



29 October 2022

## **National Youth Council providing students with more opportunities for overseas exposure**

*Youths involved in overseas programmes to ASEAN expected to increase by over 45% in 2023, from pre-pandemic numbers in 2019*

The number of youths participating in National Youth Council (NYC)-supported volunteering expeditions, youth conferences, and immersion programmes in ASEAN is expected to double in 2023, as compared to 2019. Next year, there will be over 7,000 regional opportunities for local youths to bond with regional counterparts through the National Youth Council's (NYC's) Asia-Ready Exposure Programme (AEP), bilateral and multilateral youth exchange programmes, and Youth Corps Singapore's<sup>1</sup> (YCS') Youth Expedition Programme (YEP), up from 4,800 in 2019. Close to 80 percent of these opportunities are the result of NYC's partnerships with Institutes of Higher Learning (IHLs)<sup>2</sup>, with the Singapore University of Social Sciences (SUSS) being the latest partner to sign a three-year partnership with NYC in 2022.

2 Minister of State for Culture, Community and Youth and Trade and Industry, Alvin Tan, shared these details at the 4<sup>th</sup> ASEAN Youth Fellowship (AYF), organised by NYC and the Singapore International Foundation. In his opening address, he shared about the importance for ASEAN to strengthen social connections and support for each other in the region, especially with the resumption of international travel. 45 delegates, from across the ASEAN region, will congregate and participate in dialogues with senior policy makers and thought leaders, as well as immersive learning journeys and networking sessions in Singapore and Jakarta from 29 October to 5 November 2022.

### **Building an ASEAN community with partners**

3 NYC, with the support of local and ASEAN partners, have gradually resumed overseas programmes for youths as borders re-opened this year. By the end of 2022, over 800 youths would have travelled to countries in the ASEAN region, immersing themselves in social impact or industry-specific projects.

#### *Asia-Ready Exposure Programme (AEP)*

4. The latest three-year partnership with SUSS, through NYC's Asia-Ready Exposure Programme, is expected to benefit more than 2,500 students with cultural and industry exposure to the ASEAN region, China, and India. Since its inception in August 2020, 10,000

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<sup>1</sup> Youth Corps Singapore (YCS) is the volunteering arm of the National Youth Council.

<sup>2</sup> Ngee Ann Polytechnic, Republic Polytechnic, Temasek Polytechnic, and Institute of Technical Education (ITE).

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youths from IHLs have developed a deeper understanding of Singapore's relationship with the region through the AEP programme, which was conducted virtually due to the pandemic. This includes 5,000 youths who participated in the Asia Ready Webinar Series<sup>3</sup> between September 2020 to August 2022.

*Youth Corps Singapore (YCS) Youth Expedition Project (YEP)*

5 Similarly, YCS' Youth Expedition Project continues to encourage our youths to deepen bonds with ASEAN youths through leading and participating in volunteering projects. 35 students from Temasek Polytechnic were the first YEP group to travel to Cambodia to embark on a community service project to teach in a primary school when borders re-opened this year.

*Bilateral and Multilateral Conferences*

6 Youth leaders from Singapore have travelled to other parts of the region, such as Cambodia and Indonesia, to participate in bilateral and multilateral youth conferences in the last three months, with more expected to travel to the region in the last quarter of this year. For example, NYC will be sending a delegation of five youths to the upcoming APEC Voices of the Future<sup>4</sup> platform in Bangkok in November. Youth participants will network with other youth representatives, take part in cultural exchanges and dialogue with high level representatives.

7 ANNEX provides a copy of MOS Alvin Tan's speech. For more information, please contact:

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**About the National Youth Council**

At NYC, we believe in a world where young people are respected and heard and have the ability to influence and make a difference in the world. Together with our partners, we develop future-ready youth who are committed to Singapore by instilling in them a heart for service, resilience and an enterprising spirit.

**About the ASEAN Youth Fellowship**

The ASEAN Youth Fellowship (AYF) is 7-day apex youth leadership development programme to cultivate a network of emerging ASEAN young leaders. It is organised by the National Youth Council (NYC), in partnership with the Singapore International Foundation (SIF). It is powered by the Singapore-ASEAN Youth Fund.

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<sup>3</sup> The Asia-Ready Webinar Series, an ongoing collaboration between the Singapore Institute of International Affairs and the NYC, allows youth participants to learn about key issues and emerging trends in the region through conversations with industry experts.

<sup>4</sup> The APEC Voices of the Future (VOF) is an annual programme which brings together young people and educators from the 21 APEC Participating Economies to attend the APEC Summit.

**Opening Address by Mr Alvin Tan, Minister of State, Ministry of Culture,  
Community and Youth & Ministry of Trade and Industry**

**Introduction**

1. The world has changed significantly over the past decade.
  - a. The invasion of Ukraine, which may seem far away for some of us, has led to disruptions in energy and food supplies across the world. The broader rivalry between US and China has also intensified across multiple domains.
  - b. The COVID-19 pandemic has exposed the vulnerability of youths in the region due to job losses, disruptions in education and training, and barriers to entering the labour force. This led to youth unemployment in ASEAN increasing from 8.9% in 2019 to 11.3% in 2021.<sup>5</sup>
  - c. The acceleration towards the digital economy has created exciting opportunities for all our economies. But it has also created jobs that require proficiency in digital skills, exposing mismatches between the ASEAN workforce and the future of work.
2. ASEAN will need to adjust to these shifts, but I am hopeful that we will remain a bright spot of opportunities for our youths.
  - a. ASEAN is one of the world's fastest growing economies. Before the pandemic, ASEAN was the 5<sup>th</sup> largest economy in the world and was on track to become the 4<sup>th</sup> largest by 2030<sup>6</sup>.
  - b. With more than 60% of its population aged under 35<sup>7</sup>, ASEAN is also home to a young and increasingly well-educated workforce who will drive economic growth and social progress.
3. The National Youth Council (NYC) is organising this 4<sup>th</sup> edition of the ASEAN Youth Fellowship (AYF) in partnership with the Singapore International Foundation. Inaugurated in 2018 as part of Singapore's Chairmanship of ASEAN, AYF is an apex leadership programme to grow and connect emerging ASEAN young leaders with a focus on public, private, people sector collaboration. Since its inception in 2018, more than 100 outstanding young leaders have become proud alumni of AYF.

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<sup>5</sup> Tobing, D. H. (2022, July 15). *Preparing Southeast Asia's Youth to Enter the Digital Economy*. <https://blogs.adb.org/blog/preparing-southeast-asia-s-youth-enter-digital-economy>

<sup>6</sup> Lee, J and Adam S. (2022, Jan 18). *ASEAN is poised for post-pandemic inclusive growth and prosperity – here's why*. World Economic Forum. <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/01/asean-is-poised-for-post-pandemic-inclusive-growth-and-prosperity-heres-why/>

<sup>7</sup> COVID-19 — *The True Test of ASEAN Youth's Resilience and Adaptability*. ASEAN Youth Survey 2020 Edition. (Jul 2020). World Economic Forum [www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF\\_ASEAN\\_Youth\\_Survey\\_2020\\_Report.pdf](http://www3.weforum.org/docs/WEF_ASEAN_Youth_Survey_2020_Report.pdf).

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4. Inspired by the theme of Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship 2022, this year's AYF focuses on the togetherness of ASEAN in taking action to overcome problems and uncertainties faced by the region, and congregate young leaders in ASEAN to ACT – Addressing Challenges Together.

**Unity in Diversity**

5. I am happy that we can now meet together, face-to-face, after two years of the pandemic. ASEAN has worked hard to battle COVID-19 together.
  - a. Different ASEAN Member States came together to contribute to the COVID-19 ASEAN Response Fund to promote equitable access to COVID-19 vaccines for all nations.
6. With borders re-opening and global travel resuming, ASEAN continues to work together to establish an ASEAN Universal Identification Mechanism to facilitate seamless travel across borders.<sup>8</sup>
7. As ASEAN economies recover from the global pandemic, the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement and ASEAN-wide strategy towards carbon neutrality will be developed and established to collectively strengthen regional supply chains to bolster recovery.<sup>9</sup>
8. Moving ahead, issues of common interest such as tackling climate change and the geopolitical situation among the major powers must remain our collective priority.
  - a. To allow ASEAN to flourish, we must continue to prioritise education, employment, and health;
  - b. We must continue to uphold the ASEAN values and strengthen our ASEAN identity, as individuals and as a collective.
9. Singapore launched the Forward Singapore exercise this year to engage Singaporeans to understand their concerns and aspirations, build consensus, and refresh the nation's social compact.
  - a. Under Forward Singapore, we have the Unite Pillar which seeks to tackle how we can build and maintain a cohesive, inclusive, and united Singapore.
10. In the same vein as the Unite Pillar, it is essential that we strengthen social connections and mutually support each other in the region, to stay united as one ASEAN.

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<sup>8</sup> Begum, Y. (2022, March 16). *ASEAN member states to explore further ways to strengthen supply chains amid COVID-19 recovery*. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/asean-member-states-explore-further-ways-strengthen-supply-chains-amid-covid-19-recovery-2568846>

<sup>9</sup> Cheng, I. (2022, May 15). *ASEAN to work towards mutual recognition of COVID-19 vaccination certificates to facilitate smooth travel*. <https://www.channelnewsasia.com/singapore/asean-mutual-recognition-covid-19-vaccination-certificates-ong-ye-kung-moh-2686721>

11. Inculcating a sense of belonging to ASEAN and deepening bonds with youths from the region has always been our priority.
  - a. During the pandemic, when travel was restricted, we worked with partners to initiate and support online learning journeys, internships, and projects with youths from the region.
    - (i) Asia Virtual Exposure Series Vietnam: An industry immersion program comprising of workshops and webinar dialogues to examine the business and industry opportunities in Vietnam. Organised by HFSE Global Academy, the programme provides a platform for networking with Vietnamese youth and industry representatives, while picking up cross-cultural knowledge and communication skills.
  - b. This year, as borders gradually re-opened, ASEAN member states have started organising in-person youth exchanges to bring youth leaders from the region together, such as the ASEAN Youth Dialogue held in Siem Reap, Cambodia in July and the ASEAN Youth Interfaith Camp 2022 in Indonesia. Singapore too has resumed our physical youth exchanges, both inbound and outbound including playing host to the 4<sup>th</sup> AYF.
12. By the end of this year, over 800 Singaporean youths would have travelled to countries in ASEAN immersing themselves in social or industry-specific projects.<sup>10</sup>
  - a. Singaporean youths can learn from ASEAN counterparts and have a richer contextual understanding of Singapore's role in the region.
  - b. For example, later in December, around 30 young Singaporeans will be travelling to Malaysia to network with students from Universiti Teknologi Petronas (UTP) and learn about clean energy efforts in Malaysia's oil and gas industry.
  - c. For two weeks, they will engage with industry representatives and immerse themselves in local communities to understand about sources of renewable energy Malaysia is looking to implement for sustainable development.
  - d. Next year, with the support of local and ASEAN partners, there will be over 7,000 regional opportunities for our youths to bond with counterparts in the region through overseas programmes and virtual engagements. This is part of our Asia-Ready Exposure Programme initiative to provide our youths with meaningful exposure to the region and to build friendships and networks with fellow ASEAN youths.

## **ASEAN Youths' Pivotal Role as Future Leaders**

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<sup>10</sup> Figure is calculated from a combination of YEP, AEP and IA programmes

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13. The 4<sup>th</sup> AYF coincides with the Year of ASEAN Youth<sup>11</sup>, celebrating young people as leaders who will take the region forward through overcoming the challenges facing ASEAN. The ASEAN Youth Fellows play a pivotal role in rallying fellow youths and the wider community in navigating the VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, ambiguous) environment.
  
14. ASEAN youth leaders have played a pivotal role in supporting their fellow peers and vulnerable groups. Let me share two examples of such youths here with us today.
  - a. **Matin Bin Mohdari** started the Tech for Good Institute, a new non-profit Think Tank established by Grab that leverages the promise of technology to advance inclusive, equitable, and sustainable growth.
  
  - b. As a Director of Marketing Communications at a local Malay community self-help group, Young MENDAKI club, he supports the youth mentorship and development programmes for the underserved community.
  
  - c. **Carmen Lopez** has over 14 years of experience in development in both the public and private sectors and is a Feminist Nurse Leader. She is a 2022 Young Southeast Asian Leaders Initiative Professional Fellow and was the youngest outstanding alumni awardee of the Manila Science High School in 2013.
  
  - d. She is a Gender and Development Consultant and the Chief Empowerment Officer of HerStore Asia, a digital empowerment platform that supports women artisan enterprises across Southeast Asia.
  
15. You may come from various backgrounds and sectors, but like Matin and Carmen, all of you possess one thing in common – the ability to contribute ideas and inspire change in your spheres of influence.
  
16. In the next few days, you will take part in many different activities that have been curated exclusively for the Fellowship.
  - a. You will have the opportunity to engage with prominent thought leaders and policy makers in Singapore and Jakarta.
  
  - b. And embark on various learning journeys to learn best practices to reduce waste, broaden your perspectives on food security, and learn about social inclusion.
  
  - c. It is my hope that by the end of the programme, you can think of solutions for the problems you see, and work together to address the challenges in the region.

## Conclusion

17. I wish you a fruitful programme ahead where:

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<sup>11</sup> As part of the deliverables under Cambodia's ASEAN Chairmanship, 2022 has been designated as the Year of ASEAN Youth.

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- a. Lasting friendships and networks are formed,
  - b. We develop a strong sense of togetherness among us, and
  - c. A united ASEAN community that transcends borders can be established.
18. Thank you.