

# 2025 ASEAN LEADERS' DECLARATION ON HIGHER EDUCATION: TOWARDS AN INCLUSIVE, SUSTAINABLE AND PROSPEROUS ASEAN

*Adopted in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia on 26 October 2025*

**We**, ASEAN Member States, consisting of Brunei Darussalam, the Kingdom of Cambodia, the Republic of Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, the Republic of the Union of Myanmar, the Republic of the Philippines, the Republic of Singapore, the Kingdom of Thailand, and the Socialist Republic of Viet Nam, on the occasion of the Forty Seventh (47th) Summit in Kuala Lumpur.

**RECALLING** the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Higher Education 2015 which outlines the direction of higher education in ASEAN between 2015 and 2025;

**ACKNOWLEDGING** the formation of the ASEAN Community in 2015 and the adoption of the ASEAN Vision 2025 to deepen the ASEAN integration process, through among others, the realisation of a rules-based, people-oriented, people-centred ASEAN Community, where ASEAN peoples may enjoy higher quality of life and the benefits of community building; enhanced capacity to respond effectively to challenges; and ASEAN as a region as an outward-looking region within a global community of nations, while maintaining ASEAN centrality;

**RECALLING** the ASEAN Socio-cultural Community Blueprint 2025, to enhance the competitiveness of ASEAN human resources through the promotion of life-long learning, pathways, equivalencies, and skills development as well as the use of information and communication technologies across age groups; promote an innovative ASEAN approach to higher education, incorporating academics, community service, regional placement, and entrepreneurship incubation and support; encourage regional cooperation in the areas of education, training and research, and strengthen ASEAN's role in regional and global research network by promoting initiatives and providing incentives and support for research and development, including research publications; promote the free flow of ideas, knowledge, expertise, and skills to inject dynamism within the region;

**ACKNOWLEDGING** initiatives to implement the ASEAN Socio-cultural Community Blueprint 2025 including the Declaration on Digital Transformation of Education Systems in ASEAN 2022, the Declaration on the ASEAN Comprehensive Recovery Plan 2020, the Joint Declaration on the Common Space in Southeast Asian Higher Education, the Roadmap of the ASEAN Declaration on Human Resources Development for the Changing World of Work 2020, and the ASEAN Digital Masterplan 2025;

**TAKING INTO CONSIDERATION** the global megatrends towards 2045 which predicts the changing geopolitical and geo-economic challenges, the development of frontier technologies, the changing demography in ASEAN and the world at large, which impact the higher education sector, and bring changes in societies, challenges in building shared peace, security, and prosperity across communities in ASEAN, and the need for transformation at regional and global levels;

**REAFFIRMING** the important role and contribution of higher education as one of the catalysts in achieving the ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and in supporting the implementation of the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC) Post-2025 Strategic Plan of ASEAN Community Vision 2045.

Hereby agree to:

**1. Vision and Leadership**

Recognise the role of higher education in realising the ASEAN Community Vision 2045, and the regional and national development agenda across the political security, economic and social-cultural pillars of ASEAN integration; towards building a community of resilient, innovative, dynamic, and people-centred ASEAN.

Strengthen the role of organisations that are active in the development of an ASEAN higher education community, including the ASEAN University Network (AUN), and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organization Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO-RIHED).

**2. Equitable and Inclusive Access to Higher Education**

Continue to create and implement policies and practices to ensure equitable access to quality higher education for all the peoples of ASEAN, including access to educational institutions, education technologies, financial assistance, and other non-monetary instruments to increase focus on people in vulnerable situations, and to reduce the gap between ASEAN Member States.

Advance gender-inclusive policies and leadership pathways in higher education by fostering cross-border collaboration, equitable access, and regional initiatives that empower women as key drivers of innovation and sustainable development within ASEAN.

**3. Learners Experience, Support and Success**

In the spirit of the principle of “access to success”, further develop values-based, purpose driven, humanity-centric, entrepreneurial, and adaptive learners equipped to address global sustainability challenges, thereby contributing to a more equitable world focused on People, Planet, and Prosperity; towards the development of a skilled workforce/competitive talent that aligns with the industry needs in the region.

**4. Talent Development**

Strengthen leadership and talent development in higher education institutions, through capacity building programs and cross-border mobility initiatives that enhance institutional resilience, academic excellence, and regional competitiveness, innovation, and advancement of frontier technologies.

**5. TVET as a Viable Education Pathway**

Strengthen TVET as a viable education pathway in synergy/harmony with academic pathways to meet industry requirements, enhance employability and significantly contribute to regional growth by closing the skills gap.

**6. Lifelong and Life-wide Learning Opportunities**

Further encourage the implementation, recognition, and validation of individuals' prior experiential learning via flexible education pathways to include formal, informal, and non-formal learning to provide broader access and progressive pathways to the people in vulnerable situations to ensure that their experiences and skills are formally acknowledged, thus promoting lifelong and life-wide learning for career advancement

and talent development.

## **7. Quality and Excellence in Higher Education**

Ensure the provision of quality higher education across all ASEAN Member States, by fostering purpose and value driven education, and research institutions within ASEAN to drive thought leadership in emerging fields and increasingly dynamic global challenges.

Encourage active participation and networking among higher education providers to foster innovation, collaboration, and continuous improvement in academic standards and institutional performance.

Encourage participation to promote community service in higher education in supporting holistic education and sustainable development.

Strengthen ASEAN-wide quality assurance mechanisms and cross-border recognition of qualifications via ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework Committee (AQRFC) and ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (AQAN), as appropriate, in accordance with the domestic context.

## **8. Research and Knowledge Creation**

Advance ASEAN as a Global Knowledge hub, by enhancing regional and global collaboration through joint research initiatives, student and scholar exchange programs, and cross border innovation ecosystems with regional and international partners; promote the application of knowledge-based solutions to foster inclusive and sustainable economic growth, with the aim of empowering local, national, and regional economies.

Build a knowledge driven ASEAN identity by fostering regional thought leadership, supporting ASEAN scholars in global research initiatives and establishing ASEAN-led international academic forums and policy platforms under the Common Space Initiative.

Promote awareness and encourage collaborative initiatives on protection, utilization and commercialization of Intellectual Property Rights within Higher Education Institutions across ASEAN, as part of collaborative dialogue and potential harmonisation in these areas.

## **9. Sustainability and Planetary Health**

Recognise the urgent need to advance sustainability and planetary health through higher education as a means to safeguard the well-being of present and future generations by committing to strengthening the role of Higher Learning Institutions (HLIs) as key drivers of knowledge, innovation, and action to address pressing environmental challenges and ensure the resilience of our region.

Embed Planetary Health and Sustainability in Higher Education by integrating planetary health principles into curricula, research, and institutional strategies to equip all stakeholders in the higher education ecosystem with the knowledge, skills, and values necessary to address challenges such as climate change, biodiversity loss, pollution, and environmental degradation.

Align Higher Education with the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by embedding sustainability across teaching, research, and community engagement, while remaining within planetary boundaries.

#### **10. Digital Transformation and Ecosystem**

Solidify digital transformation through advancement of digital infrastructure, emphasizing ethical practices and bridging digital divide in higher education ecosystem to enable ASEAN Member States to enhance connectivity, foster innovation, boost economic resilience, and ensure sustainable progress.

#### **11. Global Prominence**

Promote ASEAN higher education diplomacy and internationalisation within ASEAN and beyond through academic collaboration and cultural exchanges and strengthen people-to-people connectivity by intensifying mobility programs, ASEAN studies, and supporting language learning initiatives to foster intercultural understanding and elevate global prominence.

**WE** are committed on the above aspirations and this document serves as the guiding principles in promoting a people-oriented and people-centred ASEAN together with the elements contained in the Strategic Plan of ASEAN Community Vision 2045 and ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community (ASCC).

**WE** task the ASEAN Ministerial Meeting on Education (ASED) to implement this Declaration and report to us regularly through the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Council on the progress of the implementation.

**Adopted** in Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia, this Twenty Sixth Day of October in the Year Two Thousand and Twenty-Five in a single original copy in the English Language.