

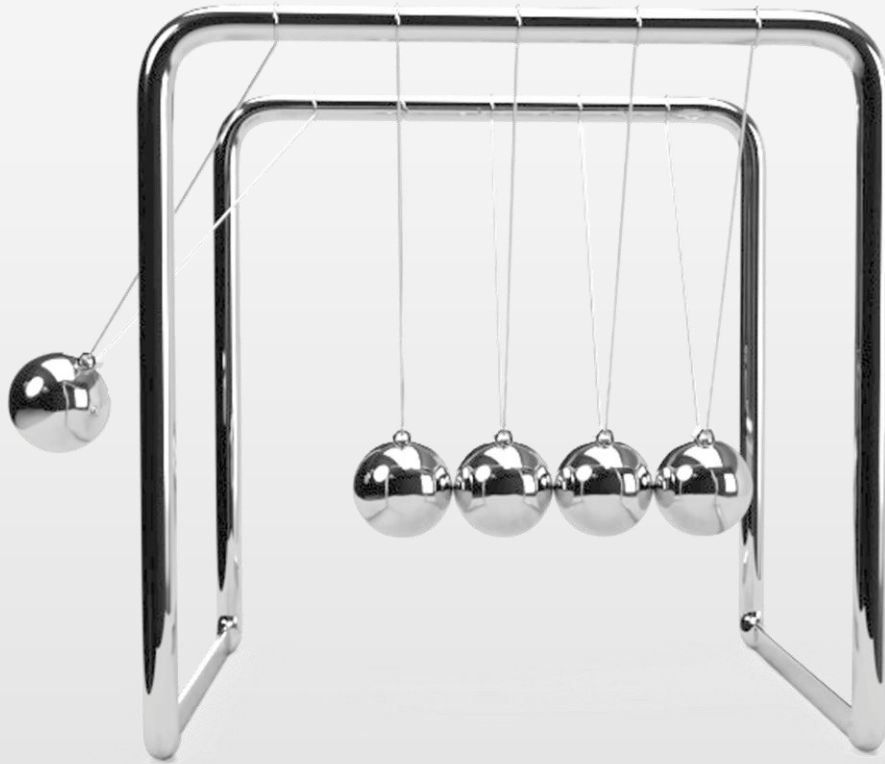
07

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.<sup>1</sup>

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**.<sup>2</sup>

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.<sup>3</sup> Universities act as critical connectors across these spheres

<sup>1</sup> 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>

<sup>2</sup> 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>

<sup>3</sup> 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 goals<sup>4</sup>** and **influencing and complementing timely, effective policymaking on the AI for social good<sup>5</sup>**.

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](#)<sup>6</sup>
- 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**:

<sup>4</sup> 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/>

<sup>5</sup> 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/](https://www.apru.org/resources_report/artificial-intelligence-for-social-good/)

<sup>6</sup> 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 2<sup>nd</sup> Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM2) back-to-back with the 10<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME10) happening in the Philippines.



### Trailblazer Webinar Series: Universities for the Common Good

*A webinar series open to the public, 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 16:00-17:30 UTC+8 / 10:00-11:30 CEST 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.*

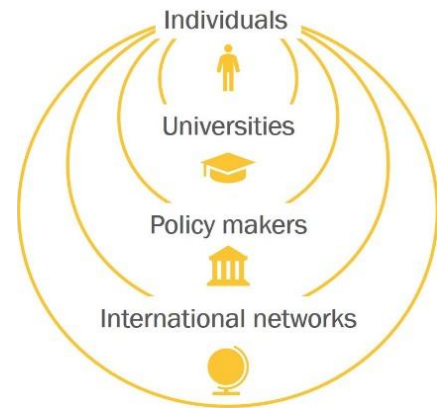
These outcomes collectively illustrate how ASEFINnoLab converts knowledge exchange and partnership prospects into sustained collaboration and impact across the Asia–Europe higher education community. Meaningful collaboration and action formed through the programme will extend well beyond the edition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



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