Achieving Inclusive Higher Education in the ASEAN Region
IMPRINT

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<th>Definition</th>
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<tr>
<td>AICHR</td>
<td>ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights</td>
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<td>AMS</td>
<td>ASEAN Member State</td>
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<td>AQRF</td>
<td>ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework</td>
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<td>ARC</td>
<td>ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education</td>
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<td>ASCC</td>
<td>ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASEAN</td>
<td>Association of South-East Asian Nations</td>
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<tr>
<td>ASEA-UNINET</td>
<td>ASEAN-European Academic University Network</td>
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<td>ASEF</td>
<td>Asia-Europe Foundation</td>
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<td>ASEM</td>
<td>Asia-Europe Meeting</td>
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<tr>
<td>COIL</td>
<td>Collaborative Online International Learning</td>
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<tr>
<td>Covid-19</td>
<td>Coronavirus Disease 2019</td>
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<td>EU</td>
<td>European Union</td>
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<tr>
<td>HE</td>
<td>Higher Education</td>
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<td>HEI</td>
<td>Higher Education Institution</td>
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<tr>
<td>J-MCP</td>
<td>Japan Multilateral COIL Project</td>
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<td>MOOCs</td>
<td>Massive Open Online Courses</td>
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<tr>
<td>MOU</td>
<td>Memorandum of Understanding</td>
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<tr>
<td>NGO</td>
<td>Non-Governmental Organisation</td>
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<tr>
<td>SDGs</td>
<td>Sustainable Development Goals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>TVET</td>
<td>Technical-Vocational Education and Training</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UMAP</td>
<td>University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>UTB</td>
<td>Universiti Teknologi Brunei</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4A</td>
<td>Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Adaptability of Education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5P</td>
<td>Purpose, Principles, Processes, People, Performance</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
I. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report on “Achieving inclusive higher education in the ASEAN region” aims to better understand the current state of policies and practices as well as opportunities and challenges to equity and inclusion in ASEAN higher education institutions (HEIs). While access to and success in quality education has been firmly placed on the international agenda through its inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; United Nations Development Programme, n.d.), Southeast Asia is currently not on track to achieving this objective (Teter, 2021) and the Covid-19 pandemic has further disrupted progress in this area.

This report will focus on two key interrelated aspects of achieving quality education in the 21st century: equitable access and success as well as inclusive internationalisation. Equitable access “refers to the participation by students who are either in the minority in a particular country or come from a “disadvantaged majority” who on average earn less or experience greater social and economic challenges than a minority population” (Asia-Europe Foundation, 2021). Inequalities of access and success in higher education (HE) are still strongly prevalent in the ASEAN region and addressing these is key in ensuring both individual and societal development. Given today’s globalised and interconnected world, inclusive opportunities for international education are also a key challenge to ensure students’ success. Since access to internationalisation opportunities provides students with key skills for their future career, reserving access to these for an advantaged minority further reinforces educational and societal inequalities. As such, equitable access and success in HE goes hand-in-hand with equitable access to internationalisation opportunities. Both issues must be addressed in tandem to achieve the overarching goal of quality education for all.

This report builds on the Asia-Europe Foundation’s (ASEF) ARC8 Outlook Report 2030 on “Inclusive and Diverse higher Education in Asia and Europe” (2021), as well as on the Equitable Access and Success in Higher Education and Advancing Inclusion in International Higher Education in ASEAN workshops organised by the ASEF in December 2021 for ASEAN and European HE professionals and professionals. As such, the experience of university professionals in the field is used to create actionable insights to foster greater inclusion in ASEAN HE in the post-pandemic era.

The ARC8 Outlook Report, launched during the 8th ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education, describes the status quo of inclusion in four key areas - equitable access and success, inclusive learning in a digital world, inclusive international mobility, and inclusive lifelong learning pathways - across Asia and Europe. The report focuses on referencing the risks as well as opportunities for enhancing inclusivity in HE by 2030.

Based on this report, ASEF organised two capacity building workshops which gathered HE professionals from both Asia and Europe along with experts to exchange on the key challenges to inclusive education and internationalisation while providing opportunities to share the best practices to enhance inclusivity. Along with insights gathered during the workshops organised by the ASEF, this report collects information from two surveys distributed to the workshops’ participants and applicants.
A total of 291 survey responses from over 100 institutions in both Asia and Europe were collected and evaluated to understand the current policies and practices, the effects of the pandemic, and strategies and aims for the future with regards to equitable and inclusive HE.

Using these sources, this report studies the current situation, the main challenges and opportunities faced by ASEAN HEIs in the areas of (1) equitable access and success and (2) inclusive internationalisation, and finally provides actionable policy recommendations to improve performance in these domains.

MAIN FINDINGS

Section II of this report studies the following research question (RQ1):

RQ1: What are the main challenges and opportunities at ASEAN universities in terms of equitable access and success of students in their institutions?

The current situation in ASEAN with regards to equitable access and success remains quite mixed. The survey conducted among 134 professionals (89 respondents from ASEAN HEIs) of HEIs showed that currently 56% of the surveyed ASEAN HEIs have diversity or inclusion strategies. Generally, ASEAN HEIs put more emphasis on inclusion in terms of “disability”, “ethnicity”, and “race”. Simultaneously, the survey results indicated that there is a significant gap between respondents’ perceived importance of inclusion and current status quo in their institutions. Beyond the persisting challenges in the equitable access and success process itself, several institutions showed quite high levels of disagreement on the existence and content of their institutional inclusion strategies, which, if not addressed, may significantly hinder coherent actions towards more equitable access and success.

The main challenges identified towards greater equitable access and success in HE can be regrouped into three categories, namely financial, institutional, and cultural barriers. The financial barriers pose the most prominent barrier for equitable access and success in HE. Although financial assistance measures are in place to aid students in need, they tend to be limited in scope and insufficient. Additionally, the lack of financial means also hinders HEIs’ ability to provide other academic and non-academic services, thereby hindering students’ ability to succeed.

The second major challenge is institutional barriers. The lack of institutional policies within some ASEAN Member States (AMS) to accommodate the marginalised groups contributes to their exclusion from HE. Not only is there a lack of specific equity strategies within certain institutions, but many are unclear on their existence; some omit infrastructures to accommodate for the education of the marginalised groups; faculties, curriculums, and modes of delivery are not adapted to cater to marginalised groups; and, some academic enrolment processes complicate marginalised groups’ ability to access HE. These are in part due to a lack of political will, and in part due to the exclusion of certain relevant stakeholders in the policy and programme formulation process, which leads to their mis-formulation.

The third major challenge is cultural barriers. There is often a general lack of attention to and understanding of the underrepresented and marginalised groups within HE. Many of the policies and practices of HEIs are designed in a way that disregard marginalised groups. This means that the concerns and needs of these student groups are
misunderstood and therefore inadequately addressed. In combination with external factors like financial constraints, historical violence, or the unequal effects of the Covid-19 pandemic, these cultural barriers affect these students’ access as well as success in HE.

In response to the identified challenges, this report lists twelve recommendations for equitable access and success in ASEAN HE:

Financial barriers for HEIs challenge
Recommendations:

1. Greater government investments in HE & HEIs
2. HEIs to establish and develop public-private partnerships.

Financial barriers for students challenge
Recommendations:

3. Develop scholarships and needs-based grants in conjunction with outreach programmes.
4. Establish specific objectives, accompanied by strategies to attain milestones.
5. Recognise marginalised students’ perspectives in the policy and programme formulation.
6. Develop adaptable policies and programmes, including their modes of delivery.
7. Develop sound and sustainable policies and programmes through evidence-based findings.
8. Enhance the internal communication and dissemination of policies, programmes, and strategies.
9. Consider adopting the “5P” model and “4A” scheme.

Cultural barriers challenge
Recommendations:

10. Train academic staff to be more sensible and adaptive.
11. Provide greater access to non-academic pastoral support resources and professionals
12. Consider implementing occasional “mental wellness days”.
Section III of the report focuses on inclusive internationalisation and aims at answering the following question:

RQ2: What are the main challenges and opportunities at ASEAN universities in terms of inclusive internationalisation in their institutions?

Similar to equitable access and success, the situation regarding inclusive internationalisation in ASEAN HEIs remains mixed at best. The survey conducted among 157 professionals of HEIs in the ASEAN region demonstrated that, currently, 86% of the surveyed ASEAN HEIs have internationalisation strategies. However, less than half (43%) include provisions to ensure the inclusiveness of these strategies.

Generally, physical mobility remains rather limited, with over 60% of ASEAN universities sending less than 5% of their students abroad. Simultaneously, internationalisation remains oriented towards the region with the top geographic priorities being other ASEAN members or East Asian countries. Inclusivity in internationalisation activities remains limited with less than 4% reporting that there are underrepresented groups in such programmes.

Furthermore, the pandemic has had a significant impact especially on the presence of international students and the opportunities for local students and faculty. Beyond the challenges remaining in the internationalisation process itself, numerous institutions show quite high levels of disagreement on multiple internationalisation priorities, which, if not addressed, may significantly affect negatively the implementation of inclusive internationalisation strategies.

During the workshop Advancing Inclusion in International Higher Education in ASEAN, the participants and guest speakers identified several major challenges to incorporating inclusiveness into the internationalisation strategies of HEIs. The most important and prevailing challenge is, evidently, institutional barriers and the structural discrimination that disadvantaged and marginalised students face in their access to education. Many institutions suffer from a lack of a strategic vision and culture towards inclusive internationalisation, leading students and staff to fail in identifying the numerous benefits associated with an internationalisation opportunity. Students of such institutions tend to perceive internationalisation opportunities in terms of their costs and challenges rather than their benefits. Even when a vision and culture of internationalisation exist, HE professionals, particularly evolving in smaller institutions of local or regional influence, suffer from a lack of opportunities to offer to their students for mobility programmes.

In addition to institutional barriers, disadvantaged students face a series of additional constraints that prevent them from successfully accessing internationalisation opportunities. Traditional, long-term mobility programmes often do not suit the needs and situations of disadvantaged students who have to care for their family or who are employed to finance their studies.

Overall, current internationalisation programmes do not suit the immediate needs and desires of such students, who most of the time are looking for ways to rapidly improve their financial situation. The very cost of such programmes is most of the time the first barrier faced by students.
Moreover, a lack of acculturation to internationalisation for disadvantaged students further limits their ability to engage in such opportunities and hinders their interest in internationalisation activities in contrast to more advantaged students who are always acculturated to the benefits of such programmes and activities.

The inadaptation of the curriculum to integrate internationalisation further strengthens this gap between advantaged and disadvantaged students by preventing the latter access to this necessary acculturation.

Finally, informational and knowledge barriers remain high within institutions and affect students from all backgrounds. Inefficient and/or insufficient communication furthermore risks reinforcing the fear of disadvantaged students towards internationalisation opportunities in the face of the challenges they risk encountering when travelling abroad, particularly in times of crisis such as the Covid-19 pandemic. The lack of knowledge of English can further represent a challenge towards engaging in such opportunities, given its status of lingua franca across HEIs. The numerous administrative and personal challenges associated with travelling abroad and settling into a new country can strongly deter disadvantaged students from engaging in such activities. Furthermore, disadvantaged students are more likely to have trouble understanding key requirements and deadlines for internationalisation programmes, as well as finding and applying for scholarship and other support opportunities. This can create situations of self-censorship among such students, and prevent others from successfully applying for and engaging in an internationalisation opportunity.

In response to these identified challenges, this report offers eight recommendations for inclusive ASEAN international mobility, as shown below:

**Institutional challenges**
Recommendations:
1. Develop a mobility strategy with defined targets
2. Develop MOUs with smaller and more diverse ASEAN universities.

**Additional constraints for disadvantaged students**
Recommendations:
3. Diversify the types and duration of mobility programmes available.
4. Internationalise the curriculum to improve interest in internationalisation.
5. Develop a conscious hybridization of the curriculum.
6. Develop virtual internationalisation opportunities.

**Informational & knowledge challenges**
Recommendations:
7. Embrace inclusive communication across the institution.
8. Implement and share a checklist for inbound and outbound students.
II. INTRODUCTION

Quality education is a key driver to both individual and societal development, especially in the knowledge-economy of the 21st century. While access to and success in quality education has been firmly placed on the international agenda through its inclusion in the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs; United Nations Development Programme, n.d.), Southeast Asia is currently not on track to achieving this objective (Teter, 2021) and the Covid-19 pandemic has further disrupted progress in this area. While the initial focus in the early 2000s lay on primary school education for all, this has mostly been achieved, shifting attention towards secondary and tertiary education.

However, the promotion of quality education goes beyond measures including share of students enrolled, teacher quality, or available resources, and must focus on equitable and inclusive access to all students regardless of their background or current situation. The Covid-19 pandemic has emphasised the fragility of the progress made in this domain by starkly highlighting the importance of a student’s socioeconomic background and environment in navigating the education system in times of lockdowns, school closures, and home-based learning. Therefore, such issues of equitable and inclusive access and success in higher education (HE) are much more pervasive and require cohesive and concerted policy efforts to overcome and avoid the negative individual and societal impacts of educational inequality.

This report on “Achieving inclusive higher education in the ASEAN region” aims to better understand the current state of policies and practices as well as challenges and opportunities to two key interrelated aspects of achieving quality education in the 21st century - equitable access and success as well as inclusive internationalisation - within ASEAN higher education institutions (HEIs). It will build on the Asia-Europe Foundation’s (ASEF) ARC8 Outlook Report 2030 on “Inclusive and Diverse higher Education in Asia and Europe” (2021), as well as on the Equitable Access and Success in Higher Education and Advancing Inclusion in International Higher Education in ASEAN workshops organised by the ASEF for ASEAN and European HE professionals and professionals.

Following a background to the issue of equitable and inclusive HE in ASEAN as well as an overview of the conducted workshops and surveys, this report will examine the current context, the main challenges and opportunities within ASEAN HEIs before giving policy recommendations to both university professionals and government officials in terms of equitable access and success and inclusive internationalisation in Chapter II and III, respectively.

Background

Key concepts: equitable access and success & inclusive internationalisation

Ensuring that all students, regardless of their socioeconomic background or current situation, are able to access and thrive in all parts of the HE system is key to fostering both individual success and societal development at a larger scale. Therefore this report focuses on the two key concepts of equitable access and success, and inclusive internationalisation.

As per the ARC8 Outlook Report 2030,
equitable access “refers to the participation by students who are either in the minority in a particular country or come from a “disadvantaged majority” who on average earn less or experience greater social and economic challenges than a minority population” (ASEF, 2021, p.15). However, equitable access on its own is insufficient. It must be combined with policies that ensure “success” both within higher learning institutions and subsequently in later life for students from minority or disadvantaged majority populations. Such success is not only determined by employment-related outcomes like earnings, type of occupation, and occupational progress, but equally by the development of the “capabilities of students to be productive citizens and their “humanistic” identities” (ibid.).

As part of equitable education, inclusive access to international education should also represent a key challenge for professionals and policymakers. Given today’s globalised and interconnected world, inclusive opportunities for international education are also a key challenge to ensure students’ success. Since access to internationalisation opportunities provides students with key skills for their future career, reserving access to these for an elite minority further reinforces educational and societal inequalities within ASEAN nations. Inclusive internationalisation can be defined as “a comprehensive process of strategically planning, concretely designing and taking targeted measures to ensure that all participants can enjoy the full benefits of internationalisation activities” (Delap & Ferencz, 2021). As such, equitable access and success in HE goes hand-in-hand with equitable access to internationalisation opportunities. Both issues must be addressed in tandem to achieve the overarching goal of quality education for all. In this setting, this report aims to gather insights and survey responses from the Capacity Building Workshops on equitable access and success as well as on inclusive internationalisation to provide a global picture of the key challenges and opportunities towards inclusive education in ASEAN.

**Current State of Equitable and Inclusive Education in ASEAN**

Equitable access and success in HE remains a pressing issue. According to Graeme Atherton et al. (2016), access to HE is unequal by social background throughout all countries where data is available (equivalent to 90% of the countries worldwide). Specifically, the study shows that inequality and access to HE is a global challenge and that there is no country in the world where the chances of accessing HE are the same regardless of a person’s socio-economic background (ibid., p.23). The lack of equitable access and success in HE contributes to a widening gap between lower middle class and poor households compared to the rest of society, which in turn negatively affects economic growth.

As stated in Article 28 of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) and reiterated in the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities (CRPD), access to education is a human right. Within ASEAN, Article 31 of the ASEAN Human Right Declaration (AHRD) states that:

“(1) Every person has the right to education, (2) Primary education shall be compulsory and made available free to all. Secondary education in its different forms shall be available and accessible to all through every appropriate means. Technical and vocational education shall be made generally available. Higher education shall be equally accessible
to all on the basis of merit, and (3) Education shall be directed to the full development of the human personality and the sense of his or her dignity. Education shall strengthen the respect for human rights and fundamental freedoms in ASEAN Member States. Furthermore, education shall enable all persons to participate effectively in their respective societies, promote understanding, tolerance and friendship among all nations, racial and religious groups, and enhance the activities of ASEAN for the maintenance of peace.”

Additionally, through the Bali Declaration on the Enhancement of the Role and Participation of the Persons with Disabilities in ASEAN Community, ASEAN Member States have pledged to provide equal rights to persons with disability also in the sector of education.

Southeast Asia (SEA) is home to approximately 7 700 HEIs and 12 million students out of a population of 661 million (ASEF, 2021, p.11). It is a diverse region both in terms of its citizenry as well as the types of HE and policies it espouses as a result of the various cultures, historical experiences, and socio-economic situations. Although the ASEAN community has witnessed a noteworthy development of HE in the past decade, issues relating to individual’s access and success in HE have contributed to the persistence of poverty and inequality in the region (AICHR, 2019, p.39 & ASEF, 2021, p.12).

A key aspect of tertiary education in preparing students for success in the labour market of the 21st century involves internationalisation activities, through which students gain exposure to foreign ideas and practices, and learn to interact with individuals from different linguistic and cultural backgrounds.

While the share of students who participate in study-abroad programmes to gain such international experience has more than doubled since the year 2000, for the vast majority of students such opportunities are limited by “geographical, political, structural, and/or social factors beyond their control” (ibid., p.72).

According to the Study on Enhancing Intra-ASEAN University Student Mobility, out of the almost 19 million students enrolled in tertiary education in 2018 in the 10 ASEAN countries, only 302 000 were involved in outbound international mobility opportunities, which represents only 1.7% of all students (Atherton et al., 2021). Even among students who are able to engage in such opportunities, mobility is often undertaken outside of the ASEAN region. While intra-ASEAN inbound and outbound mobility has been increasing steadily prior to the pandemic, in 2018 less than 10% of all such mobility was undertaken among ASEAN Member States. The vast majority of ASEAN students choosing to study abroad do so in countries not part of ASEAN, despite the existence of four major scholarship programmes and targeted initiatives providing funding to disadvantaged students (ibid.). Total inbound/outbound student mobility amounted to 537 000 students in 2018, with Vietnam, Malaysia, Indonesia, Singapore, and Thailand registering the largest numbers of inbound/outbound students within the ASEAN.

Table 1. International student mobility in ASEAN (2018)

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Type of Mobility</th>
<th>Number of ASEAN students</th>
<th>Member States with Largest N. of Students</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Outbound</td>
<td>302,000</td>
<td>Viet Nam, Malaysia, Indonesia</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Inbound</td>
<td>235,000</td>
<td>Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Atherton et al., 2021.
Since the outbreak of the Covid-19 pandemic in December 2019, education at all levels has been facing severe disruptions, including school closures, lockdowns, and stringent border controls, among others. Students have had to navigate learning in an entirely new environment and context, while education professionals have had to adapt to the restrictions and limitations of teaching and ensure the well-being of their students. In that sense, the pandemic has also represented a major turning point for the testing and deployment of new teaching methods, making full use of the virtual education opportunities offered by new technologies.

However, the pandemic is also characterised by a significant increase in inequality in terms of access to education and opportunities. Students already disadvantaged prior to the outbreak of the pandemic have, since then, had to navigate a more challenging environment in which many faced their own or their caretakers’ loss of income. Many students have had to study in significantly degraded conditions, with a large number forced to stop their studies temporarily or entirely to support their families. The pandemic has shown the extent of inequalities in access to education and in the students’ enjoyment of their HE experience.

In spite of the major challenges and hardships brought by the pandemic, the crisis represents a window of opportunity to act on the issues of inequity in access to education and international mobility opportunities. The pandemic is an occasion to rethink equitable access and international programmes, towards a diversification of opportunities and an inclusion of all students. As the workshops and this report prove, ASEAN and global education professionals are committed to ushering in and implementing positive change for a truly inclusive HE in ASEAN. As such, the recommendations provided at the end of this report offer ways for education professionals as well as policymakers to rethink equitable access to education and international mobility.

**Methodology**

This report builds on ASEF’s ARC8 Outlook Report 2030 on “Inclusive and Diverse higher Education in Asia and Europe” (2021), as well as on the workshops Equitable Access and Success in Higher Education and Advancing Inclusion in International Higher Education in ASEAN organised by the ASEF for ASEAN and European HE professionals and professionals.

As such, the experience of university professionals in the field is used to study current challenges and opportunities and to create actionable insights in order to foster greater inclusion in higher ASEAN HE in the post-pandemic era.

The report will be guided by the following two research questions:

- **What are the main challenges and opportunities at ASEAN universities in terms of equitable access and success of students in their institutions?**

- **What are the main challenges and opportunities at ASEAN universities in terms of inclusive internationalisation in their institutions?**

The ARC8 Outlook Report, which forms the basis of the current research, was launched during the 8th ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education and describes the status quo of inclusion in four key areas - equitable access and success, inclusive learning in a digital world, inclusive international mobility,
and inclusive lifelong learning pathways - across Asia and Europe. The report focuses on referencing the risks as well as opportunities for enhancing inclusivity in HE by 2030.

Based on this report, the ASEF organised two capacity building workshops which gathered HE professionals from both Asia and Europe along with experts to exchange on the key challenges to inclusive education and internationalisation while providing opportunities to share best practices for enhancing inclusivity. Each workshop was conducted online between the 15th November and 17th December 2021. The workshop *Equitable Access and Success in Higher Education* gathered 33 participants from 20 countries across Europe and Asia, to gather insights and collaborate on best practices towards achieving equitable access and success for all students in Asia and Europe. The workshop *Advancing Inclusion in International Higher Education in ASEAN*, held in tandem, gathered 33 participants from the ten ASEAN Member States, focusing on best practices towards providing inclusive internationalisation to all students in the ASEAN region.

The workshop combined one live session per week with presentations of and discussions with experts in the field of equity and inclusion in education, with focus group discussions among workshop participants aimed at sharing and developing best practices for inclusive education and internationalisation. The workshop was supported by an online platform and forum provided by the ASEF, in which participants could exchange out of the workshop sessions on challenges they face and best practices. Participants of both workshops were tasked with designing specific action plans for their HEIs for implementation towards equitable access and success in HE and in internationalisation.

Along with insights gathered during the ASEF-led workshops, this report further gathers information from two surveys distributed to the workshops’ participants and applicants in November 2021. A total of 291 responses from over 100 institutions in both Asia and Europe were collected and evaluated to understand the current policies and practices, the effects of the pandemic, and strategies and aims for the future with regards to equitable and inclusive HE.

134 and 157 individuals in various positions of responsibility within university administrations in the ASEAN region and in Europe were surveyed for the issues of equitable access and success and inclusive internationalisation, respectively. It is important to note, that similar to the workshops, only ASEAN professionals were surveyed for inclusive internationalisation, while both Asian and European professionals participated in the equitable access and success survey - however, this report focuses on ASEAN respondents only. For those applying to the capacity building workshop conducted by the ASEF, it was mandatory to complete the survey.

For the equitable access and success survey, a total of 134 individual responses from 88 educational institutions across the globe were collected, of which two-thirds of respondents come from ASEAN, with the latter being the focus in this report. As Figure 1 and 2 below indicate, responses from at least one institution were received from each ASEAN Member State, with nearly one third (30.7%) of responding institutions located in the Philippines.
In the inclusive internationalisation survey, the 157 respondents come from 101 different educational institutions across the ASEAN region. As Figure 2 below shows responses from a minimum of three different institutions were received from each ASEAN Member State, with nearly half (45.5%) of responding institutions located in the Philippines. Interestingly, Malaysia and Brunei Darussalam, while not representing a large number of institutions, have particularly many respondents per university, which will be used below to study intra-institution knowledge and communication of internationalisation strategies. One third of respondents work as administrative officers within their HEI, with an additional 20% working as administrative directors. Furthermore, 40% of respondents worked as academic faculty, with 10% holding high-level positions like vice dean or dean. The remaining respondents either held positions outside of HEIs, such as in the Ministry of Education or education foundations, or they did not disclose their position. Of all respondents, the mean and median number of years of experience in the higher education sector was 13 years, with 50% having between 6 and 20 years of experience.
Per the 8th Asia-Europe Foundation’s (ASEF) Regional Conference (ARC8) Outlook Report 2030 “Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Asia and Europe” (2021), equitable access to HE refers to “participation by students who are either in the minority in a particular country or come from a “disadvantaged majority” who on average earn less or experience greater social or economic challenges than a minority population.” (p.15). According to the OECD (January 2008), equity, in an educational context, has two implications.

The first is fairness, indicating that personal and social circumstances, including gender, ethnicity, religion, or socio-economic backgrounds, should not be a barrier to achieving academic goals.

The second is inclusivity which entails “ensuring a basic minimum standard of education for all” (p.2). More specifically, inclusivity refers to “to all students who may have been historically marginalised from meaningful education, who come from varied multi-cultural and multi-diverse backgrounds or who are at risk of not achieving their potential” (Forlin, 2013, p.68) These two dimensions, fairness and inclusivity, are complementary and should be given greater attention by HEIs.

In addition to access, “success” in HE is crucial. Success, as defined by the ARC8 Outlook Report, not only refers to the students’ ability to successfully complete their tertiary education thereby allowing them to attain enhanced employment opportunity outcomes, but also includes their ability to become increasingly more “productive citizens” and further their “humanistic identities” (Asia-Europe Foundation, 2021, p.15).
III.1. The current state of equitable access and success to HE in ASEAN

In the ASEM National Equity Policies in Higher Education 2021 study conducted by the ASEF, “less than a third” of Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) (16 out of 51) countries “have a specific higher education equity strategy” to enhance equitable access and success to HE (Asia-Europe Foundation, 2021a, p.19). Although ASEM Member States’ governments have identified a variety of target groups for equitable access and success, their policy documents have been found to focus less on children of people affected by historical violence, members of the LGBT community, and victims of sexual and gender-based violence. Regarding ASEAN countries, data retrieved from surveys with respective Member States’ Ministries of Education as part of the ASEM National Equity Policies in Higher Education report (Asia-Europe Foundation, 2021) indicates that all countries have identified low-income or lower socio-economic background students and persons with disability in their policy documents. However, there is a lack of attention attributed to several equity target groups. Only one ASEAN Member State, Vietnam, identified children of people affected by historical violence; only the Philippines identified victims of sexual and gender-based violence; and only Indonesia identified students with care experience, orphans and or youth without parental care in their respective policy documents. The “other” target group identified by Brunei Darussalam caters primarily to “students from the low-income families including orphans and those with single mothers” for its Technical and Vocational Scholarship Scheme (The Equity Policy Map, Brunei Darussalam, p.2). Figure 3 shows the number of ASEAN Member States identifying specific equity target groups in their HE policy documents, and Table 2 specifies the specific target groups identified in respective ASEAN Member States’ HE policies. Within ASEAN, the countries with the most identified target groups (6) are Indonesia and Thailand, while the countries with the least number of identified target groups (3) are Myanmar and Singapore.

Figure 3: Number of ASEAN Member States identifying specific equity target groups in their policy documents

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Target Group</th>
<th>Number</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-income or lower socio-economic background</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Persons with disabilities</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>People from rural background</td>
<td>6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous populations</td>
<td>5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender groups</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older or mature students</td>
<td>4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees of all kinds</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with care experience, orphans,</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims of sexual and gender violence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children of people affected by historical violence</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2: Equity target groups identified per ASEAN Member State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Equity Target Groups at Policy level</th>
<th>Brunei</th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
<th>Indonesia</th>
<th>Laos</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Myanmar</th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>VietNam</th>
<th>Total</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Low-income or lower socio-economic background</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with disabilities</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>10</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students from rural background</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>6</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Indigenous populations</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>5</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Gender groups</td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Older or mature students</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>x</td>
<td>4</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refugees of all kinds</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Students with care experience, orphans</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Victims of sexual and gender violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>x</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Children of people affected by historical violence</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Other</td>
<td>x</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>TOTAL</strong></td>
<td>4</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>4</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>5</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: *The Equity Policy Map. World Access to HE. (n.d.)*

Unlike the European Union, ASEAN does not provide for an interregional system of policy formation (Asia-Europe Foundation, 2021, p.25). Hence, AMS take various and differing approaches to promote equitable access and success for the target groups they identified. Table 3 compiles information retrieved from a survey with respective AMS’ Ministries of Education as part of the ASEM National Equity Policies in Higher Education report (Asia-Europe Foundation, 2021), which sought information on respective AMS’ policy frameworks, the means employed to achieve their policy targets, and the impact of Covid-19 on equitable access and success in HE.

Overall, the identification of specific equity target groups, the objectives, instruments, and institutional processes, including stakeholder consultation, tend to not be inclusive of all groups.

1. Specific targets for the participation of equity groups identified

Although ASEAN countries identify between three and six target groups, only three countries have established targets for the participation of specific equity groups in HE. While Indonesia and Myanmar centre mostly on providing low-income or lower socio-economic background students as well as ethnic minorities or individuals from least developed regions with greater opportunities to access HEIs, Lao PDR seeks to attain a 45% female student body within HEIs. However, although students with disabilities have been identified as a priority group by nine ASEAN states, none of the respondents identified any specific targets related to the access and success in HE for such students.

2. Instruments used to achieve equity policy targets

To achieve their policy targets, HEIs may employ “non-monetary” and “financial” instruments (ASEM, 2021, p.23). Regarding non-monetary instruments, these differ greatly amongst ASEAN countries. According to the Directorate General of Higher Education of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Indonesia, universities provide a wide array of services, including special institutions for students with disabilities, as exemplified by the Disability Service Study Centre. Malaysia, for its part, provides specific pathways to promote access to tertiary education, as exemplified by the Technical-Vocational.
Achieving Inclusive Higher Education in the ASEAN Region

3. Agencies responsible for equity policies and stakeholder participation

In establishing policies to promote equity, the primary agency responsible for this endeavour across all ASEAN Member States is their respective Ministry of Education. In Thailand, however, Higher Education Institution Associations, the Ministry of Finance, and the Southern Border Administrative Centre are also included in policy formulations. The stakeholder groups consulted in the policy formulation process to promote equity generally include HEIs and civil society. While some countries, namely Myanmar, consult a wider range of stakeholders, including private organisations and International Organisations, others, such as Cambodia and Lao PDR, are more restrictive in the consultation process. In monitoring the impact of the measures used to promote access and success within HEIs, with the exception of Vietnam, the respective Ministry of Education is the primary responsible agency. Thailand, however, also includes the Ministry of Finance in monitoring student loans, debt collection, and fund management.

4. Degree of autonomy by HEIs to achieve policy targets

In achieving the policy targets established, HEIs across Southeast Asia have varying levels of autonomy. HEIs in Thailand and Indonesia appear to have the highest degree of autonomy amongst ASEAN Member States as they reportedly have control over academic guidelines, student recruitment, curriculum formulation, grant proposals, and establishing programme partnerships, amongst others. Other countries’ HEIs have a lesser degree of autonomy. For example, HEIs in Cambodia, are reported to have control only over setting quotas on scholarships; and, HEIs in Myanmar have partial autonomy insofar as they abide by the financial procedures as established by government rules and regulations.

5. Covid-19 impact

Regarding the impact of Covid-19 on the existence and implementation of policies designed to foster enhanced access and success in HE of students from low-income and or marginalised groups, the pandemic has overall had a negative impact on the access to and quality of tertiary education. Government policies aimed at curbing the spread of Covid-19 have restricted HEIs’ ability to conduct in-person teaching. The principal solution to continue providing education during this disruptive event has been to transition to online courses. However, countries such as Indonesia, Myanmar, and Thailand have highlighted the difficulties students face in obtaining electronic devices, alongside their ability to pay for data packages, in order to continue to have access to their education.
Moreover, the quality of education provided has reportedly declined which in turn has negatively affected fresh graduates’ ability to improve their individual socio-economic standings. This ultimately hinders countries’ economic progress, as highlighted by Myanmar.

Table 3: Equity policies per ASEAN Member State

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Targets for the participation of specific equity groups in HE</th>
<th>Brunei Darussalam</th>
<th>Cambodia</th>
<th>Indonesia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>None</td>
<td>No information available</td>
<td>Increase the number of low-income students and students from least developed regions</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-monetary instruments</th>
<th>Bridging Programmes</th>
<th>Bridging Programmes</th>
<th>Special institutions for students with disabilities; Human resources; Academic guidelines; Institutional policies</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial instruments</th>
<th>Free tertiary education, Scholarship for low-income students</th>
<th>Loans from private banks; Minor stipends from government; Research grants</th>
<th>Scholarships and financial assistance packages</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agencies responsible for policies related to equity</th>
<th>Higher Education Division; Scholarship Section</th>
<th>Department of Higher Education</th>
<th>Ministry of Educaiton and Culture</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder groups consulted during the policy formulation</th>
<th>HEI Associations; Civil society organisations; Private sector organisations; International Organisations; Student Organisations</th>
<th>HEI Associations; Related government institutions</th>
<th>HEI Associations; Civil society organisations; Private sector organisations; International Organisations; Student organisations; Local Higher Education services; Local government; Non-Governmental Organisations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agencies responsible for monitoring the impact of measures used to promote access and success</th>
<th>Ministry of Education</th>
<th>Ministry of Education</th>
<th>Ministry of Education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of autonomy by HEIs to reach policy targets</th>
<th>Academic structure; Course content; Enrolment size</th>
<th>Quotas on scholarships</th>
<th>Academic guidelines; Student recruitment; Curriculum formulation; Grant proposals; Programme partnerships</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Covid-19 on access and success policies for low-income and marginalized groups</th>
<th>Negative impact on access to education</th>
<th>Negative impact on the quality of education</th>
<th>Negative impact on the access to and quality of education</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Targets for the participation of specific equity groups in HE</td>
<td>Lao PDR</td>
<td>Malaysia</td>
<td>Myanmar</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---------------------------------------------------------------</td>
<td>---------</td>
<td>----------</td>
<td>---------</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Attain a female student body of 45% in HEIs</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>Facilitate access to HE for students from ethnic areas and lower socio-economic backgrounds</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Non-monetary instruments</th>
<th>Lao PDR</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Myanmar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Preferential admission and special institutions for ethnic minorities</td>
<td>Pathways to access HEIs; Outreach programme; Service learning programme</td>
<td>Special institutions for refugees and minority groups; HE admissions based on the catchment area of the state</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Financial instruments</th>
<th>Lao PDR</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Myanmar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Scholarships and student loans for females, ethnic minorities, and low-income students</td>
<td>Scholarships and student loans for low-income students and students with disabilities</td>
<td>Government subsidies</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agencies responsible for policies related to equity</th>
<th>Lao PDR</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Myanmar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education and Sports</td>
<td>Department of Higher Education; Department of Polytechnics and Community College</td>
<td>Department of Higher Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Stakeholder groups consulted during the policy formulation</th>
<th>Lao PDR</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Myanmar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HEI Associations; Student Organisations</td>
<td>HEI Associations; Civil society organisations; Private sector organisations</td>
<td>HEI Associations; Rectors' Committee; Private sector organisations; International Organisations; Student organisations' Teachers union</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Agencies responsible for monitoring the impact of measures used to promote access and success</th>
<th>Lao PDR</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Myanmar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Degree of autonomy by HEIs to reach policy targets</th>
<th>Lao PDR</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Myanmar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No information available</td>
<td>No information available</td>
<td>Partial autonomy according to financial procedures per government-established regulations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Impact of Covid-19 on access and success policies for low-income and marginalized groups</th>
<th>Lao PDR</th>
<th>Malaysia</th>
<th>Myanmar</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No information available</td>
<td>Negative impact on financial assistance</td>
<td>Negative impact on access to education</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Targets for the participation of specific equity groups in HE</strong></td>
<td>Philippines</td>
<td>Singapore</td>
<td>Thailand</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
<td>---</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>No information available</td>
<td>Assistance for all equity groups based on meritocracy</td>
<td>None</td>
<td>No information available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Non-monetary instruments</strong></th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Admissions assistance; Differing institutional policies</td>
<td></td>
<td>Discretionary Admissions scheme for publicly-funded Autonomous Universities; Aptitude-based admissions</td>
<td>Quotas for ethnic students; Services for students with disabilities</td>
<td>No information available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Financial instruments</strong></th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Free tertiary education; Financial assistance for medical students; Scholarships for eligible students</td>
<td>Government subsidies; Scholarships for eligible students; Student loans</td>
<td>Scholarships and student loans for low-income, rural, and disabled students</td>
<td>Scholarships</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Agencies responsible for policies related to equity</strong></th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Commission on Higher Education; HEIs</td>
<td>No information available</td>
<td></td>
<td>Minister of Finance; Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovations; HEIs; Southern Border Provinces Administrative Centre</td>
<td>No information available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Stakeholder groups consulted during the policy formulation</strong></th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>HEI Associations; Civil society organisations; Private sector organisations</td>
<td>No information available</td>
<td></td>
<td>HEI Associations; Civil society organisations; Private sector organisations; International Organisations</td>
<td>Civil society organisations; International Organisations; Student organisations</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Agencies responsible for monitoring the impact of measures used to promote access and success</strong></th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ministry of Education</td>
<td>No information available</td>
<td></td>
<td>Ministry of Education; Ministry of Finance</td>
<td>No specific agency</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Degree of autonomy by HEIs to reach policy targets</strong></th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Academic structure; Course content; Enrolment; Teaching staff</td>
<td>No information available</td>
<td></td>
<td>Full autonomy</td>
<td>No information available</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th><strong>Impact of Covid-19 on access and success policies for low-income and marginalized groups</strong></th>
<th>Philippines</th>
<th>Singapore</th>
<th>Thailand</th>
<th>Vietnam</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>No impact on the financial instruments</td>
<td>No information available</td>
<td></td>
<td>Negative impact on the access to and quality of education</td>
<td>No impact on the implementation of policies</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
III.2. Survey findings - Equitable Access and Success in HE

To better gauge the current situation, challenges, and future goals in the domains of equitable access and success in universities, all applicants to the Capacity Building Workshop Equitable Access and Success in Higher Education participated in a specially designed survey. The aim was to understand their institution’s strategies on paper and in practice, the perceived challenges, as well as the participants’ own thoughts.

1. Inclusion and diversity strategy

The survey asked respondents “Does your institution have a Diversity or Inclusion Strategy?”. As we identified some institutions that have multiple participants in the survey, we combined their answers to grasp the overview of each institutional outlook. If there are two respondents from one institution and one answered yes and the other answered no to the question, we classified their institution as “not sure” category.

Of the 51 responding institutions from ASEAN countries, 56.9% currently had an official inclusion strategy in place (Figure 4). While the institutions without an inclusion strategy are from Indonesia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Thailand, Vietnam, the small sample size makes it unclear whether this is simply due to the specific responding institutions or whether this is a larger trend present throughout the respective countries.

![Figure 4: Diversity or Inclusion Strategy of ASEAN institutions](image)

2. Perception of the inclusion dimension

Respondents were asked to “rate the importance of inclusiveness in HE from 1-10 along the following dimensions: Gender groups, Low-income or lower socio-economic background, Rural background, Persons living with disabilities, Ethnicity, Race, and Foreign nationals” on a 1-10 scale (Figure 5). As this question intended to understand how each participant from HEIs we do not combine the responses from the same institutions.
ASEAN respondents firmly support all inclusion dimensions, with the average scores of all dimensions exceeding 8.00 points. The respondents particularly emphasised socioeconomic, ethnic, and disability issues. This may reflect the diversity in those dimensions in the region.

Moreover, the average scores for the inclusion of rural background students and foreign nationals are lower than other dimensions. This may be explained by the perception that including such rural and international students is not as much of a priority as including other groups.

**Figure 5: Respondents’ perceptions on the importance of inclusion dimensions**

![Figure 5: Respondents’ perceptions on the importance of inclusion dimensions](image)

Figure 6 indicates the gap between respondents’ perceptions and current institutional support for students falling in the following commonly disadvantaged groups: female, low-income or lower socio-economic background, rural background, persons living with disabilities, ethnicity, race, foreign nationals.” The perceived importance of inclusiveness is depicted in a bluish colour while the reported actual level of inclusiveness is depicted in a reddish colour.

Across all dimensions, the responses are indicative of persisting gaps regarding inclusion, with the perceived importance consistently ranking at least 0.8 points above the status quo situation. The gap is especially large in the “disability” (1.71 points), “ethnicity” (1.39 points), and “race” (1.36 points) dimensions. However, this does not necessarily mean that student difficulties do not exist in the other dimensions. It is important to highlight that there is a limitation to understanding the status quo by solely relying on self-reported data given that individuals’ perceptions may be biased.
3. Internal disagreements

In addition to aggregated data of survey respondents, we analysed the responses by different participants from the same HEIs to understand to what extent their perspectives on their institutions’ attitude toward inclusion converge or diverge. This analysis only focuses on the HEIs which had more than 3 participants in the survey.

3.a. Inclusion or diversity strategy

Table 3 indicates the divergence of answers across 7 institutions regarding the question “Does your institution have a Diversity or Inclusion Strategy?” Except for one institution, all others had differing responses coming from the same institution. This indicates that although institutions may have formed an inclusion or diversity strategy, they are not effectively communicated or made known internally. To further support the finding, we specifically analysed institutions A, B, and F. Take Institution A for example, amongst the five respondents, three of them believed their institution has an inclusion strategy. Interestingly, all three of them have more than ten years of working experience and are in charge of 4-25 subordinates in that particular institution. However, the other two respondents who answered “not sure” have less than 3 years of working period and no subordinates. Another indication for the existence of such a knowledge gap between more senior and more junior HEI professionals is one qualitative comment received from a respondent who perceived issues surrounding “seniority” to be a current barrier to more inclusivity in his/her institution.
Figure 6: The gap between personal perception and current inclusion level

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Institution</th>
<th>No. of Participants</th>
<th>Yes</th>
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3.6. Divergences in gap understanding

Figure 7 indicates the extent of respondents’ perceptions on the importance of gender and the status quo. The y-axis variable is calculated by subtracting the rating of the institution’s current gender inclusiveness from the importance attributed to gender equality within the HEI. There is only one institution (C) where the status quo rating and the perceived importance are equal for all respondents. In all other institutions, at least one respondent rates the importance of gender inclusivity higher than the current situation. However, there are often wide variations in these ratings. For example, in institution E, one participant rated the importance of gender inclusion 5 points higher than the institution’s current achievement, while another respondent from the same institution identified gender inclusion to be overachieved by 3 points. This supports the previous finding that the understanding of inclusion within ASEAN HEIs has often not reached a consensus.

Figure 7: Divergence in the gap between personal perception and status quo
6. Summary of Key Findings

- The majority of surveyed ASEAN HEIs (56.8%) have an inclusion or diversity strategy. However, the existence of a strategy is not always fully known by members of each institution as “not sure” weighs around 20% and the institutional level analysis indicated.

- Professionals of ASEAN HEIs highly recognised the importance of inclusion in all surveyed dimensions. They especially emphasised inclusion in terms of socioeconomic (8.52), ethnic (8.43), and disability (8.51) status. They placed relatively low importance on geographical dimensions of inclusiveness with lower rural and foreign scores.

- Equitable access and success in HEIs remains important issues, based on the comparison between personal perception and their perceived status quo. Professionals of HEIs recognise the large gap between the perceived importance of inclusion dimensions and the lower performing current situation of their institutions in all dimensions.

- There is often significant discrepancy among professionals of the same institutions on the priorities of their inclusion and or diversity strategy. This disagreement or lack of awareness may pose a significant barrier to achieve equitable access & success in HEIs.

III.3. Challenges regarding equitable access and success

Although ASEAN Member States’ governments have strived to promote equitable access to and success in HE, a number of challenges remain. As reported extensively in the Thematic Study on Right to Education: Promoting of Access to Tertiary Education in ASEAN by the ASEAN Intergovernmental Commission on Human Rights (AICHR), marginalised groups, including individuals with a low socio-economic background, women, refugees, and persons with disabilities, continue to face difficulties in accessing tertiary education (AICHR, August 2019). As evidenced by the survey results, ASEAN HEIs recognise the current gaps between the status quo and greater equitable access and success. In addition to a disparity between and within countries regarding the presence of HEIs, particularly in poorer and more rural areas, accessibility programmes “are generally focused on socio-economic status, gender and disability as opposed to broader rights” (AICHR, 2019, p.36). Our survey results support the fact that institutions’ attention to students from rural areas is relatively low. The importance of inclusion from rural areas equals 8.14, while some other dimensions score more than 8.40.

Further, while scholarships and student loans are made available in most ASEAN countries, these are “still low and insufficient to fully support study and living expenses” (AICHR, 2019, p.37). The insufficient government budgets directed towards tertiary education in certain countries, namely Lao PDR, Myanmar, and Vietnam, contributes to the lack of access to HEIs by financially disadvantaged individuals and impedes on the availability of supportive measures for marginalised groups and the quality of education provided, which in turn negatively affects their likelihood of success (AICHR, 2019, p.37). Additionally, the lack of institutional policies within certain AMS to accommodate marginalised groups further contributes to their exclusion from HE.
In Indonesia for example, not only is there a lack of infrastructures to accommodate persons with disabilities, but the “academic community is reluctant to learn with/from and welcome the people with disability, and [the] curriculum and teaching-learning approaches are not prepared to include people with disability” (AICHR, 2019, p.37-38).

Furthermore, the AICHR report notes that HE graduates face success difficulties owing to a discrepancy in the skills and knowledge provided in HEIs and those sought by employers (AICHR, 2019, p.38). According to our survey, while the majority of surveyed institutions have reportedly already established their inclusion strategies, these are not firmly ingrained within the institutions. Only one of the seven institutions had consistent answers from multiple participants on the question. If the internal strategies are not effectively communicated, those strategies may not materialise in terms of implementation.

Participants in the Capacity Building Workshop: Access and Success in Higher Education further expounded on the challenges and highlighted some of the key issues they found to be most prevalent in their educational environment, reflecting those presented by the AICHR. Additionally, with the AICHR report having been published prior to the advent of Covid-19, the participants bring further insight on its implications for students and HEIs. The identified challenges can be regrouped into three main barriers to equitable access and success of students, namely financial, academic, and cultural barriers.

1. Financial barriers

The primary challenge identified by respondents in the workshops is financial. For students, the lack of financial means poses a barrier to both their access to and success in HE. Although financial assistance measures are in place to aid students in need, these tend to be limited in scope and insufficient. Even for countries where tertiary education is free, such as the Philippines, these apply to public HEIs only. One workshop participant noted that certain students that are unable to access state universities are relegated to private institutions where the cost of education is significantly higher, and as a result, are unable to access the education they deserve. Additionally, students who do not have the financial means are unable to participate in preparatory learning programmes to allow them to be competitive with the more other educational programmes such as school trips or exchange programmes.

Many financially disadvantaged students who do access HEIs are reportedly also obligated to take up part-time employment to fund their education as their family’s household income is insufficient. The time spent working at their part-time employment not only detracts time that could be applied to studying, but also increases their levels of fatigue, in addition to other stresses, which in turn negatively impacts their ability to succeed in their education. Some students have reportedly had no other choice but to drop out of classes either due to financial barriers, mental stresses, or a combination of both. The situation worsens further when students in need of financial aid do not receive it, while students with higher income remain eligible for such aid. This issue was pointed out by a survey respondent, who described how in his university loopholes allowed more advantaged students to receive scholarships and grants originally directed at lower income students.

Moreover, despite the Covid-19 pandemic, HEIs are reported to not have reduced their tuition fees. Throughout the pandemic, during which in-person classes have been
suspended, HEIs continue to include housing and medical insurance fees, amongst others, to be able to attend courses. These apply to local students as well as students from abroad who are unable to travel to the target country due to travel restrictions in place. In addition to these standard fees, students are also obligated to acquire electronic devices (e.g., laptops and tablets) as well as internet data plans by their own means to be able to access and participate in online learning. Countries such as Brunei Darussalam and Malaysia have taken steps to help alleviate this burden on students through electronic device donations and by collaborating with telecommunication service providers such as Telco to provide subsidised data plans. Students that are unable to acquire such devices and or data plans are excluded, thereby hindering their success.

HEIs with low resources are unable to provide financial aid to all students who would be eligible for it. A respondent reported that it is “extremely hard to determine [...] which applicant may deserve the [grant] support more than another”. The lack of financial means also hinders HEIs’ ability to provide other services such as stable internet connections campus-wide, infrastructures to accommodate persons with disabilities (e.g., ramps and elevators), and both academic and non-academic services (e.g., mental health resources) on-campus and virtually. These challenges in turn strongly affect individuals’ access to and success in higher education.

2. Institutional barriers

The second challenge identified by workshop participants is institutional barriers which hinder both the access to and success of students in HE. Southeast Asia is a multi-ethnic, multi-lingual, and religiously diverse region. As such, several workshop participants noted that teaching staff are seldomly representative of the student population, and the established curriculum is not reflective of the diversity of heritage, history, and perspectives present in the country and the region more widely. A curriculum that is not reflective of Southeast Asia’s diversity may hinder students’ considerations of attending a particular HEI and can lead to biases during their education, from accession to completion.

In Myanmar for example, ethnic groups, particularly in the Rakhine state, are at a disadvantage due to ethnic conflict and political instability. The lack of a representative teaching staff impedes on the students’ ability to identify with their teachers and may promote distrust between the student and the teacher, thereby negatively impacting students’ success during their education. Related to this issue, is the teaching staff’s lack of training to cater to students with disabilities.

Another grievance noted by some participants is the heavy focus on achievement-based rather than aptitude-based admissions. Inequalities in the quality of education provided at the primary and secondary levels restrict students’, particularly those from rural areas, ability to access tertiary education. On this matter, Singapore is the only country reported in taking steps to expand its aptitude-based admissions to allow “students in some areas to be admitted based on an evaluation of their past work and competencies in specific skills not necessarily covered in previous levels of education” (The Equity Policy Map, Singapore, p.4).

Additionally, the non-recognition of certain degrees, such as International Baccalaureates, and the inability to translate
foreign grading systems into local equivalents to judge academic performance further hinders certain students’ access to HEIs.

Additionally, countries such as Brunei Darussalam, Malaysia, Myanmar, and Singapore use English as the primary language of instruction in HEIs. Students who have not previously studied extensively in English are at a higher risk of being unable to cope with the curriculum, thereby impacting the quality of the education they receive and increasing the likelihood of them not being able to successfully complete the educational programmes. Furthermore, Covid-19 has posed a significant challenge for students with disabilities in receiving quality education as online classes reportedly do not cater for the hard-hearing and the visually impaired.

Within several ASEAN-based HEIs, intra-institutional differences in the perception of an inclusion and diversity strategy represent yet another challenge. Miscommunication across the institution among different staff members appears to drive this issue, limiting the role of the strategy in fostering inclusivity in the institution.

3. Cultural barriers

A third major challenge identified is related to cultural barriers. The lack of attention and understanding attributed towards equity target groups by HEIs and or society contributes to prejudice and negatively affects these students’ integration in the HE environment. Prejudice on behalf of academic staff poses a significant threat to these students’ ability to access and succeed in tertiary education. Prior to Covid-19, many students faced difficulties in coping with being away from home and the impression of being isolated when they relocated to a foreign city or country unknown to them.

Covid-19 has worsened these psychological fragilities as government policies were erected in an attempt to curb the spread of the virus. The travel restrictions, lockdowns and social distancing regulations negatively impacted both local and international students by hindering their ability to attend classes in person or yet meet with friends and acquaintances. This in turn has fostered a disconnection from the HEI they attend, a loss of will to succeed, and for many a loss of will to live.

This disproportionately affects students from lower socio-economic backgrounds as their needs for support are simultaneously higher and less well understood by HEIs. These students often lack the financial means to seek private support in whatever form necessary when HEIs are unable to offer such services on-campus or online.

Nevertheless, other marginalised groups should not be discounted from those facing cultural pressures. In a region where LGBTIQ+ individuals face discrimination, if not criminalization, they are subject to societal pressures to conform to the norms of a given society, in addition to feelings of loneliness and disorientation. The same can be said for mature learners, refugees, and children of people affected by historical violence, amongst other groups, who may feel or are made to feel as though they do not belong within a HEI; face difficulties in interacting and integrating with the greater student body; or yet face external difficulties. These cultural pressures may consequently hinder these groups’ ability to access and succeed in HEIs.
III.4. Opportunities for equitable access and success

In an attempt to address these outstanding issues, ASEAN is pursuing several initiatives. The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2025, ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021-2025, and the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) initiatives provide HEIs with opportunities to make access and success to HE more equitable. Notably, the ASCC Blueprint 2025 provides HE professionals the opportunity to gather and develop the necessary tools to address the gap in institutional policies and capacities regarding equitable access and success; the Work Plan on Education will help address numerous issues regarding the financial, institutional and cultural challenges by providing HEIs with a robust substructure; and, employing the AQRF will aid HEIs address the challenge of translating foreign qualifications into local equivalents as to be able to better judge students’ academic performance.

The ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Blueprint 2025, established in 2016, seeks to advance the ASEAN citizens’ quality of life, cohesion, and resiliency. Regarding education, action line “B.2. Equitable Access for All” indicates that part of the ASEAN community’s strategic measures is to “provide mechanisms and enhance institutional capacity to promote greater access to basic social services for all, such as health services and education including early childhood education and vocational education, skills training, and promotion of skills recognition;” and, action line ‘E.2. Towards a Creative, Innovative and Responsive ASEAN’ seeks to “promote an innovative ASEAN approach to HE, incorporating academics, community service, regional placement, and entrepreneurship incubation and support” (ASCC Blueprint 2025, 2016, p.7, 19).

The ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021-2025 will succeed the 2016-2020 Work Plan. The 2021-2025 Work Plan seeks to “be a key guide in realising an ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community 2025 vision and “provide a strong foundation for the region’s education systems” (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2020a). As a guide, the 2016-2020 Work Plan focused on eight areas (AICHR, 2019, p.19):

1. Heightening awareness of ASEAN through strengthening Southeast Asian history and indigenous knowledge
2. Ensuring quality and basic access to education for all, especially marginalised groups
3. Using information and communications technology in education
4. TVET and lifelong learning
5. Education for Sustainable Development
6. HE development and quality assurance mechanisms
7. University-industry partnerships
8. Capacity building for teachers and the education community

The ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF), adopted in 2020, establishes a “regional common reference framework which functions as a device to enable comparisons of qualifications across ASEAN Member States” (p.6) (Figure 8).

The AQRF also aims to support existing regional efforts to promote and facilitate worker and learner mobility, improve
education and training quality, improve mechanisms “to validate non-formal and informal learning to support life-long learning,” and create more equitable opportunities for gainful employment for ASEAN citizens (AICHR, 2019, p.12).

HE professionals surveyed have shown a relatively high awareness of the importance of implementing inclusivity in practice within their institutions. On a scale of importance from 1 to 10, the average respondent scored this metric above 8 in all dimensions studied. This seems to indicate that there is a clear willingness of HE professionals to address issues of inclusivity within their institutions, and as such that inequity does not result directly from a lack of motivation of the professionals concerned.

Figure 8: Depiction of the AQRF

Source: Association of Southeast Asian Nations. (2020b, August).
III. 5. Recommendations

Based on the challenges identified and survey responses, a set of recommendations can be offered to address the most prominent barriers. These recommendations draw from the existing literature and practices on equitable access and success, recommendations put forth by ASEF (2021) and the AICHR (2019), workshop presentations, and these authors’ personal suggestions. Although financial means are of importance in promoting equitable access and success, attention should not be detracted from institutional and cultural barriers.

### Table 5: Issues and recommendations for equitable access and success in HE

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<tr>
<th>ISSUES REGARDING EQUITABLE ACCESS AND SUCCESS</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
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<td>Financial barriers by HEIs</td>
<td>1. Greater government investments in HE &amp; HEIs.</td>
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<td>2. HEIs to establish and develop public-private partnerships.</td>
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<td>Financial barriers by students</td>
<td>3. Develop scholarships and needs-based grants in conjunction with outreach programmes.</td>
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<td>Institutional barriers</td>
<td>4. Establish specific objectives, accompanied by strategies to attain milestones.</td>
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<td>5. Recognise marginalised students’ perspectives in the policy and programme formulation.</td>
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<td>6. Develop adaptable policies and programmes, including their modes of delivery.</td>
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<td>7. Develop sound and sustainable policies and programmes through evidence-based findings.</td>
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<td>8. Enhance the internal communication and dissemination of policies, programmes, and strategies.</td>
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<td>9. Consider adopting the “5P” model and “4A” scheme.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Cultural barriers</td>
<td>10. Train academic staff to be more sensitive and adaptive.</td>
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<td></td>
<td>11. Provide greater access to non-academic pastoral support resources and professionals.</td>
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<td>12. Consider implementing occasional “mental wellness days”.</td>
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Greater government investments in HE & HEIs

As described previously, financial issues pose the most prominent barrier for equitable access and success in HE. Given that “educational development corresponds to investments in the sector. With the quality and equity in tertiary education of many countries correlating with limited financial resources” (AICHR, 2019, p.37), governments should strive to invest further in HE as well as HEIs. Allocating a higher budget towards education, particularly tertiary education, will allow for a more skilled, knowledgeable, and sensible citizenry which will in turn enhance a country’s economic growth amongst other benefits.

HEIs to establish and develop public-private partnerships

HEIs, faced with the challenge of securing government funding, should seek sustainable financial resources through other means, such as public-private partnerships (AICHR, 2019, p.40). An example of this is the eMpowering Youths Across ASEAN programme. Renewed in 2019 for an additional three years between the Maybank Foundation and the ASEAN Foundation, the programme provides micro grants to youths “to develop and implement community projects that deliver tangible long-term impact, socially and economically” (ASEAN Foundation, August 2019). This programme further allows for the pursual of the objectives set forth by the ASCC Blueprint 2025 and the United Nations’ SDGs.

Develop scholarships and needs-based grants in conjunction with outreach programmes

Although most ASEAN countries provide scholarships and student loans, it should be highlighted that certain financial assistance measures are more beneficial than others. Estelle Herbaut & Geven Koen (2019) discovered that need-based grants do not improve accession rates in a systematic way, but only when they provide sufficient funding to fulfil unmet needs. Nonetheless, need-based grants appear to enhance the completion rates of disadvantaged students on a consistent basis. However, evidence gathered by Herbaut & Koen suggests that merit-based grants boost the achievements of disadvantaged students only infrequently. Finally, programmes that combine outreach and financial assistance have yielded encouraging effects.

Outreach programmes, as Herbaut & Koen (2019) detail, are effective in increasing accession rates to HE when they “go beyond providing general information” (p.7). Outreach programmes which supplement information sharing with assistance or individualised counselling have been found to increase enrolment rates overall but have a “substantial" positive impact on disadvantaged students’ enrolment rates (p.7). Albeit further research is required to assert the effectiveness of outreach programmes on HE success rates, Herbaut & Koen indicate that outreach programmes aid in encouraging students to enrol to tertiary education sooner, thereby “reducing delayed enrolment which is known to be detrimental for educational outcomes” (p.7). Although Malaysia is reportedly the only AMS conducting outreach programmes, all other AMS should adopt this approach and they must ensure that such initiatives provide guidance in the enrolment process and financial aid applications in addition to generic information.
Meanwhile, alternative pathways exist to help address the lack of financial means for students. One of these is the European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE) programme by the EU and ASEAN. The programme seeks to “strengthen regional co-operation and enhance the quality, regional competitiveness and internationalisation of ASEAN higher education institutions and students” (SHARE, n.d.). It is a €15 million European Union grant funded programme which “has provided 500 one semester intra-ASEAN scholarships for ASEAN university students” since 2016, and by the end of 2022, the SHARE programme aims to support 300 additional students (SHARE, n.d.). Other programmes include the ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarship, the novel ASEAN-Maybank Scholarship, as well as the Canada-ASEAN Scholarships and Educational Exchanges for Development (SEED).

Establish specific objectives, accompanied by strategies to attain milestones

Although primary and secondary education is guaranteed through ASEAN Member States’ respective Constitution, laws and policies, the right to tertiary education is not clearly identified in these (AICHR, 2019, p.39). Our survey also suggested that different respondents from the same institutions have a diverging understanding of which inclusion dimensions are important and underachieved. In order to promote enhanced equitable access and success, a political will and solid understanding of the status quo is essential. To that end, HEIs should first establish clear and specific objectives to include targeted marginalised groups supplemented by strategies to attain milestones. In doing so, this will aid in improving HEIs’ staff awareness and facilitate the implementation process. Subsequently, HEIs should develop and improve data collection mechanisms regarding access and success of students to affect policymakers’ will to implement more equitable policies and make resources available to reduce inequitable access and success (ARC8, p.36, & ASEM, 2021a, p.40). Additionally, surveying the labour market’s needs can further aid in influencing policymakers. The establishment of such objectives and strategies will however require efficient monitoring and enforcement mechanisms.

5 Recognise marginalised students’ perspectives in the policy and programme formulation

Those responsible for policy formulation, particularly the Ministries of Education and HEIs, additionally need to clearly identify the relevant stakeholders in the programme and or policy development process and work closely with them. As stated in the ARC8 Outlook Report, the perspectives of marginalised students, including those from minority and disadvantaged majority backgrounds, should be recognised when developing policies and programmes that seek to address equitable access and success issues (p.27). As mentioned previously there is a lack of inclusion of various equity groups, particularly for students with disability, students stemming from racial and ethnic backgrounds, as well as students stemming from various geographical backgrounds as indicated in the survey results. International organisations, private organisations, civil society organisations, teachers’ unions, as well as student associations should also be consulted. By mapping the various stakeholders’ objectives and needs, a more diverse and inclusive educational environment can be established.
Develop adaptable policies and programmes, including their modes of delivery

The policies and programmes developed and the modes by which they are delivered should be adaptable. Online learning through Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) can play a pivotal role in providing access to education for students from rural areas and persons with disabilities amongst others, particularly during disruptive times such as the Covid-19 pandemic. It is crucial though to recognise the individual equity target groups’ motivations, capacities, and abilities as they may require diverging supportive measures to accede and succeed in HE (ARC8, p.29, 32). Hard-hearing individuals for example would require online classes to display a closed caption for them to be able to follow and contribute to class discussions. The use of ICTs however must be carefully gauged to ensure that they improve the access and success of all involved and do not benefit a niche group uniquely (ARC8, p.58).

Develop sound and sustainable policies and programmes through evidence-based findings

Moreover, programmes, policies, as well as the academic staff should draw from existing effective practices in equitable access and success. As included in the AICHR (2019, p.40, 42) and ARC8 Outlook Report (2021, p.40), those involved in the development and implementation stages, including the various stakeholders, should conduct regular meetings such as through workshops, forums, or yet seminars, internally as well as with their international counterparts to share their experiences and draw from the best practices currently in place. A prime example of this has been ASEF’s Capacity Building Workshop:

Access and Success in Higher Education.

Enhance the internal communication and dissemination of policies, programmes, and strategies

Given the significant intra-institution discrepancies regarding the perceptions of inclusion and diversity policies, which may hinder the actual implementation of such policies, programmes and or strategies, optimising the internal communication of ASEAN HEIs is necessary. To achieve this, those involved in the policy-, programme- and or strategy-implementation process must take on the responsibility of ensuring that every relevant person is aware of such initiatives and adhere to them. Such communication and coordination would enhance the academic staff’s awareness and allow for a more fluid and effective outcome.

Consider adopting the “5P” model and “4A” scheme

Although it will be challenging to accommodate every target group, small steps should consistently be taken towards improving the situation. To aid in this endeavour, the “5P model” presented during the equity workshop as well as the “4As” scheme put forth by Katarina Tomasevski (2001) should be consulted as a guide to promote equitable access and success. Per the “5P model”, in planning for equity, HEIs should have a Purpose whereby the succinctly state certain outcomes they wish to achieve; allow their Principles to guide their considerations; include Processes such as milestones to lead to the outcomes; identify the People responsible, accountable, consultable, and those who should be informed; and, establish Performance targets to be met. Tomasevski’s (2001) “4As” scheme
refers to the Availability, Accessibility, Acceptability and Adaptability of education.

Notably, the accessibility of education should be attainable to all without discrimination, and is reflected in “the elimination of legal, administrative and financial barriers, and removing discrimination or obstacles such as fees and schooling distance” (AICHR, 2019, p.21).

Train academic staff to be more sensitive and adaptive

To aid in accession and success rates, the academic staff must be appropriately trained. The academic staff, particularly those responsible for student enrolment, must be free from biases. Although staff may not display explicit biases, their implicit biases pose a greater threat to students’ access to HEIs. The teaching staff must have the skills to adapt their teaching methods to accommodate various equity groups, particularly students with disability; and, must display greater sensitivity towards race, ethnicity, disabilities, and gender. Although this may entail added expenditures, HEIs should cater for such training. Additionally, HEIs should strive to ensure that potential academic staff display such sensitivities and capabilities prior to their employment. Tools such as Harvard’s Implicit Association Test can help gauge individuals’ implicit biases and should be further employed.

Provide greater access to non-academic pastoral support resources and professionals

The mental well-being of students plays an important role in students’ likelihood of success. As detailed previously, much of the mental stress placed on students from equity groups stems from their lack of financial means and the prejudice they may face daily. In addition to this, the Covid-19 has added further stress on students. To address this issue, HEIs should further make non-academic pastoral support resources and professionals accessible to students both online and on-campus.

Consider implementing occasional “mental wellness days”

Additionally, HEIs should consider implementing occasional “mental wellness days”, as the National University of Singapore has done so, whereby students and teachers are given a day off from attending classes. This will allow them some respite, allow those facing academic difficulties to seek assistance, and ultimately, help re-energise them to succeed.
IV. Towards Inclusive Internationalisation in ASEAN

IV.1. From Internationalisation to Inclusive Internationalisation

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<td>“The intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (Asia-Europe Foundation, 2021, p.75)</td>
<td>“A comprehensive process of strategically planning, concretely designing and taking targeted measures to ensure that [all actors in higher education can access, take part, and] enjoy the full benefits of internationalisation activities” (Delap &amp; Ferencz, 2021, p.5)</td>
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ASEF’s ARC8 Outlook Report 2030: Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Europe defines internationalisation as “the intentional process of integrating an international, intercultural or global dimension into the purpose, functions, and delivery of post-secondary education, in order to enhance the quality of education and research for all students and staff, and to make a meaningful contribution to society” (Asia-Europe Foundation, 2021, p.75). ASEF’s definition of internationalisation thus includes both international student and staff movement, as well as the overall internationalisation of institutes of HE in their activities and practices. Contrary to the topic of equitable access and success in HE, inclusive internationalisation remains largely understudied globally, offering less information on the challenges and opportunities towards achieving this objective. International student mobility is of significant value for students themselves, but also for respective participating universities and countries, as much culturally as economically. Culturally, international student mobility contributes to the development and improvement of cross-cultural understandings.
For students, the benefits of international mobility range from the opportunity of living abroad to learning or improving a foreign language, expanding one’s social network, developing soft skills, and widening one’s career prospects and employability (Sundberg, 2021). According to the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), there were roughly 20 million HE students in the region, spread across over 7000 universities (Atherton et. al, 2021). ASEAN has been facing a phenomenon of massification of HE.

Several ASEAN countries have started taking initiatives towards the development of HE internationalisation. The Malaysia Education Blueprint 2015-2025 (Higher Education) “reiterated the importance of achieving global prominence through the internationalisation of higher education” (The Head Foundation, 2018, p.4). The Blueprint includes strategies such as improving the support system in order to attract more inbound students and increase the overall proportion of Malaysian students engaging in internationalisation opportunities (The Head Foundation, 2018). In Singapore, internationalisation of HE stems from the country’s strong international outlook and multicultural society. Since its independence, the city-state has pursued a policy of internationalisation. In the Philippines, internationalisation of HE is viewed as “the process of integrating international, intercultural and global dimensions into the goals, functions and delivery of higher education” (The Head Foundation, 2018, p.5). Thailand is strongly engaged in the internationalisation of its HE students, and the country has participated in the setting up of the ASEAN-European Academic University Network (ASEA-UNINET) along with Indonesia, Vietnam and Austria in 1994. The network now accounts for more than 80 universities from 18 different countries (ASEA-UNINET, n.d.).

However, despite the clearly identified benefits associated with international mobility opportunities and the efforts of several ASEAN countries, already prior to the Covid-19 pandemic, only a tiny fraction of ASEAN HE students were able to engage in such opportunities. The Covid-19 has shed light on the importance of rethinking equity and inclusion in HE for all, as well as bringing about inclusive internationalisation in ASEAN.

Inclusive internationalisation is defined by Delap & Ferencz (2021, p.5) as “a comprehensive process of strategically planning, concretely designing and taking targeted measures to ensure that [all actors in higher education can access, take part, and] enjoy the full benefits of internationalisation activities.” Contrary to an internationalisation strategy, which is focused on developing the means to send HE students abroad, receive inbound international students and reinforce the exchanges among and between countries’ universities, inclusive internationalisation is entirely focused on ensuring at all times that all HE actors can have access to and benefit from internationalisation.

Supporting and developing internationalisation and international activities in Southeast Asia would bring major benefits to the region. Most importantly, it would be an important step towards creating a greater regional vision and goals, sharing common values, as well as improving and harmonising HE. Internationalisation can furthermore represent a great step towards the grooming of future Southeast Asian leaders, reinforcing the region’s attractiveness. Supporting the mobility of ASEAN students is a priority of the ASEAN, as described in the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 (Atherton et. al, 2021).
IV.2. Survey findings - Advancing Inclusion in International HE in ASEAN

To better gauge the current situation, challenges, and future goals in the domains of inclusive education in the ASEAN region, all applicants to the Capacity Building Workshop Advancing Inclusion in International Higher Education in ASEAN participated in a specially designed survey. The aim was to understand their institution’s strategies on paper and in practice, the perceived challenges, as well as the participants’ own thoughts.

1. Internationalisation Strategy

Of the 101 responding institutions, 86.1% reportedly have an official internationalisation strategy in place (Figure 9). While the share of institutions without an internationalisation strategy was particularly high within Lao PDR (33.3%) and Myanmar (30.0%), the small sample size makes it unclear whether this is simply due to the specific responding institutions or whether this is a larger trend present throughout the respective countries.

Of the internationalisation strategies implemented at ASEAN HEIs, 43.7% specifically reference an aim to ensure accessibility of internationalisation activities to all students. While the number without such a reference is relatively small at 14.9%, it is noteworthy that 42.4% of respondents were not aware whether their internationalisation strategy included references to inclusivity or not, indicating that even if this aspect was mentioned it may not play a significant role in the day-to-day organisation of internationalisation activities.

Figure 9: Share of Institutions with an internationalisation strategy (left), and with a strategy that specifically aims to ensure inclusive access to internationalisation (right).

![Pie chart showing internationalisation strategy](image1)

![Pie chart showing inclusive internationalisation strategy](image2)
2. Internal disagreements

Although overall survey respondents agreed on the importance of inclusion in internationalisation activities, their perceptions and opinions diverged regarding certain specific aspects. While the average respondent considered inclusivity in internationalisation activities as a key element, opinions and perceptions of its implementation diverged amongst respondents. As seen in Figure 10, for nearly one quarter of HEIs (23.1%) respondents disagreed on whether their institution had an internationalisation strategy in place. These results appear similar to those of our Equitable Access and Success survey.

As shown in Figure 10 (right) below, this internal disagreement becomes much more pronounced when asked about the contents of the various internationalisation strategies, such as the emphasis the institution places on the presence of international students and staff or the opportunities for local students. Here, only 23.1% of HEIs show a high level of agreement, while nearly two fifths (76.9%) show medium or low levels of agreement. Within institutions with low levels of agreement, responses on various dimensions often ranged from a score of 2 (not important at all) to 10 (very important). While a certain degree of individual discrepancies are to be expected among individual professionals, such large disparities may significantly hamper the successful implementation of institutionalisation strategies: if professionals are not aware or disagree on priorities in translating strategies into concrete actions and programmes, this can become challenging and lead to incoherent or even conflictual outcomes.

Figure 10: Agreement on whether the institution has an internationalisation strategy (left) & degree of agreement on the importance of various internationalisation dimensions (right)
3. Mobility programmes

Most of the surveyed institutions place a high degree of importance on various aspects of internationalisation. As shown in Figure 11, when asked to rate the importance of both the incoming and outgoing dimensions of internationalisation on a scale from 1-10, “international research collaboration” and “international opportunities for local students” scored particularly high with an average of 9.26 and 9.17, respectively. The presence of international students (8.76), faculty (8.48), or administrative staff (7.32) was generally deemed less important than the more direct internationalisation opportunities given to their local counterparts. Especially the presence of international administrative staff is deemed to be of relatively low importance.

Figure 11: The importance of various dimensions in internationalisation at HEIs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Dimension</th>
<th>Rating</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Presence of Int. Administrator</td>
<td>7.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of Int. Faculty</td>
<td>8.48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Presence of Int. Students</td>
<td>8.76</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int. Opportunities for Local Faculty</td>
<td>8.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int. Opportunities for Local Students</td>
<td>9.17</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Int. Research Collaboration</td>
<td>9.26</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Figure 12: The size of exchange programmes at surveyed HEIs in ASEAN

![Bar chart showing the size of exchange programmes at surveyed HEIs in ASEAN]
While internationalisation opportunities for students can take many forms, one of the most common and traditional is student mobility in the form of exchange programmes with partner universities. Among the surveyed HEIs, the vast majority provide such exchange opportunities to less than 10% of the student body, with only one fifth of institutions (19.7%) sending more than 10% of their students abroad, as shown in Figure 12. Similarly, 87.5% of HEIs reported having less than 10% of incoming exchange students.

The mean rate of student mobility is 6.1% for incoming and 7.5% for outgoing students. However, these high averages are driven by individual high-performing institutions. In the majority of surveyed HEIs (60.5%), only a handful of students (less than 5%) have the chance to go abroad, making the issue of inclusivity in the access to these opportunities particularly pertinent.

Interestingly, the number of incoming international students is significantly related to whether the HEI has an internationalisation strategy. While institutions with such a strategy have, on average, 6.6% of incoming exchange students, those without a strategy only have 1.6%. In the case of outgoing students a similar difference can be found although it is much smaller and less significant with a mean of 7.7% outgoing students with such a strategy, and 5.2% without. This underscores the importance of having a well-designed and defined internationalisation strategy in spreading the access to international activities to all.

While exchange programmes remain the most common form of internationalisation opportunities offered to students, with 80.2% of HEIs offering this, many other types of opportunities are simultaneously made available to students, as shown in Figure 13. When asked what kind of international activities the given HEI offers, 64.3% of the surveyed institutions reported that they offer short academic and internship programmes, and 42.6% offer international full degree programmes. Additionally, COIL programmes - collaborative online international learning - have increasingly gained traction in the region, and are today offered by over half (53.5%) of HEIs. In contrast to the other internationalisation opportunities, COIL programmes are a collaboration between both faculty and students from universities across the world to offer interactive online courses, and are thus much more accessible to the broader student population than physical mobility programmes.
Additionally, these have not only significantly expanded but have also offered a key to maintaining mobility and internationalisation during the Covid-19 pandemic. Other forms of existing measures for internationalisation mentioned by respondents include international research programmes, and international social and cultural activities, including language courses, student trips, summer camps and competitions.

Figure 14: Regional focus of internationalisation activities

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Region</th>
<th>Importance</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Southeast Asia</td>
<td>9.32</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>East Asia</td>
<td>8.6</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Europe</td>
<td>8.36</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South Asia</td>
<td>8.2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>North America</td>
<td>7.71</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Central Asia</td>
<td>7.58</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Oceania</td>
<td>7.33</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>South America</td>
<td>6.93</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Africa</td>
<td>6.76</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The geographic focus in these internationalisation opportunities among the surveyed HEIs is often quite local. As Figure 14 indicates, with an average of 9.32 on a scale of 1 to 10, fellow ASEAN countries are by far the most targeted in internationalisation activities, with both East and South Asia also scoring above 8. Europe is the main priority outside of Asia with a mean importance of 8.36. All other regions seem less important, particularly with Africa (6.76) and South America (6.93) deemed as less relevant destinations and partners for physical and virtual mobility.

4. Inclusivity in Internationalisation

To achieve inclusivity, it is essential to understand which subgroups are currently excluded. Therefore respondents were asked who they would classify as underrepresented in internationalisation activities. The responses confirmed that not all students have equal access to internationalisation opportunities for a variety of factors including associated costs, being away from home, disabilities, as well as lower chances in the selection process. The most common barrier to participation in internationalisation activities is low income, with three quarters of HEIs (74.3%) reporting this as an underrepresented group (Figure 15). This is followed by students from rural areas (61.4%), students with disabilities (55.4%) and students from an ethnic minority or with a migratory background (44.6%). For most institutions the underrepresentation of specific religious groups (20.8%), first generation students (23.8%),
and lifelong learners and older students (29.7%) seems to be less relevant. Additionally, some respondents have noted that the selection process for many internationalisation activities is often based on academic performance, which in itself may introduce various hindrances to different student subgroups.

5. Impact of the Covid-19 pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has had significant impacts on internationalisation opportunities by making physical mobility nearly impossible. While online internationalisation activities are increasingly being implemented and expanded, these cannot replace the experience of physically experiencing another culture and environment or yet interacting with international students and staff. This wide range of effects which the Covid-19 pandemic had on mobility is also reflected in Figure 16 below, where HEI professionals were asked what the impact of the pandemic was on various aspects of internationalisation. On average, the pandemic had the biggest impact on the presence of international students (8.13) as well as international opportunities for both local students and faculty (8.18 and 8.07). The impact on the presence of international faculty and administrative staff was noticeably lower with an average of 7.17 and 6.48, respectively. This may be due to the more long-term nature of this type of mobility compared to exchange or other programmes that bring in international students. Interestingly, the areas most affected by Covid-19 are also the ones that institutions place the most importance on in their internationalisation programmes more generally, as Figure 11 showed. The presence of international students and opportunities for local students and staff feature prominently in their strategies while also being significantly impacted. This indicates the profound impact of the pandemic on the overall internationalisation of HEIs in the region.
6. Summary of Key Findings of the survey

- The majority of surveyed ASEAN HEIs (86.1%) have an internationalisation strategy. However, only 43.7% of institutions specifically address issues of inclusivity in this strategy. Additionally, there is some internal disagreement with regards to such strategies, with nearly one quarter of institutions having staff that is not fully aware of the strategies in place - this may pose a significant barrier to achieving inclusive internationalisation.

- Professionals of ASEAN HEIs highly value all dimensions of internationalisation, with the highest emphasis placed on international research collaboration (9.26) and international opportunities for local students (9.17). The focus of these internationalisation activities remains relatively local, with an emphasis on ASEAN and East Asia.

- While the majority of HEIs offer a range of internationalisation programmes including physical exchange, only a small proportion of students (less than 5% in over 60% of institutions) have the opportunity to participate in these.

- The most common barrier to participation in internationalisation activities is low income (in 74.3% of institutions). This is followed by students from rural areas (61.4%), students with disabilities (55.4%) and students from an ethnic minority or with a migratory background (44.6%).

- The Covid-19 pandemic has severely affected all aspects of internationalisation, with the biggest impact being seen in international opportunities for local students (8.18) and the presence of incoming international students (8.13).
IV.3. Challenges regarding inclusive internationalisation in ASEAN

Key Takeaways from the Inclusive Internationalisation Survey & Capacity Building Workshop Advancing Inclusion in International Higher Education in ASEAN.

The participants of the Capacity Building Workshop Advancing Inclusion in International Higher Education in ASEAN all work in HEIs across the ASEAN and have shared during the Workshop the challenges they have faced in integrating internationalisation strategies within their institutions. In addition, the surveys distributed among participants and applicants have offered a more precise vision of the challenges faced by ASEAN HE professionals in implementing inclusive international mobility in their institutions.

The Inclusive Internationalisation Survey & the Capacity Building Workshop Advancing Inclusion in International Higher Education in ASEAN identified three major categories of challenges, in addition to the Covid-19 pandemic, in incorporating inclusiveness into HEIs’ internationalisation strategy.

1. Lack of strategic vision and of a culture of internationalization

A first major issue identified is the absence of policy strategies, visible in the lack of a clearly identified institutional roadmap or strategy towards developing and improving internationalisation for as many students as possible. The lack of strategy acts in hand with the lack of a budget for internationalisation that could trigger initiatives towards inclusive internationalisation. While 86.14% of institutions surveyed reported having an internationalisation strategy, only 43.68% could confirm that such strategy specifically aims to ensure inclusive access to internationalisation. 41.38% of respondents could not confirm such information, illustrating the challenges in upholding and disseminating the internationalisation strategy across an institution. A second major challenge is the presence of a weak internationalisation culture or a weak value given to internationalisation. Students and staff might not be able to identify the range of benefits associated with internationalisation and rather focus on the costs of internationalisation, due to a lack of awareness-raising activities about such benefits.

2. Informational barriers

Table 2 shows the summary of conclusions from the Erasmus Student Network’s Guidelines for Inclusive Mobility based on the EUROSTUDENT VI survey in 2018 regarding obstacles to international mobility. Separation from relatives, loss of income, but also the lack of information provided represent major challenges for students envisioning to study abroad. Interestingly, such challenges are quoted in almost the same proportion by students without HE backgrounds and by those with such backgrounds (Table 6, Sundberg, 2021). Such results might be attributable at least in part to the lack of adapted communication from the sending or receiving institution with regards to funding opportunities for mobile students. The difference, as the Erasmus Student Network states, holds in how easily students with different backgrounds overcome such challenges. It is furthermore important to mention the case of students facing disabilities, who face an increased number of challenges, in particular, the accessibility of education and accommodation in the host country (van Hees & Montagnese, 2020).
Table 6: Obstacles to internationalisation for students with and without a HE background

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Obstacles</th>
<th>Students without higher education background</th>
<th>Students with higher education background</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1  Additional financial burden</td>
<td>67%</td>
<td>62%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2  Separation from partner, child(ren), friends</td>
<td>49%</td>
<td>47%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3  Loss of a paid job</td>
<td>39%</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4  Lack of motivation</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>30%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5  Difficult integration of enrolment abroad into the structure of home study programme</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>28%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6  Low benefit for studies at home</td>
<td>27%</td>
<td>27%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7  Insufficient skills in foreign language</td>
<td>29%</td>
<td>25%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8  Problems with recognition of results achieved abroad</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9  Lack of information provided by domestic higher education institution</td>
<td>22%</td>
<td>22%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10 Limited admittance to mobility programmes</td>
<td>18%</td>
<td>18%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table based on the findings in (EUROSTUDENT VI Ed. DZH, 2016, p. 234)


3. Students’ (self-)censorship

Similar to the above discussion, workshop participants reported that students coming from disadvantaged backgrounds or facing disabilities tend to consider by themselves that international mobility is not something they can afford, due to their situation. There seem to exist clear instances of self-censorship among disadvantaged and disabled students regarding mobility programmes. For some students, costs associated with mobility opportunities simply amount to the finance necessary for a mobility experience, not necessarily offset by potential financial support provided by the sending and/or receiving institution.

But for most, costs also represent the alleged break in one’s studies, job search, and/or an additional loss of income from having to quit a part-time job. Many disadvantaged students also face the burden of having to provide for their family, financially and/or physically, preventing them from studying or working abroad for several months at a time. As a result, and as pointed out by the survey, a majority of exchange programmes provided by respondents’ institutions only reach between 0 and 10% of the students’ body.
4. Uneven access

Even in times of pandemic, internationalisation of university students is increasingly sought by universities across the globe, including among ASEAN countries, in order to provide students with improved and expanded opportunities to higher education and future professional prospects. The ASEAN Member States have “become a nexus of the most cohesive regional policy development on internationalisation and inclusion in Asia”, despite being one of the most culturally diverse regions in the world (Asia–Europe Foundation, 2021, p.76). However, as reported in length in the ARC8 Outlook Report, there remains an evident “prevailing norm of exclusivity rather than inclusivity” in universities’ and students’ internationalisation experiences (Asia–Europe Foundation, 2021, p.72). It appears clear that such experiences remain closed off to students from lower socio-economic backgrounds, owing to challenges such as costs primarily but also lack of prior international experience, which can represent an obstacle to undertaking such a project. International mobility can be too costly for students and investments by the institutions or governments appear too little.

Another barrier to internationalisation concerns language abilities, further disadvantaging students from lower-income families who lack access to foreign language education. An additional challenge to incorporating inclusiveness into internationalisation relates to the staff and students’ workloads, which, if too important, risks limiting their willingness to add events, information sessions, and other internationalisation activities to their curriculum. The presence of marginalised groups – based on their income backgrounds or their disabilities, among others – and their possible structural discrimination, is yet another challenge to inclusive internationalization. Low income and rural students, as well as students with disabilities, are reported to be the most underrepresented in internationalisation activities across institutions surveyed.

Furthermore, requirements to participate in such opportunities, in particular grades, represent an additional challenge to inclusive internationalisation. Disadvantaged students often have to juggle education with additional commitments such as part-time jobs or care for their relatives, which can negatively impact their grades and prevent them from engaging in these opportunities.

The numerous obstacles identified by students regarding international mobility on the one hand, and the importance of such mobility within ASEAN for the students, universities, and countries alike on the other hand, prove the importance of developing a new model of international mobility, focusing on inclusivity and tackling these challenges.

Inclusive internationalisation thus concerns all students, enabling full participation of the student body into all international HE modalities and activities. Valerie van Hees defines inclusive mobility as “creating [and ensuring] adequate conditions to learn, work, or volunteer abroad for people with fewer opportunities, by addressing their diverse support needs” (van Hees & Montagnese, 2020, p.7). In this sense, inclusive mobility and internationalisation must be addressed as a needs-based approach.

5. Covid-19 Pandemic

The Covid-19 pandemic has, for some students, represented a new challenge to such
project impossible. The pandemic has brought significantly more households into poverty and led to prolonged school closures with a devastating impact on students’ learning and access to opportunities. In the medium to long term, the pandemic’s overall effect could discourage further traditional physical student mobility for many students.

As shown in the survey, the Covid-19 pandemic has impacted all elements of internationalisation across ASEAN universities, in particular the presence of international students and the international opportunities for local students but also for local faculty and administration members.

Moreover, the workshop yielded additional insights into challenges education professionals have directly faced in implementing internationalisation strategies.

6. Size of institutions

Several participants have reported facing challenges in relation to the size and global reputation of their university. Small HEIs are significantly limited in the support they can provide to their outbound students and in their welcoming capacity of inbound students. This both limits the opportunities for outbound student mobility, but also for creating or reinforcing a culture of (inclusive) internationalisation within the university, in which local students would be able to interact with inbound international students. The size of the HEIs furthermore limits the capacity of the institute to develop a comprehensive internationalisation strategy – with specific, well-defined targets –, and to devote staff and resources towards such a strategy. Such limited capacity has been mentioned by several workshop participants as a clear challenge in developing the inclusivity of their internationalisation strategies. It limits the staff’s availability to respond to concerns raised by prospective international mobility students, as well as their ability to raise awareness about the opportunities and benefits of international mobility to other students.

7. Lack of MOUs

Furthermore, small universities, for some lacking the international reputation of major educational institutions of the ASEAN, suffer from a limited number of Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) signed with other higher education institutions, the legal basis for the deployment of students abroad. This limits the number of spots available for students to engage in mobility each semester or year, as well as the variety of mobility opportunities for students, further reinforcing the exclusivity of access to international mobility.

The lack of MOUs with partner institutions reinforces another major challenge to inclusive international mobility, that of language accessibility. The wide variety of national and local languages across the ASEAN, while it can represent the multicultural character of the region, can shut access to international mobility for disadvantaged students. While English is a lingua franca within the education sector, students who are not originating from the more internationalised, richer regions of their countries usually have a poorer mastery of the language than their peers with an already international background. Several participants have stated that internationalisation activities in their institutions tend to be directed towards students already fluent in English, limiting awareness-raising opportunities for mobility programmes among disadvantaged students.
8. Lack of perceived value of education

Several workshop participants have reported that some students turn down international mobility prospects for fears of their mobility programme and potential diploma or educational certification earned not being recognised. Such an issue relates to a larger challenge faced by HEIs in developing inclusive internationalisation: the lack of perceived value of internationalisation among students. Many students, in particular those originating from a disadvantaged background or facing disabilities, view international mobility in terms of additional costs incurred rather than in terms of benefits and opportunities. Students who have not been familiarised with internationalisation prior to reaching their HEI most often lack awareness of the expected benefits of an international mobility experience, beyond the experience itself: the hard and soft skills they can develop, the networking opportunities, and the overall improvement of their employment prospects. Communication on international mobility and its expected benefits appears limited to students who already view such experience in a positive light.

IV.4. Opportunities for Inclusive Internationalisation in ASEAN

1. Making use of existing strategic frameworks

The SHARE programme is an integral element of the strategy for improved inclusive international mobility in the ASEAN. Its main objectives, as presented by Darren McDermott at the 8th ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education on December 17th, 2020, are shown in Figure 17. The SHARE programme offers an interesting framework and displays key objectives towards developing inclusive internationalisation in the ASEAN.

Figure 17: An Inclusive ASEAN Higher Education Area

- Strengthening regional cooperation, enhancing quality and internationalisation of ASEAN Higher Education institutions
- Contributing to the harmonisation of ASEAN Higher Education through the formulation of regional frameworks
- Supporting mutual recognition and equitable, diverse and inclusive student mobility between HEIs in ASEAN to strengthen people-to-people connectivity
- Supporting the strengthening of an ASEAN identity (Erasmus Effect)

The ARC8 Outlook Report identifies five main dimensions of inclusion in internationalisation between Asia and Europe which can and should be applied within the ASEAN region (Asia-Europe Foundation, 2021, p.74-75).

1. International Education Quality Assurance, Recognition and Inclusion
2. Digitalization and online alternatives for internationalisation
3. Universal design for inclusion in internationalisation
4. Diversify the learning process in international activities
5. Internationalisation of support services

These five dimensions should be considered as key objectives towards inclusive internationalisation in the ASEAN in a post-pandemic period. As such, measures towards developing inclusive internationalisation should strive to cover some, if not all, of these dimensions. Dimension 2, Digitalization and online alternatives for internationalisation appears particularly important in a Covid-world in which physical internationalisation is made significantly more difficult.

2. Adaptation under Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic has, for some students, represented a new challenge to such internationalisation projects, but for many more, it has rendered any such project impossible. In the medium to long term, the pandemic could have an overall effect to discourage further student mobility for many students. However, while one of the most devastating crises of the past decades, the Covid-19 pandemic has offered important opportunities for inclusive internationalisation in the ASEAN. In particular, it has spurred the development of new methods of teaching which can offer new ways of understanding, envisioning, and implementing inclusive internationalisation among universities. The pandemic has shown to ASEAN countries their deep interconnection and and interdependence, providing the necessary impetus for the ASEAN to strengthen calls for an inclusive, region-wide student international mobility that reinforces a common Southeast Asian identity.

While most outbound student mobility from the ASEAN was directed towards Northeast Asian and Western countries, the pandemic offers a new impetus for developing intra-ASEAN mobility by reinforcing the attractiveness of ASEAN HEIs relative to their Northeast Asian and Western counterparts, in light of their physical and cultural proximity. HEIs will, from now on, need to adapt and take fully into account the challenges associated with post-pandemic international mobility, in order to ensure inclusive intra-ASEAN mobility.
IV.5. Recommendations - Towards Inclusive ASEAN International Mobility

The following recommendations aim at responding to the challenges identified by the Advancing Inclusion in International Higher Education in ASEAN workshop participants and experts. As such, most of them are directly inspired by the feedback and ideas of the participants and experts. A minority draws on existing literature.

Table 7: Challenges and recommendations for an inclusive ASEAN international mobility

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>MAIN CHALLENGES FOR INCLUSIVE INTERNATIONALISATION</th>
<th>RECOMMENDATIONS</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Institutional barriers</td>
<td>1. Develop a mobility strategy with defined targets.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>2. Develop MOUs with smaller and more diverse ASEAN universities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Additional constraints for disadvantaged students</td>
<td>3. Diversify the types and duration of mobility programmes available.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>4. Internationalise the curriculum to improve interest in internationalisation.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>5. Develop a conscious hybridisation of the curriculum.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>6. Develop virtual internationalisation opportunities.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Informational &amp; knowledge barriers</td>
<td>7. Embrace inclusive communication across the institution.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>8. Implement and share a checklist for inbound and outbound students.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

1. Develop a mobility strategy with defined targets

The Erasmus Student Network’s Guidelines for an Inclusive Mobility argue for the development of a mobility strategy within HEIs (Sundberg, 2021). The lack of an international mobility strategy was furthermore often reported as a key challenge to inclusive internationalisation by workshop participants. Such an issue hampers efficient communication and collaboration across different offices within the HEI, rendering access to international mobility opportunities more difficult to disadvantaged students. This is further aggravated by unclarity about the contents and priorities of the internationalisation strategies as the survey has shown. While 86% of survey respondents’ institutions already have an internationalisation strategy, a majority of such strategies appear not to be specifically targeted at ensuring an inclusive access to internationalisation. Moreover, our surveys have shown that institutions with an
internationalisation strategy send a larger proportion of students in a mobility opportunity and receive a larger proportion of inbound students. A mobility strategy should be designed, implemented, and disseminated throughout the institution, featuring target objectives as well as clearly assigned roles within the administration. Target objectives can be about the minimum percentage of students that engage in an international opportunity within a year. Not meeting such targets would need to call for a revamp of the strategy in light of the results, in order to improve such results the following year. In institutions benefitting from an International Relations Office (IRO), the IRO should play a transversal role, coordinating the different offices of the administration to ensure that the target objectives are being met. As part of this strategy, the IRO should focus on both internal and external cooperation in achieving the target objectives (Sundberg, 2021).

As part of the workshop on Advancing Inclusion in International Higher Education in ASEAN, Dr. Zainab Mohd Noor, Director of the Department of International Affairs at Universiti Teknologi MARA (UiTM) has proposed an action plan for inclusive internationalisation, the strategy of 1Student, 1Passport. 1Student, 1Passport aims at providing the roughly 60% of the student population whose parental income stands below RM4,000 (956 USD) with at least one international mobility opportunity during their studies. A key element of the project strategy stands in creating a database of this particular student population to better target and disseminate the call for sponsorships and assistance, as well as ensure that the fixed objectives are met (ASEF, 2022, p.8-10).

The lack of Memoranda of Understanding, opening the way to international mobility opportunities, was reported as a major challenge to inclusive internationalisation by several workshop participants, particularly for smaller institutions who lack the resources and international renown to secure MOUs with major institutions. As visible in the survey results, a large majority of HEIs have only been able to send less than 10% of their student body on a mobility opportunity. 88% of institutions surveyed reported having less than 10% of incoming exchange students.

In order to develop a more inclusive intra-ASEAN international mobility, we recommend to ASEAN HEIs to aim to develop partnerships with other ASEAN institutions with more regional renown and focus. Workshops, by gathering participants from various universities across the 10 ASEAN countries, offer a significant opportunity for creating and reinforcing links among these universities towards inclusive internationalisation.

Smaller, less renowned HEIs should be encouraged to develop partnerships among each other, potentially creating a community of ASEAN universities, developing internationalisation opportunities among each other. Increased and improved collaboration between other ASEAN international relations offices would enable for greater inclusion in the outgoing student mobility. Signing and implementing a wider range of MOUs allows for a wider range of opportunities, potentially opening more spots each year for students interested in a mobility programme.
Institutions should build on their already existing prioritisation of intra-ASEAN mobility. As the survey has shown, the average importance on a scale from 1-10 that is placed on mobility within ASEAN is 9.32, significantly higher than all other regions. Maintaining intra-ASEAN international mobility as the priority helps promote inclusive internationalisation. International mobility within the ASEAN offers shorter-distance and lower-cost opportunities, opening mobility opportunities for students with lower-income backgrounds. Universities should make full use of the efforts of the ASEAN in improving intra-regional cross-border travel and mobility to develop a strong and inclusive ASEAN network of universities and international mobility opportunities that can complement the existing global network.

3 Diversify the offer of mobility programmes

De Wit & Jones (2018) argue that inclusive international mobility can be achieved through the diversification of international mobility opportunities geographically and in terms of activities. The traditional credit mobility, for a semester or a year, strongly limits mobility opportunities for students with lower-income backgrounds and/or with disabilities. For students with disabilities, exchanges over long periods of time can represent a daunting and inaccessible challenge away from their access to care. Lower-income background students risk facing several challenges to mobility, including having to care for their family, having to quit employment in order to access such mobility programmes.

Most HEIs surveyed that are offering mobility opportunities do so in the form of traditional exchange programmes. A smaller proportion, 60%, reported offering short programmes. Interestingly, COIL programmes are offered by a small majority of institutions surveyed, likely owing to the necessities of adapting teaching during the pandemic.

Short-term mobility opportunities could represent an interesting solution to these challenges. Even short-term mobility allows partaking students to develop the skills and network expected to be developed during longer-term mobility opportunities. Different opportunities for mobility include internships, post-graduation internships and exchanges, and blended mobility opportunities (de Wit & Jones, 2018). Such opportunities would further increase the perceived value of mobility programmes for disadvantaged students. In contrast with more traditional academic exchanges which can be seen purely as costs by financially disadvantaged students, internship programmes represent an important opportunity for such students to improve their existing skills, build new ones and construct a more attractive CV (de Wit & Jones, 2018).

The development of intra-ASEAN mobility represents an additional opportunity for developing other forms of international mobility, by allowing for shorter-distance and lower-cost mobility programmes, as well as internship programmes. The diversification of mobility programmes is all the more important in a post-Covid world, in which disadvantaged students risk limiting themselves to access mobility due to fears of facing increasing challenges such as border closures and increasing costs.

4 Internationalise the curriculum

In order to expand the range of international experiences, as well as improving the perception of the value of an international mobility experience for all students – in
particular disadvantaged students –, an internationalisation of the curriculum should be implemented. The internationalisation opportunities should not be viewed and communicated as an extra, only available to students who have the means for it. Rather, mobility, in all its forms as described above, should be fully integrated into the education curriculum.

A key idea is to incorporate internalisation at home – defined by Beelen & Jones (2015, p.69) as “…the purposeful integration of international and intercultural dimensions into the formal and informal curriculum for all students within domestic learning environments” – within the internationalisation experience. Elements of internationalisation should be directly and systematically integrated within the core curriculum of the HEI.

Developing international and intercultural perspectives should also be supported. Internationalised student activities should be supported, such as language learning tandems, intercultural workshops and forums or local intercultural programmes. Inbound international students ought to be allowed to fully engage in such activities, as a means of improving the international experience of both international and local students and foster improved interest for mobility programmes for local disadvantaged students. Internalisation of students in all its forms should be described and communicated as a priority of the HEI, instead of an extra opportunity.

Ms. Nur Hidayati Nur Ghador, International Relations Coordinator at Universiti Teknologi Brunei (UTB) in Brunei Darussalam, has proposed developing a buddy system programme for internationalisation at home in UTB. The programme would connect inbound international students with local students, local students engaging as buddies of the international students in helping them navigate the university. International students and their buddies would be invited to cultural exchange activities to share their respective cultures and language exchange sessions to improve their knowledge of each other’s language. Such programmes and activities would allow for local students to discover various cultures and obtain a preliminary access to internationalisation, while, at the same time, improving the inclusion of international students in their receiving university (ASEF, 2022, p.18-19).

5 Make full use of the virtual internationalisation opportunities

The Covid-19 pandemic has fostered the extremely rapid and expanded development of virtual education tools as a response to border closures and the impossibility for many students to reach their international mobility programme. While these measures have been, for most, adopted on a temporary basis with little to none desire to integrate them further into the education of students, they should be considered on a permanent basis for inclusive internationalisation. Even as the borders reopen, disadvantaged students risk still being barred from internationalisation opportunities due to lack of funding and other major challenges. In order to provide all students with the benefits of an internationalisation experience, virtual internationalisation opportunities should be developed further and made permanent and fully recognised at the same level as “physical” opportunities and programmes.

Even though long-term study abroad programmes have appeared along the pandemic as hardly compatible with a fully
virtual attendance, short term education and internship opportunities offer an important alternative to traditional physical internationalisation, adapted for disadvantaged students unable to participate in such. COIL programmes, offered by a majority of institutions surveyed, represent yet another alternative for the development of virtual internationalisation opportunities.

As described by Charlton Lim during the workshop in his presentation Inclusion in ASEAN: Outcomes and Impact during the workshop, virtual programmes are not designed to replace physical programmes but to “leverage on technology to provide optimal levels of global exposure and learning” (Lim, 2021). The Young Asian Leaders Initiative launched in tandem by the National University of Singapore (NUS) and Temasek Foundation represents an interesting example of a virtual internationalisation opportunity.

In the words of the programme, the Initiative aims to “act as an avenue for local and ASEAN students to interact, have discussions and engage in Internationalisation at Home” (National University of Singapore, 2021). The programme, spread over 10 online sessions of 2 hours, allowed ASEAN students of various universities to engage along the common theme of resilience. The programme was designed both to allow students unable to travel at all times and those temporarily stuck in Singapore to maintain their “spirit of exploration” alive (Lim, 2021). Programmes and opportunities such as the Young Asian Leaders Initiative could be developed further at low cost and offer to a larger number of students the chance of interacting with foreign students from various countries on themes relevant to their studies and/or the current ASEAN and world affairs. As the Young Asian Leaders Initiative has shown, well-designed and curated virtual internationalisation programmes can represent important alternatives to physical internationalisation for disadvantaged students. The Young Asian Leaders Initiative used online tools specifically designed for interaction, encouraged student panel discussions, and the creation of a student-organised human library, to empower youths “to share and learn from each other” (Lim, 2021).

The Japan Multilateral COIL Project (J-MCP), launched in August 2021 by Kansai University in Japan, in collaboration with 45 other universities from 11 countries around the globe is another interesting example of a best practice of virtual international opportunity. The programme gathered more than 80 students who were able to learn about the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals, and collaborated together on independent research projects over the next 2 months. The virtualisation of Kansai University’s UMAP (University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific) programme has allowed it to receive more than 10 times more applications than in its physical version, with more than 282 applicants for 219 students eventually accepted, originating from 14 countries and regions and 66 institutions (Ikeda, 2021).

Encourage the hybridization of classrooms and activities

In line with the development of online classroom tools and activities during the pandemic, such efforts should be further improved and made permanent for an improved inclusion of international students facing temporary or long-term difficulty in reaching their receiving education institution. Today the hybridization of classrooms appears to take place on an ad-hoc basis, poorly
coordinated and leaving students online often facing difficulties to fully engage with the rest of the classroom and the teacher. A more conscious process of hybridization engaged across the higher education institution to fully engage students that decide or have to follow courses online is needed. Such a process would include the equipment of classrooms with microphones, projection screens, possibly live caption technology for students with disabilities or lower comprehension of the teaching language. Methods of teaching would need to be redesigned further to ensure the inclusion of all students, towards an inclusive hybridization of teaching through both online and offline activities and assignments. Recordings of the lessons appear as a priority for an inclusive hybridization, by allowing students in different time zones access to the lesson asynchronously.

Such hybridisation can furthermore be developed in the activities offered by the institution, such as in receiving international guest speakers or organising international and/or intercultural events. A workshop participant mentioned the idea of reaching out to Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs) to involve disadvantaged students in international activities, including webinars and workshop activities.

As part of the digital transformation of Kansai University, the University is developing Global Smart Classrooms, enabling interaction between participants regardless of their presence onsite or online. By always displaying the students online on the board and consciously strengthening the social presence of all students, the Hyflex-mode offers an interesting example of classroom hybridization (Ikeda, 2021).

Streamline communication and information on international mobility opportunities

A major part of an inclusive internationalisation strategy relies on effective communication by the HEI’s staff towards both inbound and outbound students. Communication on mobility opportunities must reach different student groups and offer to each of them comprehensive information of the diversity of opportunities available to them as well as their modalities of access. Communication ought to be multi-channeled to reach the largest number of students, both online and offline. It should not be viewed as fully one-way communication: in-person or hybrid guidance programmes would help disadvantaged students, often more wary of undertaking mobility exchanges, useful assistance in understanding the offers available and their requirements.

Communication ought to be developed and reinforced with outgoing students both before, during, and after their mobility opportunity. Pre-exchange communication should be focused on resolving their concerns and providing them with the information necessary to apply for a programme and reach their destination. This is all the more important in a post-Covid world, in which students should be assisted in navigating travel restrictions, visa and vaccination requirements, health and security concerns. During their exchange, communication with outgoing students should be maintained, to enquire about the students’ mental health and potential concerns while abroad. Communication during the students’ exchange should be envisaged as a lifeline, particularly for more vulnerable students, to ensure their well-being abroad.
Post-exchange communication with the student should focus on gathering feedback on the exchange, its modalities, difficulties encountered and possible ways of resolving them.

Pre-exchange and year-round communication is significantly important in ensuring that all students, and particularly disadvantaged students, get a simple access to comprehensive information about the various existing mobility opportunities. Searching and applying for a mobility opportunity should be made in a streamlined process, providing the student with a clear timeline and milestones to understand which steps they need to take to be eligible for a mobility programme.

As mentioned with the workshop participants, many disadvantaged and disabled students tend to view international mobility opportunities in terms of costs rather than benefits, owing to the numerous challenges they face when considering such opportunities. In complement to other measures towards improving the inclusivity of mobility opportunities, communication should emphasise highlighting the value of student mobility for the students and on the labour markets, in terms of the skills students can build and improve and the numerous indirect benefits of international mobility. Communication should furthermore be developed on explaining how the mobility opportunities offered fit the programme and curriculum that students are studying, to improve the attractivity of such opportunities. As the survey has shown, low-income and rural students are the most underrepresented groups of students in internationalisation activities. Communication should focus on students from these underrepresented groups, to ensure that they obtain the key elements necessary to decide in full consciousness whether they wish to engage in a mobility opportunity.

Student-to-student communication is an important element of improved communication on international mobility opportunities. Workshop participants have proposed that such communication take the form of a student club, in which students would be able to gather and exchange their experiences and/or concerns regarding international mobility opportunities and programmes. Such clubs would offer students a better understanding of what mobility exchanges entail, the benefits they can earn from such exchanges but also the challenges they would have to face and resolve them. This would ignite a spark of interest to students who have historically been left away from internationalisation, providing them with the clues and tools to apply to mobility opportunities.

Online and/or physical communication on the mobility opportunities themselves should aim to develop a streamlined process for students to search and apply for mobility experiences. This could take the form of a physical or online platform, depending on the institution’s resources. The platform would include information on the opportunity, expected costs, and tangible/intangible benefits, as well as the requirements and application procedure. It would be interesting to add a clearly visible timeline with milestones to complete for students to understand the steps they need to take to be eligible for mobility and to successfully apply for the programme.

Dr. Shiella C. Balbutin, Director of the Office of International Cooperation and Networking at Xavier University in the Philippines proposes an interesting example of inclusive communication via her “International Days.”
The International Days would consist of a 3-day event including an online forum presenting the various international opportunities on offer, “Alumni Talks” for students who have gone on exchange to present their experience, and a “Global Village”, functioning as a platform for inbound international students to participate and present their cultures and traditions. According to Dr. Balbutin, such an action plan would “promote greater awareness on internationalisation within the university community and [...] fill-in the perceived knowledge or information gap resulting to low participant turn-outs in international events or activities” (ASEF, 2022, p.44).

8 Implement checklists for outbound and inbound student mobility

The checklists were designed by the Erasmus Student Network and included in their Guidelines for Inclusive Mobility (Sundberg, 2021). This recommendation is designed specifically for members of the International Office of respective higher education institutions. The checklist for outbound student mobility is designed to ensure the inclusivity of the international mobility opportunities offered in one’s institution and should be distributed among International Office members only. That for inbound student mobility aims at ensuring that international students can receive adequate information regarding their potential or future mobility experience and plan accordingly, and should be distributed to students interested in a mobility opportunity in the institution (Sundberg, 2021).

Outbound Student Mobility Checklist

1. Student financial support
Does your institution possess enough funds to finance and/or support outbound mobility students? If so, to what extent? If not, is there any other organization (bank, foundation, NGO, etc) that can, and to what extent?

2. Student academic support
Does your institution provide support in identifying and applying for mobility programmes? What form does this support take? (counselling, online/physical platform, information meetings, etc)

3. Language Learning
Does your institution provide language courses in the language of receiving countries and/or partner institutions?

4. Administrative Support
Are the programmes on offer, requirements and deadlines clearly visible and understandable by the students?

Inbound Student Mobility Checklist

1. Student financial support
Does your institution possess enough funds to finance and/or support inbound mobility students? If so, to what extent? If not, is there any other organization (bank, foundation, NGO, etc) that can, and to what extent?

2. Student accommodation
Does your institution provide subsidized student accommodation? If not, do other organisations provide it? At what cost?

3. Language Learning
What is the recommended language level to study in your institution? If your institution’s classes are held in another language than the official language of your institutions’s country, do you provide classes and/or resources for international students to learn this language?

4. Student jobs
Does your institution offer student jobs for which international students are eligible?
Are international student eligible for student jobs outside of your institution? If so, up to how many hours per week and at what minimum wage? What are the legal requirements?

5. Healthcare and student healthcare
Does your institution provide student healthcare? What is the healthcare situation in your country/region? In terms of cost, quality and service. What are important numbers and information international students need to know?

6. Welcome Programme
Does your institution offer a welcome programme?

7. Student support services
Does your institution offer student support?
V. References


