



# **ASEM Education Stocktaking Report**

**“From Seoul to Bucharest”**

**Executive Summary**

**The ASEM Education Secretariat Belgium - May 2019**

## Executive Summary

During the first ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEM ME1) in Berlin in 2008, Ministers recognised the added value of such an informal platform for dialogue and agreed to forge a strategic Asia-Europe partnership in education, which was named the ASEM Education Process.

Eleven years later, ASEM partners and stakeholders attend the Seventh ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEM ME7) in Bucharest, Romania on 15 and 16 May 2019 to discuss political issues relating to the ASEM Education Process under two following themes: (1) Mobility for everyone: balanced and inclusive mobility in the digital era and (2) Towards the Agenda 2030 for Sustainable Development: How can the ASEM Education Process contribute?

In their previous Meeting in Seoul, Korea (ASEM ME6, November 2017), the ASEM Ministers of Education set the political and practical agenda for the ASEM Education Process until the next Ministerial and beyond, as specified in the Seoul Declaration. They agreed on ideas to develop the ASEM Education Process further and welcomed 33 initiatives and projects proposed by ASEM partners and stakeholders, to be implemented under the following 4 ASEM Education Process thematic priority areas:

- 1 Quality assurance and recognition;
- 2 Engaging business and industry in education;
- 3 Balanced mobility;
- 4 Lifelong learning including Technical Vocational Education and Training (TVET).

### The Stocktaking Report – a basis for discussion during ASEM ME7

The Secretariat describes in this report the progress made by 33 initiatives and projects under the four thematic priority areas since the Ministerial Meeting in Seoul. The report also presents their achievements and strengths as well as their shortcomings and challenges.

Based on ASEM documents, outcomes from meetings (ISOM 2018, SOM1 2018), and discussions with senior officials, stakeholders and external experts, the Secretariat has identified **8 main tasks for the future of the ASEM Education Process**. Four of these tasks refer to the **political level**; the four others to the **management level**. In addition to that, the report lists **21 recommendations** to help achieve these tasks.

The Stocktaking Report is meant as a source of inspiration for the debates in the run-up to and during ASEM ME7. The ASEM Education Ministers and Senior Officials are invited to discuss the tasks and recommendations presented by the ASEM Education Secretariat and agree on those which should be prioritized on the ASEM Education agenda.

## Initiatives and projects – cornerstones of ASEM Education with recommendations for the future

The analysis by the ASEM Education Secretariat clearly shows that the clear majority (i.e. three quarters) of the 33 ASEM government-led initiatives and projects run by ASEM stakeholders as mentioned in the Chair's Conclusions of Seoul (2017) have been carried out and achieved their objectives completely or partly. This finding demonstrates the great enthusiasm and commitment of ASEM partners and, in particular, of ASEM stakeholders who coordinate most of these activities (e.g. Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF) through its long-term project series).

A closer look at the implementation process, however, reveals that the number of partners and stakeholders who coordinate an initiative or project is rather low and the same ASEM partners and stakeholders tend to coordinate these initiatives. Quite a number of initiatives led by partners are one-off events that contribute to the development of the AEP only in the short-term. Most of the ASEM government-led initiatives do not cooperate systematically or create synergies – even if they work under the same AEP priority on similar topics. A few initiatives were cancelled or are currently on hold, such as the ASEM University-Business Forum and the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub - two important dialogue fora for cross-cutting issues which should be revitalised. The ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub however will be hosted soon by the University College of Cork, Ireland. All partners and stakeholders are invited to contribute to the revitalisation of the LLL Hub by participating in research and conferences on Lifelong Learning to support evidence-based policy.

The thematic focus of AEP initiatives is clearly on priority 3 (Balanced mobility) and priority 4 (Lifelong learning including TVET), although priority 1 (Quality assurance and recognition) and Priority 2 (Engaging business and industry in education) deal with key issues for developing the AEP and meeting global challenges. Some flagship initiatives under priority 3 deserve more attention and increased membership (e.g. ASEM-DUO) or a more balanced participation of Asian and European students (e.g. Summer School of the Asia-Europe Institute, University of Malaya). Under priority 4, only a small number of TVET initiatives took place in ASEM Education so far. This is surprising as partners and stakeholders voiced their wish - on different occasions - to make TVET more prominent in the AEP. However, there are initiatives complementing all the 4 thematic priority areas.

The Secretariat hopes that the analysis of the initiatives and projects under the 4 priority areas in this report would help to improve the aspects described above in longer term.

## Achievements, strengths, shortcomings and challenges of the ASEM Education Process (AEP)

In addition to the numerous activities, which are a real asset to the AEP, documents and meeting results as well as research findings point out many other **strengths** and substantial **achievements** of the AEP. Firstly, the ASEM Education Process offers a permanent political and practical platform to partners and stakeholders for discussing Asian-European educational themes and initiating policy-oriented or result-oriented initiatives and projects in fields of common interest.

Other positive aspects of the ASEM Education dialogue and cooperation forum are:

- ✘ the informal and non-binding character of the AEP;
- ✘ the embeddedness of the AEP in the overarching ASEM process;
- ✘ the clear focus of AEP policy dialogue and cooperation on four relevant thematic priorities and
- ✘ the establishment of the ASEM Education Secretariat as support structure of the AEP.

Despite the many positive aspects and the undeniable progress achieved during the past decade, there is **room for improvement** in the following areas: policy orientation, effectiveness and visibility; connection with international policies and topics; and management of the AEP.

Sometimes, the positive aspects can turn out to be shortcomings and challenges for the AEP. The informal and non-binding character of the AEP, for example, may conflict with the wish to make the AEP more result-oriented and to develop the political management of the ASEM Education Process, supported by a vision document and a clear action plan.

It is true that the AEP is part of the overarching political ASEM process. However, the connection is weak, and its potential is far from being fully exploited. The same is true for cooperation with other international actors in the field of educational policies such as ASEAN, the EU, the Bologna Process and UNESCO.

During ASEM ME3 (Copenhagen, Denmark, 2011), ASEM Education Ministers agreed to focus on four thematic priorities (see above) which are still relevant for the current policy dialogue and practical initiatives of the AEP. Time does not stand still and changing contexts require adjustments of themes. Recently, the implications of industrial change (Industry 4.0, digitalisation) and the impact of the UN's 2030 Sustainable Development Agenda on the AEP have been increasingly discussed. It was proposed to consider both themes in the future thematic orientation of the AEP.

The establishment of the rotating ASEM Education Secretariat is seen by AEP partners and stakeholders as a great achievement of the AEP. Such a Secretariat is unique in ASEM and ensures coordination, stability and, to a certain extent, continuity of the AEP. However, the increasing workload as well as the loss of expertise and continuity of staff upon completion of the 4-year AES mandate, raises the urgent question of how to enable the AES to meet future challenges in a long-term perspective.

## **Tasks and recommendations for the future development of the AEP**

Considering the shortcomings and challenges of the AEP presented in this Stocktaking Report, the AES proposes 8 tasks and 21 recommendations (cf. Chapter 5.2 of the Report) to be discussed at AEP policy level for the future development of the AEP with the aim to make the AEP politically stronger and sustainable, more effective and visible, and more beneficial for the people in Asia and Europe.

The tasks and corresponding recommendations are presented in the following overview:

## 1 Tasks and recommendations relating to the political level

### Task 1: Make the AEP more attractive for high-level policy makers and give the AEP a long-term perspective

**Recommendation (1):** Settle an analytical and strategic approach in preparing and following up milestone meetings in the AEP, such as (I)SOM and ASEM ME. Such approach would include preparatory documents with an analytical focus (e.g. Stocktaking Report) and a strategic purpose for the AEP (e.g. introducing a Strategy Paper on AEP Vision 2030), clearly identified meeting outcomes, and possibilities to monitor these (e.g. through Stocktaking Reports);

**Recommendation (2):** introduce more interactive formats for discussions, such as workshops in (I)SOMs and informal retreat sessions in ASEM ME, in order to discuss strategic policy orientations and better grasp their impact on the education sector, beyond the pressure of protocols;

### Task 2: Bring the AEP closer to the overarching ASEM process

**Recommendation (3):** Present and discuss main ASEM ME results during ASEM Summit and include them in ASEM Summit Chair's Statement;

**Recommendation (4):** Present AEP flagship initiatives during ASEM Summit (e.g. in an AES booth) with effective coordination with the summit host and the ASEM secretariat;

### Task 3: Connect AEP priorities with international policies and developments

**Recommendation (5):** Intensify relations with the Bologna Policy Forum/Global Policy Forum, ASEAN Plus Three, the EU and UNESCO in priority areas of common interest; discuss with European Commission how to harness the potential of EU programmes for ASEM education related to mobility and cooperation;

**Recommendation (6):** Make digitalisation (Industry 4.0) and UN's Sustainable Development Agenda a transversal theme of the AEP and support corresponding initiatives;

**Recommendation (7):** Make TVET more prominent in the AEP by (a) promoting initiatives and wider networking opportunities amongst the ASEM partners and stakeholders (e.g. by organising joint seminars for experts from the fields of politics and education and the world of work), (b) preparing a compendium on TVET systems in Asia and Europe and (c) presenting Asian-European TVET cooperation examples of good practice in AEP policy meetings and on the AES website;

**Recommendation (8):** Revitalise ASEM LLL Hub and university-business collaboration.

#### Task 4: Strengthen involvement of stakeholders

**Recommendation (9):** define official AEP stakeholders entitled to attend (I)SOMs and ASEM ME with the right to speak to increase commitment from the education sector towards the AEP, and to make the AEP more visible to them;

**Recommendation (10):** discuss the main ARC recommendations during ASEM ME, and address them in relation with the relevant AEP policy recommendations in key policy documents such as the Chairs' Conclusions and the Declarations;

## 2 Tasks and recommendations related to management level (AES and host of Senior Officials and Ministerial Level Meetings)

#### Task 5: Continue to make the informal AEP more efficient and effective

**Recommendation (11):** Introduce an action plan with clear objectives, identifiable responsibilities and targets to implement the AEP Vision 2030 (see Task No 1);

**Recommendation (12):** Continue to improve the format of (I)SOM meetings already tested in Jakarta and Krams (2018) and introduce new elements into ASEM ME (e.g. retreat sessions);

**Recommendation (13):** Ensure effective cooperation and thematic continuity of meetings between different hosts of ISOM, SOM1 and 2, ASEM ME and the AES;

#### Task 6: Monitor the AEP and its initiatives and analyse their progress and results from a policy perspective

**Recommendation (14):** Establish regular contacts between coordinators of ASEM government-led initiatives and projects by other stakeholders and prepare/collect summaries of individual meetings;

**Recommendation (15):** Support initiatives by harnessing synergies;

**Recommendation (16):** Prepare a comprehensive Stocktaking Report including an analytic view on the progress of initiatives and an assessment and development of the AEP Vision 2030 action plan and achievement of its objectives and targets;

#### Task 7: Make the AEP more visible

**Recommendation (17):** Present AEP examples of good practice on the AES website and in social media;

**Recommendation (18):** Promote AEP at ASEM Summits, Education Fairs, Global Policy Forum and other relevant events;

**Recommendation (19):** Award an ASEM prize to top-class AEP demonstration initiatives or projects during ASEM ME and disseminate information via all sorts of media;

**Task 8: Increase working capacity, continuity and stability of the AES**

**Recommendation (20):** Establish a Standing Working Group (SWG) to support the AES in its strategic work, by the next ASEMME8 in 2021;

**Recommendation (21):** Explore the possibility of giving the ASEM Education Secretariat a permanent structure that meets comprehensive challenges in a long-term perspective in order to avoid loss of expertise and to ensure sustainability and continuity.

The AES believes that the implementation of these recommendations would greatly contribute to develop the ASEM Education Process, strengthen the educational relations between Asia and Europe and better meet global challenges. For this reason, the AES proposes to the AEP policy level to discuss and adopt these recommendations.

**Thank you!**

The AES would like to thank all partners and stakeholders who have contributed to this report by completing the questionnaires and/or by providing feedback. Some special thanks go to the members of the task force for their contributions at the working meeting in September and the valuable feedback afterwards! Last but not least, the Secretariat would like to express a huge thanks to Dr. WUTTIG for his dedication and expertise in drafting this report as well as for his constructive feedback and nice collaboration.

The Secretariat wishes you an interesting reading and hopes that the conclusions and recommendations inspire you to further develop and strengthen Asia-Europe collaboration in education. The Secretariat is open to all kinds of feedback, ideas and recommendations to further support you in this process.

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