



## **7<sup>th</sup> ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC7)**

**Students' Forum: 11–15 May 2019 | Rectors' Conference: 12–14 May 2019**

**Bucharest, Romania**

### **Higher Education Taking Action towards Sustainable Development Goals: Perspectives from Asia and Europe**

#### **ARC7 Students' Forum Policy Recommendations for the**

#### **7<sup>th</sup> ASEM Education Ministers' Meeting (ASEM ME7)**

**15-16 May 2019, Bucharest, Romania**

The ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC) is the Official Dialogue Partner of the ASEM Education Ministers' Meetings (ASEM MEs). Since 2010, ARC has been contributing through Policy Recommendations to the deliberations of the Ministers and the ASEM Education Process.

The United Nations 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) are a universal call for action to shape a better future for all. The SDGs are transformative and rights-based, and explicitly refer to higher education and research.

At the 7<sup>th</sup> ASEF Students' Forum, 51 student leaders from Asia and Europe discussed the role of higher education in driving the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, with attention to three core areas of institutional activity: 1) institutional governance; 2) societal impact; and 3) international partnerships.

#### **1. Taking Action at Home: SDGs as Core Pillars of University Governance**

Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) should ensure a sustainable future by creating an inclusive and diverse society, for which HEI governance is key to providing transparent communication, access for everyone, and empowering students to enhance knowledge and obtain their full potential.

As students, we call upon the ASEM Governments to:

1. Ensure that HEIs are aligned with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by creating a specific office permeating every decision-making level that works towards implementing and achieving SDGs;
2. Establish an institution-wide digital centralised system ensuring transparent and inclusive communication by gathering and disseminating information from and to students, academic, and non-academic staff and other stakeholders;
3. Invest in teachers' trainings which support student centred learning and equip educators with tangible skills in addressing different learning needs;
4. Ensure student representation at all levels of higher education governance, including representation on internal and external auditing committees;

5. Take responsibility to educate and promote positive health behaviours by students and employees by:
  - Promoting health as equal pillars between mental, sexual, physical health, and social well-being;
  - Forming a confidential, accessible, and innovative mental health support system;
  - Easing access to sexual and reproductive healthcare services.

## **2 Taking Action at Community Level – SDGs as Drivers of University Social Impact**

Higher Education serves as a driving catalyst for civil engagement, social diversity and sustainable advancement on a local, regional, national, and international level. HEIs shall respond to community needs and promote diversity, practical education, and locally relevant research. It is crucial for HEIs to ensure accessibility and inclusiveness. Governments should support HEIs by allocating appropriate funding.

As students, we call upon the ASEM Governments to:

1. Ensure that HEIs and student organizations represent the diversity of their communities, at both access and completion levels, among students, staff, and faculty. Aspects including race, religion, ethnicity, sexual-orientation, gender, socio-economic background, and access needs shall be considered;
2. Encourage HEIs to promote experiential and practical education in order to prepare students for their careers and social life, i.e. field studies, applied problems during courses, professional skills, paid internships, volunteering, community engagement, summer schools, short courses, and entrepreneurship. These should include a strong focus on SDGs;
3. Ensure that all HEIs have sufficient research capacity by allocating funds and encouraging institutional partnerships;
4. Incentivise and facilitate meetings between community members, and HEI researchers to gather research ideas and to disseminate research findings to non-academic stakeholders;
5. Funding bodies shall involve community group representatives in research funding allocation processes;
6. Ensure that degree requirements in HEIs should include completing a minimum of 3 ECTS credits or equivalent of tailor-made, societal impacting SDG activities. Appropriate training in SDG awareness and implementation should be provided.

## **3. Taking Action at an International Level - SDGs as a catalyst to reorient Internationalisation**

For internationalisation in higher education to be sustainable and to furthermore play its key role in reaching the SDGs, we believe it must be based on the principles of quality education, cohesion, equal opportunities, solidarity, and mobilising a global knowledge community.

As students, we call upon the ASEM Governments to:

1. Call upon higher education institutions to be involved in international exchange programs interconnected amongst students, researchers, and staff and implement best environmental practices and more inclusive and streamlined processes;
2. Introduce a standardised and internationally recognised *Academic Credit System* and the issuing and recognition of transcripts in agreed upon languages;
3. Encourage leaders in higher education to promote virtual collaboration through an international online platform in order to facilitate cooperation between higher education institutions and the online application process for international mobility;
4. Provide multilateral support for mobilising students, including financial, administrative or technological and e-learning resources in order to guarantee equal access to international higher education, especially for students in need;

5. Ensure quality and diversity in higher education by providing language courses for students, researchers and staff to enhance knowledge and mobility;
6. Encourage and support a launch of an International Students at Risk Network of higher education institutions that gives students, who face difficulties at their higher education institution due to their advocacy for human rights, as well as stateless persons, a chance for an education abroad;
7. Encourage respective governmental actors to support national strategies for internationalisation of higher education institutions.

## Conclusion

Our discussions have been comprehensive and inclusive, and the recommendations that we propose in this document represent all perspectives of SDGs, from nationalities across Asia and Europe. The recommendations of our working groups emerged from deliberate and thoughtful student conversations. This exercise has exemplified that universities are change-engines and students are at its forefront. It is critical that university governance adopts a lens of efficiency and action. It is of the utmost importance that SDGs are embedded into each tier of university structure, that they are present in governance conversations, lecture halls, and student gatherings.

15 May 2019, Bucharest

## Background:

The 7<sup>th</sup> ASEF Rectors' Conference and Students' Forum (ARC7) took place at the National University of Political Studies and Public Administration (SNSPA), in Bucharest, Romania, on 11-15 May 2019. The ARC7 Students' Forum brought together 51 student leaders from 51 Asian and European ASEM partner countries to discuss how can higher education take action towards the sustainable development goals.

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