



ARC10 Policy Dialogue

Reimagining SDGs and Education Post-2030

20-21 November 2025

Bucharest, Romania

COMMUNIQUÉ

- 1** The Policy Dialogue for the 10th ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARC10 PD) was held in Bucharest, Romania, on 20-21 November 2025. The policy dialogue was a side event to the ASEM Education 1st Senior Officials Meeting (SOM1).
- 2** Guided by the theme “Reimagining SDGs and Education Post-2030”, the ARC10 PD served as the venue to discuss emerging regional and global challenges that will define the future education landscape beyond the UN 2030 Agenda. It also served as the first in-person meeting of the ASEM Education Expert Group on SDGs and Education (EG1).
- 3** The ARC10 PD was attended by 29 participants from ASEM ministries responsible for education and higher education, stakeholder organisations, and higher education institutions. The ministry participants were from Cambodia, Hungary, Kazakhstan, Lao PDR, Malta, the Philippines, Romania, Thailand, and Vietnam. Attendees from stakeholder organisations were from the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES), the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub, the European University Association (EUA), Participatory Research in Asia (PRIA), the Southeast Asia Ministers of Education Organisation (SEAMEO) Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (RIHED), and the United Nations Sustainable Development Solutions Network (SDSN) Youth. Representatives of the higher education institutions were affiliated with the Asia-Europe Institute (AEI) at the University of Malaya, Coventry University, International Islamic University Malaysia, Mathias Corvinus Collegium, National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), Panpacific University, Universiti Teknologi Malaysia, and University of Kent.
- 4** This communiqué presents the salient discussion points that emerged from the ARC10 PD, in preparation for the 10th ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting (ASEMME10) 2026. The dialogue focused on three key messages, from which five strategic shifts were synthesised. These aim to inform the ASEM Education Process’ contributions to the global dialogue on post-2030 education agenda. Crucially, it also reinforces the commitment to multilateral cooperation among national education systems in Asia and Europe in shaping the next global education framework that is locally responsive, humanity-centred and eco-ethical.

Message #1 Addressing the Unfinished Foundations of 2030

- 5** Throughout the ARC10 PD, participants deliberated on the fundamental purpose of education. It was reaffirmed that education must be rooted in preparing individuals toward personally meaningful and socially worthwhile pursuits, facilitating social integration, and nurturing a holistic capability to think and act within a framework of values, principles, and spirituality. This development serves both

individual flourishing and collective well-being. However, current global frameworks—specifically SDG4 on Quality Education—frequently overlook this broader philosophical foundation, often narrowing the purpose of education to mere economic utility. There is an urgent need to re-centre the post-2030 global education agenda on a humanistic vision that values education for its inherent worth rather than its purely instrumental output.

6 While acknowledging the significant progress made in delivering quality education globally, ARC10 PD participants highlighted many foundational requirements that remain unmet. For instance, the achievement of near-universal primary enrollment is often overshadowed by high dropout rates at the secondary level. Furthermore, significant disparities persist for students who fall outside conventional academic molds, including youth classified as NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training). Current systems frequently fail to provide equitable opportunities for students with disabilities or those marginalised by socioeconomic hardship. To address these persistent gaps in access and resourcing, a truly effective post-2030 strategy requires a nuanced, tiered approach to monitoring and evaluation. This framework must balance non-negotiable global indicators for access and equity with regionally specific metrics and national indicators aligned with developmental plans. Such a methodology ensures that progress across the education continuum is measured with both global consistency and local relevance. The ASEM Education Process could serve as a platform for dialogue and exchange in this matter.

Message #2 Navigating the Global Vision and Local Realities

7 Through the cases presented, ARC10 PD participants identified a persistent tension between global mandates and national priorities. In many contexts, national interests are invoked to delay climate action when it conflicts with locally significant, high-emission industries, leading to agreements that lack implementation urgency. Such complexity is further exacerbated by the "one-size-fits-all" nature of the global indicators adopted by the UN 2030 Agenda. While some regions focus on advanced sustainability models, others remain occupied with the unfinished business of foundational educational quality and universal access. Furthermore, economic interests frequently overshadow social inclusion. These tensions underscore the necessity of a more agile post-2030 framework, one that harmonises global ambitions with the diverse socio-economic realities and sovereign priorities of national contexts.

8 The ARC10 PD participants observed that global frameworks frequently lack the cultural resonance required to catalyse behavioral change at the local level. To bridge this gap, policy must move beyond standardised mandates toward a "localised interpretation" of global goals. There must be a concerted effort to embed indigenous knowledge systems and local philosophies, including principles of moderation and reasonableness, as ethical foundations capable of translating global commitments into meaningful local action.

9 Another point raised by the ARC10 PD participants was that the SDGs are often approached as a "menu" of discrete compliance items rather than an integrated systems map. This encourages fragmented implementation, where easily attainable targets are prioritised to enhance the reputation of higher education institutions while deeper structural reforms remain unaddressed. This "pick-and-choose" approach masks the inherent interdependencies of the 2030 Agenda, leading to progress in one area that may inadvertently stall or contradict progress in another. To rectify this, the post-2030

framework must adopt a systems-thinking approach that incentivises holistic institutional transformation. By treating the SDGs as a cohesive ecosystem, policymakers can ensure that resourcing and strategy target root causes rather than merely checking off isolated performance indicators.

10 ARC10 PD participants also deliberated on the multitude of stakeholders required to implement SDG4. It was recognised that parents, industry, civil society, and private providers are as vital as students and teachers. Progress in education is profoundly interdependent; factors outside the classroom are as critical to student performance as the internal catalysts of teacher professionalism and continuous development. Beyond 2030, governments can no longer be viewed as the sole custodians of quality education. Instead, a whole-of-village approach must be championed, where community engagement is foundational. Future educational leadership must possess the capacity to narrate transformation in a way that builds cross-sectoral trust and ownership, maximising impact across the entire ecosystem despite resource constraints. Crucially, leaders must align internal practices with the very principles they advocate, bridging the credibility gap where verbal commitments have yet to translate into everyday actions.

Message #3 Looking Ahead While Staying Grounded

11 Moving forward, higher education must prepare for a landscape defined by rapid technological acceleration. The post-2030 agenda must proactively address the duality of emerging tools, particularly Artificial Intelligence (AI). While AI offers transformative opportunities for personalised learning and climate adaptation, it carries significant risks, including corporate bias, the erosion of critical thinking, and a lack of transparency in automated decision-making. To mitigate these, the future framework should embrace a "transhumanist" ethics, focused on the responsible co-existence of humans with algorithms, ensuring that technology remains a tool for human empowerment rather than a replacement for academic and personal integrity.

12 Future-oriented thinking must be carefully balanced against existing systemic constraints. Education systems currently face an array of challenges, including demographic shifts toward aging societies, the proliferation of misinformation, and increasing geopolitical tensions. To remain relevant, the curriculum must shift from rote memorisation and purely growth-driven paradigms toward models rooted in resilience and ethics. Education must evolve from teaching facts (teaching to know) to fostering agency (teaching to act), grounding students in the values they need to lead in a changing world. By anchoring technological visions in the lived realities of equity and democratic values, the post-2030 agenda can amplify the underlying message that the digital future does not come at the cost of social cohesion.

Conclusion Strategic Shifts for the Post-2030 Agenda

13 The post-2030 agenda requires brave leadership committed to outcomes that outlast individual actors or political cycles. Towards this aim, the following five (5) strategic shifts are proposed: (i) Moving beyond "tick-the-box" exercises for rankings to integrated institutional governance where sustainability is embedded in all operational aspects, especially budgeting and quality assurance, (ii) Recognising culture as the "missing pillar" of the current SDGs, supporting models that draw on local

wisdom and indigenous knowledge, (iii), Rejecting "one-size-fits-all" mandates to account for differing developmental levels, ensuring nations focused on foundational quality are not marginalised by advanced global standards, (iv) Transitioning to models rooted in ethical governance where higher education remains a space to speak truth to power, and (v) Measuring success by the lasting impact on local communities, ensuring progress continues long after a project ends. ■

This policy dialogue was 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.

In partnership with



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 trains and develops professional competencies in various fields, such as political sciences, sociology, administrative studies, international relations, diplomacy, contributing to the national and international level a change based on democratic values and principles.



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.



Ministry of Education and Research, Romania

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