



# 9<sup>th</sup> ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education

## ASEM Higher Education Mapping: Working Towards the SDGs

### 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.

For the past 10 years, ARC 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 at all ASEMMEs, and its outcomes and outputs helped to sustain a dynamic [ASEM Education Process](#).

The ARC programme cycle covers two years **and is aligned with the timeline of the ASEMMEs**. Its results, including research, policy recommendations, feed into the preparations of ASEM Education Senior Officials’ Meetings (SOMs) and the ASEM Education Ministers Meetings (MEs), which ARC experts are invited to attend.

Past editions of ARC have brought together over 800 university, student and thought leaders representing 430+ organisations from the 51 Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) partner countries to discuss emerging higher education issues concerning both regions and to inform ASEM policy makers. **Take a look at the past editions [here](#)**. ARC contributes to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and builds on synergies with major regional policy discussions.

#### OBJECTIVES OF #ARC9



##### Facilitate exchange of good practices and networking

among policymakers, universities and student organisations in Asia and Europe



##### Inform and influence policies

Collect evidence and conduct policy dialogues with stakeholders of the 51 ASEM Partner Countries, the EU and ASEAN

#### TOPIC OF #ARC9

#### The Universal Call for Sustainable Development and the Last Decade for Action

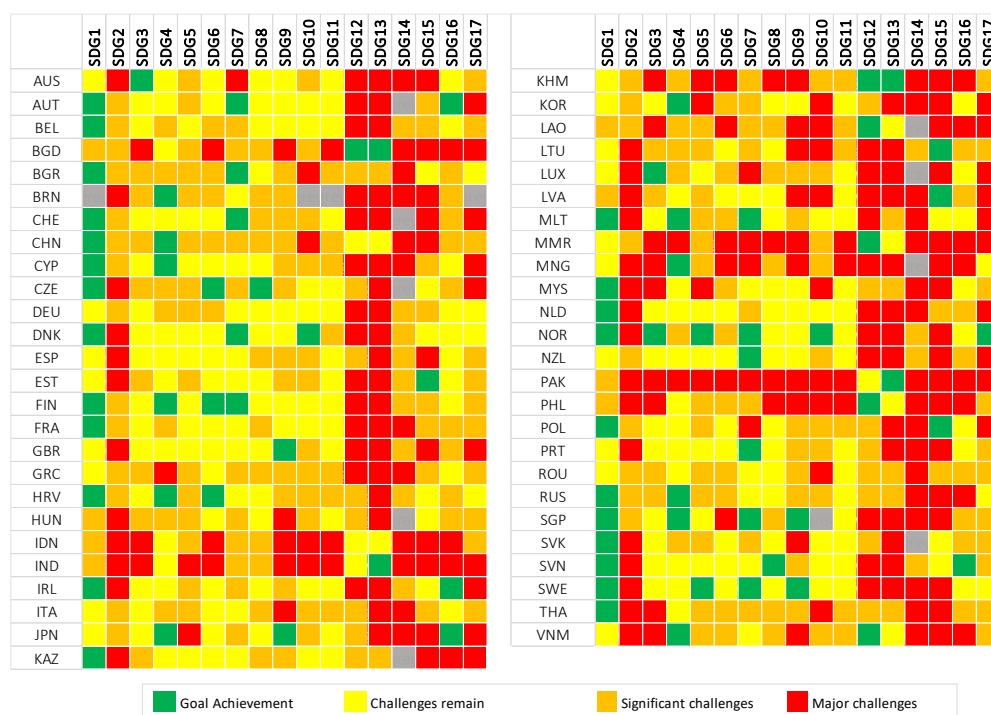
The 17 Sustainable Development Goals are a universal call for action to shape a better future for all. Universities and their students have a key responsibility to tackle complex societal challenges of our times, manifested in these Goals.

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<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.

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.** However, green and equitable economic **recovery is not possible without innovative tertiary education.** The UN system has declared a Decade of Action in 2020, and only 8 years remain to achieve the goals. Even though progress remains uneven across Asia and Europe, the awareness and willingness are greater than ever to put progress back on track.

Figure: ASEM Countries' Progress on the SDGs, 2021



Source: Sachs, J., Kroll, C., Lafortune, G., Fuller, G., Woelm, F. (2021). *The Decade of Action for the Sustainable Development Goals: Sustainable Development Report 2021*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.

### Relationship between Higher Education and the SDGs

Even though Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) are not directly addressed by the SDGs, as the **Agenda 2030 is directed towards governments** and it is their task to measure their progress towards them, **universities all over the world engage with the SDGs and contribute to their achievement.** The Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development (HESD) portal<sup>4</sup> managed by the International Association of Universities (IAU) registered over 820 actions globally, which are concrete examples on how HEIs are contributing to the achievement of the Goals.

<sup>2</sup> THE World University Impact Rankings 2020. Retrieved on 19/04/2022 from: [https://www.timeshighereducation.com/rankings/impact/2020/overall#!/page/0/length/25/sort\\_by/rank/sort\\_order/as/cols/undefined](https://www.timeshighereducation.com/rankings/impact/2020/overall#!/page/0/length/25/sort_by/rank/sort_order/as/cols/undefined)

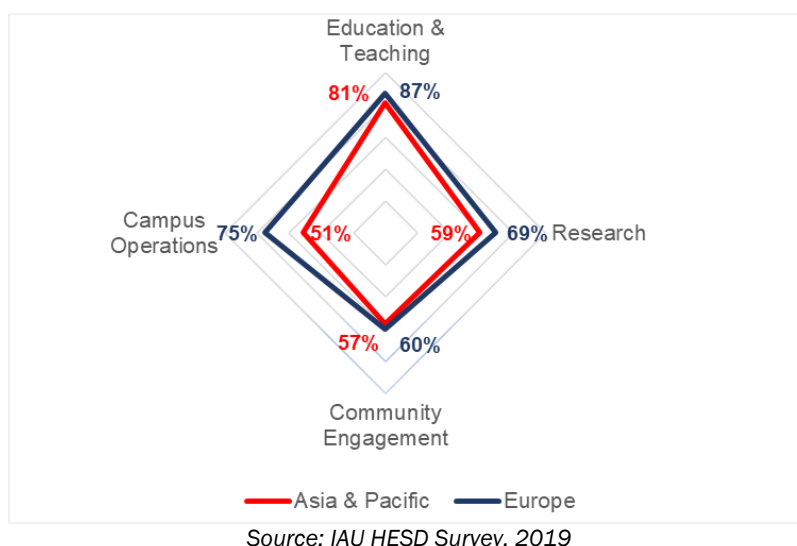
<sup>3</sup> Sustainable Development Goals Report 2020. Published by UN in July 2020, New York. Retrieved on 19/04/2022 from: <https://www.un.org/development/desa/en/news/sustainable/sustainable-development-goals-report-2020.html>

<sup>4</sup> IAU HESD portal. Available at: <http://www.iau-hesd.net/actions>

Universities have a significant impact on societal progress and become important partners for business and governments.<sup>5</sup> **They educate a large part of the workforce.** Between 2000 and 2018, the global higher education gross enrolment ratio increased from 19% to 38%<sup>6</sup>, which means that at least every third young person goes through higher education at least once in their lifetime. **Universities also carry out a significant part of basic and applied research.** One-third of the total R&D is carried out by the higher education sector in OECD countries, and HEIs and government research organisations are responsible for over three-quarters of basic research on average.<sup>7</sup>

According to the IAU HESD Global Survey in 2019<sup>8</sup>, **HEIs are equally addressing the SDG goals in all of their missions:** in teaching, research, community engagement, and campus operations.

Figure: Areas of Engagement for Sustainable Development per HE Mission



According to a survey conducted by the European University Association (EUA)<sup>9</sup>, **universities contribute to innovation for sustainable transition with a mix of these missions:** 88% of respondents listed the “development of new technologies based on **research**” as their main contribution to sustainable transitions, while 85% listed “improving student and staff understanding of sustainability” referring to their **teaching** mission, as the main contributions.

### The Emphasis on the Science-Policy-Interface

Yet, **research is the function of HEIs that receives the most attention** in the original document of Agenda 2030. Especially the **science-policy-interface is mentioned many times and is seen as one of the key methods to reach the**

<sup>5</sup> T. Jørgensen (2018). European University Association (EUA) – Universities as Partners for Sustainable Development. In: Approaches to SDG 17 Partnerships for the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) (GUNI). Retrieved 19/04/2022 from: <https://www.guninetwork.org/publication/approaches-sdg-17-partnerships-sustainable-development-goals-sdgs>

<sup>6</sup> UNESCO IESALC (2020). Towards universal access to higher education: international trends. Retrieved on 19/04/2022 from: <https://www.iesalc.unesco.org/eng/wp-content/uploads/2020/11/Towards-Universal-Access-to-HE-Report.pdf>

<sup>7</sup> OECD (2017), OECD Science, Technology and Industry Scoreboard 2017: The digital transformation, OECD Publishing, Paris <http://dx.doi.org/10.1787/9789264268821-en>

<sup>8</sup> IAU HESD Global Survey 2019, page 51. Retrieved on 19/04/2022 from: [https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau\\_hesd\\_survey\\_report\\_final\\_jan2020.pdf](https://www.iau-aiu.net/IMG/pdf/iau_hesd_survey_report_final_jan2020.pdf)

<sup>9</sup> K. Kozirog, SM. Lucaci, S. Berghmans (2022). Universities as key drivers of sustainable innovation ecosystems - Results of the EUA survey on universities and innovation. Retrieved on 19/04/2022 from: <https://eua.eu/component/attachments/attachments.html?id=3581>

**SDGs.** A recent SDG Report titled *The Future is Now: Science for Achieving Sustainable Development* also stressed that science and innovation are leverage points to achieve the goals, and there is a great **need to bridge the gap between research, knowledge and policies.**

In its Reflection Paper on sustainable development, the European Commission states that “Education, science, technology, research and innovation are a prerequisite for achieving a sustainable EU economy”<sup>10</sup> According to a study done by UN DESA, **the science-policy-interface has been described as the least addressed and that it should be given more priority in the future by UN Agencies.**<sup>11</sup>

### Higher Education Policies in Favour of SDGs

As described above, HE is a very important partner of governments in working towards the SDGs, and HEIs are addressing the SDGs across their three core missions in various impactful ways. However, **when it comes to the role of HEIs informing policies or engaging with policymakers, there is less evidence** available on practices. HEIs have historically been somewhat distant from the framing and implementing national programmes in several societies<sup>12</sup>. If the SDGs are to be realized though, then all institutions and actors in each society and community must get involved.

**Sustainable development requires an integrated approach, both in practice and policy making.** Higher Education policy falls within the national competence of countries, with different degrees of harmonisation among regions (European Higher Education Area, ASEAN, etc). There is little evidence and data available on how these national higher education policies contribute to sustainable development, how do they encourage, mandate or provide resources to HEIs to link their core functions to the SDGs.

This project will map the different higher education policies and their relationship to sustainable development across the ASEM Partner countries.

#### **Contribution of #ARC9 to the Topic**

The **project will start with research collecting evidence from ASEM countries on:**

- HEIs contribution to the SDGs in ASEM countries
- HE policies contribution to the SDGs in ASEM countries

The findings will be published and **followed by policy dialogues and consultations** with policymakers, university and student leaders, international organisations across the 53 ASEM Partners to get a better understanding of the findings.

The results will feed into the ASEM Education Process Strategic Priority on Enhancing Connectivity between Asia and Europe and benefit a wider community of stakeholders by exchanges and peer learning.

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<sup>10</sup> European Commission (2019), Reflection Paper – Towards a Sustainable Europe by 2030, EU, p. 22

<sup>11</sup> UN DESA. (2019). Comprehensive HLPF Survey Results: Evaluation of the HLPF after 4 years. Retrieved on 19/04/2022 from:

[https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24802Comprehensive\\_HLPF\\_Survey\\_Results\\_FINAL.pdf](https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/content/documents/24802Comprehensive_HLPF_Survey_Results_FINAL.pdf)

<sup>12</sup> R. Tandon (2018). Societal Engagement in Higher Education: Pathways to SDGs. In: Sustainable Development Goals: Actors and Implementation, a Report from the International Conference (GUNI). Retrieved on 19/04/2022 from: <https://www.guninetwork.org/publication/sustainable-development-goals-actors-and-implementation-report-international-conference>

**PROJECT  
ELEMENTS  
OF #ARC9**

### ARC9 Research Reports | May – December 2022

The first year of the biennial project will focus on gathering evidence and mapping out policies in the 51 ASEM Partner countries. Two reports are envisioned in this phase:

- **ASEM Higher Education Policies: Working Towards the SDGs**  
This report will be prepared by a group of ARC9 researchers. Input for the report will come from exploratory focus group discussions with stakeholders, and a survey distributed among ASEM Ministries responsible for Higher Education.

Core questions that this report will seek answers to:

- To what extent are the ASEM national higher education policies oriented towards the SDGs? How do ASEM higher education policies translate the global goals into local goals?
- Which mission of the universities are the most often targeted (education, research or the third mission)?
- What kind of policy tools are most often used to promote sustainable development in higher education?
- What are the most common institutional barriers, silos and where are the opportunities to leverage in ASEM Partner countries?

- **ASEM Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development (HESD) 2022**

This report is prepared in collaboration with the International Association of Universities (IAU) as an ASEM breakout report of their biennial Global Report on Higher Education and Research for Sustainable Development (HESD). This report will help showcase developments regarding SD in the higher education sector, and help universities implement good practices in sustainability.

Core questions that this report will seek to:

- Better understanding of how HEIs engage with sustainable development (SD)
- How HEIs work towards the SDGs;
- Who is driving these efforts within the institution and who are they partnering outside of the institution?
- Which SDGs are mainly in the focus?

Both reports will serve **two main purposes**:

- Serve as a basis for policy improvement in ASEM countries
- Initiate policy dialogues with ASEM education policy makers, university and student leaders across ASEM countries

### ARC9 Policy Dialogues | Feb – Nov 2023

During the second year, ASEF will organise policy dialogues based on the findings and recommendations of the research reports prepared in 2022.

The policy dialogues will invite representatives of key stakeholders (students, universities, university associations) and senior officials of the ASEM Ministries of Education.

The results of each dialogue event will be disseminated in a webinar. A comprehensive report will be presented at the 9<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers Meeting, as ARC is the **Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME)**,

## STAKEHOLDERS OF #ARC9

ARC9 aims to engage representatives of key stakeholder groups in the ASEM Education Process at different meetings in virtual, hybrid and face-to-face formats, depending on the public health situation.

### Civil Society

- university and student leaders, experts in higher education
- representatives of University or Higher Education Associations, Student Organisations, 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

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 by ASEF and its partner organisations.

## OUTCOMES OF #ARC9

### Tangible outcomes

- Two research-based reports to map higher education policies and practices to advance sustainable development in ASEM Partner countries
- A series of policy dialogues with stakeholders of the ASEM Education Process, e.g., Senior Officials for education of the 51 ASEM Partner countries, the EU and ASEAN, university and student leaders, representatives of regional and professional organisations in higher education
- A series of webinars to disseminate findings and facilitate exchanges, mutual learning and collaboration
- Expected outreach to at least 1 million online users via different virtual platforms of ASEF

### Intangible outcomes

- Increased understanding and knowledge of the higher education policies oriented towards the SDGs in the ASEM countries
- Increased knowledge on university practices contributing to the achievement of the SDGs in the ASEM countries
- New networking opportunities and possible partnerships among participants and their respective institutions
- Increased capacity of ASEM policymakers to contribute to the SDGs and engage with higher education institutions in this mission
- Enhanced knowledge among the participants of the ASEM Process and ASEF



**EXPECTED  
IMPACT  
OF #ARC9**

In the long-term, the expected impact of ARC9 is **to strengthen dialogue and connectivity among higher education stakeholders in Asia and Europe through exchanges and dialogue, through**

- Evidence-based policy dialogues between the ASEM Education stakeholders
- 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
- Increased awareness and engagement on the role of HE in sustainable development
- Exchange of good practices and networking among higher education stakeholders in Asia and Europe

**ECOSYSTEM AND  
SYNERGIES**

ARC9 is a platform to engage with the following organisations and create more synergies across:

**Ministerial Meetings**

- ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (and other ASEM Ministerial Meetings)
- European Higher Education Area Ministerial Meeting (EHEA) and the Bologna Policy Forum Meetings
- ASEAN Ministers' of Education Meeting

**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 Education Secretariat (AES)
- International Association of Universities (IAU)
- Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization's (SEAMEO) Regional Centre for Higher Education (RIHED)
- Academic Cooperation Association (ACA)
- ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub (ASEM LLL Hub)
- ASEAN University Network (AUN)
- European University Association (EUA)
- Erasmus Student Network (ESN)
- European Students' Union (ESU)
- Erasmus Mundus Students Association (EMA)
- UN related initiatives
  - UNESCO Higher Education for Sustainability (HESI) Initiative
  - Tokyo Convention Committee
  - Asia-Pacific Plenary on National Information Centres (APNNIC)
- 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).