



10th ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education

[Un]debated Ways of Rethinking Higher Education

PROJECT REPORT

BACKGROUND The ARC Programme is the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers Meeting (ASEMME). For the past 15 years, it has continuously evolved and contributed with various outputs (policy recommendations, research, and events) to the ASEM Education Process, and created opportunities for key Asian and European stakeholders to connect. ARC's role as a valuable dialogue partner has been reiterated in all ASEMMEs, and its outcomes and outputs helped to sustain a dynamic ASEM Education Process. This Process is supported and enhanced by the work of its four (4) Expert Groups, one of which is the ASEM Education Expert Group on SDGs and Education (EG1) that ASEF co-chairs with Thailand and Malta within the framework of ARC's tenth edition.

In this report, the achievements in 2025 – the last year of this biennial project – are featured.

ABOUT THE TOPIC

In January 2024, the 9th ASEM Education Ministers Meeting underlined the importance of working towards the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly the SDG4. The Ministers supported continued cooperation and dialogue as well as knowledge and people-to-people exchange between Asia and Europe, and ASEF was “encouraged to continue doing research on the ASEM Education Priority topics.”

In this capacity, ASEF designed the ARC10 around the future of higher education in Asia and Europe. For its second year, our work focused on facilitating the ASEM EG1 virtual learning sessions as well as organising the “ARC10 Policy Dialogue on Reimagining the SDGs and Education Post-2030”, as a side event to the ASEM Education 1st Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM1).

KEY FACTS

PERIOD:
2025

FORMAT:
Online and Onsite in Romania

ACTIVITIES:
> **ASEM Expert Group Sessions**, Online, throughout the year
> **ARC10 Policy Dialogue**, Bucharest, Romania, 20-21 November 2025

PARTICIPANTS:
39 participants engaged in the ASEM Expert Group discussions
29 policymakers, academics, university officials, and student leaders engaged in the Policy Dialogue event

AUDIENCE REACHED:

15,000+ reached on social media

KEY OBJECTIVES



KNOWLEDGE EXCHANGE

Facilitate the exchange of good practices and networking among policymakers, universities and student organisations in Asia and Europe



INFORM POLICY

Inform policies by collecting evidence and conducting policy dialogues with stakeholders of the 51 ASEM Partner Countries, the EU and ASEAN



▶ OUR WORK IN THE ASEM EDUCATION EXPERT GROUP ON EDUCATION AND SDGs

The ASEM Education Expert Group on SDGs and Education (EG1) was established to operationalise the ASEM Education Process's commitment to the United Nations 2030 Agenda by aligning education cooperation between Asia and Europe with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), particularly SDG 4 on inclusive, equitable quality education and lifelong learning.

It builds on ASEM Ministers' decisions to integrate sustainable development as a transversal theme across ASEM's education priorities and provides a collaborative platform for member states and stakeholders to share best practices, strengthen SDG implementation, and address diversity, inclusion, and equity in education.

Together with its co-chairs - the [Malta Further and Higher Education Authority](#) and the [Ministry of Education](#) of Thailand -, ASEF resumed the EG1's important work this year with renewed energy based on a work plan that outlines areas that EG1 members deem important to explore given today's education landscape.

Session 1: Setting the Scene: Where Are We, and What Lies Beyond 2030? 26 March 2025 | Online

Keynote Talk



Mr Nyi Nyi THAUNG
Education Programme Specialist
UNESCO Bangkok

The first meeting of 2025 hosted education stakeholders and representatives from ASEM member countries to develop a comprehensive Work Plan and Terms of Reference covering the EG's work up until the 10th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME10).

EG1 identified five topics of strategic interest to be tackled in the upcoming period with the vision of forming a final white paper presented to ASEM Education Ministers, aided by a powerful keynote lecture on the state of the SDGs and how far we need to go to achieve Agenda 2030's education-related goals.

Session 2: Rethinking Educational Equity: From Access to Real Inclusion 22 May 2025 | Online

Keynote Talks



Ms Elīza DĀLDERE
Ministry of Education and
Science, Latvia



Prof Dr Azirah HASHIM, FASc
Asia-Europe Institute,
Universiti Malaya, Malaysia



Mr Philip MASTERSON
SEAMEO RIHED



Dr Kraiyos PATRAWART
Equitable Education Fund,
Thailand

The second meeting of the EG1 featured stage-setting presentations from selected partner and stakeholder organisations, showcasing how they addressed barriers to accessible and equitable education within their specific contexts. These inputs provided a foundation for deeper discussions on tackling disparities across different levels—macro-regional, national, and institutional.

Discussions touched upon selected areas of interest for the Expert Group, such as strategies for mobilising and creating funding sources to promote equitable education for all and good practices for developing inclusive policies in higher education.

Session 3: Learning Cities of the Future: Building Inclusive and Equitable Learning Ecosystems 10 September 2025 | Online

Keynote Talks



Ms Tine DELVA
European Commission



Mr Phearoun PHEL
National Council for Lifelong Learning, Cambodia



Prof Yukiko SAWANO
University of the Sacred Heart, Japan



Dr Balázs NÉMETH
University of Pécs, Hungary

This joint session of the EG on SDGs and Education and the EG on Lifelong Learning and TVET focused on the transformative potential of Learning Cities in advancing lifelong learning as a driver of sustainable development. As urban areas increasingly take the lead in promoting inclusive, flexible, and future-ready education systems, the session explored how Learning Cities can foster green and digital transitions, support reskilling and upskilling across all age groups, and cultivate a culture of continuous learning.

▶▶ OUR WORK IN THE ARC10 POLICY DIALOGUE

In collaboration with the [ASEM Education Secretariat \(AES\)](#) and the [Ministry of Education and Research \(MOER\) of Romania](#), ASEF organised the ARC10 Policy Dialogue on 20-21 November 2025. This was generously hosted by the [National University of Political Science and Public Administration](#) and was a side-event of the [ASEM Education 1st Senior Officials' Meeting \(SOM1\)](#) held on 18-19 November 2025.

With the theme “**Reimagining SDGs and Education Post-2030**”, we brought together 29 policymakers, academics, university officials, and student leaders, a multisectoral cohort to engage in dialogue on issues, challenges, good practices, and policy suggestions key in driving the current SDGs forward and developing a successor agenda for education.

Incorporating the first onsite session of the ASEM Education Expert Group on SDGs and Education as its first segment, the meeting set a solid intellectual tone for the policy dialogue through a series of thought-provoking keynotes:



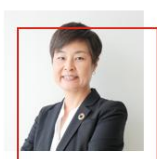
Dr Ligia DECA
National University of Political Studies and Public Administration, Romania



Prof Zainal SANUSI
International Islamic University, Malaysia



Dr Thérèse ZHANG
European University Association



Dr Jonghwi PARK
United Nations University, Japan

The second day opened with an incisive intergenerational panel discussion on revisiting the SDGs and looking beyond Agenda 2030:



Dr Doria ABDULLAH
[Universiti Teknologi Malaysia](#)



Ms Duriya AMATAVIVAT
SEAMEO SEPS & Ministry of Education, Thailand



Ms Christelle AGUSTIN
SEAMEO RIHED



Prof Seamus O'TUAMA
University College Cork, Ireland



Mr Yiannis STAMATONIKOLOS
UN Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Youth

The dialogue also featured a series of lightning talks from participants representing Cambodia, India, Ireland, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Malta, the Philippines, Thailand, and Vietnam. Their contributions highlighted shared and context-specific challenges in sustainable development, alongside innovative practices and policy frameworks shaping national education systems.

Throughout the day, participants joined in intensive brainstorming workshops and open discussions to work on an output that will carry the group's visions for the next education agenda after 2030.

Read more about the successful policy dialogue and the recap of our insightful discussions [here](#).



►► CONTRIBUTION TO THE ASEM EDUCATION PROCESS

ASEF shared its work in the field youth, education, and teaching and learning as well as the work of the ASEM EG1 at the [ASEM Education 1st Senior Officials' Meeting \(SOM1\)](#) held on 18-19 November 2025. Organised by the ASEM Education Secretariat in partnership with the Ministry of Education and Research of Romania, the event had more than 70 participants representing various ministries and stakeholder organisations in Asia and Europe.



▶▶ KEY ACHIEVEMENTS



Support to the ASEM Education Process
as the ASEMME Official Dialogue Partner



67 Total Participants Engaged
In online and onsite activities



23 Academics and Thought Leaders
gave their insights on current trends



100% Gained New Knowledge and Inspiration towards Action
on relevant topics after participating



100% Learned More on Strategic Priorities
on SDGs in Asia and Europe, including
policies and priorities pre- and post-2030



100% Benefited from Participation
for their own professional or
organisational work

▶▶ FUTURE PLANS

The Road to the 10th ASEM Education Ministers Meeting (ASEMME10), Philippines

We will continue our work as the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEMME through AHEAD Policy Dialogue 2026 themed “Generations AHEAD: Inclusive and Sustainable Education in Asia & Europe. The EG1 will continue its work and explore themes related to digitalisation and AI as well as Global Citizenship Education, with a couple more virtual sessions in the timeline. Once the communique is finalised, there will be a dissemination campaign for the output in the lead up to the ASEMME 2026 happening in the Philippines. With the host country’s support, we also aim to organise an in-person side event to the ministerial meeting, building on the output’s insights and recommendations.

ORGANISED BY



Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

ASEF is an intergovernmental not-for-profit organisation located in Singapore. Founded in 1997, it is the only institution of the Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM). ASEF promotes understanding, strengthens relationships and facilitates cooperation among the people, institutions and organisations of Asia and Europe. ASEF enhances dialogue, enables exchanges and encourages collaboration across the thematic areas of culture, education, governance, sustainable development, economy, public health and media. For more information, please visit <https://asef.org/>.

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH



The ASEM Education Secretariat (AES)

The AES was created by the ASEM Ministers of Education (ASEMME) in 2009 with the purpose of ensuring effective coordination of ASEM Education Process initiatives and activities. The Secretariat is hosted on a rotating basis, in which countries in Asia and Europe take turns to host on a voluntary basis. The current secretariat is hosted by Italy until end 2026. For more information, please visit <https://asem-education.org/>.



National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA)

Founded in 1991, SNSPA is a public higher education and research institution in Bucharest, Romania. It stands as a landmark in the Romanian academic setting and is known both nationally and internationally. SNSPA trains and develops professional competencies in Political Sciences, Sociology, Administrative Studies, International Relations, Diplomacy, European Studies, Communication Sciences, Psychology, Management, and Human Resources, thus contributing to change at national and international level, a change based on democratic values and principles. For more information, please visit <https://snsps.ro/>.



Ministry of Education and Research, Romania

The Ministry of Education and Research leads Romania's national education system as well as education, scientific research, and technological development and innovation. For more information, please visit <https://edu.ro/>.

EARMARKED FUNDERS



MINISTRY OF FOREIGN AFFAIRS
OF DENMARK



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GENERAL FUNDERS



Flags represent countries that contributed to ASEF's General Pool for the previous year, as of 11 July 2025