

## 9<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME9)

26 January 2024

Valletta, Malta

*“Leaving No One Behind”*

### Conclusions by the Chair

The 9<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME9) was held in Malta on 25 and 26 January 2024 and brought together 100 participants from 26 ASEM partners and 7 stakeholders. The Meeting was chaired by H.E. Dr. Clifton Grima, Minister for Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation, Malta.

The Meeting had the overall theme “Leaving No One Behind” and all the Ministers had the opportunity to speak about this topic linked to one of the following areas: 1. Sustainable Development Goals and Education, 2. Recognition and Balanced Mobility, 3. Lifelong Learning and TVET, or 4. Digitalisation. The main purpose of the Meeting was to seek closer cooperation between Asia and Europe under the ASEM Education Process and to share and discuss existing and new initiatives and projects, as well as to reconfirm the continuous support for the ASEM Education Process, which was initiated in 2008 in Berlin and continued in Hanoi (2009), Copenhagen (2011), Kuala Lumpur (2013), Riga (2015), Seoul (2017), Bucharest (2019) and Bangkok (online 2021).<sup>1</sup>

#### In their Meeting, the Ministers:

- Appreciated and acknowledged the initiatives, projects and activities outlined in the [ASEM Education Stocktaking Report 2022-2024 “From Bangkok to Valletta”](#) and called on the ASEM partners and stakeholders to continue working and reporting on these activities that are strengthening cooperation between Asia and Europe.
- Supported the update and further implementation of the [Action Plan](#) accompanying the [ASEM Education Strategy 2030](#), a framework for stronger collaboration and dialogue and an invitation to the ASEM partners and stakeholders to develop, implement and monitor result-oriented initiatives and projects to be realised through the interaction between ASEM Education partners and stakeholders, with the support of the ASEM Education Secretariat, the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), the ASEM-DUO Secretariat and the ASEM Lifelong Learning Hub Secretariat.
- Underlined that, especially after the COVID-19 pandemic and the possibility to meet again in-person, the ASEM Education Process needs to strengthen again its significant role in collaborating and further developing policies on (higher) education and lifelong learning (LLL), and called on the ASEM countries to foster cooperation and dialogue on

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<sup>1</sup> Previous Chair's Conclusions and Stocktaking Reports [are collected here](#).

common perspectives between the two regions and to participate in ASEM Education activities led by its countries and stakeholders.

- Thanked the (Co-)Chairs of the four ASEM Education Experts Groups on (i) Sustainable Development Goals and Education, (ii) Recognition and Balanced Mobility, (iii) Lifelong Learning and TVET and (iv) Digitalisation for their continuous and precious work and for involving most of the ASEM partners and stakeholders in the discussions, the development of tools, webinars and peer learning activities. All Expert Groups were encouraged to find synergies with other ASEM Expert Groups and to build on the achievements from previous working structures.
- Underlined the relevance, for both Asia and Europe, of the UN Agenda 2030 and the importance of achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) with a focus on SDG4; and agreed that the ASEM Education Process can contribute to realising the SDGs. The Ministers reaffirmed their desire to contribute to the implementation of SDG4 to achieve inclusive and equitable quality education and called the Experts Group 1 on Sustainable Development Goals and Education, co-chaired by Malta and Thailand, to continue its work and to build on the respective regional implementation mechanisms in both regions and in synergy with UNESCO's coordinating role for SDG 4/Education 2030 and the pivotal role of the European Commission and the ASEAN Secretariat in the regional processes.
- Emphasised the importance of inter-regional knowledge exchange on recognition of qualifications as one of the priority areas of the ASEM Education Process and appreciated the contribution made by the Expert Group 2 on Recognition and Balanced Mobility, co-chaired by India and Italy. The Ministers valued the continuous work on the [ASEM Education Compendium](#) and encouraged countries to contribute to this transparency tool, which will help to compare the various academic systems and to provide a valid source of information needed for cooperation with higher education institutions from ASEM countries. To foster information exchange, enhance recognition and the quality of recognition procedures in the two regions, the Ministers noted with appreciation and further encouraged the cooperation between national higher education authorities, the ENIC-NARIC Network<sup>2</sup> and the APNNIC Network<sup>3</sup> and regional and international networks of quality assurance bodies. The Ministers encouraged the ASEM countries to apply correctly the two relevant UNESCO regional conventions, namely the UNESCO/CoE Lisbon Recognition Convention and the UNESCO Asia-Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education – the “Tokyo Convention” – and highlighted the importance of the Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, adopted by the UNESCO General Conference in November 2019, in promoting recognition, mobility and inter-university cooperation and as a powerful instrument for dialogue between

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<sup>2</sup> The [ENIC-NARIC](#) is a network of National Information Centres on the recognition of qualifications in 55 countries in Europe, Central-Asia, Oceania, and North America. The NARIC Network, established by the European Commission in 1984, is today composed of 33 European countries and celebrates its 40<sup>th</sup> anniversary in 2024.

<sup>3</sup> The [APNNIC Network](#) was established in 2019 and is composed of currently twelve countries in UNESCO's Asia-Pacific region.

regions. The Ministers encouraged the Expert Group to promote ethics, transparency and integrity in education, to discuss how to combat fraud in education, and to explore new issues in recognition and balanced mobility by building on the work already done.

- Appreciated the work carried by the Expert Group 3 on Lifelong Learning and TVET, chaired by the ASEM Education and Research Hub for Lifelong Learning, and called on the group to continue to foster dialogue on Lifelong Learning opportunities for all. The Ministers thanked the ASEM LLL Hub, currently hosted by University College Cork with the support of the Government of Ireland, for its commitment to coordinate and revitalise the seven Research Networks.
- Acknowledged the efforts made to explore and discuss new developments, challenges and opportunities around digitalisation, such as generative Artificial Intelligence, Micro-credentials and other emerging topics. The Ministers underlined the importance and relevance of continued dialogue on the opportunities and challenges of digitalisation in education and the exchange of good practices in digitally enhanced learning and teaching and concluded that the Expert Group 4 on Digitalisation, chaired by Germany, should continue to underpin the policy dialogue on these issues, building on international instruments such as UNESCO’s 2021 Recommendation on Ethics and Artificial Intelligence.
- Appreciated the initiatives taken to advance multilateral cooperation in education between the ASEM Education Process and the Bologna Process / European Higher Education Area, especially with the Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue which organises the EHEA Global Policy Forum. The Ministers thanked the ASEM Education Secretariat and the Asia-Europe Foundation for organising a joint meeting of the EHEA’s Coordination Group on Global Policy Dialogue and Asian policy makers invited by ASEF in the framework of the ARC9 Policy Dialogue, which was held in September 2023 in Rome, where synergies and further cooperation were discussed. The Ministers suggested strengthening coordination with the European Education Area, as the overall strategic framework for education of the European Union and other European countries, alongside the work programmes for education of the Presidencies of the EU Council.
- Recognised the importance of the Asia-Europe Foundation (ASEF), established in 1997, as the only permanent institution of ASEM and emphasised the significant contribution of the ASEF for enhancing intellectual exchange and people-to-people connectivity between ASEM partners and civil society stakeholders. The Ministers expressed their appreciation to ASEF for its strong and valuable commitment in supporting the education pillar of the ASEM Process by implementing dialogue projects for youth and higher education leaders, academics, teachers and policymakers in line with the ASEM Education Process priorities. The Ministers noted with satisfaction the outcomes of the 5<sup>th</sup> ASEF Young Leaders Forum on “Leadership in Society 5.0” organised between August-December 2023 online and in Spain and Singapore; the 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> ASEF Higher Education Innovation Laboratory on “Universities’ Role in AI Innovation Ecosystems” between May-December 2023 organised online and in China; and the 16<sup>th</sup> ASEF

Classroom Network project on “Leading Change: Digital Transformation of Education in the Era of AI” organised between May-December 2023 online and in Slovenia.

- Reiterated the role of the ASEF Regional Conference on Higher Education (ARC) as the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers’ Meeting and appreciated the theme of the 9<sup>th</sup> edition of ARC on “Asia-Europe Higher Education Mapping: Working Towards the SDGs” aligned with the ASEM Education Process horizontal priority and showcasing national ASEM higher education policies and institutional practices working towards the SDGs. The Ministers recognised the organisation of three ARC9 Policy Dialogues in 2023 inviting policymakers, student and university leaders, and expressed appreciation for the tangible and intangible outcomes of the events, in particular the [ARC9 Policy Recommendations](#) by stakeholders. The Ministers encouraged Senior Officials to explore and discuss the recommendations further, and ASEF to continue doing research on the ASEM Education Priority topics across the partner countries and organising policy dialogues to discuss the findings, exchange knowledge and good practices, as well as to support the work of the ASEM Expert Groups.
- Recognised the significant role of the ASEM-DUO Fellowship Programme (ASEM-DUO) to promote balanced mobility of students, researchers and academics between Asia and Europe, and reaffirmed the importance of continuing the Programme of ASEM-DUO. The Ministers encouraged more ASEM countries to participate in the ASEM-DUO programme to enhance balanced mobility between both regions.
- Highlighted the importance of the European Union’s commitment to better connect Asia and Europe by strengthening exchange and cooperation in (higher) education between both regions via EU-funded programmes for education and research. The Ministers recognised the importance of the ASEM Education Process to serve as a platform for identifying and promoting Erasmus+ and Horizon Europe partnerships, particularly for establishing and developing multi-country partnerships that strengthen both intra-regional and inter-regional cooperation.
- Recognised the potential of the ASEM Work Placement Programme for strengthening ties between the ASEM Education activities and the world of work in both regions.
- Reconfirmed the importance of the ASEM Education Secretariat for effectively coordinating the ASEM Education Process and monitoring the implementation of the ASEM Education Strategy and Action Plan 2030, and for supporting the hosts of ASEM Education meetings, the Expert Groups and all ASEM partners and stakeholders in their activities.
- Underlined the importance of strengthening the visibility of the ASEM Education Process in ASEM partner countries and in international fora. In this context, the Ministers encouraged ASEM partners to enhance the visibility of the ASEM Education Process by maximising the use and promotion of the ASEM Education website ([www.asem-education.org](http://www.asem-education.org)) and of the ASEM InfoBoard website ([www.ASEMinfoboard.org](http://www.ASEMinfoboard.org)), the official information platform of the ASEM Process. The Ministers also encouraged ASEM partners and stakeholders to provide regular input for

communication purposes, such as best practices, information on initiatives, programmes, publications, and events.

The Ministers thanked Malta, its Ministry of Education, Sport, Youth, Research and Innovation and the Malta Further and Higher Education Authority for their warm hospitality and successful organisation of the Intermediate Senior Officials' Meeting (ISOM) held on 24-25 November 2022, the 1<sup>st</sup> Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM1) held on 22-23 May 2023, the 2<sup>nd</sup> Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM2) held on 24 January 2024 and the 9<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME9) held on 25-26 January 2024.

The Ministers thanked Ireland for hosting and financing the ASEM LLL Hub Secretariat.

The Ministers expressed their gratitude to Italy for hosting and financing the ASEM Education Secretariat (AES) since July 2022 and thanked the AES for supporting the organisation of these meetings and for promoting the further development of the ASEM Education Process.

**The Ministers thanked:**

Thailand for its commitment to host the Intermediate Senior Officials' Meeting (ISOM) in late 2024.

Romania for its commitment to host the 1<sup>st</sup> Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM1) in late 2025.

India for its commitment to host the 2<sup>nd</sup> Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM2) and the 10<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEMME10) in late 2026.