Asia-Europe Meeting

the ASEM Education Secretariat

The 7ᵗʰ ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEM ME7)
15 – 16 May 2019, Bucharest, Romania

"Connecting Education: Inclusion, Mobility and Excellence in support of the Sustainable Development Goals"

Discussion Paper

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Introduction

The ASEM Education Process (AEP) has entered its second decade as a unique platform for cooperation and exchange between Asia and Europe characterised by informality and non-institutionalised collaboration within a broad range of (higher) education themes.

The Seoul Declaration and the Conclusions by the Chair adopted at the ASEM ME6 (2017, Seoul) as well as the ISOM in Jakarta (2018) and the SOM1 in Austria (2018) have paved the way to the overarching theme of the ASEM ME7 in Bucharest: **"Connecting Education: Inclusion, Mobility and Excellence in support of the Sustainable Development Goals".** Both in the Seoul Declaration and ASEM ME6 Chair's Conclusions[1], as during the ISOM and SOM1, Ministers and senior officials have indicated that the ASEM Education Process should adapt to global challenges such as 'Digitalisation' and 'Sustainability'.

The Seoul Declaration declares in its vision for the next decade that people-to-people contacts should contribute to **sustainable development** and help cope with the labour market challenges of the **Fourth Industrial Revolution** (Industry 4.0.). The impact of Industry 4.0 and the United Nations' 2030 Development Agenda on the AEP have been increasingly discussed since then, for example during the ISOM 2018 in Jakarta (Indonesia) and the SOM1 2018 in Krems (Austria)[2].

With this discussion paper, the Romanian host and the ASEM Education Secretariat aim to provide the participants of the SOM2 and the ASEM ME7 with some **preliminary input for ideas and discussion during both meetings.** In first instance, we provide the reader with some background information on the 2 main subthemes of the meeting: 'mobility' and 'Sustainable Development Goals and ASEM Education'. We also seek to provide you with some insights on the current status of the AEP in relation to these themes and give you some ideas on how these themes could be further developed and/or integrated in the future. Finally, we also provide you with some discussion questions to think about as we are looking forward to your feedback and ideas for the debate during the meeting.

Finally, the Romanian host and the ASEM Education Secretariat would like **to invite Ministers to deliver a presentation in the beginning of each of the 2 plenary sessions of ASEM ME7.** For each session we would like to give the floor to 2 Ministers from Asia and 2 Ministers from Europe, with a focus on vision, strategies, policies and/or best practices related to the following themes:

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[1] Seoul Declaration 2017 and ASEM ME6 Chair's Conclusions
[2] Report ISOM Jakarta 2018 and Report SOM1 Krems 2018 (full report and summary report)

1) **Plenary session 1 - Mobility for everyone: balanced and inclusive mobility in the digital era**
   - Promoting balanced mobility and how to tackle challenges in balanced mobility
   - Mobility to stimulate intercultural learning and understanding between Europe and Asia
   - How to provide mobility opportunities to disadvantaged students?
   - The role of digitalisation and virtual mobility in promoting inclusion and equal chances for mobility
   - The potential of blended mobility programmes (virtual mobility and e-learning combined with physical mobility & classroom learning)

2) **Plenary session 2 - Towards the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development: How can the ASEM Education Process contribute?**

   - Vision, strategy or good practices of national education policies related to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development
   - Vision, strategies and good practices of international cooperation that contribute to the Agenda 2030.
   - Vision on the potential of the ASEM Education Process to contribute to the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development

Minister-level speakers are therefore invited to express their interest for delivering a presentation by Monday, 15th of April, 2019, at the latest, at the e-mail address of the ASEM Education Secretariat: **info@asem-education.org**

Plenary Session I: Mobility for everyone: balanced and inclusive mobility in the digital era

Why Mobility?

It is generally accepted and demonstrated that mobility of students has a positive influence on both their **personal development and employability**. A mobility experience **contributes strongly to transversal skills** such as curiosity about challenges, critical thinking, learning to learn, self-regulation skills, problem-solving and decision-making skills, improved confidence and self-efficacy, tolerance towards other values and behaviour, enhanced cross-cultural and inter-cultural competences, adaptability, flexibility and language skills[3]. The use of this broader range of knowledge and skills **will be mediated by attitudes and values** (e.g. motivation, trust, respect for diversity and virtue) and enriched by the diversity of values and attitudes arising **from different cultural perspectives**. These skills and competences not only contribute to better employability but also better equip students to navigate in our complex and uncertain world.[4] Therefore, mobility can help students to become active, responsible and engaged citizens

Mobility in ASEM partner countries

Roughly **5% of all students** of tertiary education in ASEM partner countries **participate in a mobility programme**. A **quarter** of these student flows are **between Asian and European countries**. When looking at international student flows between both regions, the United Kingdom, Germany, France and Italy are the preferred destinations for Asian students in Europe, while European students opt for Australia, Japan, Russia and New Zealand. The largest sending countries are China followed by India and Germany. However, in relation to national tertiary students, Luxembourg, Cyprus and Brunei Darussalam have the greatest percentage of students studying abroad and China and India the lowest[5]. **The movement of students between Asia and Europe is however heavily biased towards Asian students studying in Europe**. The number of mobile students from Asia to Europe is significantly (about 6 times) higher than the number of European students studying in Asia. Imbalanced mobility between Asia and Europe has already been addressed as an important issue by the country reports for the ASEM ME1 in Berlin (2008). According to the ASEM partners' information, the overall situation for the exchange of students between Asia and Europe varies from country to country. Some countries are "net importers" of mobile students (e.g. Australia, Austria, Cyprus, Germany, Hungary, New Zealand, Spain and the Netherlands), others are "net exporters" (e.g.

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[3]*The Erasmus Impact Study: Effects of mobility on the skills and employability of students and the internationalisation of higher education institutions'*, European Commission, Education and Culture, 2014.

[4] *The Future of Education and Skills – Education 2030: OECD Learning Framework 2030*, OECD, 2018, p. 3-5.

[5] *Exploring ASEM Sustainable Connectivity - What brings Asia and Europe together?*, European Union, 2019.

China, the Republic of Korea, Malaysia, Thailand, Vietnam). Japan is a "net importer" in the Asian region, but a "net exporter" in the exchange with Europe.[6]

Mobility programmes and initiatives that tackle the imbalance in mobility schemes between Asia and Europe, have always been **at the core of ASEM Education Process since 2008**. This is pursued by initiatives that focus on concrete mobility programmes and scholarships for students but also on implementing mechanisms and tools for ensuring better transparency and comparability of qualifications, learning outcomes and credits.

Mobility is seen as an important strategy in ASEM Education to contribute to intercultural learning and understanding between both regions. As the labour market and societies have an increasing global character that requires more intercultural knowledge, skills and attitudes, as well as effective communication skills, the ASEM Education Process should create more mobility opportunities for students, staff and researchers between Asia and Europe.

The Flagship Programmes under the ASEM Education Process priority theme 'Balanced Mobility' are the **ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme** and the **Asia-Europe Institute's AEI-ASEM Summer School** which were established under the auspices of the overall ASEM forum. Both programmes are still successful in delivering tangible and visible cooperation by organising balanced mobility schemes to Asian and European students. In addition, the Asia-Europe Foundation **(ASEF) programmes** such as the ASEF Summer University and the ASEF Young Leaders Summit create short term mobility opportunities for an equal number of students of both regions. After its pilot phase, the **ASEM Work Placement Programme (WPP) which was launched in 2015** aims to increase the number of students doing an internship or work placement in another region to combine professional competence development with intercultural learning for career development.

Challenges and barriers for balanced mobility

Despite the success of the above-mentioned programmes, the ASEM Education Process still faces barriers and challenges to contribute to the **quantitative impact that is needed** to achieve more balanced mobility in both regions.

The high travel and study costs are one of these barriers: lack of funding is at the basis to hinder more scholarships for mobility within the ASEM Education programmes.

Not only within ASEM Education, but in general, **disadvantaged students experience likely less opportunities** than their peers to participate in any opportunities to study in another country. In many countries, the opportunity to study in higher education and more particularly to study abroad, is rather reserved for the more advantaged students.

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[6] _ASEMME3 Status Report_ - _From Berlin 2008 Via Hanoi 2009 to Copenhagen 2011,_ the ASEM Education Secretariat Germany. 2011.

Although the agenda on "Balanced Mobility" was discussed in every senior officials' and ASEM ME meeting since 2008, no concrete solution or platform has been identified so far to tackle this issue.

Therefore, the ASEM Education Process should consider not only to tackle the imbalance between inward and outward mobility between Asia and Europe, but also between the imbalances of the social-economic background of students. The Seoul Declaration emphasises "people-to-people contacts as a critical form of cooperation to promote connectivity between Asia and Europe, boosting intercultural and inter-religious understanding and contributing to peaceful and sustainable development"[7]. If we all agree that ASEM Education can contribute to the Sustainable Development Goals, then **equity should become an important area of concern in all educational programmes and initiatives within ASEM Education**, giving all students equal chances to connect within the different ASEM regions.

> **Discussion Question 1**
>
> *How can the ASEM Education Process contribute to a more 'balanced mobility' not only in terms of addressing the imbalanced one-way mobility from Asia to Europe, but also in addressing social imbalance?*
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> **Discussion Question 2**
>
> *How can we include students in mobility programmes with a disadvantaged background? By introducing a special scheme or combine with existing schemes? What kind of initiatives could contribute to support the inclusion of disadvantaged students in mobility?*

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[7] Seoul Declaration 2017

Mobility in the digital era: virtual mobility as a strategy for inclusion?

In the Seoul Declaration, the Ministers agreed that the promotion of mobility should remain at the core of the ASEM Education Process. **People-to-People contact** continues to be the most relevant strategy to **promote connectivity between Asia and Europe and to boost intercultural understanding and dialogue**. People-to-People contact, however, is not synonymous with physical collaboration or exchanges. Technology and ICT can be used as a valuable and effective platform to **create virtual mobility and support various cooperation activities**, including the use of cyberspace for educational purposes by students and higher education institutions' staff in both regions.

Although ASEM Education provides an excellent platform to further develop and explore cyber collaboration and virtual mobility, **the great potential of ICT in closing the gap between regions and countries and to contribute to equity and accessibility in education is still untapped.**

This rationale was the basis of the ASEM Education Conference in November 2018 in Cologne titled **'ASEM Education in a Digital World: Reflections on Bridging Continents and Connecting People'**[8]. The conference explored the possibilities for boosting exchange and balancing mobility between Asia and Europe through digital formats and fostering intercultural connectivity and understanding in a digital way and suggested evidence-base and good examples to further develop policies and practices to boost digitalisation in mobility.

During the ISOM in Jakarta (2018) the **potential of blended learning in mobility programmes** was discussed in one of the workshops. Blended learning could improve access to mobility especially in the ASEM Education context. Students could for example get in contact with higher education institutions before and after physical mobility through online courses or collaborative projects with their peers. The idea of combining blended learning and mobility seems also to be a relevant tool for professional learners already engaged in their career. It seems to be the kind of mobility which is affordable in the field of Lifelong Learning where students have no time for one year or one semester to go abroad.

Digitalisation also challenges Higher Education Institutions (HEI). **New formats of intercultural connectivity** are often discussed from an academic or scientific perspective, but the digital era is also affecting HEI at their administrative and organisational level. However, different forms of mobility and new ways of learning have consequences for institutional identities evolving in a fast-changing environment.

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[8]Link to the Conference Website,
Conference Publication 'ASEM Education in a Digital World: Bridging the Continents – Connecting the People', Published by DAAD, 2019.

The above-mentioned ideas and suggestions could help to advance the discussion on the role of digitalisation in the ASEM Education Process. Digitalisation should be encompassed as an opportunity that should be pursued, maybe even more forcefully, in the future, not at least at the political level.

Discussion Question 3

How could the ASEM Education Process advance digitalisation in mobility and collaboration between Asia and Europe? What political role could there be in this? What kind of initiatives do we need to introduce or embark upon?

Discussion Question 4

Can virtual mobility, e-learning, collaborative online learning and blended learning contribute to a more inclusive mobility? What are the opportunities, challenges and pitfalls?

Plenary Session II: Towards the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development: How can the ASEM Education Process contribute?

Background on the Agenda 2030

The Sustainable Development Goals are the **blueprint** to achieve a better and more sustainable future for all. It addresses the global challenges we face, including those related to poverty, inequality, climate, environmental degradation, prosperity and peace and justice. In order to leave no one behind, it is important that we achieve each **Goal** and **Target** by 2030.[9]

Education is central to the realisation of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Within the comprehensive 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, education is articulated as a stand-alone and specific goal **in SDG4 'Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all'**. There are however other goals in which there is a prominent role for education such as in SDG8 ('Promote inclusive and sustainable economic growth, employment and decent work for all'), with a specific focus on disadvantaged people who are far from the labour market and far from opportunities for lifelong learning. In addition, the concern about skills and qualifications serves also **the broader 2030 agenda** (for example Water Management, Responsible Consumption & Production, Climate Change Mitigation, etc.).

SDG4 continues the 'Education for All' focus on quality basic education for all but broadens the agenda further to include the concern for equitable access to post-basic education (**including tertiary education**) and training for youth and adults through equitable access to appropriate learning opportunities. What is also new to SDG4 is the focus on the **relevance of learning outcomes** both for the world of work, as well as for **citizenship in a global and interconnected world.**[10]

The importance of SDG4 has also been underlined by **the Global Education 2030 Meeting** convened by UNESCO in Brussels from 3 to 5 December 2018. Education Ministers, other heads of delegations as well as representatives of multilateral organisations, civil society, the teaching profession, youth and the private sector called for strengthened collective action on SDG4 as "we are not on track to achieve SDG4s targets by 2030". Among other things, the Meeting committed **"to supporting lifelong learning opportunities for all"** and highlighted the important role of higher education and TVET and "**the importance of regional and national mechanisms for the recognition of higher education and vocational qualifications".**

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[9] https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/
[10] '*Unpacking SDG 4 - Education 2030 Guide'* UNESCO (2016).

ASEM and SDG's

During the **ASEM12 Summit** in Brussels in 2018, Leaders emphasised the link between **ASEM connectivity** - a key concept of ASEM since some years- **and sustainable development** for achieving the 2030 Agenda and recognised the importance of access to quality education as a basic human right and a tool for responsible citizenship, economic prosperity and resilience of society[11].

The ASEM Education Process and SDG's

Since the first ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting in Berlin (2008), topics related to higher education have been the centre of interest and discussions in the ASEM Education Process. During ASEM ME3 in Copenhagen (2011), Ministers agreed on **four thematic priorities** for the ASEM Education Process – all with a focus on higher education. The four thematic focus areas have been maintained until today. The Chair's Conclusions of each Ministerial Meeting include initiatives and programmes related to the four priorities and proposed by ASEM partners and stakeholders.

The fact that the four thematic areas are still the same as those in the early years of the AEP and that topics related to these areas are also high on the agenda of other policy forums (e.g. ASEAN Plus Three, European Union, Bologna Process) demonstrates that the ASEM Education Ministers were right to give priority to these themes. However, it might well be asked whether the **four AEP should be adapted to new global challenges and/or given a new focus for the future development of AEP.**

Linking the thematic priorities and initiatives of the AEP to SDG4 does not put a question mark on using the four priorities in the future, but rather could **bring the AEP closer to a global policy reference framework (2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development)** signed by all UN member states (including all ASEM partner countries). By doing this, ASEM partners could contribute to implement the commitments agreed upon in the UN 2030 Agenda.

In the analysis of the ASEM Education Process and its initiatives and activities between ASEM ME6 in Seoul and ASEM ME7 in Bucharest (Stocktaking Report 'from Seoul to Bucharest'), the ASEM Education Secretariat has asked the partners and stakeholders to link their initiative to the specific sub-goals of the SDG4. It could be concluded that **most of the ASEM Education initiatives are currently already contributing** to one or more sub-goals of the SDG4 without clear indication. If ASEM partners and stakeholders include **a more explicit reference** to SDG's and would give a specific attention to the sub-goals of SDG4 (and other SDG's) when developing and implementing initiatives under the 4 priority themes in the future, it would become more

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[11] ASEM. (2018). Chairman's Statement of the 12th ASEM Summit. Brussels, Belgium.

obvious that the **ASEM Education Process contributes actively to the realisation of the SDG's** to the mutual benefits of peoples in both regions.

Discussion Question 5

Should ASEM Education Process contribute more explicitly to the SDG's by, for example, including Sustainable Development as a transversal theme in the Process? Or are there other or better ways to link the SDG's to the political agenda of ASEM Education?

Discussion Question 6

What kind of initiatives or programmes could the ASEM Education Process develop or integrate within the four AEP priority areas and implement to contribute even more to the SDG's and in particular to the achievement of SDG4?