

ASIA-EUROPE MEETING (ASEM)
Intermediate Senior Officials Meetings (ISOM)
“Implementation of the ASEM Education Strategy and Vision 2030”
St. Julian’s (Malta)
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ITEM 9. PARALLEL WORKSHOPS
9.2 WORKSHOP 2
ASEM HIGHER EDUCATION MAPPING:
POLICIES AND PRACTICES WORKING TOWARDS THE SDGS

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The Higher Education (HE) sector plays a significant role in the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As key societal partners, Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) help to provide social and technical solutions for the challenges embodied in the SDGs. Many HEIs address the SDGs across their three core missions (teaching, research and third mission) in impactful ways.

Despite their important role, there continues to be a need to deepen and broaden the knowledge on policy, strategic management, and operationalisation of SDGs in higher education at national and institutional levels. Policymakers and practitioners have to connect how SDGs are advocated, enacted, and implemented locally to the actual progress of the SDGs occurring globally, to accelerate action and delivery of the 2030 Agenda.

‘Sustainable Development’ was introduced as a [transversal theme](#) within the ASEM Education Process (AEP) during the ASEMME7 in Bucharest, Romania, to link AEP more explicitly to the SDGs and provide a platform for exchanges, mutual learning and cooperation among partners to work towards the goals.

The [Asia-Europe Foundation \(ASEF\)](#) launched a study to address the issue of policy-practice interface and collect evidence from the 51 ASEM Partner countries on their policies working towards the SDGs, to provide evidence for future policy discussions and map areas where countries could work better together.

The “**ASEM Higher Education Policy Mapping: Working Towards the SDGs**” [study](#) is a work in progress and will be launched early February 2023. It is exploring the following research questions:

- (1) To what extent are national higher education policies oriented towards the SDGs?
- (2) What kind of policy tools are most often used to promote sustainable development in national/regional higher education agendas?
- (3) How do ASEM higher education policies translate into practice?

The study started with a thorough literature review to identify existing resources on the topic and surveytools in place, and continued with two methods of data collection: a Survey that received in total 21 responses from ASEM countries so far (17 European countries and 4 Asian countries); and a series of Focus Group Discussions that engaged 14 policymakers so far to contribute with qualitative informationto the findings of the surveys.

During the workshop, 7 initial insights from the data collected were shared with participants:

1. Governments play a key role in pushing SDG implementation.
2. Government’s roles: provide common strategy & establish regulations for SDG implementation.
3. There are six SDGs highlighted by ASEM respondents (SDG4, SDG5, SDG8, SDG9, SDG10,SDG13).
4. Most ASEM respondents reported having an existing government document for SDGs implementation.
5. Education and training and research are focus areas addressed in their SDG-related gov document.
6. Financial support is the most commonly employed policy tool among ASEM respondents, followed by accreditation requirements & audit, monitoring and evaluation.
7. When asked about perceived barriers to HEIs contributing to the SDGs, three issues emerged.

Participants were invited to discuss in small groups the following questions:

1. Which mission of the university do you think would be most important for your national government to support in order to contribute to the SDGs?

#5: Education and training and research are focus areas addressed in their SDG-related gov document



13.C. In the government document(s) you identified, where is sustainability addressed exactly? (Select all applicable)

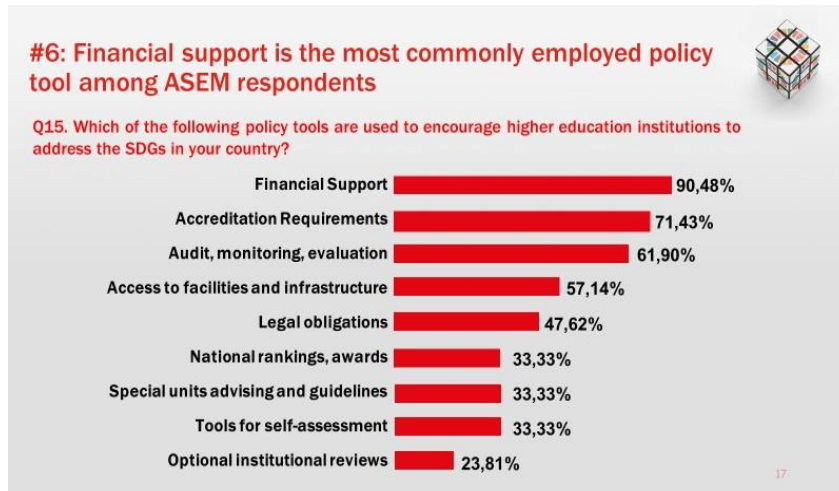
1 st	Learning and Teaching
2 nd	Research
3 rd	Partnerships and community engagement
4 th	Campus operations and governance

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Participants agreed with the survey respondent countries and ranked Education and Teaching as the most important mission of HEIs to make sure SDGs are incorporated and thought about. Second mostimportant area was Research, as many governments provide incentives for the HE sector to conduct research on the SDGs and come up with innovative solutions. Community engagement and Campus operations were ranked third and

fourth respectively, missions of universities where they should enjoy autonomy to implement locally suitable actions, rather than nationally coordinated ones (even though, there some countries where these missions are also addressed at the central level).

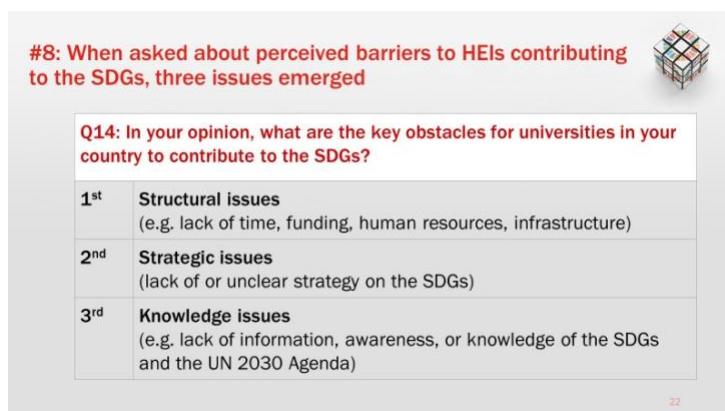
2. What is the most effective policy instrument for encouraging higher education institutions to tackle SDGs? Why?



Participants discussed the initial finds of the survey. In the survey, 90% of the responding countries identified financial support as the most often used policy tool to incentivize HEIs contribution to the SDGs. Some workshop participants agreed with that, while others found that accreditation might be the most effective even though the different systems in place in ASEM countries can make the use of this policy tool difficult.

The role of national rankings and awards has been discussed and while it is considered to be effective it is not necessarily leading to desired results. Policy tools for self-assessment and optional institutional reviews were also discussed as effective especially in HE systems where HEIs enjoy maximum autonomy.

3. What are the most difficult challenges applying the SDGs in your country's higher education sector?



Participants discussed the different barriers HEIs face in their countries when it comes to contribution to the SDGs. Each breakout group identified one of the three main categories suggested by the survey: Structural issues, Strategic issues, and Knowledge issues.



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