

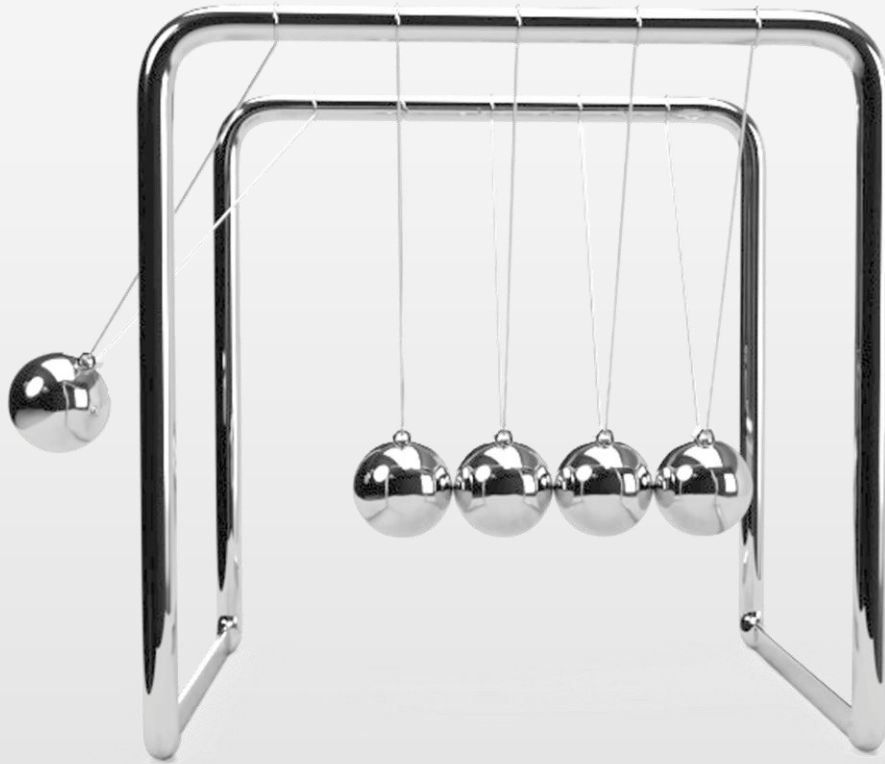
07

ASEF HIGHER EDUCATION

innoLab

The Role of
Universities in
Advancing
AI for Good

Concept Overview



Background

Established in 2021, the [ASEF Higher Education Innovation Laboratory](#) (ASEFInnoLab) creates opportunities for higher education stakeholders from Asia and Europe to expand their professional network, exchange knowledge, and collaboratively build their capacity to address common global challenges. Guided by its overarching theme of “Universities’ Role in Artificial Intelligence (AI) Innovation Ecosystems,” ASEFInnoLab stands as a unique platform for higher education stakeholders to exchange good practices and co-create new ideas at the intersection of education, research, and innovation.

In its seventh edition, the project will bring together outstanding experts, scholars, and changemakers to explore universities’ role in advancing AI for humanity’s benefit.

Programme Objectives

ASEFInnoLab7 is a design thinking laboratory for leaders, managers, and administrators of tertiary higher education institutions with the mission to:



Improve

universities’ role in multistakeholder AI innovation partnerships



Foster

an Asia-Europe network of university leaders, academics, and thought leaders on AI governance and innovation



Inform & Influence

education policymaking and strategies across 50 ASEM partner countries

Thematic Focus

AI is increasingly permeating every aspect of human life and has emerged as a transformative force shaping societies, economies, and institutions worldwide. As its capabilities and applications continue to expand, AI has begun to significantly shape progress across many sectors, including those critical to sustainable development.

AI is found to be a **potential enabler for achieving many of the social, economic, and environmental targets** under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). However, significant trade-offs and gaps remain. How can developing and low-income countries harness AI in a manner that is anchored in their own values, priorities, and local contexts? As AI applications increasingly rely on large-scale data processing, how can the needs of innovation be balanced with data protection, safety, and accountability? Persistent concerns also remain around inequalities in access and benefits, bias and discrimination, erosion of social cohesion and effects on societal resilience, and the ethical frameworks needed to govern AI’s growing influence.¹

It is within this complex and evolving landscape that **universities assume a critical, impactful role**. As centres of learning, engines of innovation and knowledge creation, and ethical anchors, higher education institutions (HEIs) occupy a central role in **shaping how AI is researched, governed, and applied in service of the common good**.²

International organisations have increasingly underscored the pivotal role of universities in shaping AI for societal benefit. The International Association of Universities (IAU) acknowledges the **potential of AI in augmenting a whole-of-institution approach towards the SDGs** and emphasise the importance of strengthened collaboration between universities, industry, and government.³ Universities act as critical connectors across these spheres

¹ Vinuesa, R., Azizpour, H., Leite, I. et al. (2020). The role of artificial intelligence in achieving the Sustainable Development Goals. *Nature Communications*, 11, Article 233. <https://doi.org/10.1038/s41467-019-14108-y>

² Etchemendy, J., Landay, J., Li, F.-F., & Manning, C. (2025, October 30). *Universities must reclaim AI research for the public good*. Stanford Institute for Human-Centered Artificial Intelligence, Stanford University. <https://hai.stanford.edu/news/universities-must-reclaim-ai-research-for-the-public-good>

³ International Association of Universities. (2024, May). Higher education and research for sustainable development. *IAU Horizons*, 29(1), 10–12. <https://iau.global/all-publications/iau-horizons-issue-volume-29-no-1-2024>

given their unique advantage at **aligning groundbreaking innovation with global sustainability goals⁴** and **influencing and complementing timely, effective policymaking on the AI for social good⁵**.

ASEFInnoLab7 complements ongoing international efforts by diving deep into how universities can catalyse AI in pursuit of broader societal goals. Carrying the theme **“The Role of Universities in Advancing AI for Good”**, it will focus on areas where universities can take the lead towards inclusive, ethical, and socially beneficial outcomes:



AI4GlobalGood

Universities harnessing AI to contribute to global social, environmental, or economic sustainability and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



AI4PublicInterest

Universities strengthening public understanding, inclusion, trust, and engagement through policymakers, legislators and the broader public



AI4InstitutionalExcellence

Universities seeking proper AI governance, policies, and infrastructure for enhanced excellence of the institution and its contribution to public good

Programme Design

ASEFInnoLab7 aims to strengthen cross-regional networks and dialogue on the role of universities in AI innovation ecosystems by building institutional capacity, promoting ethical and inclusive AI practices, and generating actionable outputs to inform strategic policy and leadership in higher education. This edition, we will deliver a full programme with virtual and in-person elements in various formats throughout the year.



Policy Lab: Strategic White Papers on Advancing AI for Good

A white paper co-creation programme for invited participants, March to November 2026

This component will convene **invited academics, researchers, and experts through a Call for Interest** to develop forward-looking white papers through a collaborative process. Anchored in ASEFInnoLab7's thematic areas, the programme positions universities as active policy actors shaping diverse the dimensions of AI.

Who will be developing the white papers?

We will bring together **about 60 higher education experts, professionals, academics, and researchers** from Asia and Europe who meet the following **eligibility criteria**:

- Working with AI-related teaching, learning, research, management initiatives
- Hold citizenship and residency in eligible [ASEF partner countries](#)⁶
- Have excellent command of English (written and verbal)

ASEFInnoLab participants are **not required to have technical or coding skills**. There will also be **no technological exchanges in this programme** as it primarily leans towards topics associated with the social sciences given its focus on the theoretical, managerial, and organisational aspects of AI in higher education.

What topics and audience will the white papers address?

White papers produced through this process will articulate strategic pathways through which higher education institutions can align AI development and deployment with societal needs, ethical principles, and long-term public value. The white papers will **address an issue within the following areas**:

⁴ Bong, Y., Yunus, S., Weerawarna, R., Senkerik, R., Tan, R., Masood, T., Leoni, T., Wawn, T., & Camilleri, V. (2025, February). *White paper for universities on navigating artificial intelligence innovation ecosystems in AI for sustainable development*. Asia-Europe Foundation. <https://asef.org/publications/asefinnolab-white-paper-sustainable-development/>

⁵ Wong, W. (2020). AI and the future of work: A policy framework for job disruption into social good for all. In *Artificial Intelligence for Social Good* (pp. 244-275). Association of Pacific Rim Universities; Keio University. https://www.apru.org/resources_report/artificial-intelligence-for-social-good/

⁶ All ASEF projects are implemented in line with the decisions of the ASEF Board of Governors.

- **#AI4GlobalGood:** Universities **harnessing AI** to contribute to **global social, environmental, or economic sustainability** and the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)
- **#AI4PublicInterest:** Universities **strengthening public understanding, inclusion, trust, and engagement** through policymakers, legislators and the broader public
- **#AI4InstitutionalExcellence:** Universities seeking proper AI governance, policies, and infrastructure for enhanced excellence of the institution and its contribution to public good

The target group of the papers will be **two-fold**: providing insights and advice to **higher education leaders and education policymakers** at the same time.

How does the process look like?

We will be onboarding a roster of 10 expert coordinators who will meet in **April 2026 at the sidelines of the prestigious Shanghai Forum in China hosted by Fudan University** to lay the groundwork for the drafting process. The coordinators will each build a team of 5 experts from our pool of responses from the Call for Interest and work on a white paper topic in the following months.

The teams will be invited to present their draft at the **ASEFInnoLab7 Conference to be hosted by University of Nottingham in the United Kingdom in August 2026**. As an experiential, collaborative programme, the conference will welcome around 60 participating experts and will have an array of interactive sessions that will facilitate peer-to-peer learning to aid the finalisation of the white papers.

The full lineup of white papers will be officially launched in November 2026, potentially onsite. The compendium will also be shared at the ASEM Education 2nd Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM2) back-to-back with the 10th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME10) happening in the Philippines.



Trailblazer Webinar Series: Universities for the Common Good

A webinar series open to the public, May to June 2026

This **public webinar series** will open ASEFInnoLab7's conversations to a wider audience by showcasing insights and practices from the ASEFInnoLab community of academics, researchers, and experts working at the intersection of AI and higher education. Experts will be delivering **interactive talks showcasing concrete use cases, institutional approaches, and emerging practices** that demonstrate how universities are harnessing AI to safeguard and advance the common good.

Each session, invited speakers will deliver a talk on their chosen topic. This will be combined with facilitated discussions, including live Q&A and breakout sessions. This format is intended not only to deepen understanding of key issues but also to enable participants to collectively distil lessons learned, reflect on transferability across contexts, and exchange perspectives across Asia and Europe.



Sessions will take place every Wednesday at 16:00-18:00 SGT / 10:00-12:00 CET via Zoom

Participation in any of ASEFINnoLab7's components is free. For those invited to join the onsite events in China and the United Kingdom, ASEF will also cover all expenses.

Key Outcomes

What will our participants get out of ASEFINnoLab7? *Knowledge, ideas, connections, and a path for impact.*

UNDERSTANDING OF UNIVERSITIES' ROLE IN ADVANCING AI FOR GOOD

Participants will acquire new knowledge and ideas on how universities can shape AI research, governance, and application in service of the common good through expert inputs, peer exchange, and critical reflection.

INCREASED PROFESSIONAL NETWORK ACROSS ASIA AND EUROPE

Participants will deepen professional networks and connect with like-minded academics, researchers, and experts working at the forefront of AI and higher education. Therefore, we fully expect new bilateral and multilateral partnerships to emerge.

CO-CREATED, IMPACTFUL OUTPUTS DEVELOPED IN A DYNAMIC ENVIRONMENT

Those working on white papers will team up under the guidance of an expert coordinator to co-develop outputs that position universities as influential actors in shaping responsible and inclusive AI ecosystems in a collaborative, intercultural environment.

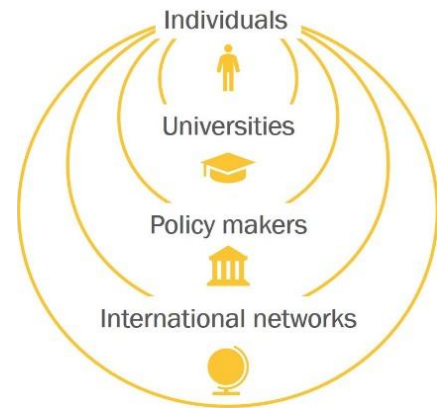
These outcomes collectively illustrate how ASEFINnoLab converts knowledge exchange and partnership prospects into sustained collaboration and impact across the Asia–Europe higher education community. Meaningful collaboration and action formed through the programme will extend well beyond the edition towards lasting impact.



Impact

In the long term, the impact of ASEFINnoLab is expected to be realised on four levels:

- **Individual level:** Inspire Asia-Europe higher education academics and administrators to act and improve institutional strategies and practices in digital innovation.
- **Institutional level:** Strengthen Asia-Europe universities' role in AI innovation ecosystems.
- **Policy level:** Inform the Asia-Europe education policymakers on universities' roles and strategies in AI innovation ecosystems.
- **International level:** Support an Asia-Europe peer network to facilitate exchange on innovation and find opportunities for collaboration.



Implementing Partners



The Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF)

ASEF is an intergovernmental not-for-profit organisation located in Singapore. Founded in 1997, 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/>.



Fudan University (FDU)

Fudan University is a major public research university in Shanghai, People's Republic of China. Founded in 1905, today it is widely considered as one of the most prestigious and selective universities in the country. The QS University Rankings 2021 ranked Fudan as the 7th most reputable university in Asia, while it is classified as a Double First Class University by the Ministry of Education in China. Fudan also actively incubates high-tech industries and encourages them to convert knowledge to power. In return, the multi-pattern development of the high-tech industries helps the University to industrialize the research outcomes. For more information, please visit <https://www.fudan.edu.cn/en>.



University of Nottingham (UoN)

University of Nottingham is a leading public research university renowned for world-class research, innovation, and interdisciplinary education. The university's mission emphasises excellence in education, research, and civic engagement, with a strong international outlook and commitment to improving lives worldwide. UoN has grown into a globally recognised research-intensive institution with a rich academic heritage and international footprint. It serves a large and diverse student body, with tens of thousands of students from more than 150 countries enrolled across undergraduate, postgraduate, and research programmes spanning humanities, sciences, engineering, business, and health disciplines. They have several campuses hosting a comprehensive range of academic pathways in the United Kingdom, China, and Malaysia. For more information, please visit <https://www.nottingham.ac.uk/>.

Supporting Partner



Asia-Europe for Artificial Intelligence (AE4AI) Network

The AE4AI Network was established by 20 academics and university managers from Asia and Europe in 2023 with the intent to enhance universities' role in AI innovation ecosystems and together pursue collaboration and actions on AI Governance, AI in Education, and AI for Sustainable Development. For more information, please visit <https://www.asiaeuropa4ai.org/>.