



ASEAN Declaration on AI Policy

- Participants in last week's 4th [ASEAN Digital Ministers' Meeting](#) (ADGMIN) adopted a new [Singapore Declaration](#) on "Building an Inclusive and Trusted Digital Ecosystem," which included a long-awaited and relatively business-friendly ASEAN Guide on Artificial Intelligence (AI) Governance and Ethics.
- Singapore showed off its regional leadership on the topic by drawing attendees from all ten ASEAN member states, plus China, the European Union, India, Japan, South Korea, Timor-Leste, and the United States - with the non-ASEAN observers adding some political weight to ASEAN's consensus process and policies.
- While avoiding contentious "data sovereignty" matters, ASEAN appears determined to try to develop shared regional standards on AI, with an eye toward preventing the proliferation of cybercrime and maintaining trust in information network infrastructure.

Key Takeaways from the Singapore Declaration

- **ASEAN Guide on AI Governance:** The Singapore Declaration adopted the non-binding [ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics](#) and established an ASEAN Working Group on AI Governance, which will further develop shared regional standards. Recognizing that ASEAN countries are at "different stages of digital development," the guide is intended to offer ASEAN member states a "flexible" approach to national policies on how to implement, design, develop, and deploy AI systems safely and responsibly, *with an eye toward eventually establishing common AI principles for the region.*
- **Fighting Online Scams:** The declaration also establishes an

ASEAN Working Group on Anti-Online Scams (WG-AS), which will aim to *collaboratively address online and telecommunication scams*, share information on policies and best practices, and support enforcement. The WG-AS is also intended to reinforce confidence and trust in network and information security infrastructure.

- **Centrality of the Digital Economy:** The declaration reinforced the centrality of the digital economy in ASEAN's Digital Masterplan 2025 and affirmed that ASEAN aims to *conclude negotiations on the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) by 2025*. The next ADGMIN will take place in Thailand in January 2025.

TAG Take

Singapore made progress toward establishing region-wide digital standards at the meeting, but implementation will likely be sporadic and vary by country. The ASEAN Guide on AI Governance and Ethics is a **highly practical step** – part policy document and part guidebook – emphasizing values and principles for governments and businesses rather than dictating binding measures. The Guide's AI Risk Impact Assessment Template and Use Cases reinforces the “guidebook” function of the document for a broad audience.

Singapore aims to use its key role in ASEAN to be a global leader in AI governance – if it can rally the ASEAN members as planned. Given that technology will almost certainly outpace policy and regulations, the flexible approach of the ASEAN Guide on AI Governance may hold up well alongside other AI agreements and frameworks like the G7's International Guiding Principles on AI.

ASEAN's AI governance efforts may be **encumbered by individual countries' disparate efforts**. Several countries are developing their own national guidelines for AI, such as Singapore's proposed **Model AI Governance Framework for Generative AI** and Indonesia's forthcoming Presidential Regulation on AI, which is expected to be unveiled later this year. While Philippine Speaker of the House Martin Romualdez announced last month that the country plans to propose a binding regional regulatory framework on AI when it serves as ASEAN Chair in 2026, any binding commitments may be a bridge too far for most ASEAN members.

ASEAN will also work with **external partners** to support AI-related developments and digital governance, including on cybersecurity. Notably, the only extra-ASEAN agreement **signed** during the ADGMIN was a five-year ASEAN-China Memorandum of Understanding on Cooperation in Communications and Digital Technology, which pledged deeper cooperation on cybersecurity, digital and ICT policies, digital infrastructure development, and emerging technologies including AI and 5G use cases. While that agreement underscores China's interest in influencing the digital economy in the region, certain aspects of China's efforts – especially in the realm of 5G – may encounter quiet resistance from the United States, Japan, South Korea, and others, due to perceived national security risks. Notably, the United States appeared to bring no specific ASEAN-focused proposals on AI or digital policy to Singapore, which seems to reflect Washington's recent spotty

approach on digital policy in the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF) and at the World Trade Organization.

Meanwhile, the United States, Japan, and South Korea did hold a **separate trilateral meeting** on the sidelines of the ADGMIN to discuss opportunities to strengthen cooperation on digital issues, building on similar discussions at the trilateral summit held at Camp David last August. The countries agreed to hold working-level follow-up meetings on priority areas, including cybersecurity, technology education, and mobile communication networks such as Open RAN.

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