Regional Policy Review 2024 from Third Countries not Associated to the Programme

Asia

REGIONAL REPORT

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Erasmus+

Enriching lives, opening minds.

ENFP National Focal Points

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Introduction

The Erasmus+ regional policy review acts as a bridge between the Erasmus+ programme and third countries not associated to the programme, shedding light on the policy landscape that shapes educational exchange and collaboration. By examining the interplay between local policies and Erasmus+ objectives, the document aims to foster a more cohesive and effective approach to international education, enhancing the programme's reach and impact across diverse educational systems.

Regional Report

The report's primary approach is to aggregate the national policy frameworks of third countries not associated with the Erasmus+ programme within a specific region. This offers a macroscopic view of how regional policies support, complement, or diverge from the Erasmus+ programme's goals and practices. The report aims to identify common themes, challenges, and opportunities for regional collaboration, providing insights into the broader regional stance towards cooperation and mobility in international education.

The report analyses the region's specific educational policies related to the Erasmus+ programme. It examines how national policies facilitate or hinder participation in Erasmus+ activities through a regional lens, highlights successful alignments, and pinpoints areas where policy adjustments could enhance cooperation.

Individual Country Reports

The regional report embeds national reports from individual countries within the region. However, country data and statistics are available in the annex. The Erasmus+ National Focal Points (ENFPs) prepared these country reports, which are essential to understanding the nuances of each country's engagement with Erasmus+ and identifying tailored strategies to improve integration and outcomes.

Erasmus+ Priorities and Features

The regional policy review of the third countries will be underpinned by the priorities that align with the overarching goals of the European Union, mainly focusing on digitalisation, the Green Deal, inclusion and diversity, and active participation in democratic life. These priorities reflect the EU's commitment to addressing current global challenges through education and training, ensuring that the Erasmus+ programme contributes to building a more sustainable, inclusive, and digitally advanced future. It will also look at the essential features, most notably internationalisation, and how this is implemented in the regions.

Internationalisation: As a fundamental feature of Erasmus+, internationalisation involves promoting cross-border collaboration and cultural exchange. This facet of the programme is designed to broaden participants' horizons, fostering mutual understanding and respect among diverse cultures. Through international partnerships and mobility opportunities, Erasmus+ aims to create a global learning community that values diversity and global interconnectedness. In this document, a probe is done on how this important feature is implemented in the countries not associated to the programme.

There will be six regional reports: Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America, Caribbean, the Middle East, and the Pacific, along with annexed country reports.

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1. Overview of Educational Policy in Asia

Education systems in Asia and other parts of the world are evolving while governments and educational institutions express their dedication to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). In September 2024, at the 6th Asia Meeting on Education 2030 in Bangkok, policymakers and teachers discussed ways of tackling deep-rooted inequalities and enhancing learning. However, a persisting problem is 'learning poverty', as many education systems focus on reducing secondary school completion rates rather than foundational literacy and numeracy. This means that millions of children across the region cannot achieve minimum learning standards despite the increase in school attendance rates.

Gender inequality is still rampant in many areas of Asia, where more than 450 million adults are unable to read and write basic texts, the majority of them being women. Governments have made efforts to enhance access to education for girls, but there are still deficiencies in retention and advancement to levels beyond primary education. Several regional efforts have been made to overcome these divides, such as gender-responsive teacher training and scholarship programmes to increase the enrolment of women in higher educational institutions.

Higher education in Asia has been expanding, but access to it is highly stratified. Although the rates of enrolment have increased in countries like Bangladesh, students from low-income families face many challenges, especially in rural areas. University enrolment is expected to increase substantially across the continent, but the quality and equity of funding across institutions pose a challenge to equal access to education. Asian countries have also increasingly become major senders and receivers of international students in the increasing trend of student mobility. However, affordability and recognition of qualifications are significant issues.

Cooperation has become a critical component of education policy as countries share best practices and develop strategies. Organisations like ASEAN and SAARC have launched collaborative programmes to enhance vocational education, digital literacy, and teacher training. Furthermore, multilateral institutions like UNESCO and the Asian Development Bank are assisting large-scale educational reforms, focusing on digital transformation and inclusive learning.

However, Asia still has to face some challenges in order to align its education systems with labour market needs. In response, several countries are focusing on developing skills in STEM fields, especially in artificial intelligence and technology-based industries. Despite progress, another critical issue is ensuring that all students, independent of their socio-economic status, can benefit from these advancements. In its progression towards 2030, Asia needs sustainable investments in education and increased collaboration to close learning gaps and create a more equitable education system.

2. Higher Education and Vocational Education Policies and Agreements in Asia

Asia, as in other parts of the world, is currently experiencing changes in the field of higher education and vocational training, which are due to regional integration, digitalisation, and a high interest in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4). The Bangkok Declaration, signed at the 2024 Ministerial Meeting on Education in Asia, is a joint statement of the Asian education ministers on improving equity, quality, and participation in higher education institutions. This framework focuses on four main areas: first, on the prioritisation of lifelong learning; second, on the necessity to increase the investment in research; and third, on the improvement of regional mobility to eliminate the differences in education and labour market participation.

The three main objectives of the declaration are: the recovery of access and quality in the post-pandemic education systems, the erasure of the existing gaps in education and the enhancement of the technology-based solutions to enhance the system's resilience.

In line with the UNESCO Education 2030 Agenda, policymakers have begun to extend online learning platforms, incorporate AI-based tools into classrooms, and strengthen teacher-training programmes. The ADB and ASEAN, as well as other regional bodies, are supporting these efforts to address skill gaps, digital divides, and economic disparities across member countries.

Meanwhile, the UNESCO Asia and Pacific Regional Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education (Tokyo Convention) was signed in 2018 and is an important tool for standardising degree recognition in the region. This framework allows academic mobility, professional growth, and international cooperation in research by facilitating students and professionals who want to go further than their country's borders. The convention is important in ensuring that the education systems in different regions of Asia are compatible in terms of educational standards and thus promote equity in access to higher education and the reduction of regional differences in the attainment of academic qualifications.

The Asia-Pacific Quality Network (APQN) is a significant accreditation body of higher education in Asia that collaborates with national quality assurance agencies to enhance the quality of higher education in the region. Thus, APQN guarantees the comparability of the assessment procedures and the credibility of regional qualifications, which is important for the ease of movement of students and their qualifications between universities in Asian countries. Its work is important for institutions that want to become international and for students who want to transfer credits between universities in different Asian countries.

Policies on education and mobility are developed by SEAMEO and other regional organisations in order to improve the quality assurance and curriculum development. SEAMEO is a regional intergovernmental organisation established in 1965 among governments of Southeast Asian countries to promote regional cooperation in education, science, and culture in the region. SEAMEO's projects enhance teacher training, support vocational education reform, and advocate for multilingual education in a region with linguistic diversity. These efforts are in line with SDG 4 and highlight the importance of ensuring inclusive and equitable education systems that address existing socioeconomic barriers.

In the same vein, the Colombo Plan for Cooperative Economic and Social Development in Asia and the Pacific was established in 1951 and is still a significant regional educational cooperation organisation. This initiative provides scholarships, capacity building, and technical assistance in various fields of development and thus adds to the human capital development and the overall regional economic development. The member countries of the Colombo Plan are involved in joint research, faculty exchange, and funding of STEM education to make sure that graduates are market-ready.

Student mobility and academic cooperation have been key focus areas for the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), with multiple initiatives facilitating cross-border education and research. The ASEAN International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Programme, coordinated by SEAMEO RIHED, which is SEAMEO's Regional Centre specialising in higher education and development, plays a crucial role in promoting higher education exchange by enabling students from ASEAN nations to study in participating institutions across the region. This programme fosters intercultural competence, academic collaboration, and skill development, strengthening ASEAN's higher education landscape.

The Roadmap on the ASEAN Higher Education Space 2025 also sets out ASEAN's vision for an integrated and competitive higher education system. This roadmap promotes harmonised educational standards, mutual recognition of qualifications, and the expansion of student and staff mobility programmes. By fostering stronger academic networks, it supports the region's broader economic and educational development goals.

The Master Plan on ASEAN Connectivity (MPAC) 2025 further enhances student and workforce mobility by reducing barriers to intra-regional movement, developing student databases, and expanding internship programmes across ASEAN countries. Complementing these efforts, the Working Group on Mobility and Quality Assurance of Higher Education among ASEAN Plus Three (China, Japan, and South Korea) focuses on strengthening quality assurance in student exchanges and institutional collaborations.

By advancing these initiatives, ASEAN continues to work towards a cohesive and globally competitive higher education system. These efforts contribute to a stronger knowledge-based economy while ensuring students have access to diverse learning opportunities across the region. Some countries in Asia have also implemented new strategies of digital education due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The Ministry of Higher Education, Science, Research and Innovation (MHE-SI) in Thailand has also focused on the development of blended learning strategies and the promotion of digital skills. In the same manner, the National Digital Transformation Programme of Vietnam is one of the most significant investments in the development of AI-powered adaptive learning platforms, thus increasing the accessibility of education for millions of students. In the region, more governments are developing policies to ensure digital access, especially in rural and hard-to-reach areas where connectivity is still a major barrier to learning.

Science and technology research and higher education ministries have greatly facilitated Asia's bid to become a knowledge economy. These include Japan's Science and Technology Agency (STA), Thailand's National Science and Technology Development Agency (NSTDA), Vietnam's Ministry of Science and Technology, and the Philippines' Department of Science and Technology (DOST). STA, NSTDA, MoST, and DOST support research through funding, scholarships, and collaboration with industry. These agencies are important in the development of Asia's research university and in the competition for global science, technology, and educational leadership.

In the next decade, Asia and its member states will have to continue to invest in higher education, cooperation, and digitalisation in order to ensure that educational institutions remain sustainable and accessible for all. By forming successful partnerships, developing appropriate policies, and offering learning opportunities for the entire life, the region has the potential to overcome its current issues and develop a strong and integrated education system.

3. Vocational Education and Training in Asia

At present, Asia is developing a comprehensive framework for the development of vocational education and training (VET) to link skills development with the needs of the changing world. Currently, many regional and national initiatives are enhancing TVET to support the digital transformation, achieve sustainable and inclusive economic growth, and enable workers to work in the green and knowledge-based economy of the future.

The ASEAN TVET Council (ATC) is playing the leading role in the development of cooperation in TVET in Southeast Asia. The ATC was established as a multi-sectoral framework to ensure the coordination of policies and strategies related to TVET among the ASEAN member states, improve the quality of TVET, align qualifications, and promote the mutual recognition of skills and certificates. This initiative increases the mobility of workers within the region, which means that workers are able to get jobs across member states' borders. The ATC works with industry and education institutions to ensure that the curriculum is in sync with the labour market so that graduates learn relevant skills.

Meanwhile, the regional cooperation among SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) member states in Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) marks a significant effort to shape vocational training in South Asia. The region has adopted various initiatives to enhance skills development, promote employability, and standardise qualifications across countries. The SAARC Framework for Action for Education 2030 emphasises the importance of vocational training, digital literacy, and youth employment as key priorities. Additionally, discussions on a SAARC Regional Qualifications Framework aim to create mutual recognition of skills and certifications to facilitate labour mobility within the region. National-level policies, such as Pakistan's National TVET Policy and Nepal's Council for Technical Education and Vocational Training (CTEVT), align with these regional efforts by improving technical education, competency-based training, and public-private partnerships. Approved in 2018, Pakistan's national TVET policy encourages the informal sector of the economy by providing people with opportunities to gain formal certification through the system called 'Recognition of Prior Learning' (RPL). It is interesting to note that the national TVET policy of Pakistan has been developed with the technical assistance of TVET Sector Support Programme, which is funded by the European Union and Governments of Germany and Norway.

The previous SHARE Programme (Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region) was a project that falls under this collaboration and was co-funded by the EU. The main objectives of SHARE were to enhance the ASEAN higher education systems by promoting regional mobility of students and academic staff, developing qualification frameworks, and ensuring that the higher education systems of member states of ASEAN are compatible. It did this by supporting credit transfer systems and university capacity-building workshops that guarantee that students get international exposure and institutions benefit from shared best practices.

Following the success of the SHARE Programme, the EU-ASEAN Sustainable Connectivity Package-Higher Education (SCOPE-HE) Programme was introduced to further deepen cooperation between the two regions. SCOPE-HE expands on the foundations laid by SHARE by incorporating a broader focus on gender equality, women's empowerment, digital skills, and green skills. This programme seeks to foster an ASEAN regional network of vocational education institutions and businesses, particularly in sectors linked to sustainability, digital transformation, and the green economy.

SCOPE-HE aims to enhance knowledge-sharing through capacity building, policy dialogues, technical assistance, and networking opportunities between ASEAN and European institutions. By integrating Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) into its framework, the programme ensures that young professionals and academic institutions in ASEAN can align their competencies with global industry standards, making them more competitive in regional and international job markets.

Research and innovation are also an important focus of the EU-Asia partnership, with Horizon Europe playing a leading role in boosting scientific cooperation. European and Asian researchers collaborate through co-funded research projects, knowledge exchange programmes, and public-private partnerships to address global challenges such as climate change, digital transformation, and health security. These initiatives help to generate and share new knowledge in technology and policy in order to enhance the knowledge-based economies of the two regions.

4.1. EU-Asia Knowledge Partnerships and Research Networks

The Asia-Europe Meeting (ASEM) Education Process serves as a key platform for cooperation between the EU and Asian countries in higher education, research, and training. ASEM facilitates dialogue on mobility, recognition of qualifications, and joint research, aligning

efforts with the European Higher Education Area (EHEA) and regional frameworks in Asia. ASEM ministerial meetings help shape policies on inclusive and digital education, promoting long-term collaboration between governments, universities, and research institutions.

In the field of vocational education and training (TVET), the EU has engaged in various bilateral and regional partnerships to modernise training systems and integrate digital and green skills into vocational education. The EU-ASEAN Sustainable Connectivity Package - Higher Education (SCOPE-HE) Programme is a prime example of such efforts. SCOPE-HE focuses on building an ASEAN regional network of TVET institutions, developing green and digital competencies, and strengthening industry-academia collaboration to bridge skills gaps.

Additionally, bilateral agreements play a vital role in advancing TVET. The Thai-German Dual Vocational Education Programme (DVT) is a strong example of a successful EU-Asia vocational training partnership, integrating elements of the German dual system into Thailand's educational framework. This initiative equips students with practical experience through internships with German and Thai companies, increasing employability and closing the education-industry gap. Similarly, the Philippines-Korea Technical Cooperation Programme supports skills development in mechatronics, construction, and automotive engineering by providing scholarships and state-of-the-art training facilities.

4.2. Bilateral and Regional Strategies in Education and Innovation

Beyond regional cooperation, bilateral agreements continue to shape EU-Asia collaboration in higher education and research. The EU-China Higher Education Platform for Cooperation and Exchange is the primary framework for higher education collaboration between the EU and China. It promotes student mobility, academic partnerships, and policy dialogue, ensuring that European and Chinese universities can collaborate effectively in areas such as joint research projects and qualification recognition.

For South Korea, the recent association with Horizon Europe marks a significant milestone in strengthening research cooperation. South Korea is now one of the few non-EU countries fully associated with Horizon Europe, allowing Korean researchers and institutions to participate in EU-funded projects on equal terms with European counterparts. Additionally, the EU-Korea Digital Partnership, launched in 2022, aims to enhance cooperation in artificial intelligence, quantum technology, cybersecurity, and semiconductor research, reinforcing joint research and education initiatives in emerging digital fields.

While these partnerships have made strides in fostering collaboration, challenges remain in harmonising qualification frameworks, sustaining mobility programmes, and expanding digital learning platforms. The EU and Asian countries continue to address these issues through policy dialogues, research cooperation, and knowledge-sharing initiatives.

As these collaborations grow, education, research, and training remain focal points in building a sustainable knowledge economy. Both regions are aligning their strategies to address skills development, qualification recognition, and digital transformation—ensuring that academic and vocational training systems can support the increasingly interconnected global economy.

5. Future of International Education and Training for the EU-Asia Partnership

Higher education and training in Asia are evolving rapidly due to economic development, technological change, and demographic shifts. Regional frameworks such as the ASEAN Higher Education Space and the Tokyo Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications for Higher Education facilitate academic integration and policy harmonisation. Other initiatives, such as the APEC Education Strategy and the South Asian University framework, support STEM education, sustainability skills, and digital innovation.

International cooperation remains essential in strengthening these efforts. Programmes like Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, and the EU-Asia Connectivity Strategy are instrumental in fostering academic mobility, research collaboration, and institutional capacity building. The SHARE Programme (Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region) has contributed to the development of regional qualification frameworks and policy dialogue, enhancing the quality and comparability of higher education systems. Looking forward, the partnership between the EU and Asia in the field of international education and training is a clear strategy of both parties to develop a global workforce of the future. Both regions are thus reading their students and researchers to meet the challenges of the future through shared qualifications, digital innovation, and academic collaboration. As Asia moves closer to the EU, these strategic measures will not only help to improve the academic and career opportunities of people but also to increase regional sustainability, economy, and mobility. The EU and Asia are building the future of a more integrated and sustainable world by supporting inclusive and equitable educational systems.