

EU-ASEAN Sustainable Connectivity Package - Higher Education Programme (SCOPE-HE)

Concept Note

EU-ASEAN Policy Dialogue on Higher Education: The Sustainable Connectivity Showcase

26-27 May 2025, Brussels, Belgium

Background

The European Union (EU) and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) are strategic partners with a relationship based on shared values and principles such as a rules-based international order, effective and sustainable multilateralism, and free and fair trade. Contributing to a peaceful, fair and prosperous world, this partnership is benefitting citizens by enhancing prosperity, promoting security, strengthening resilience, and improving connectivity.

The EU and ASEAN continue to promote sustainable connectivity within and between the two blocs, in line with their joint commitments towards the achievement of the Agenda 2030 and the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the Paris Agreement on Climate Change. Enhancing sustainable, comprehensive, and rules-based connectivity leads to improved cooperation and creates considerable benefits to citizens on both sides.

People-to-people connectivity, including the mobility of people through education and cultural exchanges, innovation and joint research, and the creation of quality jobs are avenues through which partnership- and community-building are being pursued by the EU and ASEAN. The Global Gateway and the work of the Team Europe Initiative on Sustainable Connectivity of the EU aim to enhance EU-ASEAN cooperation by concrete projects at both regional and national levels across Southeast Asia.

In this context, the **Sustainable Connectivity Package - Higher Education Programme (SCOPE-HE)** contributes to strengthening the connectivity between the European and Southeast Asian regions. Implemented by a consortium of Nuffic and DAAD, SCOPE's specific objective is to increase exchanges and people-to-people connections, notably in higher education, TVET, and research within ASEAN as well as between the EU and ASEAN.

As digital transformation, the need for workforce mobility, and youth empowerment intensify globally, both regions stand to benefit from stronger collaboration. People-to-people connectivity has been a cornerstone of the EU's success, enabling individual connections and institutional partnerships that enhance exchanges between regions and fosters economic integration, fair trade and collaboration essential to address challenges related to digital transformation and green transition. Building networks based on shared values and experiences across borders has supported the EU's integration process. It has also contributed to social cohesion and stability by cultivating the sense of an European identity and solidarity among its population. The Bologna Process and the Erasmus programme have been pivotal in shaping this connectivity.

EU-ASEAN Sustainable Connectivity Package - Higher Education Programme (SCOPE-HE)

In ASEAN, the Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025 (MPAC) adopted by the ASEAN member states includes the development of people mobility as a strategic objective of the association. The plan focuses on enhancing the movement of individuals across the region to promote economic integration, cultural exchange, and skills development. To facilitate mobility for education, tourism, and employment, the harmonisation of higher education and qualifications, mutual recognition of professional credentials, and improvements in digital infrastructure is defined as a key initiative. Further, MPAC emphasises human capital development through capacity building and upskilling initiatives, as well as fostering people-to-people connectivity through youth and cultural exchange programmes, supporting ASEAN's vision of an inclusive and integrated community.

Consequently, the issue of skills recognition is critical. Both the EU and ASEAN face challenges in ensuring the portability of skills certifications and aligning qualifications frameworks. Lessons from the EU's European Qualifications Framework (EQF) and ASEAN's ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF) can provide valuable insights into facilitating labour mobility and improving workforce competitiveness. Additionally, the importance of youth in shaping sustainable futures must be recognised, particularly through amplifying youth voices and enhancing youth participation in policymaking. By investing in young people and tapping into their potentials, both regions can drive innovation and sustainable development.

Key Objectives

In line with the above-mentioned rationale, the **EU-ASEAN Policy Dialogue on Higher Education** under the theme **"The Sustainable Connectivity Showcase"** aims to advance cooperation in higher education, TVET, and research, strengthening the foundation for regional integration and cross-regional collaboration.

To ensure a balanced exchange of insights and foster actionable outcomes for deeper EU-ASEAN cooperation, the sessions of the policy dialogue will follow a three-sequence structure to foster knowledge exchange and the discussion of actionable outcomes:

1. **Presentation of the ASEAN Landscape:**

Representatives from ASEAN member states will present the regional education sector particularities, including current trends, achievements, research landscape, challenges, and expectations, particularly related to higher education, TVET, skills recognition, and youth engagement. This session aims at providing EU counterparts with a comprehensive understanding of the ASEAN higher education sector and its up-to-date priorities and needs.

2. **Presentation of EU Insights and Trends:**

Representatives from EU member states will share experiences and best practices in higher education, focusing on key initiatives such as the Erasmus+ programme, the European Qualifications Framework (EQF), and examples of youth participation and representation. The emphasis will be on lessons learned and a potential adaptation in the ASEAN context. Further, representatives from EU member states will present

EU-ASEAN Sustainable Connectivity Package - Higher Education Programme (SCOPE-HE)

expectations towards an increased mobility, education exchanges, and research collaboration with higher education institutions in the ASEAN region.

3. Discussion on Synergies and Aligning Actions:

During this moderated joint session, discussants will identify synergies and the alignment of actions in the EU and ASEAN regions. Participants will co-create a roadmap for regional collaboration, addressing:

- The feasibility of an Erasmus-inspired intra-ASEAN scholarship programme;
- Enhanced alignment of qualification frameworks to support workforce mobility;
- Mechanisms to involve youth in shaping education policies and regional integration efforts.

Key Topics

The EU-ASEAN Policy Dialogue on Higher Education will address and address several key topics:

1. The Future of Erasmus and Intra-ASEAN Scholarships

- Presenting the regional education sector particularities, including policies, achievements, research landscape and challenges.
- Analysing the impact of the Erasmus programme as a model for ASEAN.
- Assessing the feasibility and design of an intra-ASEAN scholarship programme.

2. The Recognition of Skills for Mobile Workers

- Addressing the alignment of qualification frameworks to support workforce mobility.
- Enhancing mutual recognition agreements and portability of skills certifications.
- Presenting the mobility and skills needs in EU member states.

3. Youth Participation and Representation

- Promoting youth participation and representation in education governance.
- Exploring examples of existing engagement models and cross-regional platforms to amplify youth voices.

Output and Expected Outcomes

- Brussels Policy Brief, summarising the policy discussions and recommendations on advancing Erasmus-inspired initiatives in ASEAN.
- Enhanced understanding of skill recognition frameworks for intra-regional and inter-regional mobility.
- Strategies for greater youth engagement in policymaking and governance.
- Strengthened partnerships between the EU and ASEAN, particularly between education ministries, academic institutions, and the private sector.

EU-ASEAN Sustainable Connectivity Package - Higher Education Programme (SCOPE-HE)

Target Groups

- **Policy Makers:** Ministries of Higher Education, Vocational Training, Employment, and related sectors from EU and ASEAN member states.
- **Diplomats:** Heads of cooperation, counsellors and attaches in charge of education.
- **Higher Education Leaders:** University presidents, university international relation departments, regional education networks.
- **Private Sector:** Employers and industry representatives supporting workforce development and innovation, Chambers of Commerce.
- **Youth and Student Representatives:** Regional student associations engaged in policy discussions on education.

Format and Activities

- **Panel Discussions:** Featuring officials from EU and ASEAN member states, experts, and practitioners.
- **Parallel Sessions:** Gathering target groups together to address a specific issue and co-designing policy recommendations.
- **University visit:** Presenting the collaborative models of a Belgian University.
- **Side meetings:** Different ASEAN target groups to be received by related EU organisations.
- **Networking Opportunities:** Facilitating cross-sector and cross-regional partnerships.