

Another notable characteristic of ASEAN as an organisation has been the relatively small size and stability of its membership. This has changed only once, with the admission of Brunei in 1984, a development which did not necessitate and changes to ASEAN's structure overall. Although an increase in membership of ASEAN has been canvassed on a number of occasions, the association has been cautious and reserved when considering potential new members. A Sri Lankan bid for membership was rejected. Papua New Guinea however, acquired 'official observer status' in 1976, became a 'special member' in 1983, and gained membership in three ASEAN committees in 1985. "Indonesia's Foreign Minister Mochtar summed up the recent ASEAN consensus on the membership issue when he stated in July 1986: 'I think it is enough for ASEAN to have six members... A new member will not automatically make ASEAN more effective.'"²⁶

New dialogue relations have also been suggested, but ASEAN has been cautious in considering broadening the dialogue relationships. A move was made in 1984 with the introduction of the 6 plus 5 dialogues with the five Pacific dialogue partners (Japan, the US, Canada, Australia, and New Zealand). However, ASEAN has a strong interest in ensuring that such discussions are not dominated by the major developed Pacific economies (especially Japan) in ways detrimental to its developing Third World membership.