Concept Paper

Rationale and Background

The contemporary global landscape is facing a wide range of challenges, including climate change resulting from the intensifying effects of global warming, the escalation of geopolitical conflicts, and the emergence of a new world order that challenges the existing globalization system. This shift is reflected in the growing reliance on trade protectionist measures adopted by countries to safeguard their national interests, leading to increasingly stringent policy implementation. These challenges have significant impacts on countries worldwide, particularly developing economies that rely heavily on exports, forcing them to confront structural difficulties and seek viable solutions.

The global economy is expected to remain volatile and unstable due to various factors that affect countries worldwide. According to UNCTAD (2025), global economic growth is shown to decelerate from 2.9 percent in 2024 to 2.6 percent in 2025, while economic expansion in developing economies is expected to remain stagnant with no acceleration. Developing economies are likely to be the most affected by these conditions, with growth projected to slow marginally to 4.2 percent in 2026. These outcomes are largely driven by international factors, including sudden policy shifts, increased volatility in financial channels, instability in capital flows and exchange rates, and heightened geopolitical tensions.

In response to these factors, the UNCTAD Trade and Development Report 2025 also proposes that addressing international and global imbalances requires diversification of export markets through international actions. Strengthening regional integration—including regional supply chains and regional trade is identified as a critical approach, as it provides countries with alternative options and greater flexibility. This also underscores the need for developing economies to strengthen and reassess their existing regional capacities and resources.

The Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), comprising countries in Southeast Asia with diverse economic potential, has been described as a “dark horse” in the global economy. This characterization stems from its distinctive strategic advantages, including abundant natural resources and rich cultural diversity, which enhance the region’s capacity to project its strengths within the global economic system. These factors are reflected in the differentiated economic potentials of individual member states: Thailand’s strengths in food security and biodiversity; Myanmar’s natural gas and critical mineral resources that support energy security; Singapore’s prominence in trade as well as financial and banking services; and Vietnam’s increasing ability to attract foreign direct investment (FDI). Collectively, these attributes strengthen ASEAN member states’ capacity to respond effectively to global-level challenges.

However, ASEAN continues to face internal challenges, particularly in terms of regional unity. The region encounters multiple constraints, including geopolitical factors and disparities in the strengths and weaknesses of individual member states. One important mechanism to strengthen ASEAN lies in the continuous and systematic understanding of each country's challenges, strengths, and policy directions. At present, however, in-depth analyses on these issues remain insufficient.

Foreseeing the profound impact of these shifting global dynamics, the International Institute for Trade and Development (ITD) recognizes that ASEAN member states share fundamental economic characteristics and face common structural vulnerabilities. In alignment with its core mission to enhance regional economic integration through the active exchange of experiences and knowledge, the ITD has positioned the Trade Intelligence Center (TIC) as the central stage for ASEAN cooperation, through a new series of Regional Trade Intelligence Report (TIR) and country-specific commission analytical papers. The TIC provides a dynamic platform for member countries to share in-depth insights, decode individual national strengths, and align policy directions. By deepening our systematic understanding of both regional capacities and their strategic implications for ASEAN members, the TIC empowers the ASEAN community to collaborate effectively, transforming shared global-level challenges into unified regional solutions and newly unlocked trade opportunities.

Objectives

- To produce **a comprehensive Regional Trade Intelligence Report (TIR)** that brings together country-level analyses of emerging economic trends across ASEAN, while reinforcing the Trade Intelligence Centre (TIC) as a regional platform for trade intelligence, knowledge exchange, and evidence-based cooperation.
- To produce **country-specific commission analytical papers** on ASEAN Member States, examining their economic conditions, key challenges, and opportunities through the lens of the identified megatrends, escalating trade wars and protectionist policies, Geopolitical Conflicts and the shifting world order, Rapid technological transformation, Structural demographic shifts, and climate change and the impacts of global warming.

To promote knowledge exchange and strengthen academic cooperation among countries under the framework of the Trade Intelligence Center and the ASEAN community