



# 8<sup>th</sup> ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARC8)

Vision 2030: Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Asia and Europe

## OVERVIEW



## BACKGROUND ON THE #ARC SERIES

The ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARC)<sup>1</sup> is the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers Meeting (ASEMME) and the only bi-regional multi-stakeholder dialogue platform for university and student leaders, policy makers and ministers to discuss higher education issues and shape the education landscape in Asia and Europe.

Past editions of ARC have brought together over 746 university, student and thought leaders representing 423 organisations from 51 Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) countries to discuss emerging higher education issues concerning both regions and to inform ASEM policy makers.

Its results, including policy recommendations, feed into the preparation of ASEMMEs, which ARC experts are invited to attend. ARC contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and builds on synergies with major regional policy discussions.

### The mission of ARC is to



**Facilitate exchange of good practices and networking** among universities and student organisations in Asia and Europe



**Inspire stakeholders to take action** on issues of joint concern in Asia and Europe



**Inform and influence** policymakers of the 51 ASEM Partner Countries

## TOPIC OF #ARC8

The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are a universal call for action to shape a better future for all. Universities and their students have a key responsibility to tackle complex societal challenges of our times, manifested in these Goals. While recognising the outstanding results of universities contributing to the SDGs<sup>2</sup>, the recent COVID-19 pandemic has highlighted how fragile the achievements on the goals are. According to the Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020<sup>3</sup>, COVID-19 is reversing decades of progress on poverty, healthcare and education. Green and equitable economic recovery is not possible without innovative tertiary education and a **renewed commitment to inclusion in tertiary education**, if we are to deliver on our promise on leaving no one behind.

UNESCO invited higher education institutions in July 2020 to put the values of inclusion and equity on their recovery roadmap, develop new partnerships, inclusive online learning solutions, and improve policies together with national officials and international organisation in the next decade.<sup>4</sup> The ASEM Education Ministers have also highlighted at their last meeting that the ASEM Education Process should aim at ensuring inclusion and equality in education by building

## KEY FACTS

### WHEN

Throughout October 2020 – December 2021

### WHERE

Online and onsite in various Asian countries

### TOPIC

Outlook 2030: Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Asia and Europe

### PARTICIPANTS

Expert group: ~20 selected experts, university and student organisation leaders  
Attendees: ~850 attendees at the hybrid and virtual events

### METHODOLOGY

- Online expert working group discussions and consultations formulating outputs
- Virtual and face-to-face policy discussions with decision makers
- Virtual and face-to-face capacity building trainings

<sup>1</sup> Formerly called the ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC), From ARC8 onwards, the project will be renamed to the ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education, merging the Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum for greater synergies and impact.

<sup>2</sup> THE World University Impact Rankings 2020.

[https://www.timeshighereducation.com/rankings/impact/2020/overall#!/page/0/length/25/sort\\_by/rank/sort\\_order/asc/cols/undefined](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/rankings/impact/2020/overall#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/asc/cols/undefined)

<sup>3</sup> Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020. Published by UN in July 2020, New York.

<https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/sustainable/sustainable-development-goals-report-2020.html>

<sup>4</sup> Speech of Ms Stefania Giannini, Assistant Director-General for Education, UNESCO in her speech at the Higher Education Sustainability Initiative Special Event, 8 July 2020. <https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/hlpf/2020/HESI2020>

comprehensive education systems that are accessible to all.<sup>5</sup>

In accordance with these calls, ARC8 invites Asian and European higher education and student leaders to leverage on the current COVID-19 disruption and make inclusion and diversity central values of their paradigm shift. Titled “**Outlook 2030: Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Asia and Europe**”, ARC8 will explore how universities and students can foster inclusion and diversity in the final decade for the Agenda2030, and raise awareness on potential risks and opportunities along 4 subthemes:

- 1 | Inclusive Learning and Teaching in a Digital World
- 2 | Inclusive and Flexible Lifelong Learning Pathways
- 3 | Inclusive International Mobility of People and Knowledge
- 4 | Equitable Access and Success in Higher Education

The theme aligns with the priority areas of the ASEM Education Process<sup>6</sup> and with the confirmed topic of the ASEMME8 on “ASEM Education Vision and Strategy 2030” as well.

In addition to ARC8, ASEF will organise several spin-off activities focusing on disseminating findings of the ARC8 Outlook Report 2030 and build capacity for local and regional stakeholders.

## SUBTHEMES OF #ARC8

### Theme 1 | Inclusive Learning and Teaching in a Digital World

Higher Education Institutions have done a remarkable job in adopting technology to enhance learning experiences and outcomes in the last decade, with many migrating their courses or even full degree programmes online. For example, European institutions have reported a high level of general acceptance of digital learning (93%) and its increased use in regular teaching (87%), according to a survey conducted by the European Universities Association.<sup>7</sup> With the outbreak of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is even more important to evaluate and consolidate learning points from the forced online transformation of universities and find new ways to make distance learning as inclusive and equitable as possible.

This ARC8 subtheme discusses the future of learning and teaching and makes recommendations on values & good practices that ASEM policy makers and universities should foster in order to contribute to the Agenda 2030. Possible questions to be addressed are:

- *How can technology ensure equity among learners and how shall it be enhanced in the next 10 years?*
- *Which capacities and attitudes should teaching staff develop to create a more inclusive learning environment by 2030?*
- *What quality assurance approaches shall ASEM universities adopt to suit the requirements of a digital era?*

### Theme 2 | Inclusive and Flexible Lifelong Learning Pathways

Higher Education Institutions from both regions provide lifelong learning opportunities to equip learners from all socio-economic and educational backgrounds with the necessary knowledge and skills to adapt to new tasks and situations. According to UNESCO Institute of Lifelong Learning<sup>8</sup>, participation in adult learning has increased overall since 2015, but progress has been uneven and particularly weak in Asia and the Pacific. Some groups in society have access

<sup>5</sup> Conclusions by the Chair. 7<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEM ME7), 15-16 May 2019, Bucharest, Romania titled “Connecting education: inclusion, mobility and excellence in support of the Sustainable Development Goals.” [https://cdn.aseminfoboard.org/documents/Conclusions-by-the-Chair\\_ASEMME7-with-Annexes.pdf](https://cdn.aseminfoboard.org/documents/Conclusions-by-the-Chair_ASEMME7-with-Annexes.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> The 4 core priorities of the ASEM Education Process are the following: 1) Quality Assurance and Recognition, 2) Engaging Business and Industry in Education, 3) Balanced Mobility, 4) Lifelong Learning including TVET. In 2019, “Sustainable development” and “Digitalisation” were adopted by the ASEM Education Ministers as horizontal and crosscutting priorities on top of the 4 core priority areas.

<sup>7</sup> Trends 2018. Learning and Teaching in the European Higher Education Area. By Michael Gaebel & Thérèse Zhang. European University Association 2018. <https://eua.eu/downloads/publications/trends-2018-learning-and-teaching-in-the-european-higher-education-area.pdf>

<sup>8</sup> 4<sup>th</sup> Global Report on Adult Learning and Education (GRALE4). Leave No One Behind: Participation, Equity and Inclusion. UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning. 2019, Germany.

to a multitude of learning opportunities throughout life, while disadvantaged, vulnerable and excluded populations have very little prospect of engaging in lifelong learning. In some countries, women represent the majority of adult learners, however in many parts of the world, women still have limited access to education opportunities. Disadvantaged groups – adults with disabilities, older adults, refugees and migrants, and minority groups – participate less in lifelong learning and in some countries provision for these groups is regressing.

This ARC8 subtheme discusses risks and opportunities in addressing inequality in lifelong learning, and how to realize the potential of adult learning and education, both for SDG 4 and for the other 16 SDGs. Recommendations for policy makers and universities will address the following possible questions:

- *What actions can learners, institutions, and policy makers take to make lifelong learning systems more inclusive and diverse?*
- *What kind of partnerships should universities develop to create inclusive lifelong learning systems in the next decade?*
- *How to monitor and evaluate efforts on making lifelong learning opportunities available to all?*
- *What kind of policy coherence and cooperation is feasible between Asia and Europe in lifelong learning by 2030?*

### Theme 3 | Inclusive International Mobility of People and Knowledge

Today over 5,3 million students are studying abroad and 50% of these are enrolled in courses and programmes outside their home region.<sup>9</sup> The increasing internationalisation of higher education calls for policy tools to facilitate student mobility and improve access to higher education across regions and continents. The UN Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications adopted in 2019 is the latest tool that facilitates the cross-border education for students, teachers, researchers and job-seekers, and widens circulation of knowledge and innovation. In June 2020, Norway became the first country to ratify the UNESCO Global Convention with all other Member States encouraged to follow this lead for the benefit of all learners.

When it comes to internationalisation of universities, there is a need for more holistic and inclusive approaches to widen participation of underrepresented groups in international activities too.<sup>10</sup> According to Erasmus statistics, only 7% of exchange students coming from a disadvantaged or underrepresented group.<sup>11</sup>

This ARC8 subtheme discusses opportunities for making cross-border mobility and internationalisation more inclusive in the next decade, especially in the light of the recent setbacks due to the COVID-19 situation. Possible questions to be addressed are:

- *How to develop internationalisation at home activities (intercultural studies, COIL, integration of foreign students, etc.) in full awareness of the diversity of student groups and their needs?*
- *What could be the complementary formats of student and staff mobility, when there are very limited physical mobility opportunities available for underrepresented groups?*
- *How can Asian and European universities work together on a multi-layered strategy to promote inclusive internationalisation and improve the situation by 2030?*
- *How to Asian and European countries work together to adopt the UN Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications?*

<sup>9</sup> Norway becomes first country to ratify UNESCO Global Convention on Higher Education. 10/07/2020. UNESCO. <https://en.unesco.org/news/norway-becomes-first-country-ratify-unesco-global-convention-higher-education>

<sup>10</sup> ACA reflection Paper: Internationalisation for all? Wider inclusion in the internationalisation of higher education. April 2019.

<sup>11</sup> Social Inclusion & Engagement in Mobility Project. <https://siem-project.eu/>

## Theme 4 | Equitable Access and Success in Higher Education

Improving access and success rates of under-represented and vulnerable groups in higher education is already on the agenda of many governments and universities, as widening access to quality higher education is viewed as a precondition for societal progress and economic development.<sup>12</sup> At a systemic level however, equity in higher education remains a “headline” priority of governments and policy commitment varies considerably<sup>13</sup>. Universities on the other hand are increasingly committed to adopt inclusion and diversity as their core values. They have realised that through ensuring equitable treatment, they improve their learning environment as well as their research.<sup>14</sup>

This ARC8 subthemes discusses how to move the discourse on diversity from a challenge to be solved to a precondition for quality and excellence; and get Asian and European universities and policy makers to embrace this notion at a systemic level. Possible questions to be discussed under this theme are:

- *How to create awareness and holistic strategies to widen access and increase success of underrepresented groups in higher education?*
- *What kind of staff training and tools are needed to engage administrative, teaching and research staff to address diversity issues?*
- *What kind of national strategies or plans could foster the social dimension of higher education systematically? What are the differences in Asia and Europe?*

## PARTICIPANTS OF #ARC8

In total ARC8 aims to engage **20 experts and student organization leaders to participate in the ARC8 Expert Group** and **850 attendees to benefit from the project outputs** from the sectors below, at different meetings in virtual, hybrid and face-to-face formats, depending on the public health situation.

### Civil Society

- experts, university managers, students, and youth leaders (18-30 years old), representatives of Non-Governmental Organisations (NGOs), International Organisations (IOs) from ASEM Partner countries

### Public Sector

- ASEM Education Senior Officials (SOMs) or their representatives
- ASEM Education Ministers or their representatives
- representatives of national education agencies and other stakeholders of the official ASEM Education Process

### Private Sector

- Private sector & business representatives

A geographical and gender balance as well as a good representation of experts, higher education leaders and students from diverse academic fields will be ensured through the Open Call for Application and a comprehensive selection process by ASEF and its partner organisations.

<sup>12</sup> Report of the 2012-2015 BFUG Working Group on the Social Dimension and Lifelong Learning to the BFUG. 17 April 2015. [http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015\\_Yerevan/71/3/Report\\_of\\_the\\_2012-2015\\_BFUG\\_WG\\_on\\_the\\_Social\\_Dimension\\_and\\_Lifelong\\_Learning\\_to\\_the\\_BFUG\\_613713.pdf](http://www.ehea.info/media.ehea.info/file/2015_Yerevan/71/3/Report_of_the_2012-2015_BFUG_WG_on_the_Social_Dimension_and_Lifelong_Learning_to_the_BFUG_613713.pdf)

<sup>13</sup> Jamil Salmi: Higher Education equity policies across the globe. November 2018. <https://worldaccesshe.com/wp-content/uploads/2019/02/All-around-the-world-Higher-education-equity-policies-across-the-globe-FINAL-COPY-2.pdf>

<sup>14</sup> Anna-Lena Claeys-Kulik, Thomas Ekman Jørgensen, Henriette Stöber (EUA). Diversity, equity and inclusion in European higher education institutions: results from the INVITED project. November 2019. <https://eua.eu/101-projects/737-invited.html>

## PROJECT ELEMENTS OF #ARC8

### ARC8 Expert Group Meetings | Online | October 2020 – June 2021

A selected group of experts, university and student organisation leaders collaborate online to prepare an **ARC8 Outlook Report 2030: Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Asia and Europe** along the subtopics of ARC8. The Outlook Report outlines emerging issues that could grow into major challenges and/or opportunities in the coming 10 years in the given field/topic. Inputs for the report will come from an online consultation process with stakeholders in the 51 ASEM partner countries and from previous research done by Asian and European stakeholders. The Report will include recommendations for ASEM policy makers and for ASEM universities.

The **ARC8 Outlook Report 2030** has two main purposes

- Serve as a basis for policy dialogues with ASEM education policy makers;
- Outline directions for capacity building training for ASEM universities.

### ARC8 Virtual Conference | Online | June 2021

The virtual conference will launch the Outlook Report 2030 developed by the ARC8 Expert Group and present the main findings and recommendations for policy makers and ASEM universities. The conference programme will consist of panel discussions and debate sessions featuring members of the ARC8 Expert Group and prominent thought leaders from Asia and Europe. Attendees will have the chance to further discuss and contribute to the findings.

### ARC8 Capacity Building Trainings | Hybrid | June – November 2021

The capacity building trainings will build on the recommendations developed by the ARC8 Expert Group (see above) and engage higher education stakeholders to jointly work towards a more inclusive and diverse higher education sector in their countries. There are two trainings envisioned in a partially virtual format combining in-person and virtual participation:

- Southeast Asia, October 2021
- South Asia, November 2021

The target group consists of youth/student leaders and university managers within the specific regions. The trainings are designed to

- Increase the participants' understanding of the ARC8 topic/subtopics and get familiar with global institutional practice in these fields;
- Assist the participants to develop action plans which they can implement in their home institution to improve inclusion and diversity in different areas;
- Build an Asia-Europe community of student leaders, university managers and education practitioners who can make a difference in higher education by 2030.

### ARC8 Policy Dialogue Meetings | Hybrid | throughout the project

As ARC8 is the **Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME)**, members of the ARC8 Expert Group will be invited to engage in policy dialogue with ASEM policy makers based on their findings and recommendations of the Outlook Report 2030 and the outputs of the capacity building workshops. As part of the policy dialogue process, members of the ARC8 Expert Group could be invited to contribute to the following meetings: ASEM Education Senior Officials First Meeting (SOM1), 2021, Germany; 8<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME8), 2021, Thailand; Events related to regional policy forums, like the Bologna Policy Forum of the European Higher Education Ministers' Meeting, the Southeast Asian Higher Education Senior Officials Meeting, the World Access to Higher Education Day, etc.

## OUTCOMES OF #ARC8

### Tangible outcomes

- An "ARC8 Outlook Report 2030 on Inclusive and Diverse Higher Education in Asia and Europe" (jointly developed by ARC8 experts, university and student leaders)
- Virtual Conference with launch of the ARC8 Outlook Report 2030 for stakeholders in the 51 ASEM countries

- A series of policy dialogues with stakeholders of the ASEM Education Process e.g. senior officials and education ministers of 51 ASEM Partner countries in the framework of the ASEM Senior Official Meetings and the 8th ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting
- A series of capacity building workshops to accelerate good inclusion practices in ASEM higher education institutions and student communities, including concrete action plans created by participants
- Expected outreach to at least 1 million online users via social media platforms by ASEF (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn)

#### Intangible outcomes

- Increased understanding and knowledge of ARC8 participants on the ARC8 topic through continuous content development, dialogue, and exchange on the topic
- New networking opportunities and possible partnerships among participants and their respective institutions
- Increased capacity of ARC8 participants to take action on ARC8 topics and collaborate with each other to contribute to the achievement of the Agenda 2030
- Enhanced knowledge among the participants of the ASEM Process and ASEF

#### EXPECTED IMPACT OF #ARC8

In the long-term, the impact of ARC8 is two-fold

#### Enhanced civil society engagement in the ASEM Education Process

- Through evidence-based policy dialogues between ASEM Ministers and officials, academics, education leaders and practitioners, representatives from the business and industry, policy makers and national governments, IOs and NGOs
- Through content input to the policy dialogue process, towards sustainable education policies to be considered at a national, regional and – representing the Asia-Europe position – global level.

#### Enhanced connectivity among ASEM higher education stakeholders

- Through the exchange of good practices and networking among higher education stakeholders in Asia and Europe;
- Through strengthened Asia-Europe networks among universities and student associations as well as various stakeholders in education;
- Through capacity building in ARC8 topic areas and incentivising on issues of joint concern, thereby contributing to the achievement of the SDGs.

#### ECOSYSTEM AND SYNERGIES

ARC8 builds on the intellectual foundation of the following organisations and the outcomes of the project is expected in turn to feed back into their upcoming work:

#### Ministerial Meetings

- ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (and other ASEM Ministerial Meetings)
- European Higher Education Area Ministerial Meeting (EHEA) and the Bologna Policy Forum Meetings
- Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization's (SEAMEO)

#### Senior Officials' Meetings

- ASEM Meeting of Senior Officials in Education (ASEM SOM)
- Southeast Asian Higher Education Senior Officials Meeting (SEA-HiEd SOM)
- Asia-Pacific Meeting on Education 2030 (APMED) by UNESCO

#### Regional & International Organisations and Initiatives

- Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) as the ARC Secretariat
- ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub (ASEM LLL Hub)
- ASEAN University Network (AUN)
- European University Association (EUA)
- International Association of Universities (IAU)
- Erasmus Student Network (ESN)

- European Students' Union (ESU)
- Erasmus Mundus Students Association (EMA)
- Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation, Regional Institute of Higher Education (SEAMEO RIHED)
- UN related initiatives
  - UNESCO Higher Education for Sustainability (HESI) Initiative
  - Tokyo Convention Committee
  - Asia-Pacific Plenary on National Information Centres (APNNIC)
  - SDG Acceleration Action
- World Access to Higher Education Day (WAHED)

**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.

The work of ASEF's Education Department (ASEFEdu) focuses on the themes digitalization & inclusion, and hence, contributes with its projects to the achievement of the UN 2030 Agenda and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), especially to Goal4: *ensuring inclusive and equitable quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all*.

For more information, please visit the [www.ASEF.org](http://www.ASEF.org).

**VISUAL CONCEPT**

*The United Nations General Assembly identified 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) that encompass many aspects of contemporary society. The goals serve as globally recognised standards that call upon stakeholders across all sectors, including education, to implement them by 2030. Achieving the SDGs, however, is a complex interplay that requires both strategic thinking as well as creative and innovative methods. Solving a Rubik's cube - one of the most famous educational toys ever - resembles this multifaceted process: it takes not only analytical skills and imagination but also hands-on action in solving the puzzle to get all the colours, sides and patterns right within the given time. Like the pieces in a Rubik's cube, the SDGs are interconnected and any decision to move towards a certain direction has an impact on the overall pattern and outcome.*