

1st Senior Officials' Meeting (SOM1)
in Bucharest, Romania on 18-19 November 2025



Asia-Europe Meeting

ASEM Education

Keynote “Fostering a Common Higher Education Area in Southeast Asia”

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Fostering a Common Higher Education Area in Southeast Asia

SEAMEO RIHED

18 November 2025

ASEM SOM I

Bucharest

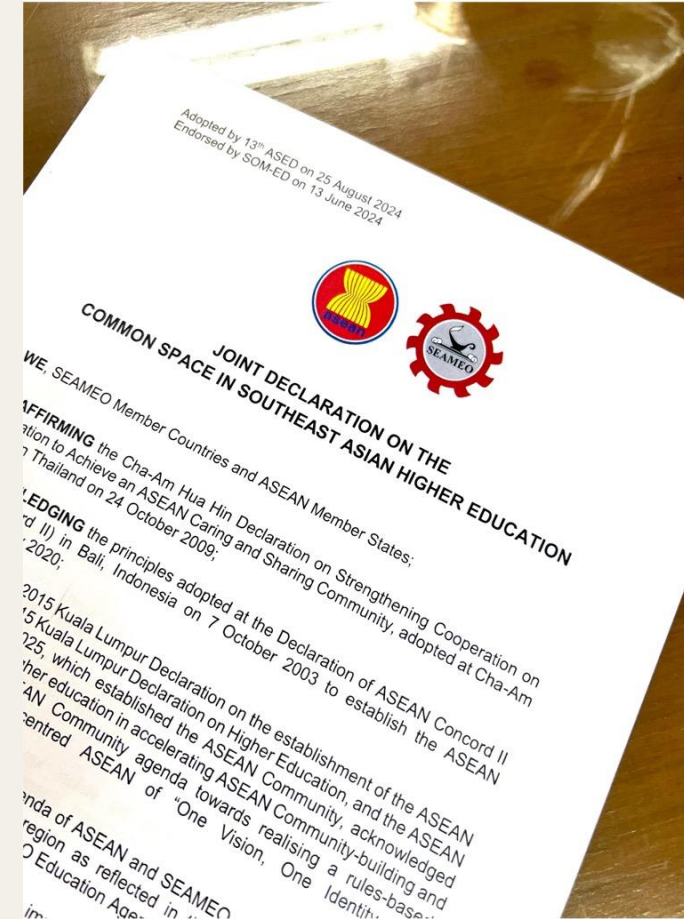


From Idea to Reality...

It starts with an idea...

Background and Milestones

- + **Concept of Common Space launched:** SEAMEO Council (2008) – provides foundation for regional harmonisation of higher education
- + **Key Initiatives:**
 - + ASEAN Quality Assurance Network (**AQAN**)
 - + Asian International Mobility for Students (**AIMS**) Programme
- + **Joint Declaration:** Adopted by Education Ministers (August 2024)
- + **ASEAN Summit** (October 2024), Joint Declaration noted by leaders - establishes a new Ministerial Directive for SEAMEO RIHED and ASEAN Secretariat



The Future Starts Now...



Planning our Shared Future

- + **Mandate and Joint Oversight:** With the Joint Declaration, RIHED and ASEAN Secretariat jointly oversee implementation of the Common Space
- + **Joint Technical Workshop** (Jan 2025) – RIHED and ASEAN Secretariat drafted key strategic documents:
 - + Roadmap and Workplan for the Common Space
 - + Terms of Reference for a new Steering Committee
- + **Merged Policy Platform:** combines existing ASEAN (AWGHEM) and RIHED (SEA-HiEd SOM) higher education platforms into a new annual Steering Committee Meeting
- + **Ministerial Meeting on Higher Education:** proposed every 2 years
- + **8th AWGHEM** (April 2025): Strategic documents reviewed
- + **ASEAN Ministers' Education and Higher Education Roundtables** (June 2025), documents endorsed in principle in Langkawi

Turning Plans into Progress...



Regional Endorsements

- + **20th ASEAN SOM ED** (August 2025), formal endorsement of documents and dissolution of AWGHEM to merge with SEA-HiEd SOM and create the Regional Initiative for Southeast Asian Higher Education (**RISE**) Steering Committee
- + **Circulation for formal adoption** of documents to the Ministerial level is underway.
- + **Call for Inaugural Chair** – circulated through ASEAN/SEAMEO
- + **Expressions of interest:** Cambodia, Malaysia, and the Philippines
- + **Consensus: Malaysia to serve as Inaugural Chair (2026-2027)**



Making it happen...



Establishing RISE

+ Next steps:

- + nominations of national representatives to the Steering Committee (DG level or higher, responsible for higher education)
- + RIHED and the ASEAN Secretariat will convene a technical meeting to coordinate Joint Secretariat functions for the Steering Committee and Ministerial Meetings
- + ASEAN will lead the Secretariat in 2026 whereas RIHED will lead Secretariat functions in 2027.

Reality Ignites Through Action...

Enablers to Common Space in Southeast Asian Higher Education / SEA-HE Area

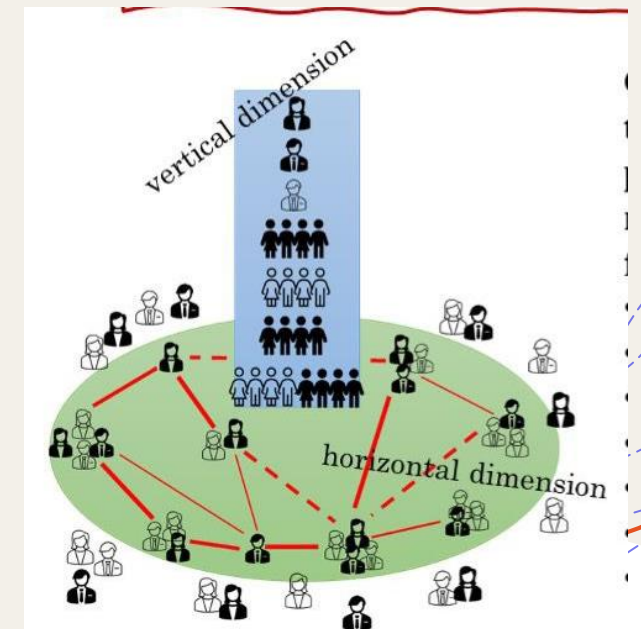
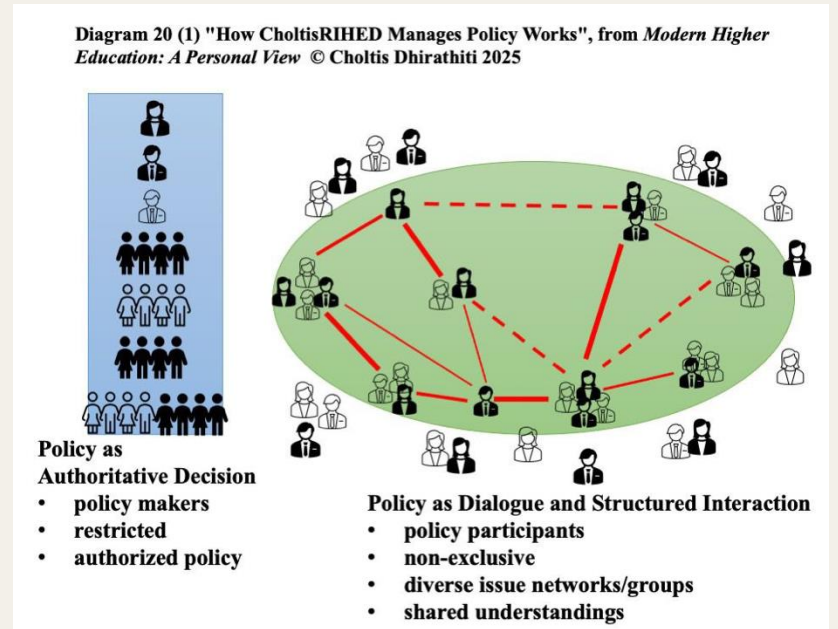


Diagram 9 "Higher Education Enablers: The Focuses for Southeast Asian/ASEAN Higher Education Area?", from *Modern Higher Education: A Personal View* © Choltis Dhirathiti 2025

RIHED's Role and Approach

- + RIHED bridges the vertical (decision-making) and horizontal (shared understanding) dimensions of higher education policy by **organising key regional networks and platforms into functioning policy communities**. Rather than operating as isolated programmes or issue networks, these groups are intentionally connected to create shared purpose and coordinated action.

- + This approach enables:
 - Collective and participatory policy processes
 - Cross-boundary collaboration and relationships
 - Integrated expertise and shared knowledge
 - Mutual understanding and common direction
 - Sustained commitment and collective action
- + **Examples of Policy Communities:**
 - AIMS Programme (RIHED)
 - IQAdvance Initiative
 - RIHED-AQAN-AUN Collaboration Framework



Finally, a Reality...



Towards a Common Higher Education Area

- + **Annual Steering Committee Meetings** and **Biennial Ministerial Meetings** will guide and monitor our shared progress in harmonising regional higher education.
- + **RIHED** is driving this vision forward through:
 - + The development of a **new strategic framework – the Bacolod Strategy** – and the **Da Nang Objectives** for the **AIMS Programme**, Southeast Asia's flagship initiative for intra-regional student mobility.
 - + An updated **Memorandum of Agreement** with **AQAN** and the **ASEAN University Network**, strengthening collaboration on **quality management, mutual recognition and qualifications excellence** across the region.
 - + A renewed emphasis on **policy work** and driving **evidence-based policymaking** for the region.

Thank you!

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