



Opportunities Ahead

SHARE Baseline Study of Internationalisation in ASEAN

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Executive Summary

Objectives

The study aims to provide insight on the role of Higher Education institutions – in particular to identify opportunities and challenges for closer cooperation in developing an ASEAN Higher Education Space.

Methodology

A literature review of ASEAN policy documents, reports, and scholarly publications was conducted. This formed the basis of discussions with several informed experts and former policy-makers to identify current strengths, opportunities and weaknesses of internationalization development in the ASEAN region.

A survey was distributed to 400 ASEAN HEIs to understand policy aims. In total 110 respondents from across the 10 countries involved completed the survey. Focus group interviews were conducted with 28 representatives from 25 HEIs to gain deeper understanding of the issues explored in the survey, and offer more insight regarding diversity. The following topics were covered in the interviews: 1) importance and relevance of internationalisation; 2) level of internationalisation of the institution and roles of different stakeholders; 3) role, relevance and scope of partnerships and collaboration; 4) student and staff mobility; 5) impact of COVID-19 and the response of the institution in terms of



internationalisation policies; 6) role and importance of ASEAN harmonisation (shared instruments for organising mobility and recognition of studies); 7) status and image of HEIs.

About the Study

This study, commissioned by the EU SHARE Programme, offers an overview of the state of internationalisation of Higher Education in the ASEAN region, which encompasses ten countries. The study focuses on the region as a common space characterised by harmonisation and regionalisation. The study focusses on the region as a common space which has indicated that it looks for harmonisation and regionalisation. It distinguishes three levels of policy-making and implementation of policies: the ASEAN level, the national level, and the Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) level.

Findings

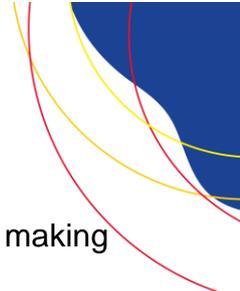
As a follow-up of the 2015 *Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Higher Education*, several declarations and work plans have been developed to set the framework for policymaking. In recent years, there have also been significant steps forward in the creation and implementation of key tools, which offer a basis for compatibility and comparability of procedures for stakeholders to work closely together within the region. These tools include the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework, the ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework, and a number of initiatives to develop a credit transfer system facilitating student mobility. These tools are intended to form the backbone for trust and confidence-building in the Higher Education sector. The literature shows that the ASEAN Secretariat, the EU SHARE Programme, and the newly established ASEAN Working Group on Higher Education Mobility (AWGHEM) are instrumental in progressing the internationalisation agenda of the new ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021 – 2025.

While the main focus within the internationalisation agenda is on student mobility, the key instruments developed promote the modernisation of Higher Education and curriculum reform. Recent policy documents in particular show awareness of current developments and challenges for the Higher Education sector in ASEAN and beyond, such as digitalisation, sustainable development, and human resources.

Although internationalisation is understood to be a broad concept, harmonisation and regionalisation are perceived as channels for enabling it. The importance of diversity and diversification is highlighted to allow for the cooperation of groups of countries within ASEAN. The experts stressed the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic, while that at the same time noting it has resulted in more and closer cooperation.

The survey outcomes highlight the perceived importance of internationalisation, with it being made explicit in the strategic plans of many universities. However, the penetration of internationalisation at the different levels within HEIs may be unbalanced, since often the international office is the main actor. Internationalisation activities have been implemented during the pandemic by applying virtual modalities. This has led to concerns around limited funding, and lack of instruments for recognition and curricula development based on a student-centred or learning outcomes-based approach.

While the survey revealed that harmonisation and regionalisation are believed to be important solutions, respondents expressed that international cooperation is not limited to the ASEAN region. University networks are perceived as a strategic instrument for



cooperation and harmonisation. Internationalisation can be further advanced by making more use of online courses and joint degrees.

Analysis of the findings on internationalisation policies in ASEAN indicated that a number of topics require more attention. Firstly, there needs to be more awareness that internationalisation is a multi-level and multi-faceted process in which the different levels should take responsibility. The role of ASEAN - and in particular national governments - should promote not only the importance of internationalisation of Higher Education for society, but also the key ASEAN documents defined and mentioned above to facilitate quality of performance, modernisation of Higher Education and curricula reform. Furthermore, policies could be developed to broaden the number of HEIs that are perceived as 'international'. Regarding the HEIs themselves, it is important to develop ownership of internationalisation at all levels.

In terms of strength and opportunities, it is suggested that by building on the notion of cultural diversity, a stronger ASEAN identity could be developed as a means for harmonisation. The growing outbound - and for some countries growing inbound - of foreign students is an obvious success, as well as intra-ASEAN mobility growing substantially over the period 2013-2019. Nevertheless, there is still significant scope for ASEAN to be made more attractive to foreign students by strengthening the image of the Higher Education sector. This requires deeper reflection and debate.

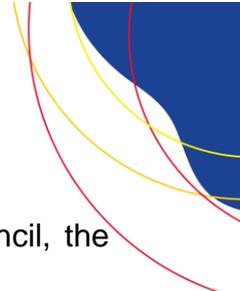
Conclusions

A number of different initiatives have contributed to the successes of ASEAN policymaking on internationalisation so far. The region is in a position to show more ambition by creating shared policies to: promote ASEAN as a brand and to showcase its attractiveness as a place to study; and promote internationalisation and modernisation instruments more effectively. There are also opportunities for ASEAN to: take the initiative to create a regional endowment fund for scholarships; further apply the well-functioning model of networks and partnerships; introduce a quality mark system to stimulate next steps on internationalisation; organise activities to stimulate intra-ASEAN mobility; and, finally, to overcome hurdles for studying in the region by making it more easy and attractive.

About SHARE Programme

The Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE) Programme is the European Union's flagship higher education programme with ASEAN. Since 2015, SHARE has worked alongside the ASEAN Secretariat and regional partners to strengthen regional cooperation, enhance the quality, regional competitiveness and internationalisation of ASEAN Higher Education institutions and students.

SHARE provides technical assistance to the ASEAN Secretariat and regional stakeholders in their implementation of the ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021-2025, which was adopted by the ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting (ASEM) on May 31st, 2021. As a key sector for the ASEAN region, Higher Education is incorporated in the Work Plan through 'Outcome 3: Enhanced regional capacity in higher education as part of lifelong learning provision, including the harmonisation of ASEAN higher education.'



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