

The Future of Higher Education Student Mobility in Southeast Asia:

Possibilities for an Intra-ASEAN Scholarship Programme



one vision one identity one community

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The ASEAN Secretariat

Jakarta

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The Future of Higher Education Student Mobility in Southeast Asia: Possibilities for an Intra-ASEAN Scholarship Programme is a regional synthesis report developed under PHASE 1 of the Intra-ASEAN Scholarship Program for ASEAN Nationals, funded by the ASEAN Development Fund (ADF)

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Executive Summary

This report provides an overview of scholarship programmes that enable higher education students from Southeast Asia to study both within and beyond the region. It also explores key higher education stakeholders' perceptions of the benefits and challenges of these programmes, and offers their recommendations for the development of an intra-ASEAN scholarship programme (IASP) aimed at enhancing regional student mobility. The findings are based on 10 national reports produced by consultants from each of the 10 ASEAN Member States (AMS). The research involved data collection from 253 surveys and 145 interviews with various stakeholders, including government officials, university leaders, student mobility coordinators, and representatives from the private sector and non-governmental organisations.

The key findings reveal the strong receptiveness and support for an IASP due to the positive outcomes yielded from existing student mobility schemes such as enhancing collaboration and partnership among stakeholders, significant student transformation, promoting institutional internationalisation strategies, and strengthening regional ties for the regionalisation efforts and harmonisation of higher education space in ASEAN. At the same time, persistent challenges are recognised by informants, especially driven by differences in resources, readiness, and visions for what the IASP should achieve. These aspects highlight a collective action problem that necessitates various actions, such as clarifying the primary objectives for establishing the IASP, defining fair and transparent systems for contributions to and benefits from the programme, and aligning coordination and regulatory structures among Member States. These efforts are essential not only to enhance intra-regional student mobility but also to strengthen ASEAN's regional identity.

Stakeholders recommend a multifaceted approach that involves governments, higher education institutions, NGOs, private enterprises, and learners to address financial, administrative, and inclusivity challenges, ultimately fostering a more connected and educated ASEAN community. This regional report categorises the recommendations according to the dimension of the collective action problem they are poised to solve (i.e. regulatory inconsistencies, dimensions of IASP's theory of change, inequities in benefits, and disparities in resources and capacities), and provides actionable steps that can guide further discussions on how to move forward.

The report also presents an operational framework for the IASP, offering strategic models designed to address the challenges identified in the study while capitalising on the opportunities. These models are developed along two key dimensions: the structural dimension, which focuses on creating a shared vision and regulatory framework for the IASP, and the resource dimension, which addresses the financial costs of implementation. The report outlines four specific models aimed at mitigating resource disparities, resolving regulatory inconsistencies, and fostering consensus among AMS, thus maximising the collective potential of the region to shape a path forward for the IASP.

Ultimately, this report serves as a valuable resource in ongoing discussions about the future of the IASP. It is positioned to contribute to the advancement of key documents and initiatives aimed at promoting Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Belonging (DEIB), inclusive people-to-people connectivity in the region through student mobility scholarships while broadly strengthening the Common Space in Southeast Asian Higher Education for peaceful and sustainable living in an ASEAN Community and Southeast Asian region.

List of Abbreviations

AIMS	Asian International Mobility for Students Programme
AMS	ASEAN Member States
ASEAN	Association of Southeast Asian Nations
AUN	ASEAN University Network
AWGHEM	ASEAN Working Group on Higher Education Mobility
EU	European Union
IASP	Intra-ASEAN Scholarship Programme
HEI	Higher Education Institution
EHEA	European Higher Education Area
ERASMUS	European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students
NGO	Non-governmental Organisation
SDGs	Sustainable Development Goals
SEAMEO RIHED	Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation Regional Centre for Higher
	Education and Development
SOMED	ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education
UMAP	University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific



1

Introduction



Since the 1990s, and with increasing momentum in the 2000s, scholarship-supported mobility programs have been introduced in Southeast Asia to foster intra-regional cross-border studies. Although these programmes have made significant contributions, they predominantly focus on short-term exchanges and encounter challenges related to scope, quantity, sustainability, and inclusivity. Furthermore, their integration with the broader ASEAN Community building project remains underdeveloped (Chao, 2023). To enhance the impact of these programmes on intra-regional student mobility, a more coherent approach and a strategic focus on equity and access to scholarships are needed (Atherton et al., 2020). Addressing existing barriers, particularly for students from less privileged backgrounds, is also crucial to expanding the reach and benefits of these scholarships across the ASEAN region.

Recognising the importance of higher education and cross-border mobility in ASEAN's regional integration efforts, the 2021-2025 ASEAN Work Plan on Education prioritises "harmonisation through strategies, mechanisms, and scholarship provision." Additionally, the Roadmap on the ASEAN Higher Education Space 2025 (SHARE & ASEAN Secretariat, n.d.) sets the goal of "boosting intra-ASEAN student mobility by 2025," which includes the creation, ownership, and operationalisation of an ASEAN-branded scholarship. This initiative is overseen by the ASEAN Working Group on Higher Education Mobility 2025 (AWGHEM) and is endorsed by the ASEAN Senior Officials Meeting on Education (SOMED).

To advance the development of a coherent scholarship strategy in the region and contribute to the long-term goal of supporting ASEAN nationals in pursuing higher education within Southeast Asia, the intra-ASEAN Scholarship Programme (IASP) was launched, with plans to run in three phases from 2022 to 2030. Phase 1 of the IASP involves conducting research to (1) map existing scholarships in the region and (2) report on the perceived benefits, challenges, and needs across different ASEAN Member States and stakeholder groups regarding the future of an intra-ASEAN scholarship programme. This report presents the findings of this research.

The remainder of the introduction discusses efforts to establish a Common Higher Education Space in ASEAN and the role of student mobility programmes in promoting intra- and inter-regional cooperation in higher education globally. The subsequent section details the project's methodology, including the systematic review process and empirical data collection. The third section maps existing scholarships for ASEAN nationals to study both within and outside the region and presents the benefits and challenges of these programmes according to stakeholders. Following this, the report offers insights from respondents across the ten AMS on the future development and implementation of the IASP, addressing their interest, readiness, expected challenges, and suggested funding models. The report concludes with recommendations from stakeholder groups involved in the study, proposes models for the IASP, and outlines the next steps for the programme's advancement.

Southeast Asia, consisting of 11 nations, is among the most diverse regions in the world. This includes the 10 member countries of the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Timor-Leste, which, at the time of writing, is in the process of becoming a member state. The formation of ASEAN was built on a process of understanding and cooperation between countries in the region which all desired stability in regional politics, resolved regional conflict solutions, and achieved peace objectives, security guarantee, and economic development against the context of international superpowers' stratagem and competition during 1950s and 1960s (Keling et al., 2011). As of 2022, the ASEAN region had an estimated population of approximately 671.7 million people. The population is notably young, with 51% within the productive age range of 20 to 54 years, and one-third under 20 years old. The working-age population (20-59) accounts for 55.8% of the total, numbering about 373.7 million (ASEAN Statistical Brief, 2023). The region is home to over a thousand ethno-linguistic groups and various religious communities, including Christianity, Islam, and Buddhism.

In terms of economic output, AMS collectively generated about USD 3.7 trillion in 2022 and are classified into three economic tiers by the World Bank: high-income, upper middle-income, and lower-middle-income economies. Despite its diversity, ASEAN is progressing towards social and economic integration, aiming to become an inclusive, harmonious, and equitable community. One of the areas considered crucial in facilitating ASEAN integration is higher education. During its 2015 summit, the ASEAN acknowledged the critical role of higher education in accelerating the region's development agenda.

At the regional level, there are a number of organisations that are active in the development of a Common Space in Southeast Asian Higher Education, including the ASEAN University

Network (AUN), and the Southeast Asian Ministers of Education Organisation Regional Centre for Higher Education and Development (SEAMEO RIHED), although these organisations pursue slightly different aims. The SOMED supports global and regional commitments in education by promoting lifelong learning underpinned by the principles of equity, inclusion, and quality. Its specific priorities include advancing futureready education at basic and higher education levels and technical and vocational education and training; ensuring inclusive education; building the capacity of education personnel; and mobilising resources for education through partnerships with various key stakeholders. The AUN, a network of HEIs in ASEAN, aids in the development of a regional identity while creating a platform to allow the region's leading HEIs to collaborate. Meanwhile, SEAMEO RIHED fosters cooperation and provides policy platforms among governments and universities to enhance higher education for the sustainable future of the Southeast Asian region. With the highest body being the 11 Education Ministers, SEAMEO RIHED is mandated to assist AMS in fostering the efficiency and effectiveness of higher education through training and policy-oriented research. It also serves as the regional centre and clearinghouse for higher education information and documentation, and promotes collaboration and institutional linkages to assist in strengthening institution-building and development.

There is general consensus among AMS that an enhanced capacity and harmonised higher education system will contribute to a more prosperous region. The ASEAN Socio-cultural Community Blueprint 2025 provides for the promotion of "an innovative ASEAN approach to higher education" which will "promote greater people-to-people interaction and mobility within and outside ASEAN" leading to "the free flow of ideas, knowledge, expertise, and skills to inject dynamism within the region."

Regional integration and ASEAN community building have been building momentum in the ASEAN region since ASEAN membership expanded in the 1990s. The role of higher education in regional development became particularly evident in 2008 when SEAMEO RIHED explored the development of a Common Space in Southeast Asian Higher Education through the 43rd SEAMEO Council Conference (Chao, 2023). This year also marked a crucial turn with the launch of the 2007 Economic Community Blueprint, stipulating the free movement of skilled labour and services and thereby highlighting the need for increased mobility in the region, especially in higher education (Wang, 2022).

In 2015, higher education's role was further solidified with the consolidation of the ASEAN Community (Wang, 2022) by way of the Kuala Lumpur Declaration on Higher Education (Chao; 2022; Wang, 2022). In the regional documents that followed, the importance of cross-border mobility was highlighted (ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2011–2015), as well as the need to conceptualise a single-branded scholarship scheme in the region (ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2016–2020) and to harmonise ASEAN higher education alongside enhancing the region's capacity in higher education (ASEAN Work Plan on Education 2021–

2025). In some ways, these developments appear to be reminiscent of European regionalisation (Cheng, 2018) such as the establishment of the European Higher Education Area (EHEA), yet their disparate historical and sociocultural contexts lead to different trajectories and configurations (Chao, 2023).

Harmonisation appears beneficial for nations to achieve enhanced understanding and a greater sense of shared purpose and common destiny (Sirat, Azman, & Abu Bakar, 2014). Built on the "ASEAN Way" of consultation and consensus (Albert, 2019), the region continues to deepen intra-regional collaboration mechanisms in higher education such as aligning credit transfer systems, building a quality assurance framework for mutual recognition of qualifications, and facilitating intra-regional academic, staff, and labour mobility (Lim et al., 2022). As a further step, ASEAN Secretariat and SEAMEO RIHED have developed a Joint ASEAN-SEAMEO Declaration on the Common Space in Southeast Asian Higher Education, adopted at the 13th ASEAN Education Ministers Meeting on 25 August 2024 in Buriram, Thailand.



Intra-Regional Student Mobility Programmes Around the World

According to Sirat and colleagues (2014), scholarships play an integral part in the harmonisation of higher education in the ASEAN community, as does international student mobility (Atherton et al., 2020). Indeed, they have been shown to serve as key instruments for driving regionalization processes in many regions around the globe. For instance, Europe's flagship initiative is the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS, now rebranded to Erasmus+) programme, which is often touted as the 'gold standard' of mobility schemes worldwide (McDermott, 2017) and has served as a model for cooperative efforts in higher education in other regions (Atherton et al., 2020). It covers formal and non-formal education and both physical and virtual mobility. Funded by the European Union (EU), it draws on a central budget that covers a broad scope of activities, including intra-European mobility as well as international academic cooperation with partner countries both within and outside the EU. It is structured around key actions, including individual mobility (including students, staff, and young people from youth and sports organisations) and cooperation partnerships between institutions (such as European Universities and joint postgraduate programmes), among others (European Commission, n.d.a). Its overall strategic direction, budget, and evaluation is managed centrally by the European Commission. Meanwhile, programme implementation is decentralised to National Agencies in each participating country, with National Erasmus+ Offices serving as focal points and enhancing the relevance and impact of the programme, as well as its visibility (European Commission, n.d.b). Additionally, it operates under a standardised framework across all member states, with comprehensive support structures such as an online portal for applications and extensive guidance materials. The impact of Erasmus has been studied extensively, showing significant gains in students' intercultural competences, adaptability, communication skills,

employability, and a sense of European identity (European Union, 2019).

Similar initiatives have also been developed in other regions. For instance, the three-year CAMINOS project in Latin America (2016 to 2019) aimed to embed mobility in academic programmes to strengthen institutional cooperation and the Latin American Higher Education Space (DAAD, n.d.) as well as link existing mobility programmes at the country or university network level. In addition, it aims to promote and enhance their visibility for increased takeup. One of the project's main outputs is the creation of the CAMINOS Handbook, which identified shared best practices and outlines key guiding principles to assist partner universities in managing mobility programmes and fostering intra-regional mobility of students and staff in Latin America ("CAMINOS Aims and Objectives", n.d.). Meanwhile, the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme, which runs from 2022 to 2027, aims to foster academic mobility in the region by supporting African HEIs and providing scholarship opportunities for trainees, students, and staff in areas such as agriculture, engineering, information and communication technologies, environment, and climate change. It also focuses on inclusive mobility opportunities that tackles women's participation, as well as the promotion of entrepreneurship and employability especially in green jobs (European Commission, n.d.c). Both CAMINOS and the Intra-Africa Academic Mobility Scheme are supported by the EU. ENLACES is another initiative focused on Latin America and the Caribbean. Established by IESCALC-UNESCO, one of its key activities is the creation of a Map of Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, along with efforts to harmonise national and subregional systems on areas such as mobility policies, mutual recognition of qualifications, and credit transfer systems (Knight, 2012).

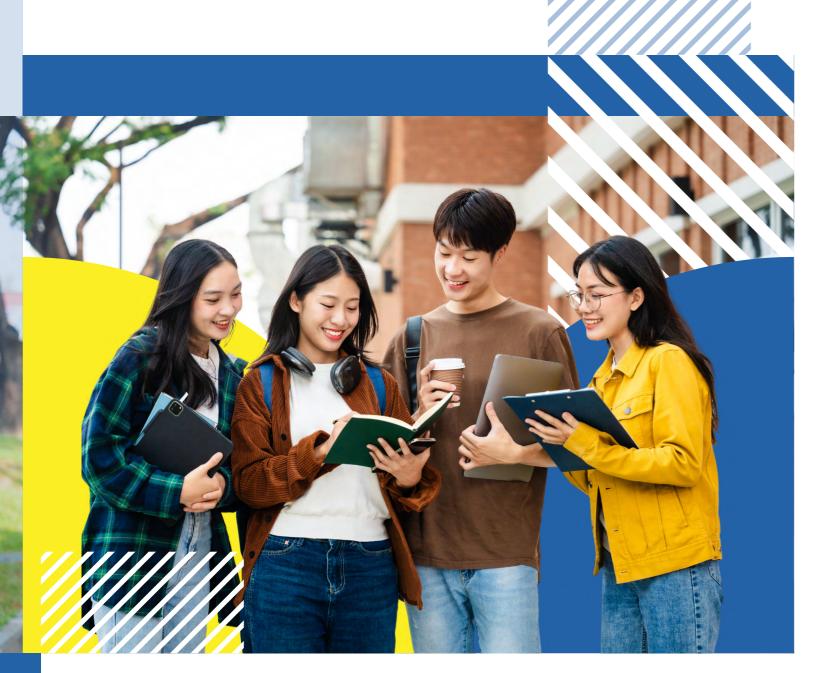
In Southeast Asia, intra-regional student mobility and scholarships have shown progressive efforts with the emergence and growth of various initiatives in the last two decades, such as the Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS) Programme and the AUN's student mobility initiative, the former being considered the flagship programme aligning with ASEAN's objective of people-to-people connectivity. This programme was launched in 2008 as a pilot and part of SEAMEO RIHED's efforts towards building a Common Space of Higher Education in the region. The first intraregional exchanges took place in 2010 as the M-I-T (Malaysia-Indonesia-Thailand) pilot project and guided by the vision of balanced mobility. AIMS is based on governments' participation in the selection of HEIs, with the number of inbound and outbound students being mutually agreed to determine a balance (McDermott, 2017). The AIMS Programme serves three objectives: to harmonise the regional higher education system, enhance the internationalisation processes of universities, and equip students with intercultural competencies and a sense of regional identity and citizenship.

Meanwhile, the AUN, established in 1995, aimed at fostering regional identity and strengthening existing networks of HEIs, mostly from leading institutions. The University Mobility in Asia and the Pacific (UMAP) was launched in 1995 with the goal of enhancing institutional cooperation as well as student and staff mobility in the region, largely through short-term and noncredit-bearing exchange (Chao, 2023). From 2015 to 2022, the EU-SHARE programme was also implemented and contributed to intra-ASEAN and ASEAN-EU mobility scholarships alongside key result areas such as qualifications frameworks, quality assurance, and credit transfer systems (McDermott, 2017). These mobility initiatives are expected to strengthen the sense of ASEAN identity among future ASEAN citizens, entrepreneurs and leaders of the ASEAN community, given its diversity of cultures, religions, languages, political ideologies and economic size (Chao, 2023). Furthermore, these programmes are seen to promote regional peopleto-people connectivity and enhance graduate employability (Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2022c).



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Methodology



This project commenced in October 2023 by a team of regional consultants (RC) who carried out a systematised review between October and December 2023 to develop the design of the survey and interview protocol. This process involved studying research articles, policy documents, and case reports. A rapid scope of the field was first conducted in the Scopus database with search terms related to ASEAN, Southeast Asia, scholarship, and student mobility. Grey literature databases were also searched, specifically the UNESCO database and Overton.io using the same search terms in Table 1. These approaches were complemented by reviewing reports based on the researchers' knowledge of the field and hand searching. As a result, three reports were deemed most relevant and useful in designing the survey instrument: two were related to perceptions or practices on scholarships (Institute of International Education, 2016; Association of Southeast Asian Nations, 2020) and one presented key information that was used to structure the data collection instruments (British Council & DAAD, 2014). An overview of the contents of each of these reports is outlined in Table 1.

Table 1. Overview of main reports used for the survey and interview design

Report	Objective	Use of survey
British Council & DAAD (2014)	"This project reviews national government-funded outward mobility scholarship schemes in 11 countries (Brazil, China, Egypt, India, Indonesia, Kazakhstan, Mexico, Pakistan, Russia, Saudi Arabia and Viet Nam) with the goal of better understanding why governments sponsor these programmes; how they are designed, administered, and funded; who participates and where they study; and what impact the programmes are having." (p. 4)	No
Institute of International Education's (2016)	"The overarching purpose of this paper is to assess the current state of global data on scholarships available at the tertiary level for individuals from developing countries. In addition to assessing the data, the analysis explores the feasibility of creating a baseline against which future progress towards Target 4.b can be monitored at the global level. A broad range of scholarship programmes sponsored by government institutions, non-profit organisations, and corporations were reviewed in order to inform the analysis, identify challenges, and propose solutions." (p. 2)	Yes (survey used available as appendix)
Association of Southeast Asian Nations (2020)	"This study focuses on three key areas which shape the level and nature of international student mobility in any region. In each area, it looks at the evidence regarding the present situation and where/how progress could be made The first subject to be examined is the data available on flows of international students within ASEAN and how it is collected The second subject which the study focuses on is the administration and provision of student visas across ASEAN The third and final subject examined is scholarship provision and specifically the case for a single student mobility scholarship in ASEAN." (p. 20).	Yes (survey used available as appendix)

¹ In this document, grey literature is understood as sources outside traditional commercial publishing, such as reports and white papers.

The data collection tools—comprising the survey instrument and interview protocol—were developed based on preliminary desk research. Surveys were selected for their ability to map the landscape of existing scholarships and to quantify the broad perceptions of stakeholders across ASEAN, providing a comprehensive overview. In contrast, semi-structured interviews were designed to delve into the qualitative dimensions, such as the rationale, challenges, and needs that could shape the future of an IASP. This approach offered depth and contextual richness. Together, these methods provided a robust framework for addressing the research objectives by combining $the \, strengths \, of \, both \, quantitative \, and \, qualitative \,$ data collection.

A pilot test of these tools was conducted, and they were refined based on the feedback received. The finalised tools were then implemented across all 10 AMS by locally based national consultants targeting stakeholders from government ministries, higher education institutions (public and private), private enterprises, and nongovernmental organisations (NGOs). The selection and distribution of respondents were managed at the discretion of the national consultants. Overall, 253 surveys were completed and 163 interviews conducted between February and April 2024.



Scholarship Programmes Available to ASEAN Nationals



This section presents the results of the mapping exercise on scholarships available to ASEAN nationals. It primarily focuses on government– and donor–funded programmes, identified through surveys, interviews, and desk research conducted across the 10 AMS. Although some scholarships funded by private enterprises and universities were identified, it proved challenging to produce an exhaustive list. Excluding them from the list also enables a more uniform and consistent dataset and avoids duplication, especially that some of these scholarships might be supported by the same government or donor funds that are already captured in the exercise. Nonetheless, what follows is the most comprehensive mapping of these scholarships to date.

The scholarships identified can be categorised in different ways. For instance, they may be examined from a **strategic dimension**, i.e., whether their objective is to attract students to come study at a location or send students outside the country. More specifically, they may also be grouped according to the **geographical dimension**, such as whether the student mobility happens within the ASEAN or outside the region. Lastly, the scholarships may be viewed from a **financial dimension**, such as whether they are funded by an ASEAN or non-ASEAN-based entity. For this report, the list of scholarships will be presented mainly from a geographical perspective, i.e., based on whether the mobility stay supported takes place within the ASEAN or outside the region, providing further discussions on the strategic and financial dimensions within the sub-sections.

3.1 Intra-Regional Student Mobility Programmes Around the World

Many of the scholarships target the ASEAN region as a study destination (e.g. AIMS, SHARE Programme). Some countries, such as Brunei, Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, and Singapore, have dedicated initiatives to encourage mobility into their respective countries. Meanwhile, several programmes are targeted at sending nationals from their countries to study elsewhere, including the ASEAN but not necessarily (e.g., Thailand International Postgraduate Programme, Domestic and Abroad Training and Capacity Building of Science and Technology Personnel in Viet Nam, LPDP scholarship of Indonesia, and Strengthening Higher Education Project in Lao PDR). Other initiatives have a clear focus on sending students to leading universities (e.g. His Majesty's Government Scholarship to Study Abroad in Brunei Darussalam, National Scholarship Programme in Malaysia), English-speaking countries (e.g.

SBPP in Brunei Darussalam), or destinations with whom they maintain diplomatic relations or strategic partnership (e.g. UTB ExperiencePLUS in Brunei Darussalam).

Most of the scholarship programmes are government-funded, covering full degrees at the undergraduate and postgraduate level, with a few from Indonesia covering non-degree programmes. Tuition, living allowance, health insurance, and return airfare are the most common costs supported for the programmes outlined. Meanwhile, a few offer additional forms of study support in the form of book allowance (ADB-Japan Scholarship Programme and the Thailand International Postgraduate Programme) and laptop allowance (ASEAN-Maybank Scholarship Programme) have been identified.

Table 2. Scholarship programmes for ASEAN Nationals to study in another ASEAN country

Programme Name	Funding/ Managing Organisation	Organisation Type	Eligible ASEAN Nationalities
ADB-Japan Scholarship Program	Asian Development Bank	Multilateral Organisation	Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam
ASEAN-Maybank Scholarship Programme	Maybank Foundation	NGO/ Foundation	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
ASEAN Master on Sustainability Management	ASEAN	Multilateral Organisation	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
ASEAN Undergraduate Scholarships	Autonomous Universities of Singapore	HEIs	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam
Asian International Mobility for Students (AIMS)	Member governments and universities SEAMEO RIHED	Government Multilateral Organisation	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Brunei Darussalam Government Scholarship for Foreign Students	Brunei government	Government	Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Dr. Goh Keng Swee Scholarship	The Association of Banks in Singapore	Private Enterprise	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam
Kemitraan Negara Berkembang (KNB) Scholarship	Indonesian government	Government	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Malaysia International Scholarship (MIS)	Malaysian government	Government	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam

Host/Destination Countries	Education Level Supported	Duration of Mobility Supported	Costs Supported
Hong Kong, India, Japan, Pakistan, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, United States of America	Masters	Full programme	tuition , living allowance, book allowance, health insurance, return airfare
Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam	Undergraduate	Full programme	visa fees, health insurance, tuition , establishment allowance, living allowance, laptop allowance, return airfare
Indonesia, Norway	Masters	Full programme	tuition, living allowance, return airfare
Singapore	Undergraduate	Full programme	Tuition, living allowance, return airfare
Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam	Undergraduate	One semester	health insurance, tuition , living allowance, return airfare
Brunei	Undergraduate Masters	Full programme	visa fees, tuition, language course fees, living allowance, return airfare
Singapore	Undergraduate	Full programme	tuition, establishment allowance, living allowance, return airfare
Indonesia	Undergraduate Masters Doctorate	Full programme	tuition, living allowance, return airfare
Malaysia	Masters Doctorate	Full programme	tuition, living allowance

Programme Name	Funding/ Managing Organisation	Organisation Type	Eligible ASEAN Nationalities
Malaysian Technical Cooperation Programme (MTCP) Scholarship	Malaysian government	Government	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
SEAMEO SEARCA Graduate Scholarships	SEAMEO SEARCA	Multilateral Organisation	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
SHARE Programme	European Union Support to Higher Education in ASEAN Region	Multilateral Organisation	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Thailand International Postgraduate Programme	Thai government	Government	Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Viet Nam
His Majesty's Government Scholarship to Study Abroad	Brunei government	Government	Brunei Darussalam
Education Loan Scheme Assistance (SBPP)	Brunei government	Government	Brunei Darussalam
Rif'ah Scholarship	Brunei government	Government	Brunei Darussalam
Higher Education Quality and Capacity Improvement Project (HEQCIP)	Cambodian government	Government	Cambodia
Lembaga Pengelola Dana Pendidikan (LPDP) Scholarship	Indonesian government	Government	Indonesia
Indonesian International Student Mobility Awards	Indonesian government	Government	Indonesia

Host/Destination Countries	Education Level Supported	Duration of Mobility Supported	Costs Supported
Malaysia	Masters	Full programme	tuition, living allowance, return airfare
Indonesia, Japan, Malaysia, Philippines, Taiwan, Thailand	Masters Doctorate	Full programme	health insurance, tuition, living allowance, return airfare
Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam	Undergraduate	One semester	tuition, living allowance, return airfare
Thailand	Masters	Full programme	visa fees, health insurance, tuition, living allowance, establishment allowance, book allowance, thesis allowance, return airfare
Malaysia, Singapore, United Kingdom, Ireland, Australia, China, United States of America, and Any Top 250 QSWU and THEWU Rankings	Undergraduate Masters Doctorate	Full programme	visa fees, tuition, living allowance, return airfare
Malaysia, Singapore, United Kingdom, United States of America, Canada, Egypt, Australia, New Zealand and Switzerland	Undergraduate	Full programme	visa fees, health insurance, tuition, living allowance, return airfare
Malaysia, Egypt, Jordan, United Kingdom and Ireland, and Australia	Undergraduate	Full programme	visa fees, health insurance, tuition, living allowance, book allowance, return airfare
Malaysia Australia	Masters Doctorate	Full programme	tuition, health insurance, establishment allowance, living allowance, return airfare
Worldwide	Masters Doctorate	Full programme	health insurance, tuition, living allowance
Worldwide	Undergraduate	One semester	tuition, living allowance

Programme Name	Funding/ Managing Organisation	Organisation Type	Eligible ASEAN Nationalities
Beasiswa Pendidikan Indonesia	Indonesian government	Government	Indonesia
Beasiswa Indonesia Maju	Indonesian government	Government	Indonesia
Beasiswa Indonesia Bangkit	Indonesian government	Government	Indonesia
Strengthening Higher Education Project in Lao PDR	Lao government	Government	Lao PDR
Cetana Scholarship Program for Study Abroad	Cetana Education Foundation	NGO/ Foundation	Myanmar
Commission on Higher Education Scholarships for Graduate Studies Abroad	Philippine government	Government	Philippines
Asia-Ready Exposure Programme (AEP) Grant	Singaporean government	Government	Singapore
Bank of Thailand Scholarship	Thai government	Government	Thailand
Domestic and Abroad Training and Capacity Building of Science and Technology Personnel	Vietnamese government	Government	Viet Nam

Host/Destination Countries	Education Level Supported	Duration of Mobility Supported	Costs Supported
Worldwide	Non-degree programme Undergraduate Masters Doctorate	Full programme	tuition, living allowance
Worldwide	Non-degree programme Undergraduate Masters	Full programme	visa fees, tuition, health insurance, living allowance, return airfare
Worldwide	Non-degree programme Undergraduate Masters Doctorate	Full programme	tuition, living allowance
Worldwide	Masters Doctorate	Full programme	health insurance, tuition, living allowance, return airfare
Malaysia, Philippines, Thailand, United States of America	Undergraduate Masters	Full programme	tuition, living allowance
Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam; Japan, Korea	Masters Doctorate	Full programme	tuition, living allowance
Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam, China, India	Non-degree programme	Up to three months	tuition, living allowance
Australia, Canada, China, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Netherlands, Republic of Korea, Singapore, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, United States of America	Undergraduate Masters Doctorate	Full programme	tuition, living allowance
Worldwide	Non-degree programme Post-doctorate	Three months to two years	tuition, living allowance

3.2. Scholarship programmes for ASEAN Nationals to study outside the ASEAN region

Most of the scholarships identified in this category are funded by non-ASEAN governmental entities to host ASEAN students. These scholarships are offered by countries such as Australia, Canada, Germany, India, the United Kingdom, the United States, Japan, Italy, Hungary, and Turkey, as well as the EU. The majority of these programmes provide full scholarships for postgraduate studies, while a few, such as Stipendium Hungaricum and the Türkiye Scholarships – ASEAN Joint Scholarship Programme, also support nondegree programmes. In terms of the types of costs supported, most offer waivers for visa and tuition, living allowance, book allowance, and return airfare.

Within ASEAN, Malaysia stands out for offering specific government-funded scholarships. Notable examples include the National Scholarship Programme (PPN) and the Special Programme to Japan, South Korea, France, and Germany (JKPJ). The PPN enables Malaysian nationals to pursue studies at top universities in countries like Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States, while the JKPJ focuses on opportunities in Japan, South Korea, France, and Germany.



Table 3. Scholarship programmes for ASEAN Nationals to study outside the ASEAN region

Programme Name	Funding/ Managing Organisation	Organisation Type	Eligible ASEAN Nationalities
ASEAN-China Young Leaders' Scholarship for Postgraduates Program (ACYLS-Graduate Program)	ASEAN	Multilateral Organisation	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
ASEAN Scholarship to Study in Nalanda University	ASEAN	Multilateral Organisation	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Australian Awards	Australian government	Government	Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Myanmar, Philippines, Viet Nam
Australian Awards for ASEAN	Australian government	Government	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Canada-ASEAN Scholarships and Educational Exchanges for Development (SEED) Project	Canadian government	Government	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Chevening Awards	British government	Government	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
DAAD Scholarships	German government	Government	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Doctoral Fellowship in India for ASEAN	Indian government	Government	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters Programme	European Commission	Government	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam

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Host/Destination Countries	Education Level Supported	Duration of Mobility Supported	Costs Supported
China	Masters Doctorate	Full programme, four to five month research fellowship	tuition, establishment allowance, living allowance, health insurance, return airfare
India	Masters Doctorate	Full programme	tuition, living allowance, return airfare
Australia	Masters	Full programme	visa fees, tuition, establishment allowance, living allowance, book allowance, research allowance, return airfare
Australia	Masters	Full programme	visa fees, tuition, establishment allowance, living allowance, book allowance, research allowance, return airfare
Canada	Undergraduate Masters	One to two semesters One semester	visa fees, tuition, living allowance, book allowance, return airfare
United Kingdom	Masters	Full programme	varies per AMS but typically covers visa fees, tuition, establishment allowance, living allowance, return airfare
Germany	Masters Doctorate	Full programme	tuition, establishment allowance, living allowance, research allowance, return airfare
India	Doctorate	Full programme	tuition, living allowance, book allowance, return airfare
European higher education institutions and their partners	Masters	Full programme	visa fees, tuition, living allowance, return airfare

Programme Name	Funding/ Managing Organisation	Organisation Type	Eligible ASEAN Nationalities
Fulbright Graduate Scholarship Program	American government	Government	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Fulbright US- ASEAN Visiting Scholars	American government	Government	Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Thailand, Viet Nam
Higher Education for ASEAN Talents (HEAT)	ASEAN	Multilateral Organisation	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Italian Government Scholarships	Italian government	Government	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Japan Government (Monbukagakusho) Scholarship	Japanese government	Government	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Stipendium Hungaricum	Hungarian government	Government	Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
Turkiye Scholarships - ASEAN Joint Scholarship Program	Turkish government	Government	Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam
National Sponsorship Programme (PPN)	Malaysian government	Government	Malaysia
Special Programme to Japan, South Korea, France, and Germany (JKPJ)	Malaysian government	Government	Malaysia

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Host/Destination Countries	Education Level Supported	Duration of Mobility Supported	Costs Supported
United States of America	Masters Doctorate	Full programme	varies per AMS but typically covers visa fees, tuition, establishment allowance, living allowance, return airfare
United States of America	Doctorate	Three to four months research fellowship	visa fees, tuition, living allowance, return airfare
Republic of Korea	Doctorate	Full programme	tuition, establishment allowance, living allowance, return airfare
Italy	Masters Doctorate	Full programme	tuition, living allowance, health insurance
Japan	Undergraduate Masters PhD	Full programme	tuition, living allowance, return airfare
Hungary	Non-degree programme Masters Doctorate	Full programme	tuition, living allowance, accommodation allowance, health insurance
Turkiye	Non-degree programme Masters Doctorate	Full programme, 3-12 months research fellowship	tuition, living allowance, language course fees, accommodation, health insurance, return airfare
Top universities in Australia, the United Kingdom, and the United States of America	Undergraduate	Full programme	tuition, living allowance
Top universities in Japan, South Korea, France, and Germany	Undergraduate	Full programme	tuition, living allowance

3.3. Perceived benefits of existing scholarships

Participants across 10 AMS have cited a range of benefits of scholarship programmes for both individuals and institutions.

At the individual level, current scholarship programmes in the region provide students with opportunities to study abroad, enriching their educational experiences and enhancing their employability. These students develop valuable skills, including language proficiency, intercultural understanding, and networking abilities, which give them a competitive edge in both local and international job markets. The following are examples from informants from Brunei Darussalam and Lao PDR:

The Discovery Year has resulted in a transformative journey for students. They become more mature and gain confidence when they are studying abroad, becoming independent thinkers with better critical thinking and decision-making skills. (respondent working in a public university in Brunei Darussalam)

Participating in a mobility programme, students acquire knowledge and improve their language proficiency, which significantly enhances their job opportunities. Many exchange students from our university now hold excellent positions, particularly those working for foreign companies. (Deputy director of planning and international cooperation of a public university in Lao PDR)

The head of dual degree department of a public university in Cambodia offered a similar observation:

When students are back from the exchange programme, they seem to be more curious and get better in their academic performance during the rest of their studies here in Cambodia. I also observed that students are

more adaptive to foreign cultures, which is good for Cambodians as they are normally kind of traditional by staying with their parents. (Head of dual degree department of a public university in Cambodia)

Additionally, mobile students gain diverse perspectives, cross-cultural insights, and industry knowledge, especially in programmes that include internships or apprenticeships. This exposure broadens their career horizons and deepens their understanding of the region. Incoming students, on the other hand, contribute fresh ideas and experiences to their host universities, helping local students develop communication, and intercultural and networking skills.

At the institutional level, scholarship programmes are strategically important for HEIs to achieve internationalisation goals. They enhance the global presence of institutions, foster international partnerships within and beyond the region, and support the harmonisation of higher education across the region. A specialist of the department of science and international cooperation in a public university in Viet Nam shared their opinion:

After getting involved in international projects, I've realised something interesting about Viet Nam's preferences. We often fancy working with places like England, Australia, or the US, but you know what? Turns out, teaming up with our neighbours in ASEAN is way cooler. It's just easier to vibe with them, their style matches ours, and it's way more fun! ...Sometimes when students interact with Westerners, there might be some cultural differences, so it's a bit of a mismatch. But when they meet their ASEAN pals, they tend to blend in more easily. (A specialist of the department of science and international cooperation in a public university in Viet Nam)

A respondent working for the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brunei Darussalam also confirmed how the scholarship "contributes to enhancing bilateral cooperation between Brunei Darussalam and other countries" and "aligns with the nation's commitment to implement the ASEAN Socio-Cultural Community Blueprint 2025 and the SDGs." The head of public relations unit in a Cambodian public institution explained further about the benefit of participating in mobility scholarship schemes:

... [when we are participating in this kind of exchange programme] generally outside [universities in other countries] may not recognise the quality of education in [our country] but that should be the case for our institution, as we are among the best. After a few waves of exchange students, among the AUN/SEED-Net partners, they did not question our students' capacity; they accepted our students as many as we sent. (Head of public relations unit in a Cambodia university)

The Pro-Rector of a public university in Myanmar made another comment regarding enhanced institutional capacity in supporting mobile students:

Our university administrative staff have become aware and have built up their experience in helping students with universities' applications. We also became familiar and built up a track record of understanding the credit transfer system between our university and the host university of ASEAN. (Pro-Rector of a public university in Myanmar)

Hosting international students prompts institutions to improve academic teaching quality, develop courses in English, and encourage faculty to adopt new teaching methods tailored to the needs of international students. For example, a coordinator in a public university in Myanmar remarked that

Having inbound students increases our academic's teaching quality while developing their curiosity to explore new teaching methods on teaching international students; it also boasts their English Proficiency Skills as they are required to use English as medium of instruction. (a coordinator in a public university)

Participation in coordinated mobility programmes also elevates a university's international visibility. For example, a Lao university's involvement in the EU-SHARE Project, particularly in Collaborative Online International Learning (COIL) schemes, has facilitated academic collaboration with ASEAN universities and potential partnerships with institutions outside the region. Such collaborations have led to significant research outputs, improved administrative management, enhanced student services, and strengthened credit transfer systems within ASEAN.



3.4. Perceived challenges of existing scholarships

Despite numerous benefits of regional mobility scholarships, several significant challenges persist. Among the most frequently cited issues are language barriers and difficulties in the credit transfer process and meeting quality assurance criteria among higher education systems and institutions in AMS. English proficiency levels vary widely across the region, which can create barriers for students. For instance, a respondent from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brunei Darussalam noted that a lack of fluency in English hindered applicants from some AMS, preventing them from satisfying the entry requirements to enrol in HEIs in Brunei Darussalam. Language barrier is also a prominent issue for students from rural areas who often struggle with academic English. The language barriers not only reduce the pool of eligible applicants but also complicate the application process and impede the overall learning experience for students during their time abroad. The director of a vocational and assistive technology centre for the blind in Viet Nam voiced their opinion:

Additionally, language proficiency is a significant barrier. For example, in short-term courses, students' English proficiency may still be limited. Therefore, the number of places available is restricted, even though there are many talented students with limited language skills. (The director of a vocational and assistive technology centre for the blind in Viet Nam)

Furthermore, the absence of a cohesive regional credit transfer mechanism continues to pose a critical obstacle to student mobility. Respondents in Myanmar admitted that most Myanmar universities have not yet fully developed a credit transfer system, except for those who have experience under EU SHARE. Apart from that, many students who have participated in mobility programmes report the need to extend their studies upon returning home, leading to delayed graduation, which has been identified

as an issue for Indonesian or Burmese students. According to Myanmar informants, universities in this country have a semester break that is not compatible with most ASEAN universities. This means returning students will have to wait until the running semester finishes before resuming their studies.

Student preferences also play a crucial role in the operation of scholarship schemes within the region. Majority of students in the region have been more inclined to pursue education in more developed countries like Singapore, Japan, or South Korea, or in traditional Western destinations like the United States, United Kingdom or Australia, which may reduce the attractiveness of other AMS. For example, informants working in HEIs in Cambodia have expressed concerns that, despite their readiness to accommodate students, the number of inbound students may remain low.

Finally, financial constraints present another significant challenge. An interviewee from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs in Brunei Darussalam admitted that it was a challenge to "ensure availability of resources and capacity to better manage the scholarship" especially when they had to process international applications "in the thousands." The deputy head of student mobility office in a public university in Singapore echoed this viewpoint, stating that "we do not have a lot of budget to give to every single student." Due to limited funding, some scholarships do not cover pre-departure costs such as visa fees and travel expenses, which can still be prohibitive to students. This issue has been noted in interviews with respondents from Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, and Viet Nam. For instance, an Asian regional scholarship officer in Viet Nam commented:

Many [of our] students come from impoverished backgrounds... Even if they're really talented, some of them manage to get scholarships. But with those scholarships, they won't use the money to enrol in a [partly] free programme for exchange. Instead, they'll use it to cover other living expenses because that's their top priority

– having food to eat, a place to stay, you know.
(Asian regional scholarship officer in Viet Nam)

Financial barriers also hinder institutions in AMS from participating in regional mobility programmes because they often lack funding resources and necessary infrastructure, such as student accommodations, internet connectivity, technological platforms, and learning facilities, to adequately support incoming international students. For instance, a scholarship coordinator of a private university and another interviewee working in the office of the registrar of another

private HEI in the Philippines both expressed their concern over "financial incapability of [their] institution" to send students overseas. At the same time, interviews with Cambodian informants revealed that most international relations offices in Cambodian HEIs required additional resources, from staffing to infrastructure, to manage incoming student affairs effectively. In addition, lack of dormitories resulted in increasing reliance on private properties for student housing, raising parental concerns about security if students choose to study in Cambodia.

3.5. Participation of disadvantaged groups

While most scholarship programmes are open to all individuals, there are some that give priorities to specific groups to promote inclusivity and equal access to less privileged students. For example, in Lao PDR, scholarships often give preferential consideration to female students and those from disadvantaged backgrounds, including rural areas, ethnic minorities, and low-income families. In its annual report in 2023, the Indonesian Endowment Fund Agency also indicates its efforts to broaden participation from minority and disadvantaged groups by becoming "more massive, more inclusive." In Brunei Darussalam, the Rif'ah scholarship scheme targets low-income and underprivileged students, providing them with opportunities to pursue higher education locally or overseas. Similarly, the Diversity and Inclusion Scholarship Programme focuses on empowering leaders from vulnerable groups in Myanmar.

However, language barriers and timely access to scholarship information remain significant obstacles for these less privileged groups. Students from rural areas in countries like Myanmar and Cambodia often have limited exposure to foreign languages, hindering their participation in scholarship programmes. Meanwhile, the entry criteria of scholarship programmes often mean

that students who are already academically strong and active in extracurricular activities are more favourable. Another obstacle to achieve diversity and equity in current scholarship programmes in the region is systemic barriers such as disparities in academic qualifications, limited slots for eligible applicants, and inadequate marketing of scholarship programmes that inhibit access for disadvantaged students.

Nonetheless, efforts have been made to address these challenges including improving access to scholarship information, providing financial support, and enhancing language proficiency through targeted programmes. The IASP is expected to further contribute and reinforce these efforts to promote diversity, inclusivity and equity in higher education in the region.



Stakeholder Perceptions on the Establishment of an IASP



This section, drawing on data from surveys and semi-structured interviews, examines stakeholder responses to the proposed IASP. It provides an in-depth analysis of their interest, readiness, perceived benefits, and challenges that must be addressed for successful implementation. The section is structured to present a comprehensive understanding of stakeholder perspectives, emphasising both the positive reception of the programme and the key issues that need to be managed to ensure its effectiveness. Through this detailed examination of the opportunities and challenges associated with the IASP, the section lays the groundwork for the recommendations that follow.

4.1. Interest and Readiness

The proposal to establish the IASP received a highly positive response. Survey data indicates strong overall interest among stakeholders, with 82% of respondents expressing interest, 18% reporting ambivalence, and none expressing disinterest. The absence of disinterest is particularly significant, highlighting broad support and general openness to the programme across ASEAN Member States.

While the interest in IASP was evident, survey responses and interviews indicated a mixed level of institutional readiness. Only over 30.9% of the respondents working in higher education institutions affirmed that their institutions were fully equipped administratively for the IASP, 51.7% indicated that their institutions were only partially equipped, and 17.4% acknowledged the need for further institutional preparedness. This

is reflected in the disparities in the capacity of the higher education system in AMS. For instance, in Thailand, there are institutions that have extensive experience in managing scholarship programmes. Meanwhile, representatives from HEIs in Myanmar and Cambodia anticipated an improvement in their infrastructure in the near future to participate in IASP. Currently, a representative from the Department of Scholarship Management in the Ministry of Education in Myanmar admitted that the country would need to dedicate a facility to facilitate the selection process for its overseas scholarships. This discrepancy among HEIs in AMS highlights the necessity for continued investment in infrastructure and administrative capacity to ensure effective programme management for IASP.

4.2. Benefits

Stakeholders identified the primary benefit of the IASP as its potential to strengthen regional connections and networks, with 91% of the survey respondents highlighting this advantage. As an interviewee from Institute of International Education in Thailand stated, IASP "can build a collective knowledge base and tackle regional challenges within the ASEAN region."

The second most cited benefit of the IASP, recognised by 89% of respondents, was its potential to enrich student experiences and gain essential skills for their future careers, which will contribute to the growing labour force of the region as commented by the coordinator of outbound mobility in a Lao public university. According to the vice-chancellor for international affairs of a university in the Philippines, "students will be given opportunities for internships, research projects, community service, enabling students to gain valuable practical experience and develop essential skills for their future careers." This viewpoint was shared by other interviewees in Indonesia, including the co-head of research and advocacy of Indonesia Youth Diplomacy who commented that programmes like IASP would create a "pool of human resources from across ASEAN" that contributed to "a robust, integrated ASEAN economy and market, ultimately benefits corporations in the region." A respondent working in Nuffic Southeast Asia based in Indonesia shared a similar vision of "the creation of a more common ASEAN labour market, with students better connected to it" once IASP officially operated.

The third benefit, acknowledged by 78% of respondents, is the alignment of the IASP with institutional goals and international cooperation strategies. This alignment is expected to enhance institutional reputation and visibility in the region. As the international affairs director of a public university in the Philippines pointed out, the IASP could "establish connections with prominent regional institutions, paving the way for future collaborations and enhancing our global standing." Additionally, stakeholders see the IASP

as an opportunity for institutional improvement through capacity-building programs for both academic and professional staff and increased engagement in staff mobility initiatives. A Prorector of a public university in Myanmar explained this point further:

Admin staff also become aware and attain experience in helping students with the scholarship application, becoming familiar with online application systems. They also become familiar with the credit system/ credit transfer system in general. Effectiveness of credit hour. Benefits the scholarship brings can be at Individual, faculty, uni as well as at the country level. We feel like we are taking an active role in and becoming part of the international community. (Pro-rector of a public university in Myanmar)

As pointed out by interviewees from Malaysia, IASP could also be a good opportunity for institutions to highlight their distinctive niche areas, which are preferably mapped with global challenges outlined under the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and widen access for mobility programmes to disadvantaged student groups. Resonating with this vision, an interviewee working in a private university in Brunei expressed interest by stating that participation in IASP could contribute to the institution's mission to establish Brunei Darussalam as an international hub for higher education.

The stakeholders also emphasised the need for more extensive cultural exchange and integration and talent development within Southeast Asia, echoing sentiments for a more inclusive and diverse approach to education and community building in ASEAN. The international linkages and heritage director from the Philippines, for instance, commented that IASP could be a platform for its participants to develop cultural understanding, establish networking and collaboration and exchange of ideas. Similarly, a deputy director of planning and international cooperation in a public university in Lao PDR said that programmes like IASP would "particularly

empower students to unlock their potential and broaden their horizons," and the head of international affairs in a university in Indonesia anticipated IASP would "diversify the student body, enrich the academic experience, and foster a sense of regional citizenship among students."

4.3. Challenges and Needs

Despite the overall supportive attitude, respondents expressed their reservations regarding the IASP's principles and structure since the programme was still in the development process. Stakeholders, however, identified a number of challenges that needed to be addressed for the success of IASP operation. Funding sources and sustainability emerged as the most prevalent concern among the respondents, with over 90% agreeing it was crucial. From the institution perspective, it was not possible for them to provide funding for student mobility as it was very costly. Interviews revealed that institutions heavily relied on financial support from external partners for mobility initiatives. Therefore, having a sustainable source of funding is a necessary condition for HEIs to participate in IASP. The finance factor also emerged as a critical determinant of student participation in the IASP. As explained by an interviewee from Lao PDR who was the head of international cooperation of a university:

The availability of full scholarships is crucial for encouraging greater student participation in the IASP. Without such financial support, many students may find it challenging to afford the programme, especially considering that the majority of our students come from average-income families in the provinces. (Head of international cooperation of a Lao university)

Stakeholders further highlighted the challenges of regulatory and accreditation in credit-bearing mobility programmes due to differences in academic calendar year (e.g., number of semesters, starting time of the term), number of credits of modules and programmes, as well as quality assurance and degree recognition. In AMS where English is a foreign language and students have more difficulties in meeting the entry language requirement for mobility programmes, language barriers were cited as an additional obstacle. Nonetheless, respondents did not regard cultural integration as a challenge. Instead, it was a motivator for HEIs and students to take part in regional mobility. For example, one interviewee from Viet Nam said that there was a higher degree of cultural similarities and harmonisation between Vietnamese and ASEAN friends compared to those outside the region.

Another challenge in actualising IASP is student preference. As pinpointed by stakeholders in many AMS, ASEAN students have a strong preference for education experience outside the region. A senior leader from a Singaporean university admitted that most Singaporean students would prefer short-term overseas exchanges within the region rather than full degree programmes, as Singapore universities tended to enjoy stronger global reputations. Some lesser-known AMS destinations might find it more difficult to attract inbound students. An interviewee from Brunei Darussalam had a concern that students in the region would tend to choose Malaysia and Singapore for their mobility.

Recognising these challenges, the respondents identified needs for support in key areas including financial support (92.6%), networking opportunities for ASEAN HEIs to exchange experience and learning (90.6%), administrative training for participating HEIs to best accommodate incoming students (62.4%), and marketing IASP to increase the programme's visibility among students and other stakeholders (61%). Apart from funding which was the most cited by the respondents, networking opportunities were selected as the second most urgent need. From the point of view of an acting director of international cooperation in a public university in Lao PDR:

Expanding our international connections and networks plays a significant role in promoting successful international cooperation, including student mobility. As we have observed, having wider networks creates valuable opportunities for our faculty members to participate in international activities such as conferences and symposia. These experiences not only enrich their professional lives but also increase their interest in international collaboration, including being involved in this programme [IASP]. (Acting director of international cooperation in a Lao public university)

The need for support of administrative training received mixed response from stakeholders in different AMS due to the differences in resources, infrastructure and experience of scholarship management. However, many respondents still emphasised the importance of administrative skills training to manage IASP efficiently, given the wide scope and complexities of the programme. The Vice Dean of Education Research in a university in Indonesia explained in the interview:

I think the guidance is very important because sometimes we are offered this kind of a programme, but the guidance is not very clear. What kind of students, the form that you need to fill in to select the students... I think those kinds of administrative things would be very helpful. And of course sometimes we also receive some questions from the students. So a help desk will be very helpful. (Vice Dean of Education Research in a university in Indonesia)

In order to promote IASP among students and other stakeholders, many respondents put an emphasis on marketing and promoting IASP branding, as well as highlighting the programme's distinction. According to an interviewee in Singapore who works as Director of overseas liaison of a Singaporean public university, it was necessary to build a "pipeline of interest." Another respondent from a private university Brunei believed that stronger marketing efforts

would help to "raise the profile and reputations of HEIs in Brunei Darussalam so they can also become 'attractive' places for students".

4.4. Funding

Some 92% of the respondents identified national governments of AMS as the primary funders of the IASP. The respondents explained that national governments play a central role in shaping educational policies and have greater financial resources for long-term commitments and stable funding. They also highlighted potential contributions from multilateral organisations, NGOs, and private companies, emphasising a collaborative funding approach. HEIs could further contribute financially by waiving tuition fees and providing free accommodation for incoming students. As yet, there are calls for the leadership of the ASEAN Secretariat in IASP implementation. For instance, an interviewee from Cambodia voiced their opinion:

To improve the ownership and sustainability of the fund, the ASEAN Secretariat should play a more important role in coordinating and managing intra-ASEAN scholarship policies and plans, mobilising funds from potential sources (governments and the private sector), cooperating with partners, and ensuring accountability for fund managers' reporting and monitoring. (interviewee from Cambodia)

The roles of HEIs in implementing IASP was well acknowledged by respondents. As stressed by Malaysian interviewees, international offices at the institutions could work with faculties in mobilising students and providing advice for students and partners on matters arising related to credit transfer and quality assurance.

Regarding the funding model, collaborative funding and external sponsorship were the more preferred models selected by over 41.6% and 50.3% of the respondents respectively, as respondents might have perceived them as

options for the sustainability of IASP. Some respondents from Singapore suggested a public-private partnership (PPP) model, combining public, private, and institutional resources to support IASP. Corporate donors and the private sector, particularly successful companies in the ASEAN region, were viewed as ideal sources of sponsorship.

There's no shortage of corporate donors who can be persuaded and encouraged to contribute to the scholarships [...] Don't you want to have your next generation management trainees, your next generation CEOs be equally comfortable in Singapore, Thailand, Viet Nam, Malaysia and so on, right?

This vision was also shared by a respondent from Lao PDR who works in a government agency:

Firstly, the private sector possesses substantial financial resources. Secondly, by investing in the programme, they contribute to shaping the future workforce, as they will likely employ these graduates after their graduation. (an interviewee working in a government agency in Lao PDR)

From the perspective of the private sector, a respondent working as a finance team leader in Lao PDR demonstrated their willingness to collaborate in funding IASP in the interview:

Our company can contribute to this IASP. Still, we need more discussion on terms of contributions. In particular, we want to focus on students from the areas where our company has ongoing projects. (Finance team leader in Lao PDR)

4.5. Establishing the IASP: A Collective Action Problem

Despite widespread support for the IASP, the survey and interview data underscores a collective action problem (Olson, 1965), whereby a lack of coordinated efforts and mismatches in collective versus individual interests and capacities act as barriers in the path towards a common good. This issue, which has implications in the future of the IASP and regional community building, appears to be driven by a number of factors. For instance, **regulatory inconsistencies** could complicate the implementation of IASP, where countries may be reluctant to align their systems if it requires significant changes to their educational policies (e.g. synchronising of academic calendars or changing entry requirement of language proficiency), leading to a fragmented approach that undermines the programme's cohesiveness. Additionally, disparities in resources and readiness in implementing the IASP among AMS and HEIs can exacerbate the problem, whereby those with less developed educational infrastructures or trajectories in student mobility participation such as Lao PDR, Myanmar or Cambodia may face difficulties in implementing the IASP effectively, such as aligning with regional standards or providing adequate support to participating students. This can lead to inconsistent experiences across the region and undermine the programme's cohesion and reputation.

Another important consideration is **possible perceived inequities in benefits**, especially when certain countries or HEIs lack the visibility, attractiveness, or the resources to fully reap the benefits of such a programme. This could result in reduced motivation and a lack of collective action, where some members may opt out or contribute less, weakening the overall impact of the scholarship scheme. Additionally, the need for a coordinated effort to manage and govern the scholarship scheme could be hindered by **differing national and institutional interests and priorities**. One way this issue may manifest is in

the concern around rankings, as countries and universities strive to enhance their positions on global and regional scales and where priorities in investments may be focused towards improving one's standing rather than aligning with broader collective educational goals within ASEAN. Without a strong and effective governance structure, differences in national and regional priorities might result in a fragmented and less effective programme.

Equally important, the collective action problem in developing the IASP is reflected in the lack of consensus or clarity around the programme's theory of change. Stakeholders have varying opinions on whether the primary goal should be addressing regional challenges and fostering greater regional integration or promoting intercultural understanding and regional collaboration. For instance, some stakeholders view the scholarship scheme as a means to tackle specific regional challenges aligned with the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), and thus emphasise the need for targeted mobility that addresses these issues directly (for instance environmental issues in the Mekong delta area, or sustainable economic development in mountainous areas in Viet Nam). Conversely, other stakeholders might prioritise enhancing intercultural understanding and fostering regional collaboration, seeing the programme as a way to build stronger personal and professional ties across nations. These differing perspectives can lead to disagreements

on the programme's design and implementation, such as how scholarships are allocated, what types of students are prioritised, and how success is measured, resulting in fragmented efforts and reduced collective commitment. This divergence in views underscores the importance of aligning stakeholders around a common theory of change to ensure effective cooperation and the successful realisation of the scholarship scheme's objectives.



Recommendations from Stakeholders



Considering the issues outlined above, this section presents the recommendations for the future implementation of IASP from the survey and interview data gleaned from governments, HEIs, mobility coordinators, representatives from international offices, and other donors (such as NGOs and private enterprises). They are categorised according to the dimension of the collective action problem they are poised to solve, providing actionable steps that can guide further discussions on how to move forward.

5.1. Tackling regulatory inconsistencies

Government collaboration and legal frameworks.

Establishing a comprehensive legal framework is vital for the effective implementation of the IASP. Governmental involvement from the outset, demonstrated through explicit laws and policies (such as visa policies, mutual credit recognition, quality assurance framework), is paramount for securing commitment to the scholarship scheme with policies as tangible expressions of support, providing a strong foundation for the programme. This includes standardising document requirements for student visas across ASEAN nations. HEI leaders should collaborate with governments to build and sustain the necessary policies and frameworks through, for instance, developing accreditation standards, ensuring quality assurance, and facilitating academic exchange within ASEAN.

Enhanced harmonisation through credit transfer, mutual recognition, and synchronised academic calendars.

The seamless implementation of the IASP requires the mutual recognition of credentials between HEIs across AMS. Addressing these administrative complexities can enhance the IASP's efficiency and appeal to students and participating institutions. For this, leveraging existing national quality assurance agencies to develop and refine mechanisms for credit transfer and programme accreditation is paramount. Another important issue that needs to be addressed for the success of IASP is harmonising academic programme details, including synchronising academic calendars and learning outcomes, for credit recognition between home and host institutions. Alongside traditional qualifications, microcredentials should also be explored.

Agreement on minimum standards and requirements.

Ongoing efforts are necessary to establish and reach consensus on the fundamental criteria for enrolling in institutions across ASEAN under the IASP, while also acknowledging the unique characteristics and standards of each institution. To facilitate effective mobility programmes, it is essential to develop and maintain a robust infrastructure, including both physical facilities and operational mechanisms. Furthermore, creating comprehensive guidelines tailored to these requirements will ensure a smooth and consistent implementation of the programme, fostering greater educational mobility and cooperation within the region.

Creation of a special unit or task force for the IASP.

Stakeholders also recommended establishing an operational task force at the regional and national levels that can act as focal points dedicated to managing, coordinating, evaluating, and monitoring the implementation of the IASP. This task force should be entrusted with developing inclusive eligibility criteria to ensure scholarships are accessible to diverse groups of students, particularly those from economically disadvantaged countries. This task force includes representatives from government agencies, HEIs, private enterprises, and NGOs to ensure transparency, sustainability, and comprehensive participation. Such a multi-stakeholder approach will not only secure funding commitments but also facilitate information sharing and joint implementation of the IASP. Additionally, governments should work collaboratively to streamline administrative processes, reducing bureaucratic barriers (such as visa processing) and simplifying application and selection procedures.

Clarity around scholarship information and the selection process.

Providing clear and concise information on scholarship goals and benefits gained from participating in IASP is critical for motivating students. This includes clear guidance on where and whom to contact for further inquiries, and information of IASP should be available in both local languages and English to ensure full understanding among students. This could be implemented as an online data repository, a scholarships catalogue, or a one-stop information website portal, providing a centralised location where students can easily access information on upcoming scholarship opportunities, clear procedures, eligibility criteria, and success stories. Concurrently, IASP coordinators should possess strong communication skills to effectively support target students and liaise with multiple stakeholders.

Streamlining the scholarship application process and immigration paperwork will facilitate smoother student movement across borders. Meanwhile, proactive strategies to navigate political challenges in specific member states should be in place for successful IASP implementation. It is expected that each country will have a country coordinator who will be responsible for coordinating with a network of designated international offices from the participating universities and serve as a point of enquiry to answer the questions students and relevant parties might have.

5.2. Tackling lack of consensus or clarity around the IASP's theory of change

Clarifying the focus of the IASP through continued discussions and consultations.

As the literature review and empirical data suggest, there are diverse views on what the IASP seeks to accomplish. The top-down, government-led approach focuses on grand challenge coordination and aims to address high-level regional issues through centralised oversight and strategic direction. This method emphasises the importance of creating a unified framework to tackle major challenges and foster regional integration. Some examples provided by stakeholders include developing and promoting courses targeting key study areas crucial for ASEAN's development such as regional/area studies, sustainable development, and emerging technologies, among others. The IASP could also promote community engagement and multilateral collaboration through projects with a regional component, promoting the rich cultural heritage of the region while also contributing to SDGs. Additionally, pre-departure training focused on ASEAN-centric skills can also be facilitated to not just prepare students for their academic and cultural experiences but also to provide an opportunity to introduce students to the essential facts about ASEAN, including its aims, community pillars, history, and member states to realise the idea of ASEAN citizenship.

In contrast, the bottom-up, Erasmus-style approach prioritises building regional identity and facilitating cultural exchange by encouraging grassroots proposals and institutional collaborations. This model supports individual mobility experiences and promotes deeper intercultural understanding among students and staff. In this context, offering short-term opportunities can also attract a wider student base, generate excitement for the programme, and leverage the cost-effectiveness of ASEAN countries while actively promoting the IASP. Continued dialogue among stakeholders will

be crucial in finding a balanced approach that integrates these perspectives, ensuring that the IASP effectively meets the diverse needs of ASEAN students while fostering a stronger regional identity.

Aligning regional and national priorities.

Some stakeholders have pointed out that the IASP should promote community engagement and multilateral collaboration through projects with a regional component, promoting the rich cultural heritage of the region while also contributing to SDGs, as well as promote ASEAN students' employability by ensuring that scholarship objectives directly address the workforce needs outlined in each member country's policies. Encouraging scholarships that rotate among member countries also allows for a broader distribution of benefits and a richer understanding of the region, while implementing scholarship terms that encourage graduates to contribute to their home countries' development can foster a sense of responsibility.

Mechanisms for continued trust building.

Active engagement and collaboration between governments and other key stakeholders are perceived as necessary elements to building consensus on the value and anticipated success of the IASP. To ensure policy continuity across different governments, it is also crucial to actively engage policymakers and cultivate their sense of ownership over the programmes. This can be achieved by developing robust supporting systems such as policy dialogues, networking opportunities, and capacity-building activities, which not only facilitate the exchange of ideas but also drive regional development and competitiveness. Moreover, these initiatives are vital for fostering mutual trust among stakeholders, which is essential for the longterm success and sustainability of policies across political transitions.

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5.3. Tackling perceived inequities in benefits

Widening institutional and country participation.

It is recommended that institutions located in areas other than capitals or urban areas are also engaged in IASP. These institutions have unique local expertise and potential for crossdisciplinary collaborations that can address educational and social challenges, particularly for disadvantaged groups. Their participation in IASP will enrich students with experiences that are not readily available in urban settings. HEI leaders should recognise and leverage these strengths of local universities, which contributes to promoting inclusivity and diversity within the IASP. This involves aligning the IASP with ASEAN educational policies to cater to the diverse needs of member states, as well as building niches in ASEAN HEIs to enhance their attractiveness. The scholarship offerings should be strategically diverse, with annual adjustments reflecting student needs and aligning with ASEAN's broader goals.

Inclusive student selection processes and targeted funds.

IASP is expected to be actively promoted among underserved or underrepresented communities within ASEAN to guarantee students in lessdeveloped areas, low-income backgrounds, those with disability, and other marginalised collectives are aware of the scholarship opportunities and that they are fully supported throughout the application process. A targeted endowment fund may also be explored, especially for the vulnerable populations. Additionally, creating scholarship application criteria that promote equitable access is also recommended, including flexible language requirements and eligibility criteria for students from diverse language, socioeconomic, and disciplinary backgrounds. Additionally, flexible learning pathways should be offered through micro-credentials and shorter exchange options alongside traditional semesters.

Targeted outreach and information transparency.

Targeted outreach to underserved or underrepresented communities within ASEAN will ensure that information reaches students in less-developed areas, low-income backgrounds, or marginalised groups. Effective information dissemination will also warrant equitable access to scholarship opportunities for students and HEIs. Governments should establish mechanisms to ensure that information and resources are distributed equitably across ASEAN. This involves developing a transparent information system that provides consistent and reliable information to all prospective scholarship applicants.

Diversification of mobility options to meet various needs.

Stakeholders have alluded to the need to introduce various mobility options (e.g., credit or full degree mobility, physical or virtual mobility or a combination of both, different levels of education from undergraduate to doctoral, durations of mobility, etc.) tailored to students' preferences and needs. These options should also include semester exchanges, internships, or sandwich programmes. By providing a range of options across various fields of study, levels of education, and career stages, the IASP can cater to the diverse academic aspirations of ASEAN students, thereby promoting greater participation, enhancing inclusivity, and fostering a deeper sense of regionalisation of higher education. In addition, teaching staff and research mobility may also be supported, further strengthening the ASEAN Common Higher Education Space.

Awareness raising about the IASP.

It is crucial to implement strategic marketing efforts to establish a strong, recognisable brand for IASP and to raise awareness of lesser-known HEIs in some AMS which will enhance students' understanding and appreciation of the diversity of people, cultures, and perspectives within ASEAN. One suggestion is establishing a co-branded network that leverages active alumni engagement and recruit alumni of the IASP programme as ambassadors to raise awareness and generate student interest in their home countries. Promotional campaigns are also anticipated to encourage participation from eligible students and institutions. This may involve disseminating information through various channels including websites, social media, and outreach events at the national and regional levels.

Data-driven implementation.

Another suggestion is to monitor and evaluate IASP's impact on student outcomes, skills development, and ASEAN's broader strategic goals. This may involve developing criteria for the selection of scholarship recipients, as well as monitoring and evaluation mechanisms to assess the impact, effectiveness, and inclusivity of the programme.



5.4. Tackling disparities in resources and capacity

Strong governmental commitment.

It is crucial that the Heads of States of ASEAN member states express their full commitment in establishing and maintaining IASP to promote and strengthen regional cooperation in higher education through mobility of students. As financial sustainability is essential for the long-term success of the IASP, governments should pursue strategies that ensure IASP's sustainability, for example, involving corporates in the funding model. Moreover, institutions are expected to develop tangible strategies in implementing IASP appropriate for their national higher education contexts.

Collaboration with established networks such as SEAMEO RIHED and AUN to pool resources, expertise, and credibility.

By partnering with these organisations that already have a strong presence and established relationships across ASEAN Member States, the IASP can benefit from their extensive experience in managing regional programmes, thus reducing the burden on individual member states whose resources (in human, experience, and finance) and capacities are more limited. This collaboration also promotes a sense of shared ownership and trust among member states, as it builds on familiar and successful frameworks, making it easier to achieve consensus and commitment.

Enhancing partnerships with other (sub)regions.

By fostering continued collaboration with external partners such as the EU, Korea, India, the United Kingdom, as well as ASEAN +3 and ASEAN +6 countries, the region can tap into a broader pool of resources and expertise. These international alliances not only maximise opportunities for joint initiatives but also contribute significantly to the development of a skilled workforce within ASEAN, ensuring the region remains competitive on a global scale.

Continued collaboration with the private and third sector.

Creating feasible mechanisms to encourage the active participation of private enterprises, NGOs, and other organisations in funding IASP can contribute to funding sustainability. One possible way to do it is engaging the private sector through corporate social responsibility initiatives, with a successful example such as the Nippon Foundation's support for visually impaired students. This approach will contribute to the equality, diversity and inclusivity goal of IASP by providing financial assistance to disadvantaged individuals and at the same time, enhancing the brand image of participating companies and IASP, and contributing to societal welfare and development of ASEAN member states. Multilateral collaboration or bilateral agreements between ASEAN and other regions can also achieve broader regional impact and address common regional issues more effectively.

Capacity building programmes for IASP management.

Addressing the issue of inadequate human resources for managing scholarship programmes is critical for the success of the IASP. Regular training and continuous professional development for individuals responsible for managing IASP at the national levels are necessary to ensure they remain well-informed and adaptable to changes in regulatory and financial landscapes across different countries. The training will not only address the shortage of skilled personnel but also foster stronger ties among HEIs through the promotion of expert exchanges within ASEAN. This initiative can create a large pool of experts in diverse fields, facilitating knowledge transfer and capacity building among universities and organisations, which in turn will contribute to regional development, cooperation, and mobility.

Provision of language training programmes.

HEI leaders have identified language proficiency as a significant barrier to the success of the IASP. It should be noted that among ten ASEAN member states, English is viewed differently, for instance, in Singapore, English is an official language while in other countries such as Thailand, Viet Nam, Lao, or Cambodia, English is a foreign language. To address this issue, incorporating an English language preparatory programme into the IASP as a pre-departure initiative might be essential to increase student access and interest in the programme. Additionally, providing language training for staff and faculty members responsible for coordinating and managing the IASP programme is equally important to enhance their ability to communicate and collaborate with international partner institutions and to teach inbound students.





6 Summary and Next Steps



This report presented the results of the scholarship mapping exercise on available student mobility scholarships in the ASEAN region and outlines stakeholders' views on the planned IASP gleaned from 253 surveys and 145 interviews with higher education stakeholders, including government officials, university leaders, student mobility coordinators, and partners from the private sector and non-governmental organisations.

Overall, while there is a general interest in the programme and a willingness to participate among the respondents, varying levels of resources, readiness, and visions of what the IASP should aim to achieve reveal a collective action problem that warrants various lines of action with regard to clarifying the main objective for establishing the IASP, defining fair and transparent systems of contributions to and benefits from the programme, and aligning coordination and regulatory structures between AMS not only to boost intra-regional student mobility but also to strengthen ASEAN's regional identity. For this, the stakeholders' recommendations for IASP emphasise the importance of a multifaceted approach involving governments, HEIs, NGOs, and private enterprises in addressing financial, administrative, and inclusivity challenges towards fostering a more connected and educated ASEAN community.

This report serves as inputs for further ongoing dialogues and consultations on the future of the IASP, including the generation of possible models, the development of an Operations Manual for the programme, and the further development of key documents and initiatives for promoting inclusive people-to-people connectivity in the region through student mobility scholarships while strengthening the Common Space in Southeast Asian Higher Education more broadly.

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Operations Manual for the Intra-ASEAN Scholarship Programme

This Operations Manual for the Intra-ASEAN Scholarship Programme (IASP) is a live document that outlines strategic models designed to address the challenges and leverage the opportunities identified in the Regional Synthesis Report. While the findings showcase a rich diversity of visions and aspirations for the IASP, some offer contrasting perspectives on the goals and desired implementation of the IASP, signalling a collective action problem.

Given the diversity in resources, educational infrastructures, and readiness among ASEAN Member States, this Operation Manual presents a menu of models seeking to address specific challenges such as resource disparities, regulatory inconsistencies, and the need for consensus while maximising the collective potential of the ASEAN region. Overall, it seeks to synthesise and reconcile these findings and ideas, enabling ASEAN stakeholders to collectively imagine and collaboratively shape a path forward.

Background

Since the 1990's, a number of mobility programmes supported by scholarships have been launched to attract participants to engage in intra-regional cross-border studies in ASEAN. Despite the wideranging scholarship mobility initiatives in the ASEAN region, they mostly support short-term exchanges and face limitations in terms of scope, quantity, sustainability, and inclusivity. Their alignment with the ASEAN Community building project also remains to be clearly defined (Chao, 2023). To explore the configuration of a coherent scholarship strategy in the region, and to further contribute to the long-term goal of supporting ASEAN nationals in pursuing higher education studies in the Southeast Asian region, the intra-ASEAN Scholarship Programme (IASP) project was launched and projected to run in three phases from 2022 to 2030.

As part of the first phase, the Regional Synthesis Report was produced, collecting and synthesising data from interviews, survey responses, literature review, and the National Validation Workshop to map existing mobility scholarships in the region and glean stakeholders' interest, readiness, and ideas around the establishment of the IASP. The findings suggest that there are diverse views on what the IASP seeks to accomplish. The top-down, government-led approach focuses on grand challenge coordination and aims to

address high-level regional issues through centralised oversight and strategic direction. This method emphasises the importance of creating a unified framework to tackle major challenges and foster regional integration. In contrast, the bottom-up, Erasmus-style approach prioritises building regional identity and facilitating cultural exchange by encouraging grassroots proposals and institutional collaborations. This model supports individual mobility experiences and promotes deeper intercultural understanding among students and staff.

Despite widespread support and interest for the IASP, the survey and interview data underscore a collective action problem (Olson, 1965) due to disparities in resources, readiness, and stakeholder interests. Considering this issue, there is a need for strategies that align the interests of participating ASEAN Member States and ensure that all participants can equitably reap the benefits of such a programme.

Towards a Common Vision for the IASP: A Menu of Models

To address the problem around collective action on the IASP, stakeholders should consider both structural and resource dimensions. On the **structural dimension**, ASEAN Member States would need to look at whether defining and aligning a shared vision and regulatory framework under the IASP is preferred or that existing schemes remain decentralised, i.e., they operate as before, but with additional coordination and support. By incorporating strengthened coordination frameworks and defining the level at which they are applied, the region can more effectively ensure that national and institutional interests are balanced with collective goals and vision.

Meanwhile, the **resource dimension** looks into the costs in implementing the IASP. This dimension may be understood not only based on financial commitments but also on efforts related to human capital and consensus-building needs. For instance, building a new scholarship scheme that focuses on grand challenges coordination and a distinct ASEAN branding would require a different (and more profound) social, financial, and time investment than creating an information drive on existing scholarships or building a website with streamlined information on these programmes. For this dimension, it is important that a fair and transparent approach is adopted to ensure success, especially that ASEAN Member States have different economic capacities to contribute as well as varying levels of need or support.

Table 1. Considerations for the IASP: Structural and resource dimensions

Resource dimension		Structural dimension	
		Bottom-up	Top-down
	Low cost	INTRA-ASEAN SCHOLARSHIPS PLATFORM Bottom-up implementation, low cost	ASEAN SCHOLARSHIPS SERVICE DESK Top-down implementation, low cost
	High cost	ASEAN SCHOLARSHIPS FUND Bottom-up implementation, high cost	ASEAN-BRANDED JOINT PROGRAMMES Top-down implementation, high cost

Model 1. Bottom-up implementation, low cost Intra-ASEAN Scholarships Platform

Matching existing offer with demand to boost intra-ASEAN mobility

Objective.

A potential intra-ASEAN scholarships platform could build on the strengths of existing scholarship programmes by shifting from merely coordinating scholarships to embracing a "platform" philosophy. By facilitating this quasimarket system, the platform could significantly enhance intra-regional student mobility, ensuring that opportunities are aligned with the evolving needs and aspirations of students across ASEAN.

Design.

This approach would focus on creating a dynamic environment where student mobility demands are matched with available opportunities across the region. Rather than simply managing scholarships, the platform would act as an online marketplace, allowing students to explore and select mobility programs that best meet their academic and career goals, while enabling Higher Education Institutions (HEIs) to showcase their offerings and attract diverse talent. Existing scholarship schemes drawing on a combination of funding sources will continue as before, but with streamlined information in the form of a website and information point, including the development of an interactive tool embedded in the platform to help. ASEAN study destinations and success stories will be featured in this platform.

Delivery partners.

The ASEAN Secretariat will provide general oversight and the necessary coordination, policy alignment, and credibility, reinforcing the platform's ASEAN branding. National Education Ministries will play a critical role in aligning the platform with national education policies, ensuring smooth integration of existing scholarship programmes, and reflecting the educational priorities of each member state. HEIs across ASEAN, as the main providers of mobility programmes, will be essential in populating the platform with their course offerings and making them attractive to prospective students. Technology partners, such as technology firms or edtech companies, will be crucial in developing and maintaining the platform's digital infrastructure, ensuring it is userfriendly, scalable, and capable of meeting regional demands. Industry and business partners will enhance the platform by offering internships, employment opportunities, and funding, aligning programmes with labour market needs and boosting students' employability. Student and Alumni Associations can provide valuable insights into student needs and preferences, shaping the platform's offerings and serving as advocates and ambassadors. International organisations and development agencies like UNESCO, the World Bank, and other regional development banks can offer strategic guidance, funding, and global perspectives, enhancing the platform's impact

and sustainability. Other regional partners like the EU and ASEAN+3 can play significant roles in enhancing the Intra-ASEAN Scholarships Platform by providing additional resources, expertise, and opportunities for collaboration and interregional exchanges. The EU, with its extensive experience in managing mobility programmes like Erasmus+, can offer valuable insights and best practices for designing and implementing the platform. Lastly, marketing and communications **experts** will be key in effectively promoting the platform and its offerings, ensuring ASEAN study destinations and success stories are prominently featured and widely communicated. By bringing together these diverse partners, the Intra-ASEAN Scholarships Platform can successfully match student demand with available opportunities, significantly boosting intra-regional student mobility and fostering a stronger ASEAN identity.

Challenges.

Creating a user-friendly, scalable, and secure platform that caters to diverse needs across multiple countries requires significant technological expertise and resources. Continuous maintenance and upgrades will also be necessary. In addition, ensuring accessibility for students in less technologically advanced or lower-income ASEAN countries might be difficult, which could hinder equitable access to opportunities. While the model is low-cost, maintaining the platform and ensuring it continues to meet the evolving needs of students and institutions will require ongoing funding, which might not be readily available from all ASEAN member states or partners. The success of the platform also heavily depends on the participation and contributions of various stakeholders, including governments, HEIs, and private sectors. If key partners fail to engage fully, the platform's effectiveness could be compromised.

Opportunities.

By adopting a platform model that matches student needs with available opportunities, the initiative could significantly increase intra-ASEAN student mobility, contributing to the development of a shared regional experience. HEIs that are less well-known can also gain exposure and attract diverse talent through the platform, fostering greater competition and collaboration across the region. Lastly, by building on existing scholarship programmes and enhancing their visibility and coordination, the platform can maximise the use of current resources without the need for entirely new funding streams.

Model 2. Top-down implementation, low cost ASEAN Scholarships Service Desk

Strengthening the ASEAN identity through consistent and high-quality mobility experience

Objective.

The ASEAN Scholarships Service Desk is envisioned as a centralised body that enhances the existing landscape of ASEAN scholarships by offering standardised support and guidelines under a unified ASEAN brand.

Design.

While current scholarship programmes continue to operate independently, the ASEAN Scholarships Service Desk will play a crucial role in streamlining processes and ensuring consistency across the region. It will provide guidelines to national and institutional coordinators regarding visa processing and offer administrative training to ensure that all participating institutions meet minimum requirements that will be decided by ASEAN. Additionally, similar to the CAMINOS project, it will provide a detailed handbook outlining implementation guidelines, including infrastructure standards and student support provisions, to guarantee a high-quality experience for all scholarship recipients. This initiative will not only simplify the administrative processes for students and institutions but also strengthen the ASEAN identity by ensuring that all mobility programmes operate under a shared framework of excellence and support.

Delivery partners.

The ASEAN Secretariat, as the central coordinating body for ASEAN, would play a crucial role in overseeing the establishment and operation of the ASEAN Scholarships Service Desk, ensuring alignment with broader ASEAN integration goals and maintaining consistency across all scholarship programmes under the ASEAN brand. National Education Ministries are essential partners in this effort, helping to implement the standardised guidelines and training provided by the Service Desk and ensuring that national scholarship programmes align with the regional standards set by the Desk, facilitating smooth coordination at the national level. **HEIs across ASEAN** will be key players in delivering the educational components of the scholarships, implementing the guidelines provided by the Service Desk, and benefiting from the administrative training and support necessary to meet ASEAN's minimum requirements for scholarship programmes. To support student mobility, Visa and Immigration Authorities will be vital in streamlining and standardising visa application processes across member states, ensuring that scholarship recipients experience minimal delays and complications. Technology and EdTech Companies will be critical in developing and maintaining the digital tools and infrastructure necessary for

the Service Desk, including the dissemination of handbooks and guidelines, while also creating user-friendly interfaces for students, institutions, and administrators. Industry and business partners will provide insights into workforce needs, ensuring that the Service Desk's guidelines and training align with industry standards. International organisations and development agencies, such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and regional development banks, can bring additional expertise in education quality standards, administrative best practices, and capacity-building, ensuring that the Service Desk's guidelines meet international standards. Other regional partners like the EU and ASEAN+3 can play significant roles in providing additional resources and expertise in implementing this type of support. Student and Alumni Associations will contribute valuable feedback on the effectiveness of the Service Desk's guidelines and training programs, helping to refine them to better meet the needs of current and future scholarship recipients. Finally, Intergovernmental organisations, like SEAMEO, will be key partners in disseminating the Service Desk's guidelines and facilitating collaboration between national education systems and institutions, ensuring a cohesive and integrated approach to scholarship management across the ASEAN region.

Challenges.

This model presents important challenges, including the potential for resistance from national and institutional actors who may be wary of relinquishing autonomy or adapting to new standards. Implementing standardised guidelines across diverse educational systems could be complex, requiring significant coordination and compliance efforts. The need for uniformity may also stifle innovation at the local level, as institutions might struggle to align their unique programmes with the prescribed regional standards.

Opportunities.

The Service Desk offers substantial opportunities, such as improved administrative efficiency, reduced bureaucratic hurdles for students, and a more cohesive ASEAN educational framework that could enhance the region's global competitiveness. By leveraging the expertise of various delivery partners—including the ASEAN Secretariat, National Education Ministries, HEIs, and international organisations—the Service Desk has the potential to create a more integrated and supportive environment for scholarship recipients, ultimately contributing to a stronger and more unified ASEAN identity.

Model 3. Bottom-up implementation, high cost ASEAN-Branded Scholarship Fund

Expanding access and levelling the playing field for intra-regional student mobility

Objective.

This fund will focus on expanding opportunities by identifying and pre-approving specific academic programmes offered in ASEAN HEIs where scholarships for mobility will be allocated. By establishing minimum student quotas for participation and aiming for a wide representativeness of HEIs, the fund ensures that beneficiaries from underrepresented and lesser-known institutions gain access to the benefits of student mobility.

Design.

This approach involves providing scholarships to potential students from a range of programmes from both well-established and underrepresented or less-known institutions, ensuring a broad and inclusive reach. Similar to the ADB-Japan Scholarships and inspired by AIMS's principle of balanced mobility, ASEAN governments and HEIs will negotiate and agree on a set student quota for participation, thereby guaranteeing that students from underrepresented institutions can benefit from student mobility opportunities. An ASEAN scholarship fund body will be appointed to monitor compliance with student participation quotas and the balance in HEIs, but the implementation of the scholarships as well as the academic programme lies on HEIs and ASEAN Member States.

Delivery partners.

ASEAN Member State Governments are essential for providing the political backing, funding, and policy alignment needed for the scholarship programme, and will also help pinpoint priority areas and institutions to achieve regional and national development objectives. The ASEAN **Secretariat** will provide overarching coordination and ensure that the fund aligns with ASEAN's broader educational and regional integration goals. It will facilitate communication among member states, oversee the implementation of policies, and ensure that the scholarship programme maintains its ASEAN branding and objectives. National Higher Education Ministries will play a key role in coordinating between the scholarship fund and national education policies, streamlining regulatory processes, and ensuring alignment with national priorities. Both established and lesser-known HEIs will be integral in delivering pre-approved academic programmes, managing the scholarships, and upholding high educational standards while fulfilling minimum student quotas. A central ASEAN Scholarship Fund Administration **Body** will oversee the programme's operations, including the selection and approval of programmes, monitoring compliance with quotas, and overall fund management. Other regional partners like the EU and ASEAN+3 can

play significant roles in enhancing the Intra-ASEAN Scholarships Platform by providing additional resources, expertise, and opportunities for collaboration and inter-regional exchanges. Research Institutions and Think Tanks will contribute vital research and analysis to identify effective programmes and institutions, and assist in evaluating the fund's impact. International organisations and development agencies, such as UNESCO, the World Bank, and regional development banks, will offer additional expertise, funding, and strategic guidance to broaden the programme's reach and effectiveness. Finally, Student and Alumni Associations will provide valuable feedback, advocate for the programme, and assist with practical aspects of mobility and cultural exchange, helping to refine and effectively implement the initiative.

Challenges.

Securing sufficient funding and political commitment from all ASEAN Member States could be difficult, especially when balancing the interests of well-established and underrepresented institutions. Furthermore, the administrative burden of monitoring compliance and managing the fund could strain the central administration body, particularly in ensuring that quotas are met and that all institutions adhere to the required standards.

Opportunities.

By expanding access to mobility programmes, this IASP model can help bridge gaps between well-known and lesser-known HEIs, providing students from all backgrounds with the chance to benefit from regional mobility. This could lead to a more diverse and vibrant educational landscape in ASEAN, strengthening ties between member states and contributing to broader regional development objectives.

Model 4. Top-down implementation, high cost ASEAN-Branded Joint Programmes

Niche-building that tackles ASEAN's grand challenges

Objective.

The "ASEAN-Branded Joint Programmes" represent a novel approach designed to address ASEAN's grand challenges through strategic niche-building among Member States and HEIs. Aside from contributing to deeper regionalisation, it also holds the potential to enhance the attractiveness of different ASEAN countries as study destinations.

Design.

This initiative features a distinctive ASEAN branding and involves contributing to a shared fund that will support scholarships and curriculum development co-designed by Member States and HEIs, focusing on regional issues or crosscutting themes that reflect each country's unique strengths and needs. Taking the Erasmus Mundus European Joint Programmes as an inspiration, this scheme enables ASEAN stakeholders an even more active role in the curricular design process, ensuring that the programmes are tailored to address specific regional challenges and foster collaborative solutions. In this context, ASEAN can help build niches between its Member States and universities to enhance attractiveness for intraregional student mobility by creating thematic academic programmes around regional themes or industries. For instance, a programme in 'Marine and Coastal Management' could be co-designed by universities in the Philippines, Malaysia, and Viet Nam, addressing common maritime issues and drawing students with an interest in this specialised field. This approach highlights regional expertise and attracts students interested in focused, high-impact study areas. ASEAN can also introduce 'ASEAN Excellence Scholarships' specifically for students participating in these joint programmes and which could be tailored to support students pursuing niche studies or research in areas where member states have particular strengths, thus incentivising intraregional mobility and cross-cultural exchange.

Delivery partners.

ASEAN Member State Governments are essential for providing political support, funding, and policy alignment, ensuring the programmes meet national priorities and receive high-level backing. The ASEAN Secretariat will play a pivotal role in overseeing and coordinating these joint programmes, ensuring they align with ASEAN's broader strategic objectives and regional integration goals. It will facilitate collaboration among member states, provide guidance on the programme's ASEAN branding, and ensure that the initiatives contribute to addressing the region's grand challenges. National Higher Education Ministries will facilitate coordination between the programmes and national education policies, streamlining regulatory processes for crossborder academic collaboration. HEIs from across ASEAN will be central to co-designing curricula, offering courses, and participating in mobility schemes, thereby ensuring academic rigour and relevance. An ASEAN-appointed task force or an existing intra-regional mobility network will provide coordination, establish a framework for collaboration, and align initiatives with regional educational goals. Industry and Business Partners will contribute real-world insights, offer internships and project opportunities, and support funding and sponsorships, addressing regional challenges. Research institutions and think tanks will provide valuable research and analysis on regional issues, integrating cuttingedge knowledge into the programme's curriculum. Other regional partners like the EU and ASEAN+3 can play significant roles in providing additional resources and expertise in designing and implementing this programme. International organisations and development agencies such as UNESCO and regional development banks, will offer expertise, additional funding, and strategic guidance to enhance the programme's impact. Finally, Student and Alumni Associations will offer feedback, advocate for the programme, and assist with the practical aspects of mobility and cultural exchange.

Challenges.

This model faces substantial challenges, particularly due to the high costs involved in establishing and maintaining such joint programmes. Securing adequate funding from all member states could be difficult, especially given the varying economic capacities and priorities of different countries. Additionally, coordinating the design and implementation of curricula across diverse education systems and regulatory environments presents a complex task that requires significant administrative effort and alignment of national policies. There is also the challenge of ensuring that the joint programmes meet both regional and international standards of academic excellence while remaining relevant to the specific needs of ASEAN. The potential for bureaucratic delays and resistance from national institutions reluctant to adopt a standardised regional approach could further complicate the programme's rollout.

Opportunities.

The ASEAN-Branded Joint Programmes offer considerable opportunities to enhance regional integration, develop specialised expertise in key areas, and boost the global reputation of ASEAN's higher education sector. By focusing on niche areas that address regional challengessuch as maritime management or sustainable agriculture—the programmes can attract top talent and position ASEAN as a leader in these fields. The involvement of industry and business partners, research institutions, and international organisations provides additional opportunities for real-world application, funding, and expertise, further enhancing the programme's impact. Ultimately, the success of this initiative could significantly contribute to addressing ASEAN's grand challenges while promoting educational excellence and regional cohesion.

Defining the scope of the IASP

For each of the model options described above, IASP stakeholders will also need to consider and clearly articulate the following aspects:

Mobility type.

Stakeholders will need to decide whether the IASP will support formal education programmes (such as undergraduate and postgraduate degrees) only, or if it will also include non-formal education opportunities such as short courses, professional training and internships, and workshops. This decision will influence the target audience and the nature of partnerships with HEIs. Additionally, there is a need to clarify whether the IASP will focus on full degree programmes, short-term credit-bearing courses that contribute to a degree at the home institution, or a mix of both. This will impact how scholarships are allocated and the type of academic recognition provided by HEIs.

Scholarship coverage.

Define whether the IASP will offer full scholarships that cover all expenses or partial scholarships that might only cover specific costs, such as tuition fees or accommodation. This decision will directly impact the program's budget, reach, and inclusivity. Transparency in what is covered will also help manage expectations among students and HEIs.

3 Inclusion.

Stakeholders will need to determine the inclusion elements that will be incorporated into the IASP and the level at which they are applied (individual, institutional, national, and regional levels). At the individual level, there is a need to establish criteria to ensure that scholarships are accessible to a diverse group of students, including those from marginalised communities, remote areas, and underrepresented social or economic backgrounds. This may involve implementing affirmative action policies or setting quotas to ensure fair representation. At the institutional level, define how the IASP will include a wide range of HEIs, ensuring that both well-established and lesser-known institutions can participate. This might involve capacity-building support for smaller or less-resourced HEIs to meet the programme's standards and participate effectively. At the national level, consider how the IASP can align with national education policies and development goals of member states, ensuring that the programme contributes to national priorities such as skills development, innovation, and regional integration. Lastly, at the regional level, stakeholders may examine how to ensure that the benefits of the IASP are distributed equitably across all ASEAN member states. This includes considering the socio-economic disparities between countries and striving to balance the representation of students and HEIs across the region.

Each of these aspects must be carefully defined and integrated into the overall strategy for the IASP to ensure it meets its objectives of enhancing intra-ASEAN student mobility and fostering a stronger ASEAN identity through education.

Proposed Structure of the IASP Operations Manual

Based on the model preferred by ASEAN stakeholders, an Operations Manual providing a more detailed description of the IASP implementation may be structured as follows:

1 Introduction.

It will provide a brief introduction to the IASP and its objectives, as well as an explanation of the document's purpose and how it will be used by stakeholders. This section will also outline the primary users of the manual.

2 Governance and Organisational Structure.

It will provide a description of the IASP's governance model, including the key stakeholders' roles and detailed responsibilities.

3 Operations and Workflow.

This section will outline specific processes for scholarship or platform management, the scope of mobility covered (short- or long-term, degree or credit mobility, etc.), a step-by-step guide for application and selection processes, and procedures for HEIs to submit programmes, manage student intake, and maintain compliance. Protocols for managing communications between students, HEIs, and the IASP administration will also be included, as well as a data management plan covering policies for data collection, storage, access, and privacy.

4 Compliance and Quality Assurance.

It will outline the procedures for ensuring that all stakeholders adhere to guidelines and national/international regulations, as well as metrics and processes for assessing and maintaining the quality of scholarships and academic programmes. Requirements for regular reporting by HEIs and audits by the IASP administration will also be provided.

5 Partnership Management.

Aside from detailing the roles and expectations for each stakeholder type, the process for bringing in new partners or participants will be outlined, so will the guidelines for effective collaboration and communication among partners as well as protocols for resolving conflicts or issues between partners.

6 Funding and Financial Management.

An explanation of the platform's funding sources and financial sustainability model, as well as guidelines for budgeting, resource allocation, and financial planning. Requirements for financial reporting and transparency will also be outlined.

7 Monitoring and Evaluation.

This section will describe the tools and methods for ongoing monitoring of IASP's outcomes vis-a-vis its objectives. It will also provide an explanation of the processes for gathering feedback from users and partners and using it to improve the platform, as well as requirements for regular performance reports and accountability mechanisms.

8 Marketing and Communications.

It will outline strategies for promoting the IASP and ASEAN study destinations, Guidelines for internal and external communications (including media relations and stakeholder engagement), and plans for engaging students, HEIs, and other stakeholders through various channels.

9 Legal and Ethical Considerations.

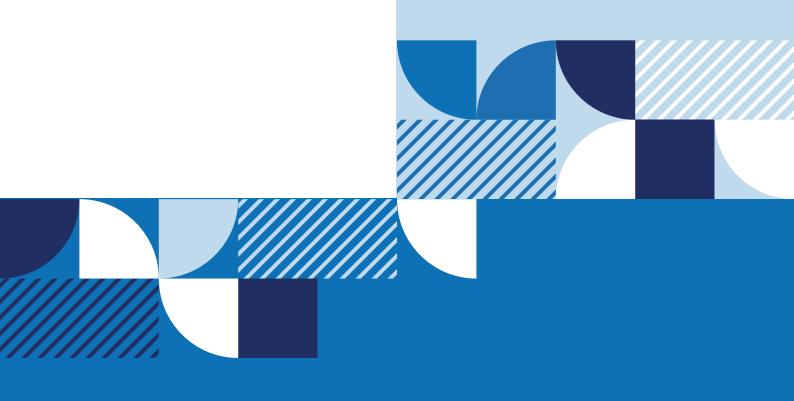
This section will provide an overview of any legal requirements for operating the IASP in different ASEAN Member States, as well as ethical standards for the operation of the IASP and the conduct of all partners.

10 Appendices.

It will contain a glossary with the definitions of key terms and concepts used in the manual, sample forms, templates, and checklists for various processes and key contacts for support and queries related to the IASP.

11 Document Control Procedures.

Lastly, the Operations Manual will include guidelines for managing and updating the document, as well as a history of revisions and updates to the manual.



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