

CG GPD - ASEF Policy Dialogue

Higher Education Policies Working Towards the SDGs in Asia and Europe
27-29 September 2023
Rome, Italy

BACKGROUND NOTE

THE ORGANISERS

This dialogue event is based on synergies between:

- The **Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)** and its work in fostering higher education policy dialogue between Asia and Europe, with specific focus on its ARC9 Report titled “Asia-Europe Higher Education Mapping: Working Towards the SDGs”; and
- EHEA’s **Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue (CG GPD)** and its work in developing continuous dialogue with other regions and international organisations on matters of common concern.

PARTICIPANTS

We will have around 30 participants from the following target groups:

- 15-20 members of EHEA’s CG GPD (Member List: Albania, Austria, Belgium Flemish Community, Belgium French Community, Cyprus, Education International - European Trade Union Committee for Education (EI - ETUCE), European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA), European Students' Union (ESU), European University Association (EUA), European Commission, France, Germany, Holy See, Ireland, Italy, Kazakhstan, Malta, Netherlands, Romania, Spain, UNESCO, and the United Kingdom)
- 10 delegates invited by ASEF from Asia

OVERARCHING MEETING GOALS

- Conduct an Asia-Europe dialogue on higher education’s role in sustainable development;
- Achieve the objectives for ASEF’s ARC9 Project, which are to engage representatives from Asia and Europe to discuss the findings of the ARC9 Report, draft recommendations for the 9th ASEM Education Ministers Meeting (ASEMME), and facilitate exchange of good practices and networking; and
- Achieve the objectives of EHEA’s CG GPD, which is to conduct a dialogue with Asia and prepare for the Global Policy Forum in 2024.

What is ASEF?

The [Asia-Europe Foundation \(ASEF\)](#) is an intergovernmental, not-for-profit organisation based in Singapore which brings together the people of Asia and Europe to address common global challenges. It is the most active stakeholder in the ASEM Education Process, the only permanent institution of ASEM, and the official dialogue partner of the ASEMME.

Education is one of ASEF’s key thematic areas. By connecting youth, students, teachers and educators, higher education leaders and experts with policymakers across both regions through different projects, ASEF contributes significantly to the ASEM strategic objectives listed in the ASEM Strategy 2030. Since 2018, ASEM Education partners and stakeholders have repeatedly stressed the importance of contributing to the United Nations Sustainable Development Agenda 2030.

Recognized as official events of the ASEM Summits, the ASEM Foreign Ministers' Meetings (ASEMFMMs), and the ASEMMEs, ASEF's education projects bring the voice of the youth into the ASEM Process and facilitate a structured dialogue between young people and the political leaders of both regions.

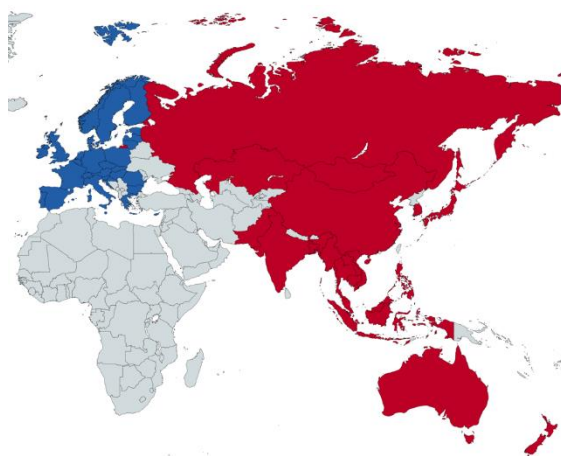
The ARC9 Study on Asia-Europe Higher Education Mapping: Working Towards the SDGs

ASEF published the study "[Asia-Europe Higher Education Mapping: Working Towards SDGs](#)" aimed at addressing the issue of policy-practice interface and collect evidence from the [51 ASEM partner countries](#)¹ on their policies working towards the SDGs. This research also hopes to provide evidence for future policy discussions and map areas where countries could work better together.

The report consists of two complimentary parts:

- Higher Education Policies contributing to SDGs (covering 31 national contexts in Asia and Europe)
- Higher Education Institutions contributing to the SDGs (240 institutional responses from 42 countries in Asia and Europe)

What is ASEM and the ASEM Education Process?



The [Asia-Europe Meeting \(ASEM\)](#) is a unique, informal platform for political dialogue and cooperation in various policy areas between 51 partner countries. It was launched in 1996 with the first political Summit of Heads of State or Government held in Bangkok, Thailand.

ASEM meetings and activities involve European and Asian decision makers at different levels: ASEM Summits, Ministerial Meetings, Senior Officials' Meetings, regular dialogues, and initiatives by ASEM partners.

ASEM's strength is its informality at the very highest level that allows for and fosters informal exchange of views on many topics in different fields. In fact, the ASEM is based on three pillars, namely: political, economic and financial, and social and cultural.

Education forms an integral policy part of ASEM's social, cultural, and educational pillar and is seen as key to enhance mutual understanding and development of the two regions. In 2006 during the Helsinki Summit, ASEM leaders stressed the value of dialogue and exchange of best practices on questions related to education and training, leading to the establishment of regular ASEM Education Ministers' Meetings as a consequence. The first ASEMME took place in Berlin, Germany in 2008 and it established the beginning of the [ASEM Education Process](#) (AEP), organised around a two-year cycle. More specifically, every two years, the ASEM Education Ministers gather during the Ministerial Meeting (i.e., the ASEMME) to set the political and practical ASEM Education Process agenda. Before the Ministerial Meeting, Senior Officials and experts from ASEM's stakeholders meet at the Intermediate Senior Officials' Meeting (ISOM) and at the two Senior Officials' Meetings (SOMs) to discuss the policy orientation of the ASEM Education Process.

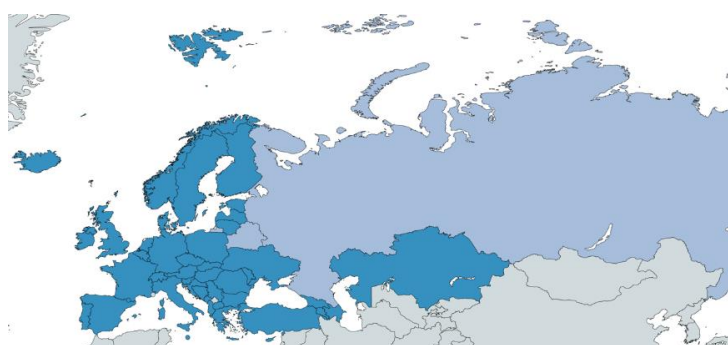
To make the ASEM Education Process more structured, Ministers decided to formulate an [ASEM Education Strategy for 2030](#) and its [Action Plan](#) to provide a framework for collaboration with common objectives to encourage international exchanges, share good practices, help partners cope with similar issues, and contribute to the [Sustainable Development Goals](#). This Strategy and Action Plan has been acknowledged by Ministers at the last ASEMME held online in Bangkok, Thailand in 2021, and represents a milestone for the overall ASEM Education Process. All ASEM

¹ 21 Asian countries, the ASEAN Secretariat (ASEC), 30 European countries, and the European Union (EU)

meetings are organized by the ASEM Education Secretariat in collaboration with the host country. The Secretariat is at the heart of the ASEM Education Community. It contributes to institutional memory and coherence between initiatives to avoid duplication. Asian and European countries take turns hosting the Secretariat every four years on a voluntary basis to guarantee the continuity of the ASEM Education Process.

Since July 2022, the Secretariat is hosted by Italy until 2026. The ASEMME9 will take place on 25-26 January 2024 in Malta. The ASEM Education Secretariat, together with Malta and in consultation with ASEM partners, is now drafting the Chair's Conclusions for the ASEMME9.

What are the EHEA and the Bologna Process?



The **Bologna Process**, launched with the Bologna Declaration of 1999, is the main voluntary process in education at the European level, and it is nowadays implemented in 49 states² (27 European Union countries and 22 other countries who signed the European Cultural Convention), which define the **European Higher Education Area (EHEA)**.

The EHEA is an international collaboration on higher education that involves 49 countries with different political, cultural, and academic traditions. Through the Bologna Process, countries, institutions, and stakeholders of the European area continuously adapt their higher education systems making them more compatible and strengthening their quality assurance mechanisms. For all these countries, the main goal is to increase staff and students' mobility and to facilitate employability. As part of the EHEA, participating countries agreed to introduce a three-cycle higher education system consisting of bachelor's, master's, and doctoral studies. Most of them also ensure the mutual recognition of qualifications and learning periods abroad completed at other higher education institutions by ratifying the **Lisbon Recognition Convention** adopted in 1997. Moreover, these countries have implemented a system of quality assurance to strengthen the quality and relevance of learning and teaching. All the reforms on higher education are based on common fundamental values as all countries are committed to upholding institutional autonomy, academic freedom and integrity, participation of students and staff in higher education governance, and public responsibility for and of higher education.

To assess the progress made within the EHEA and to decide on the new steps to be taken, Ministerial Conferences are organised by the Bologna Follow-Up Group (BFUG) every two to four years. During the last Ministerial Conference hosted virtually by Italy in 2020, Ministers adopted the forward-looking, visionary **Rome Ministerial Communiqué** affirming their commitment to developing a more inclusive, innovative, interconnected and resilient EHEA. The next Ministerial Conference will take place in Tirana, Albania in May 2024. Apart from the role of the BFUG to ensure the implementation of the steps upon which the Ministers have decided, the EHEA makes use of several support structures, namely the BFUG Board, the BFUG Secretariat and the working groups. Among many working groups, the **Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue** (CG GPD) aims at developing dialogue with other regions and international organisations on matters of common concern and relevance for higher education. The CG GPD is also in charge of preparing and conducting the Global Policy Forum in Tirana in May 2024 (with a Global Policy Statement), and its activities are supported by the **IN-GLOBAL Project** co-funded by the EU.

Since 1999, the EHEA's Ministerial Conferences are held every 2-4 years in one of its member countries. In 2009, host countries started organising the Bologna Policy Fora participated in by countries outside the EHEA to engage in dialogue with ministries based in the EHEA. In 2020, these

² The Russian Federation and Belarus are currently suspended from the EHEA, as decided by the BFUG members at the **BFUG Meeting LXXX**, held in Strasbourg on the 11 and 12 April 2022.

fora were renamed into the “Global Policy Forum.” The next Global Policy Forum will be in Tirana, Albania in May 2024 and will be organised by the host country in close collaboration with the CG GPD. One of its outcomes will be a Statement. Thus, on Day 3, CG GPD will engage policymakers from Asia and Europe to consult them on the drafting of this key document. The list of previous fora and statements can be found [here](#).

Sustainable Development Goals in EHEA's Policy Papers

Sustainable development is discussed in all working structures of the BFUG and the SDGs are specifically mentioned in the following Communiqués:

- **[2020 Rome Ministerial Communiqué:](#)**
“Higher education will be a key actor in meeting the United Nations’ Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030. We commit to supporting our higher education institutions in bringing their educational, research and innovation capacities to bear on these fundamental global objectives and to deploying resources to ensure that our higher education systems contribute to the achievement of the SDGs. Moving towards climate neutrality is essential for all of us, and learners must be prepared for new “green” jobs and activities. They must be offered up-skilling and reskilling opportunities in a lifelong learning perspective and enabled to develop and apply new technologies and approaches.”
- **[2018 Paris Ministerial Communiqué:](#)**
“We commit to developing the role of higher education in securing a sustainable future for our planet and our societies and to finding ways in which we, as EHEA Ministers, can contribute to meeting the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals at global, European and national levels.”

Sustainable Development Goals in ASEM's Policy Papers

Sustainable Development is discussed in all the working structures of the ASEM Education Process. An Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goals and Education was established in early 2023 and meets regularly. The SDGs are specifically mentioned in the following outcomes documents of the ASEM Education Ministerial Meetings:

- **[Chair's Conclusions - ASEMME8](#)** (Bangkok, December 2021):
The Ministers “underlined the importance of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals with a focus on SDG4 and agreed that the ASEM Education Process can contribute to realizing the SDGs. The Ministers re-confirmed their commitment to contribute to the implementation of SDG4 in order to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education and Lifelong Learning opportunities for all. Therefore, they welcomed the newly formulated mission of the ASEM Education Process: “By 2030, the ASEM Education Process (AEP) will contribute to a more prosperous, resilient and sustainable Asia-Europe education region, better prepared for current and forthcoming global challenges. ASEM Education partners and stakeholders will reaffirm the AEP as an advanced transregional dialogue and cooperation platform. They aim to develop the AEP as a platform to promote inclusive and equitable quality education and training through equal and mutually beneficial Asia-Europe partnerships, leveraged by people-to-people connectivity. Through partnerships, exchanges and collaboration, ASEM Education partners and stakeholders will support the education sector to train individuals able to navigate through rapidly changing and increasingly complex societies and labor markets, while respecting national, regional, interregional and local education contexts and practices, as well as academic values. In order to realize this vision and mission statement, ASEM Education partners and stakeholders have identified strategic objectives, instruments and working methods, and developed an Action Plan in order to ensure effective implementation and tangible results.”” (cc. 13)
- **[Chair's Conclusions - ASEMME7](#)** (Bucharest, May 2019):
The Ministers “underlined the importance of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals with a focus on SDG4 and agreed that the ASEM Education Process can contribute to realizing the SDGs. Therefore, the Ministers confirmed their commitment to contribute to the implementation of the SDG4 in order to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all. The Ministers welcomed the suggestion to link the ASEM Education Process more explicitly to the Sustainable Development Agenda 2030 by introducing “Sustainable Development” as a transversal theme within the 4 priority areas of the ASEM Education Process.” (cc. 12)