

EU-ASEAN Sustainable Connectivity Package - Higher Education Programme (SCOPE-HE)

TERMS OF REFERENCE

CALL FOR TENDERS (CfT)

Study on the Ratification and Implementation of the Tokyo and Global Conventions on the Recognition of Qualifications in Higher Education in ASEAN

ABOUT THE PROGRAM ME	<div>1</div> <p>The EU-ASEAN Sustainable Connectivity Package – Higher Education Programme (SCOPE-HE) is a joint initiative funded by the European Union (EU) to support, among others, interconnected and dynamic higher education research clusters as well as technical and vocational education and training between ASEAN (Association of Southeast Asian Nations) and the EU. Implemented by Nuffic in collaboration with the DAAD (German Academic Exchange Service), this programme will run for 48 months.</p> <p>SCOPE-HE aims to achieve the following objectives, leveraging the success and experiences of the EU Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region (SHARE) programme and the Erasmus+ programme:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Support student and academic mobility within ASEAN member states, between ASEAN and the EU, through policy dialogues as well as greater comparability of reference systems and higher education frameworks. • Strengthen EU-ASEAN cross-regional university networks tackling global challenges by fostering research and technological connectivity. • Bridge skills gaps by strengthening ties between vocational education institutions and the private sector, particularly in green and digital sectors.
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Enhancing global connectivity in higher education is essential for promoting international collaboration and advancing innovation in a highly interconnected world. Currently, millions of students pursue their education abroad, with a significant portion studying outside their home region. These figures are expected to grow in the coming years. A key factor in supporting this cross-border mobility is the recognition of academic qualifications, which not only facilitates student and academic mobility but also collaboration among higher education institutions (HEIs), and reinforces cross-regional integration.

To address this need at the global level, UNESCO member states adopted the Global Convention on the Recognition of Qualifications concerning Higher Education in 2019. As the first United Nations treaty on higher education with a global scope, this convention lays the normative foundation for expanding cross-border mobility and transnational institutional cooperation in learning, teaching and research.

Grounded in principles of knowledge sharing, innovative collaboration and global citizenship, it builds on and complements regional conventions such as Lisbon (1997) for Europe, Tokyo (2011) for Asia-Pacific, Addis Ababa (2014) for Africa, and Buenos Aires (2019) for Latin America and Caribbean. These regional conventions serve as foundational pillars that align with the broader objectives of the Global Convention, ensuring that recognition practices within each region contribute to a more harmonised and globally interconnected higher education system.

In the Asia-Pacific region, the Tokyo Convention provides normative and operational principles for regional cooperation in the recognition of qualifications. It outlines principles for the assessment of qualifications; recognition of qualifications

		<p>giving access to higher education; recognition of partial studies; recognition of qualifications in higher education; and recognition of qualifications of refugees and displaced persons. To date, 12 countries have ratified the Tokyo Convention, though no ASEAN member state is among them. Similarly, no ASEAN member state has ratified the UNESCO Global Convention on Higher Education. This lack of engagement underscores the need for renewed attention and coordinated action in the region.</p> <p>Europe has seen more consolidated progress in implementing the UNESCO recognition conventions, offering experiences that may inform similar developments in the Asia-Pacific. Supported by the coordinated efforts of national recognition authorities, the European Network of Information Centres (ENIC) and the National Academic Recognition Information Centres (NARIC), the Lisbon Recognition Convention complements the Bologna Process, fostering greater harmonisation and cooperation in the European Higher Education Area (EHEA).</p> <p>To date, the Lisbon Recognition Convention has been ratified by 55 countries, including all members of the EHEA and several non-European states. Furthermore, the Global Convention has been ratified by 38 countries, 20 of which are European.¹ Europe's example illustrates the potential benefits of regional commitment to recognition frameworks and offers practical insights that can inform similar efforts in ASEAN.</p> <p>As none of the ASEAN member states have ratified either the Tokyo Convention or the Global Convention on Higher Education, there is a clear need to support efforts towards</p>
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¹ Andorra, Armenia, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Estonia, Finland, France, Georgia, Holy See, Hungary, Iceland, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Norway, Moldova, Romania, San Marino, Slovakia, Sweden and the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.

	<p>ratification and implementation. At the ASEAN Policy Forum on Higher Education in November 2024, co-organised by Lao PDR, SCOPE-HE and UNESCO, stakeholders emphasised the importance of promoting mobility through regional and interregional integration and recognition practices in higher education.</p> <p>Based on this background, SCOPE-HE will commission a study to support the ratification and implementation of the Tokyo Convention and the Global Convention on recognition of higher education within ASEAN. The study will provide an overview of the current landscape, identify key barriers and opportunities, and assess the compatibility of regional frameworks such as the ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework (AQRF), ASEAN Quality Assurance Framework (AQAF) and ASEAN Credit Transfer System (ACTS) with the conventions' principles.</p> <p>Drawing on Europe's experience with the Lisbon Recognition Convention, it will offer actionable national and regional recommendations and identify areas for EU-ASEAN cooperation. These efforts align with UNESCO's capacity-building initiatives across Asia-Pacific and globally to support the ratification and implementation of the recognition conventions. Engaging diverse stakeholders and partners is essential to further strengthen network development within ASEAN and across other regions.</p> <p>Ratifying both the Tokyo Convention and the Global Convention on higher education offers a crucial opportunity to align with international norms and best practices, collectively advancing regional harmonisation in higher education. Additionally, implementing these complementary conventions will enhance interregional cooperation between ASEAN and other regions, including the EU. Strengthening interoperability between ASEAN and EU qualification frameworks will facilitate</p>
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	<p>student and workforce mobility, expand participation in Erasmus+, promote joint degree programmes and research collaborations, as well as enhance mutual trust in higher education standards, ultimately fostering greater interregional academic and professional opportunities.</p> <p>Focus of the study</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Assessment of the state of play in ASEAN: Provide a comprehensive overview of the current status of ratification and implementation of the Tokyo Convention and the Global Convention in each ASEAN member state.<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Country-level Assessment: Identify key challenges such as administrative and political barriers and analyse enabling conditions or good practices that can support and facilitate the ratification and effective implementation of both Conventions by ASEAN Member States.- Institutional Assessment: Mapping of existing or potential National Information Centres (NICs), including their roles, mandates and institutional capacities.- Regional Assessment: Assess the compatibility of frameworks, policies and practices on the recognition of qualifications and mobility, such as the AQRF, AQAF and ACTS, with the principles of the Tokyo Convention and the Global Convention.<p>This assessment will be conducted in close cooperation with the Bureau of the Tokyo Convention Committee and the Asia-Pacific Network of National Information Centres (APNNIC), with UNESCO Bangkok as Secretariat.</p>2. Comparative analysis with the Lisbon Recognition Convention and the Global Convention.
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		<ul style="list-style-type: none">- Sampling: Select a sample of 5 to 10 European countries that have ratified the two conventions. The sample should reflect a diversity of historical, political and educational backgrounds, as well as varying trajectories in the ratification process.- Trajectory of Ratification: Summarise the ratification journey of selected countries and analyse how similar challenges and barriers in ASEAN were addressed in the European context, particularly in the ratification and implementation of the two conventions.- Role of European Cooperation Mechanisms: Assess the role of European cooperation mechanisms in supporting the implementation of both conventions. This includes examining the role of the ENIC, NARIC and the Lisbon Recognition Convention Committee (LRCC); <p>This comparative analysis will be developed in close cooperation with the Bureau of the LRCC, ensuring accurate reflection of European experiences.</p> <p>3. Actionable recommendations to advance ratification by ASEAN member states and regional implementation: Building on the findings from the assessments and comparative analysis, this section will present a set of concrete, actionable recommendations to support ASEAN member states in the ratification and effective implementation of the Tokyo Convention and the Global Convention.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">- Support National and Regional Reforms: Address both national- and regional-level reforms (e.g., policy alignment, institutional capacity, development of NICs) and propose practical steps to enhance
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		<p>information sharing, mutual trust and cross-border recognition practices.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Promote EU-ASEAN Strategic Cooperation: Identify opportunities for strategic EU-ASEAN cooperation in support of these national and regional processes, including through technical assistance, peer learning, and engagement with relevant regional bodies. - Incorporate Adaptable Lessons from Europe: Highlight relevant and adaptable lessons from the Europe's experiences, while recognising the specific contexts and needs of the ASEAN region.
ELIGIBILITY	3	<p>This Cft is eligible for registered organisations or individuals who meet the following criteria:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. General <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Registered organisations such as universities, research institutions, think tanks, consulting firms or other relevant entities. • Individual researchers with a proven track record in higher education research. • The applying entity must be legally registered in an ASEAN member state or demonstrate established partnerships/network within ASEAN and the EU. 2. Research Team Composition <p>The research team must consist of a Core Team (Lead Researcher and Research Assistants) and Field Researchers based in ASEAN member states.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Core Team (Lead Researcher and Research Assistants) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> One (1) Lead Researcher <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Advanced degree (PhD or equivalent) in higher education studies, education policy, comparative education, international relations, public policy or a related field. ○ Demonstrated research expertise through relevant publications and/or projects,

		<p>knowledge of recognition of qualifications, higher education mobility, and the UNESCO Tokyo and Global conventions is highly desirable.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ An established network of relevant professional and academic contacts in ASEAN and/or Asia-Pacific. ○ In-depth knowledge of regional and global qualifications frameworks, quality assurance mechanisms and recognition practices. ○ Track record of stakeholder engagement with higher education institutions, ministries, quality assurance agencies and international organisations in the Asia-Pacific region and/or EHEA. ○ Responsible for leading the core team and coordinating with field researchers. <p>At least three (3) Research Assistants:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Master's (preferable) or bachelor's degree in education, management, public policy, international development or other related areas. ○ Relevant knowledge and prior research or work experience on the topic. ○ Demonstrated experience in or exposure to stakeholder engagement with academic institutions, networks or regional organisations in Asia-Pacific and/or the EHEA. ○ Provide direct support to the Lead Researcher in data collection and analysis, literature review, comparative analysis and drafting the final report. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● At least five (5) Field Researchers (based in ASEAN member states): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Each residing in an ASEAN member state and willing to travel within ASEAN.
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EXPECTED OUTPUTS & SERVICES	4	<p>The selected research team is expected to deliver the following outputs:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Country-by-country analysis of the ratification status and implementation of the Tokyo and Global conventions across ASEAN member states. This includes a description of national context, identification of country-specific

		<p>barriers, and good practices/opportunities to ratify and implement both conventions.</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none">2. Analysis of existing regional frameworks, policies, agreements and/or institutional capacities in ASEAN relevant to the ratification and implementation of both conventions.3. Historical background that aided each EU country in overcoming identified barriers and challenges.4. Actionable recommendations to advance the ratification and implementation of both conventions in ASEAN.5. Serve as resource persons at consultations and provide recommendations to ASEAN policymakers, national policymakers, higher education institutions and other relevant organisations within ASEAN to ratify and implement both conventions.6. Provide a research report of approximately 100–150 pages (excluding annexes) addressing the above mentioned objectives and comprising the following: executive summary; background of the research; purpose and scope; methodology; literature review; analysis of interviews with key stakeholders; conclusions; and recommendations for follow-up actions or research (medium- and long-term).7. Commit to supporting the dissemination of the study's results to key ASEAN stakeholders, in collaboration with the SCOPE-HE team, during the entire duration of SCOPE-HE. <p>All documents and other materials produced as a result of the services rendered against these terms of reference including but not limited to strategies, reports, application forms, report forms, etc. are transferred deliverables, and ownership of intellectual property rights is to be assigned to SCOPE-HE (specifically DAAD as implementing partner) without exception. The results, however, can be used for further research to contribute to the publicly available body of knowledge.</p>
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PROVISIONAL TIMELINE	5	Timeline for Study: 12–18 Months	
		1. Planning and Preparation (1–2 months)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Refine research objectives, methodology and work plan. 2. Establish collaborations with regional stakeholders and experts. 3. Collect preliminary data and secure access to relevant information.
		2. Data Collection and Analysis (6–9 months)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Conduct desk research to review existing literature, policies and frameworks. 2. Comparative analysis: Assess how ASEAN countries' practices align with the UNESCO Tokyo and Global conventions. 3. Engage in fieldwork such as surveys, interviews or focus groups with key stakeholders, including but not limited to the Bureau of the Tokyo Convention Committee; APNNIC; Ministries of Higher Education in ASEAN; ASEAN Qualifications Reference Framework Committee; European Network of National Information Centres (ENIC-NARIC); UNESCO; educational institutions; and student and professional associations. 4. Analyse data to identify gaps, challenges and opportunities.
		3. Drafting and Validation of Findings (3–4 months)	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Prepare interim reports and policy briefs based on findings. 2. Validate findings through consultations, workshops or

		<table><tr><td>December 2026–February 2027</td><td>Editing and proofreading of report</td></tr><tr><td>February 2027</td><td>Submission of final report</td></tr><tr><td>March 2027</td><td>Publication and dissemination of report to key ASEAN and EU stakeholders in collaboration with SCOPE-HE team</td></tr></table>	December 2026–February 2027	Editing and proofreading of report	February 2027	Submission of final report	March 2027	Publication and dissemination of report to key ASEAN and EU stakeholders in collaboration with SCOPE-HE team		
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BUDGET AND INDICATIVE PAYMENT SCHEDULE	6	<table><tr><td>Anticipated Budget</td><td>Up to 70.000 Euro</td></tr><tr><td>Team Composition</td><td><u>One (1)</u> Lead Researcher and <u>at least three (3)</u> Research Assistants.</td></tr><tr><td rowspan="3">Indicative Payment Schedule</td><td>1st payment: 35% of the offer, upon submission of final proposal and agreed timeline</td></tr><tr><td>2nd payment: 35% of the offer, upon submission of progress report</td></tr><tr><td>3rd payment: 30% of the offer, upon dissemination of report</td></tr></table>	Anticipated Budget	Up to 70.000 Euro	Team Composition	<u>One (1)</u> Lead Researcher and <u>at least three (3)</u> Research Assistants.	Indicative Payment Schedule	1st payment: 35% of the offer, upon submission of final proposal and agreed timeline	2nd payment: 35% of the offer, upon submission of progress report	3rd payment: 30% of the offer, upon dissemination of report
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APPLICATION & SELECTION PROCEDURE	7	<p>Interested applicants should apply as a research team comprising <u>one (1)</u> Lead Researcher and <u>at least three (3)</u> Research Assistants. Field researchers may be recruited following the approval of the tender.</p> <p>1. Applicants can send the proposal to the contact point below. Proposals will be evaluated based on the documents submitted by the applying research team, including the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Curriculum vitae of the Lead Researcher indicating that eligibility criteria are fulfilled.• Curriculum vitae of each Research Assistant indicating that eligibility criteria are fulfilled.								

		<p>2. A comprehensive proposal to address the expected outputs as listed above, and further comprising:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Description of the research design and methodology, including potential ethical issues/anticipated difficulties relating to data collection. • Preliminary bibliography for literature review. • Proposed workplan and timeline, including an indicative start date for the research. • Detailed cost breakdown (including daily expert rates for each participating researcher and travel costs). <p>3. The selection committee will send the invitation letter for tender to shortlisted applicants.</p> <p>The table below shows the evaluation criteria weightings.</p> <table border="1"> <thead> <tr> <th>Component</th><th>Item of Evaluation</th><th>Weighting</th></tr> </thead> <tbody> <tr> <td rowspan="2">Researchers' Profiles</td><td>Researchers' CVs</td><td>30%</td></tr> <tr> <td>Track record based on previous relevant projects</td><td>20%</td></tr> <tr> <td rowspan="2">Research Proposal</td><td>Research design</td><td>40%</td></tr> <tr> <td>Bibliography</td><td>10%</td></tr> <tr> <td colspan="2">Total Score</td><td>100%</td></tr> </tbody> </table> <p>4. The successful applicant will receive a formal letter to initiate the tender process.</p>	Component	Item of Evaluation	Weighting	Researchers' Profiles	Researchers' CVs	30%	Track record based on previous relevant projects	20%	Research Proposal	Research design	40%	Bibliography	10%	Total Score		100%
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DEADLINE & POINT OF CONTACT	8	<p>Please send your application (comprising a Research Proposal and the CV of each member of the applying research team, in a single PDF) to scope-he@daad.de</p> <p>All applications must be submitted by 1500 GMT+7, 31 August 2025.</p>																