, and support for the institutional strengthening of ASEAN.

A key element of the APSP's design was the integration of OGDs, with the program's original structure incorporating a dual implementation model, with The Asia Foundation (TAF) responsible for implementing program activities and the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade (DFAT) tasked with engaging OGDs and advocating for inter-departmental collaboration. Additional funds were allocated specifically for OGDs to implement activities with ASEAN. This structure aimed to ensure a 'whole-of-government' approach, involving diverse OGDs to provide multi-sectoral engagement, coherence, and sustainable impact.

This initial vision of the APSP therefore aimed to foster deep and multifaceted cooperation between Australia and ASEAN, and by allocating specific funds for OGDs and envisioning a dual implementation model, the program aimed to harness the full spectrum of Australia's governmental and broader institutional expertise.

Nevertheless, the absence of a formal theory of change in the design phase, where the planned outputs and outcomes did not specifically incorporate a rationale of OGD involvement, may have

contributed to challenges in implementation, particularly in aligning OGD engagement with program goals, given the absence of explicit causal pathways and identified assumptions.

2. Challenges in Engaging OGDs

Despite the otherwise well-conceived program design, the APSP faced considerable challenges in fully engaging a diverse range of OGDs in its activities. Several factors contributed to this limited engagement, including:

- Conflicting organisational priorities, and possible resource constraints;
- Lack of dedicated staffing within DFAT in the ASEAN Mission during the initial stages of the APSP;
- Unforeseen disruptions including the COVID-19 pandemic;
- Strict ASEAN definitions limiting collaboration; and
- Communication and alignment issues among Australian OGDs and agencies.

Organisational Priorities and Resource Constraints

Many OGDs had organisational priorities that did not align with the APSP's focus on ASEAN, with one TAF representative observing that 'it's been difficult to involve other Australian government departments in ASEAN initiatives, likely because they lack the manpower or priority for regional cooperation beyond individual ASEAN countries.' Further, government officials indicated that OGDs often lacked the dedicated staffing or resources to prioritise engagement with ASEAN, with domestic priorities and pre-existing international commitments rendering it challenging. These observations underscore a critical disconnect that emerged between the strategic objectives of the APSP, and the operational capacities of OGDs. The divergence in priorities indicates that, while the APSP envisioned a whole-of-government approach, OGDs may not have perceived ASEAN engagement as aligning with their own core mandates or immediate interests.

These perceived resource constraints and differing priorities highlight a fundamental challenge for a regional initiative such as the APSP: OGDs are largely structured and resourced to address domestic issues or bilateral engagements (with certain exceptions emphasised, such as the Home Affairs and Attorney-General's Departments), whereas multilateral initiatives may not fit neatly within OGD operational frameworks.

Lack of Dedicated Staffing within DFAT for APSP

The APSP's early implementation suffered from a lack of dedicated higher-level staffing within DFAT. Initially, there was no dedicated First Secretary position for APSP, and the responsibility fell to a Development Counsellor already managing multiple programs, with one government official stating that 'most programs had dedicated personnel', and that '*locally-engaged staff had limited authority to lead initial outreach efforts.*' This in turn constrained DFAT's capacity to advocate effectively for OGD engagement.

This reflected an underestimation of the administrative and diplomatic efforts required to engage OGDs effectively: without a focal point to coordinate and champion the APSP internally, the program lacked visibility and strategic push within the Australian government. This gap likely contributed to the early challenges in aligning OGD participation, as there was no consistent effort to communicate the program's importance, or to negotiate the integration of departmental agendas.

With the commencement of the dedicated First Secretary for Political Security in January 2023, APSP experienced a marked increase in OGD participation, particularly in cybercrime and transnational crime workshops.

Covid-19-related disruptions

The COVID-19 pandemic further hindered efforts to engage OGDs, with travel restrictions, shifting priorities to address the pandemic, and resource reallocations having limited the ability of OGDs to participate in APSP activities, and further impeding APSP advocacy with other Australian entities.

ASEAN procedural constraints

As indicated in the main report, ASEAN procedural requirements represented a hindering factor in program implementation. One example that complicated collaboration was ASEAN's strict definition of what constitutes an 'ASEAN activity', with Australian entities often restricted from participating in certain activities that were not perceived as directly relevant to ASEAN's established frameworks. These strict frameworks limited to some extent the flexibility required for Australian OGDs to engage rapidly or meaningfully.

Internal communication and alignment

Challenges in communication and alignment among Australian entities regarding ASEAN engagement also played a role, with one interviewee remarking that *'Australian government divisions often don't communicate effectively. For instance, those engaging with ASEAN's socio-cultural pillar may be unaware of efforts in political security or cybercrime, opening opportunities for APSP to bridge these gaps.'* This lack of internal coordination may therefore have limited to some extent the ability to present a unified and synergistic approach to ASEAN engagement.

3. APSP Responses

Recognising the challenges outlined above, APSP adopted an increasingly adaptive approach in the latter program period to enhance OGD engagement. This included strengthening DFAT's advocacy role, leveraging successful OGD partnerships, engaging specialised academic and research institutions, enhancing flexibility and responsiveness, facilitating early involvement of OGDs, and showcasing successful models.

Strengthening DFAT's advocacy role

A dedicated First Secretary position for APSP was established within DFAT in January 2023. This role focused on improving advocacy efforts with OGDs, fostering better communication, and promoting the benefits of ASEAN engagement. This signified a strategic shift towards prioritising the APSP, and recognising the importance of internal advocacy, and while there was no direct evidence in this regard, almost certainly enhanced the program's visibility, and facilitated more effective communication with OGDs. This underscored the critical role of dedicated leadership in driving inter-departmental collaboration, and aligning somewhat disparate agendas, at the regional level, towards a common goal.

Leveraging successful partnerships

The APSP capitalised on successful partnerships with OGDs that had a history of ASEAN engagement, such as the AFP. The AFP's strong reputation in the region served as a foundation for deeper collaboration, a notable example being the Australian Federal Police, a representative of which

emphasised that *‘the AFP has a very good reputation in these countries, and it’s good for us to say ‘we’re here again supporting your activities’*’. This level of endorsement reinforced Australia’s credibility in ASEAN and laid a foundation for future, more complex collaborative efforts.

Building on existing relationships and leveraging established trust networks is likely to prove an effective strategy: the AFP’s exceptional regional reputation and ongoing engagements provided a tangible demonstration of the benefits of OGD and Australian agency participation, and highlights the value of incremental progress and utilising successful models to encourage broader engagement.

Engaging Australian institutions

The program expanded engagement with Australian academic and research institutions, such as the Australian National Centre for Ocean Resources and Security (ANCORS) and the Commonwealth Scientific and Industrial Research Organisation (CSIRO). These institutions brought valuable expertise and resources to APSP activities. An ANCORS representative stated for example that *‘ANCORS has worked throughout the Indo-Pacific region for many years; this is not new territory, and with our resources, it’s something we can tailor as needed’*.

Involving academic and research institutions has therefore introduced specialised knowledge and innovative perspectives to the program, with such entities often having greater flexibility and able to operate across borders more fluidly than government agencies. Their involvement not only enriched APSP activities, but also demonstrated alternative pathways for expertise mobilisation when OGDs faced constraints.

Flexibility and responsiveness

After a hesitant start, the APSP adopted a more flexible and responsive approach to activity planning, allowing for adjustments based on shifting regional dynamics and the expressed needs of ASEAN Secretariat and bodies, and ASEAN Member States. Indeed, early consultation with ASM and other stakeholders, including OGDs, helped identify priorities and secure buy-in for activities. An AFP officer highlighted the importance of early engagement, stating that *‘early discussions with partner countries [...] would allow us to better tailor APSP support, securing buy-in for specific initiatives, like cryptocurrency training’*.

Flexibility and responsiveness were therefore essential in facilitating cooperation, in a region where national and local contexts can change rapidly. By aligning activities more closely with ASEAN’s needs and involving stakeholders early, the APSP increased its relevance and potential impact. This adaptive approach reflected a shift from a top-down/ theoretical approach, represented in the original program design, to a more collaborative model, enhancing ownership and engagement among participants.

Early involvement of OGDs

After somewhat shaky start, greater efforts were made to involve OGDs earlier in the activity planning process. This early involvement aimed to align APSP activities with OGDs’ priorities and secure their participation. Stakeholders nevertheless emphasised that continuous efforts are necessary in this regard, with one Australian government official stating that *‘if we could be part of the discussions earlier... we could suggest themes for workshops or capability development, which would allow us to secure buy-in for programs like cryptocurrency training,’*

Early involvement of OGDs would therefore foster a sense of ownership, and allow for the alignment of program activities with OGD objectives. It would mitigate the issue of misaligned priorities by

integrating OGD input into the planning stages, thus making their participation more attractive and feasible.

4. OGD Responses

DFAT's adaptive approach led to some degree of improved engagement with OGDs in several dimensions. OGDs began to participate more actively in APSP activities, particularly when they perceived more direct alignment with their priorities, and recognised the benefits of such engagement. While not representing Departmental engagement *per se*, the implication of agencies such as the AFP provided expertise in areas such as cybersecurity and counter-terrorism. This strongly suggests that such contributions are far more easily obtained and ultimately more technically beneficial when direct sources of expertise are sourced.

Over time, improved communication channels between DFAT, TAF, and OGDs facilitated better coordination. Sharing preliminary work plans and providing advance notice of activities allowed OGDs to plan and allocate resources more effectively. OGDs gradually started to recognise the long-term benefits of engaging with ASEAN through the APSP. This recognition included opportunities for learning, building regional networks, and enhancing Australia's influence in the region. The pertinence of this was underscored by one Australian government officer, who stated that *'cyber is increasingly recognised as a major priority across Southeast Asia, akin to counter-terrorism, and is critical for APSP's future focus'*.

The positive response from OGDs indicates that the adaptive measures adopted by APSP addressed to some extent the underlying barriers to engagement. By aligning program activities with OGD priorities and demonstrating clear benefits, the APSP made participation more attractive. The recognition of long-term strategic advantages suggests that OGDs began to view ASEAN engagement not just as an external obligation but as an opportunity to advance their own departmental objectives.

5. Future OGD Engagement

Building on the experiences and lessons learned, several approaches could enhance OGD engagement in future iterations of the APSP. The limited involvement of OGDs has restricted the diversity of expertise and perspectives, affecting the program's effectiveness; enhancing engagement with OGDs will therefore be essential for a cohesive and effective 'whole-of-government' approach.

Inter-departmental briefings

Increasing awareness of APSP objectives and benefits among OGDs is crucial. DFAT and TAF should organise regular inter-departmental briefings and information sessions to present the APSP's goals, activities, and potential benefits to OGDs, in particular given that, as one DFAT official suggested, *'expanding government department involvement in APSP remains challenging but essential for broader ASEAN-DFAT engagement'*.

Such briefings would help break down communication barriers and build a shared understanding of the APSP's strategic importance. They could provide a platform for dialogue, questions, and the alignment of expectations, and could foster a collaborative environment where OGDs feel informed and valued as active partners, rather than peripheral participants.

Early-stage cooperation

Aligning OGDs' budgeting and resource allocation towards APSP objectives could be facilitated by sharing preliminary work plans and activity schedules with OGDs several months ahead of implementation. This would allow OGDs to plan and secure necessary resources, increasing their ability to participate, with one stakeholder emphasising that *'improved internal relationships among Australian government divisions could unify their ASEAN approach, but these connections aren't well-established.'* Advance planning would respect the operational realities of OGDs, which often require lead time for budget approvals and staffing arrangements, thus mitigating resource constraints by allowing departments to integrate APSP activities into their annual plans, making participation more feasible.

Aligning APSP activities with OGDs' priorities and securing their buy-in would also require involving OGDs in the immediate planning stages. This would include consultations to identify emerging political-security issues and themes for activities. This approach is confirmed by one DFAT official who stated that *'ASEAN engagement needs to be demand-driven, with ASEAN requesting and prioritising projects. This aligns better with DFAT's mission than with agencies focused on domestic or bilateral concerns.'* Inclusion in planning in this manner would not only align activities with OGD priorities, but also empower departments to contribute their expertise and insights, and foster a sense of shared ownership.

Enhancing OGDs' ability to participate in specific events and initiatives could be achieved by providing them with timely information about upcoming workshops, seminars, and other activities, allowing them to plan and allocate resources efficiently. This would also signal respect for their operational processes, and acknowledge the practicalities of governmental coordination.

Establishing clear roles and responsibilities

Clarifying the structure and responsibilities within the APSP framework is essential. Defining the roles of DFAT, TAF, and OGDs clearly, and outlining expectations and responsibilities, would improve coordination and accountability among all parties, with one DFAT official stating that *'communicating APSP's role and benefits is challenging, as DFAT itself often struggles to navigate ASEAN's structure and to explain APSP's value within it.'* A strong, formal delineation of roles would not only prevent inefficiencies, but would also enhance accountability. In turn, by understanding their specific contributions and expectations, OGDs could engage more confidently and effectively.

Fostering internal coordination among OGDs

More broadly, enhancing communication and alignment within the Australian Government could be achieved by creating mechanisms for regular communication among OGDs regarding ASEAN engagement, possibly through inter-departmental committees or working groups. More formal coordination mechanisms could address the siloed nature of OGDs, with regular interactions building relationships, facilitating knowledge sharing, and aligning efforts.

Addressing resource constraints

Overcoming staffing and funding limitations that hinder OGD participation would require exploring options for providing administrative support or funding to OGDs to facilitate their involvement in a future iteration of APSP, with one Australian government official noting however that *'larger programs with more consistent funding [...] allow Australian agencies to allocate dedicated staff.'* By offering support or finding innovative funding solutions, the APSP could potentially lower the threshold for OGD participation, with departmental resource constraints being a fundamental impediment to engagement.

6. Conclusion

The challenges faced by the APSP are not unique but reflect broader issues of inter-departmental coordination, resource allocation, and strategic alignment. The adaptive measures already taken demonstrate that, with targeted interventions, these challenges can be mitigated, and underscore the importance of dedicated leadership, effective communication, and the alignment of program objectives with departmental priorities.

Leveraging the expertise and resources of various Australian entities will enrich APSP activities, foster stronger relationships with ASEAN counterparts, and contribute to regional stability and prosperity. It is essential to build on the lessons learned and consolidate the approaches already established.

The integration of OGDs into the APSP represents both a significant opportunity and a complex challenge. Indeed, the success of any future iteration of the APSP will largely hinge on effective collaboration between DFAT, TAF, OGDs, and ASEAN counterparts. By addressing the challenges and implementing the recommended steps, the program can realise its full potential in enhancing political security cooperation in the region.