

DFAT Management Response
Mid-Term Review of the ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking Program (ASEAN-ACT)

DFAT commissioned a Mid-Term Review (MTR) of the ASEAN-Australia Counter Trafficking program (ASEAN-ACT) (\$80 million, 2018-2028) from August to December 2022, assessing program implementation between November 2018 – June 2022. The review was conducted remotely by Strategic Development Group (SDG), with a mixed method approach that included a desk review of key documents, online consultations and written responses from informants. The purpose of the MTR is for improvement and accountability by examining the program’s relevance, effectiveness, efficiency and contractor performance, and to inform decisions about continuing ASEAN-ACT into the next phase (Phase 2) of the program, including whether to renew the current Managing Contractor’s (DT Global) contract for a further five years (i.e. November 2023 to November 2028).

The review found ASEAN-ACT to be highly relevant, with a clear commitment to and valuing of ASEAN-ACT by state and non-state actors engaged in the program, particularly as a result of the close linkages to regional mechanisms and relevance to partner priorities in implementing the *ASEAN Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, Especially Women and Children* (ACTIP). The review found the program to be consistent with Australia’s priorities for development in the ASEAN region, and that the response to the COVID-19 pandemic was strong and in line with the Australian Government’s *Partnerships for Recovery* response strategy. There is evidence of progress overall towards the end of program outcomes. Program efficiency and cost effectiveness are considered to be reasonable given the difficulties posed by the pandemic, with the program meeting expenditure targets and adopting an adaptive approach to the evolving challenges of the pandemic. Lastly, the MTR found the contractor has performed well and is well placed to continue to strengthen program implementation.

Summary of DFAT Management Response

DFAT welcomes the findings of the independent review, which were on balance positive and confirmed that ASEAN-ACT is delivering value for money and on track to meet its end of program outcomes. DFAT agrees with 11 of the 15 recommendations aimed at further improving the program and agrees in part with four recommendations related to expansion of programming and partnerships which would have human resource and budget implications. More detailed responses to each recommendation are included in the table below, including planned actions by DFAT and ASEAN-ACT in response to the MTR recommendations.

Individual management response to the recommendations

Regional Level (Pathway 1)

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
Recommendation 1: DFAT and ASEAN-ACT should develop an ASEAN Engagement Plan to boost recognition of the program within the ASEAN Secretariat and ASEAN Member State (AMS) missions to ASEAN. The Engagement Plan would be well located within the ASEAN-ACT Diplomatic Strategy which is currently in draft form.	Agree	DFAT agrees the existing draft internal ASEAN-ACT Diplomatic Strategy could be strengthened to include a plan to enhance program engagement and recognition with ASEAN, particularly the ASEAN Secretariat.	Short-term (Phase 1¹) In consultation with ASEAN-ACT, DFAT will review and finalise the ASEAN-ACT Diplomatic Strategy.	By September 2023

National Level (Pathway 2)

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
Recommendation 2: Recognising the importance and priority accorded to localisation, ASEAN-ACT should invest further in strengthening the capacity (number of staff and their technical knowledge and skills) of country teams to effectively lead on all aspects of the program, particularly in Pathways 2 and 3 which demand strong capacity in partnership brokering and management;	Partially Agree	DFAT agrees localisation is important and a strength of ASEAN-ACT. In principle DFAT agrees that the capacity of country teams could be enhanced to further strengthen program effectiveness. However, in terms of increasing number of staff, there may be budget implications for ASEAN-ACT that need to be carefully considered.	Short-term (Phase 1) DFAT and ASEAN-ACT to enhance country team capacity within existing human resource and budget parameters under Phase 1 of the program, particularly in the areas of GEDSI and MEL. Medium-term (Phase 2²)	By November 2023

¹ ASEAN-ACT Phase 1: November 2018 to November 2023

² ASEAN-ACT Phase 2: November 2023 to November 2028

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
MEL; GEDSI; and design and delivery of a broader suite of capacity development activities as well as the process of supporting the Political Economic Analysis (PEA) and its application including ongoing monitoring and updating, and on development and management of the civil society organisation (CSO) grantees.		DFAT also notes ASEAN-ACT is continuing to build the capacity of the country teams through regular training, knowledge exchange and technical and strategic guidance from the ASEAN-ACT Leadership Team.	DFAT and ASEAN-ACT to consider the number, capacity and roles of the country team as part of a program design update for Phase 2.	Mid-2024
Recommendation 3: DFAT and ASEAN-ACT should increase the proportion of the investment allocated to country programs , to enable increase in number of program staff, and/or increased use of local experience and expertise through contracting or partnership grants with Non-State-Actors (NSAs) to bolster technical capacity and contribute to program delivery.	Partially Agree	DFAT agrees in principle that the use of local expertise and experience could bolster technical capacity and contribute to program delivery. However, increasing the proportion of the investment allocated to country programs (Pathway 2) may have budget implications to either the regional program (Pathway 1) or the public policy and dialogue program (Pathway 3), which will require careful consideration.	Medium-term (Phase 2) This recommendation will be considered as part of a program design update for Phase 2.	Mid-2024
Recommendation 4: Recognising the importance of regional collaboration to address TIP as a transnational crime, and in support of the normative dimensions of ACTIP, DFAT and ASEAN-ACT should:	Agree	DFAT accepts both elements of this recommendation: a. DFAT will revisit arrangements to engage Indonesia to finalise the Memorandum of Subsidiary Arrangement (MSA) to enable	Short-term (Phase 1) a. DFAT will review arrangements to finalise the MSA. DFAT and ASEAN-ACT will examine and identify opportunities to strengthen support to Myanmar	a. By April 2023 b. By July 2023

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
<p>a. Develop a strategy to expedite MSA signing in Indonesia. While noting the efforts that have already gone into this process and some of the obstacles being beyond immediate control, action on this should be prioritized.</p> <p>b. Examine opportunities to support CSOs operating in Myanmar and/or seek ways to include Myanmar nationals' participation in activities with other AMS.</p>		<p>program implementation in Indonesia.</p> <p>b. DFAT notes that ASEAN-ACT has commenced engagement with CSO partners in Myanmar and agrees that working to support Myanmar in counter-TIP efforts is important and should continue. No direct funding can be provided to the military regime.</p>	CSOs, including enhancing Myanmar nationals' participation, while ensuring our support does not provide direct funding, nor legitimise or give credibility to the military regime.	
<p>Recommendation 5:</p> <p>DFAT and ASEAN-ACT should expand programming in Malaysia through regional activities under Pathway 1, and/or deliver dedicated national activities under Pathway 2, noting that this will have budget implications.</p>	Partially Agree	In principle DFAT agrees. Expanded programming in Malaysia is desirable at both regional and national levels. DFAT notes there are budget implications that will require consideration.	<p>Short-term (Phase 1)</p> <p>DFAT and ASEAN-ACT to identify opportunities to enhance engagement with Malaysia within existing programming and budget parameters.</p> <p>Long-term (beyond Phase 2)</p> <p>DFAT to consider programming in Malaysia as part of a future phase of investment in counter trafficking.</p>	<p>By April 2023</p> <p>By November 2028</p>

Inclusive Policy Dialogue (Pathway 3)

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
<p>Recommendation 6:</p> <p>ASEAN-ACT should develop a clearer articulation of the purpose of engagement of NSAs (CSO and private sector) under Pathway 3. ASEAN-ACT should reflect the analysis and advice in the PEA in the selection of grantees, the areas of work, regional and national focus of the policy dialogues and the strategies applied to multistakeholder policy dialogue.</p>	Agree	<p>ASEAN-ACT engagement with CSOs is addressed in the ASEAN-ACT Policy Engagement Plan, which outlines a process for selecting and engaging CSO grantees. DFAT agrees the Policy Engagement Plan could be further strengthened to clarify the purpose of engagement of CSOs.</p> <p>DFAT also agrees there could be clearer articulation of the purpose and objective of ASEAN-ACT engagement with the private sector to support ASEAN member states (AMS) implementation of the ACTIP.</p>	<p>Medium term (Phase 2)</p> <p>DFAT and ASEAN-ACT to refine the purpose and scope of Non-State Actors (NSAs) engagement as part of a program design update for Phase 2. The Policy Engagement Plan will be updated following the program design update.</p>	End July 2024
<p>Recommendation 7:</p> <p>To maximise the benefits of grants with NSAs, ASEAN-ACT, through the country teams, should invest appropriate level of capacity in identifying, selecting, and managing the relationships as well as the program inputs provided by the grantees, and seek to develop enduring relationships over time with relevant and high performing actors to support effectiveness and sustainability of program outcomes. Clear criteria and a transparent process for selection of grantees, available for all stakeholders, would support effectiveness.</p>	Agree	<p>DFAT acknowledges that this aspect of the program is in early stages and that the program has only been working directly with non-state actors (NSAs) for a relatively short period of time. DFAT and ASEAN-ACT will consider the management of NSA relationships as part of the overall scoping of the country teams for Phase 2.</p>	<p>Medium-term (Phase 2)</p> <p>DFAT and ASEAN-ACT to consider NSA relationship management as part of a program design update for Phase 2.</p>	Mid-2024

Gender equality, disability and social inclusion

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
<p>Recommendation 8:</p> <p>ASEAN-ACT should strengthen capacity to deliver the GEDSI strategy by country teams by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Continuing to develop strategic partnerships with relevant CSOs with experience and expertise in different aspects of GEDSI that can support country teams and other partners' knowledge and commitment in their programming b. Engaging with other DFAT investments with effective GEDSI partnerships with government and non-state actors for example in Philippines, Cambodia, Indonesia, c. To progress disability inclusion in the program, build on Australia's investment in disability inclusion and leadership in the ASEAN region over the past decade by developing national level partnerships with OPDs and seeking involvement of relevant line ministries and agencies responsible for disability. 	Agree	DFAT is committed to the program's GEDSI objectives and supporting implementation of the program's GEDSI strategy. DFAT notes that the ASEAN-ACT team are working with their GEDSI Director to ensure country teams can effectively deliver the strategy.	<p>Medium-term (Phase 2)</p> <p>DFAT will support the ASEAN-ACT team as follows:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. ASEAN-ACT will continue to partner with CSOs that advance the rights of marginalised groups and adopt a more holistic approach to GEDSI, including disability inclusion. ASEAN-ACT will also explore partnerships with CSOs and organisations of persons with disabilities (OPDs) to build the capacity of counter-TIP actors to deliver accessible and inclusive programming. b. DFAT will support and promote engagement and synergies on GEDSI with other DFAT aid investments as applicable. c. DFAT and ASEAN-ACT to identify and develop national level partnerships with OPDs, including with relevant AMS line ministries responsible for disability inclusion. 	Ongoing

Monitoring Evaluation and Learning (MEL)

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
Recommendation 9: ASEAN-ACT should refine the MEL system through a reduction and streamlining of the performance indicators. This will deliver clear benefits for efficiency, accessibility and utility for readers and users of the information. Enhancements (detailed in the report) will strengthen evidence-based decision making and promote learning, and accountability to program partners; assist a manageable progress and performance monitoring and support adaptive, strategic and activity level management by the ASEAN-ACT team and DFAT; and support more succinct and accessible program performance and progress reporting.	Agree	<p>DFAT agrees there would be value in revising and streamlining the performance indicators with ASEAN-ACT, including addressing DFAT's development program indicators as applicable.</p> <p>A review of the program theory of change, followed by a review of the MEL system was outlined in the program's approved Annual Work Plan for 2023.</p>	Medium term (Phase 2) ASEAN-ACT to revise the MEL system/framework and share with DFAT for consideration the draft MEL Plan covering the period up to the end of the program (November 2028) and in line with the program design update for Phase 2.	By mid-2024

Capacity development

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
Recommendation 10: ASEAN-ACT should revisit and, if required, update the foundational strategies developed in the inception stage, particularly the CDS to ensure it is relevant to the current context and the objectives are realistic given the demands being managed by the relatively	Agree	DFAT agrees a review of ASEAN-ACT's foundational strategic documents is warranted and timely at the mid-point of the program.	Medium term (Phase 2) Foundational strategic documents, including the Capacity Development Strategy (CDS), will be reviewed as part of the transition to Phase 2.	By end 2024

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
lean country team that primarily hold responsibility for its delivery.				

Strategic direction

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
<p>Recommendation 11:</p> <p>To strengthen overall effectiveness, ASEAN-ACT should more clearly articulate the inter-dependence of Pathways 1 and 2 and continue to strengthen programming that demonstrates and reinforces this by:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Ensuring that National Program Steering Committees (NPSC) consistently seek alignment of national activities with the ACTIP and the Bohol Workplan 2.0 (2022-27) outcomes to support effectiveness and sustainability, while recognising ASEAN-ACT's ability to contribute to and influence National Actions Plans varies. b. Explore options for embedding the NPSC with national peak inter-agency committees/councils by articulating this in the MSA with countries, which is building on the success in some countries, while recognising that the opportunities vary between the different countries. 	Partially Agree	<p>DFAT agrees that it is important to be clear on inter-dependence between pathways to strengthen programming. This will be considered during the program design update proposed and review of the theory of change and will be articulated in foundational strategies (see recommendation 10), annual work plan and in the revised MEL Plan (recommendations 9 and 12).</p> <p>DFAT notes that the ASEAN-ACT team's planning process, including the six-monthly review and reflection workshops with partners and among staff, continues to serve as a forum to discuss and plan for inter-dependence between pathways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. NPSCs are committee structures created for the purpose of implementing ASEAN-ACT in each of its partner countries. As such all activities endorsed by the NPSCs are directly aligned with the ACTIP, as 	<p>Medium term (Phase 2)</p> <p>DFAT and ASEAN-ACT to consider the inter-dependence of the pathways as part of a program design update for Phase 2.</p> <p>ASEAN-ACT will clearly articulate in its annual work plan and relevant strategic documents the interdependence between pathways.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. DFAT and ASEAN-ACT to continue to ensure all activities endorsed by NPSCs are aligned with the ACTIP. 	<p>By mid-2024</p> <p>Ongoing</p>

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
		<p>well as complimentary aspects of national strategies and plans to counter trafficking in persons.</p> <p>b. NPSCs are committee structures created for the purpose of implementing ASEAN-ACT in each of its partner countries.</p> <p>NPSC representative agencies are the key counter trafficking actors in each of the countries in which the program works, as such there are already close links to government agencies and CTIP national mechanisms. DFAT therefore considers it unnecessary to articulate this in country MSAs, particularly given the complexities of amending these MSAs.</p>		
<p>Recommendation 12:</p> <p>The planned review and revision of the ToC should seek to simplify and make clearer the relationship and interdependency of the different outcome areas and pathways of change, particularly the connection of EOPO3 with the other outcome areas, including considering the rearticulating of this outcome area as part of improving clarity and understanding of Pathway 3. The review process may benefit from external</p>	Agree	<p>This relates to Recommendation 9. DFAT agrees there would be value streamlining and simplifying the Theory of Change (ToC).</p>	<p>Medium term (Phase 2)</p> <p>DFAT and ASEAN-ACT to consider simplifying and streamlining the ToC during ASEAN-ACT's ToC workshop, in line with a program design update for Phase 2 and reflected in the MEL Plan.</p>	By mid-2024

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
facilitation and involve regional leadership and country teams and engage with DFAT and other critical partners.				
Recommendation 13: DFAT should ensure that there is sufficient commitment of available staff to drive critical areas that advance Australia's political and diplomatic objectives and support effective, efficient program management, in particular: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. Coordination and communication on TIP with other Commonwealth Government departments, regional and national leaders. b. By ensuring time efficient approval based on well informed advice is provided to ASEAN-ACT on strategic, operational and program matters. 	Agree	<p>DFAT agrees that sufficient resourcing is critical to support efficient and effective implementation of ASEAN-ACT.</p> <p>DFAT notes ASEAN Mission's 2022 restructure included the allocation of an additional FTE resource (Locally Engaged Staff member) to the ASEAN-ACT program management team.</p>	Medium-term (Phase 2) DFAT will periodically monitor resources to manage the ASEAN-ACT program <ul style="list-style-type: none"> a. DFAT will continue to engage relevant Government stakeholders, including Ambassador to Counter Modern Slavery, People Smuggling and Human Trafficking to advance Australia's political and diplomatic objectives. b. DFAT will ensure efficient approval processes, including consultation with internal stakeholders to communicate high quality and timely direction and advice to ASEAN-ACT. 	Ongoing
Recommendation 14: DFAT and ASEAN-ACT should explore options to provide structure to the current, what appears to be	Agree	DFAT notes there is an existing mechanism (i.e. informal trafficking in person's Donor Coordination Meeting) which is held on a semi-regular basis in	Short term (Phase 1) DFAT and ASEAN-ACT to discuss and explore existing	December 2023

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
<i>ad hoc</i> , information sharing and coordination with development partners at the regional level on TIP initiatives and related policy and program areas		<p>Bangkok, for partners to discuss regional policy and programming priorities. There is also a quarterly CTIP partners meeting, which DFAT engages, involving programs focused on CTIP and related migration and labour issues in ASEAN, including the DFAT-funded TRIANGLE in ASEAN program.</p> <p>DFAT will continue to encourage and support ASEAN and partner governments to play a greater role in donor coordination.</p> <p>DFAT agrees there is scope for closer linkages between the Bali Process on People Smuggling, Trafficking in Persons and Related Transnational Crime (Bali Process) and ASEAN-ACT and notes the Bali Process Regional Support Office (RSO) in Bangkok will work to strengthen regional donor coordination in 2023.</p> <p>DFAT notes that closer collaboration between the Bali Process and ASEAN was agreed at Ministerial level at the recent Eighth Bali Process Ministerial Conference (2023 Adelaide Strategy for Cooperation).</p>	<p>mechanisms and initiatives to enhance engagement with partners and donors on TIP initiatives and policy and program areas</p> <p>DFAT will consider this as part of the review of the ASEAN-ACT Diplomatic Strategy (Recommendation 1)</p> <p>DFAT and ASEAN-ACT to explore closer linkages with the Bali Process, and support the RSO to strengthen regional donor coordination.</p>	

Recommendation	Response	Explanation	Action plan	Timeframe
Recommendation 15: ASEAN-ACT should ensure that implementation of the Communications Strategy and consolidation of communications provides an opportunity to strengthen progress towards EOPOs. This will require dedicated resourcing and continued consideration of how communications can support policy engagement, advocacy, and capacity development in addition to valuable public diplomacy.	Agree	DFAT considers that the ASEAN-ACT Communications Strategy supports achievement of the program EOPOs, however is open to considering opportunity to enhance program communications to support further progress of EOPOs.	Medium term (Phase 2) DFAT and ASEAN-ACT to examine if the ASEAN-ACT Communications Strategy could be further strengthened to support progress towards EOPOs, following the program design update and development of revised ToC. DFAT to discuss with ASEAN-ACT if current resourcing levels allocated to communications is sufficient.	End of 2024