

## Chapter 8

# Asia – Europe Cooperation on Labour Mobility, Education, and Training: What are the implications of digital transformation for ASEM?

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# Asia–Europe Cooperation on Labour Mobility, Education, and Training

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## WHAT ARE THE IMPLICATIONS OF DIGITAL TRANSFORMATIONS FOR ASEM?

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### Introduction

Over the past 24 years, the Asia–Europe Meeting (ASEM) has played a key role as a forum for dialogue and cooperation in connecting Asia and Europe. ASEM has become an emblem of cooperation and connectivity between the two regions. With advances in technology and innovation, as well as digitalisation in a wide range of issue areas, innovative cooperation approaches are envisaged in an array of sectors, including economic and financial matters, investment to new locations, sustainable growth, and, not least, the movement of people.

In light of the upcoming Cambodian chair of the 13th ASEM Summit (ASEM13) in 2021, this chapter contributes to the plenary study on ‘Asia–Europe Connectivity and Cooperation: Ensuring Inclusive and Sustainable Growth Amidst New Global Challenges’, by focusing on the dimension of people-to-people connectivity and discussing how digitalisation impacts on human mobility. To this end, it will explore formal and informal cooperation instruments between Asia – in particular, the Association of the Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) – and Europe – namely, the European Union (EU) – with regard to labour mobility and migration, education, and training. As the main regional integration frameworks from the two continents, which are part of ASEM, both the EU and ASEAN have developed different mobility policies and are cooperating on a wide range of areas linked to the mobility of people. Building on the practices within the EU and ASEAN, this contribution will discuss how these experiences could be extrapolated to the ASEM context, addressing both opportunities and challenges raised by the mobility of people within the evolving digital economy of Asia and Europe.

The empirical data used will draw on previous studies and expert interviews with government officials, diplomats, civil society organisations, academia, and other key stakeholders active in the field of labour mobility conducted by the author within the two regions (see also Jurje [2018] and Jurje and Lavenex [2019; 2018; 2016; 2014]).

The chapter will first discuss the people-to-people mobility frameworks implemented in the EU and ASEAN. Then, an analysis of the cooperation instruments on labour mobility and migration, education, and training in place between the two regions will follow. This contribution will further look at digitalisation strategies across Europe and Asia and their impact on the mobility of people. Finally, the conclusions will summarise the key findings and present recommendations for the ASEM leaders.

## **People-to-People Connectivity: Labour Migration and Academic Mobility Frameworks in Asia and Europe**

This part will first discuss the existing mobility policies in place within ASEAN and the EU. Secondly, it will analyse the ongoing cooperation programmes and instruments developed between the two regions with regard to managing migration and fostering mobility.

### **Intra ASEAN People-to-People Mobility**

The movement of labour within the Southeast Asian region, while not part of the original declaration establishing ASEAN in 1967, entered the regional integration agenda in the context of ASEAN's decision to liberalise trade in services. The mobility of service providers or highly skilled professionals attached to trade was first addressed with the adoption of the 1995 ASEAN Framework Agreement on Services (AFAS) and later with the initiative to conclude the Agreement on the Movement of Natural Persons (MNP). Most of the commitments inscribed in the AFAS and then the MNP cover mainly highly skilled professionals attached to a commercial presence, intra-corporate transferees (with durations of stay from two years up to five/eight years), and business visitors, who are people employed in their home countries that are entering another country for business-related purposes for short time periods and not receiving remuneration in their host countries (allowed for between 30 and 120 days). Only Viet Nam, Cambodia, and the Philippines have inscribed provisions on contractual service suppliers<sup>1</sup>, which are service providers de-linked from commercial establishment, but these are allowed only for a limited duration of stay (e.g. a maximum of 90 days in Viet Nam) and their mobility is subject to education and experience requirements. However, in practice, trade-related labour mobility is seen as only facilitating the movement of professionals, managers, and qualified staff under the intra-corporate transferee category (see also Nikomborirak and Jitdumrong [2013] and ILO and ADB [2014]). Travelling within the region for up to one month is visa-free for ASEAN nationals, but work visas remain subject to domestic regulations.

In addition to this are a number of so-called Mutual Recognition Arrangements (MRAs), which further promote the mobility of selected skilled professionals. So far, MRAs have been

concluded for professions covering engineering, accountancy, architecture, surveying, nursing, dental and medical practitioners, and tourism (Interviews 1, 2). Nevertheless, an MRA does not automatically grant ‘free movement’, as domestic immigration procedures or language barriers can seriously restrict the mobility of professionals within the region (Interviews 1, 2, 3, 4).

A greater flow of skilled labour has been envisaged following the establishment of the ASEAN Economic Community (AEC) in 2015 (see ASEAN Secretariat [2008, 2015]) by developing additional mobility initiatives. These include the following:

- Facilitating mobility through the issuance of visas and employment passes for business and skilled labour
- Recognition of professional qualifications
- Implementing and developing new MRAs
- Human resources development in the area of services
- Core competencies and qualifications in priority services
- Strengthening labour market programme capacities
- Enhancing the mobility of scientists and researchers
- Human resources development
- Promoting decent work
- Protecting and promoting the rights of migrant workers

Particularly for the movement of people, the AEC has sought to speed up the implementation process of the MRAs but also proposes achieving greater cooperation amongst the ASEAN University Network institutions to increase the mobility of students and academic staff.

In addition to the economic pillar that covers mobility, cooperation under the socio-cultural pillar led to the signing of the Declaration on Migrants’ Rights (2007) and subsequently of the ASEAN Consensus on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers (2018). The documents aim to safeguard the rights of migrants and their families in accordance with national laws and regulations, and call for appropriate employment protection, wages, and living conditions as well as for coordination on anti-trafficking policies. Exchanges of good practices and policy ideas between governments, workers’ associations, and employers’ associations are closely coordinated with the International Labour Organization (ILO) Regional Office for Asia and the Pacific, under the ASEAN Forum on Migrant Labour (Interviews 1, 2, 6, 7). There are also a few intra-ASEAN bilateral memoranda of understanding covering the labour mobility of lower-skilled labour, specifying conditions for domestic migrant workers related to the duration of stay, language requirements, and immigration procedures – however, there is no regional cooperation system for low or unskilled labour.

It should also be mentioned that the available data reveals that overwhelming shares of both recorded and unrecorded labour flows within ASEAN are actually in low- and semi-skilled labour, categories of migrants that are not addressed at the regional level (see ILO and ADB [2014]; Huelser and Heal [2014]). According to UNDESA and OECD (2013), some 6.5 million ASEAN citizens were reported to reside in other ASEAN states, although this is probably a large underestimate given unrecorded migration. In fact, it is acknowledged that the vast majority of migrants searching for work within ASEAN are unskilled or semi-skilled (Huelser and Heal, 2014; Orbeta, 2013). While flows of skilled labour in ASEAN have increased, they remain small in comparison to the flows of unskilled or semi-skilled labour migration. Orbeta (2013) estimates that nearly 9 out of 10 migrants from ASEAN moving within the region are low skilled, and OECD data (2010/2011<sup>2</sup>) shows that the majority of emigrants have only primary education, with unskilled migration outstripping skilled migration significantly as for example in Indonesia, Myanmar, Cambodia, Thailand, and the Lao PDR (OECD Database DIOC-E in Huelser and Heal [2014]). The available data from key destination states (Orbeta, 2013; ILO and ADB, 2014) also reveal this gap between highly skilled and low-skilled migration. For example, in Thailand, only about 3% of workers are highly skilled, while in Singapore they account for nearly one-quarter – however, the majority come from outside the region, including China, India, the United States (US), and the United Kingdom. As opposed to skilled mobility, it is not surprising that low-skilled migration is not on the AEC agenda, denoting clear political challenges associated with national sovereignty concerns and the reluctance of receiving countries to address the subject of low-skilled migration at the regional level. The main destination countries in the region are Malaysia and Singapore (mainly domestic helpers from the Philippines and Indonesia, and construction workers and agricultural labour especially from Indonesia to Malaysia), as well as Thailand, with workers from Cambodia, the Lao PDR, and Myanmar (ILO and ADB, 2014; Capannelli, 2013).

## EU Free Movement of People

The free movement of workers – today, people – together with capital, goods, and services constitute the four fundamental freedoms of the European Single Market Act (Art. 18 EC). The full free movement of workers was introduced in 1968 with Regulation 1612/68, and in 1987, the Single European Act set forward that the free movement norm was to be extended from the group of ‘workers’ to the economically inactive, and today covers all EU citizens as well as their foreign relatives. Special provisions apply to the service sector for persons who maintain their employment contracts with an employer in their home country and stay enrolled with their home country social security systems but move to another EU country to work for a period of up to two years.

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<sup>2</sup> The original database can be accessed here: <http://www.oecd.org/els/mig/dioc.htm>.

These ‘posted workers’ are excluded from needing a work permit and do not need to go through the recognition of their professional qualifications<sup>3</sup> (Directive 96/71/EC).

EU migrant workers and their families have the right to the same taxation and enjoy the same social advantages as their fellows in their host states (e.g. child-raising allowances and right to education for children, etc.). The EU Member States have coordinated their social security systems and established a framework that mutually recognises qualifications (Deacon et al., 2011). The social rights of third-country nationals have been addressed in the EU Long Term Residents Directive (2003/109/EC) and the EU Family Reunification Directive (2003/86/CE).

The EU free movement regime is further reinforced by the abolition of controls at the internal borders of the EU, as decided in the 1985 Schengen Agreement and realised in 1996. This abolition of internal border controls was taken as an impetus for cooperating on external migration to the EU. The conditions for crossing the EU external border, visas for stays shorter than three months, and wide sections of asylum policy are regulated by EU rules. Although the EU lacks a full-fledged competence on economic immigration from third countries, directives have been adopted concerning specific groups, such as the highly skilled (for example the Directive for Intra Corporate Transferees, 2014/66/EU), students, researchers, and seasonal workers. In addition, the mobility regime has been extended to a few non-EU Member States that have a special association status with the EU. The full freedom of movement has been introduced through the Treaty on the European Economic Area of 1992 with the remaining members of the European Free Trade Association and with Switzerland by a bilateral treaty in 1999.

In addition, trade agreements with chapters on services concluded by the EU with third countries have incorporated specific mobility provisions linked to trade. Most of these mobility liberalisations cover the categories of intra-corporate transferees, or in the EU terminology ‘key personnel’ (a category present in almost 70% of the EU agreements), and self-employed persons within the companies established and effectively controlled by these nationals in the territories of the EU. There are some exceptions that also give rights for service suppliers de-linked from a commercial presence. One such example is the economic partnership agreement concluded with the distant Cariforum countries. Nonetheless, the significance of the commitments related to service suppliers not linked to establishment is contested. The agreement is said to be ‘crowded with economic needs tests, which remove certainty’ (Kategekwa, 2008: 11). Nevertheless, as Dawson (2012: 15) points out, in contrast with the European Union’s General Agreement on Trade in Services offer, which is quite ambiguous, the economic partnership agreement provides

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<sup>3</sup> A written declaration might be required.

clear and understandable terms for temporary movement and straightforward requirements regarding training and certification, with a focus on specific sectors in which the Cariforum states have services capacity. Numerical quotas for key personnel and graduate trainees in the liberalised sectors have been eliminated. Free trade agreements (FTAs) signed with the Republic of Korea (in force from 2010) and Colombia and Peru (concluded in 2011) are also cases where GATS+ provisions have been granted, in particular with regard to the maximum duration of stay of highly skilled personnel, but also the inclusion of contractual service suppliers and independent professionals, service suppliers independent from commercial presence.

Regarding the mobility of students and researchers within the EU, a specific policy instrument was introduced at the regional level, the so-called ERASMUS+ programme. It supports education, training, youth, and sport in Europe by providing opportunities for over 4 million Europeans to study, train, and gain experience abroad. The main features of the programme are recognition and validation of skills and qualifications (various tools that ensure that skills and qualifications can be more easily recognised and are better understood, within and across national borders); dissemination and exploitation of results; open access to project outputs to support learning, teaching, training, and youth work; encouragement for beneficiaries to publish research output through open access pathways. At the same time, ERASMUS+ includes a strong international dimension, namely cooperation with partner countries, notably in the fields of higher education and youth. Amongst the main actions with partner countries, which include Asian countries and ASEAN counterparts, are the international credit mobility of individuals, capacity-building projects in higher education, support for policy dialogue, and Jean Monnet activities.<sup>4</sup>

In sum, economic integration, with the creation of the Single Market, has triggered the free and full movement of people within the EU, and service-trade related external labour mobility is present in all of the EU's FTAs that have a chapter on services. Besides the mobility of people associated with commercial establishments (i.e. intra-corporate transferees and business visitors), there are also openings inscribed for the other categories, a notable example being the FTA concluded by the EU with the Cariforum states. At the same time, the mobility of students, researchers, and academic staff is highly encouraged through ERASMUS+, the EU's special programme to support education and training development.

## Cooperation Instruments for Migration, Education, and Training Between Asia and Europe

Within ASEM, which brings together the EU and its Member States as well as the ASEAN countries and ASEAN Secretariat (amongst other participants from the two continents), exchanges on international migration were initiated in 2003 under the ASEM Conference of the Directors-General of Immigration and Management of Migratory Flows, with the scope of strengthening links between members' immigration authorities and permitting exchanges of information and of good practices in the field of international migration. So far, 14 conferences have been organised, with discussions covering mostly aspects related to migration control and the management of migration flows. Additional discussions on migration, particularly on labour migration, education, and training mobility between Asia and Europe, may also gain further importance in the agenda of the ASEM Ministers of Employment and Labour Meetings. Furthermore, the Asia–Europe Foundation supports and augments the formal ASEM migration discussions through other cooperation events and exchanges on ASEM migration themes. In practice, people-to-people connectivity between Asia and Europe accounts for some 400,000 internationally mobile university students, more than 200,000 research collaborations, and 13 million migrants (including workers, professionals, and academics moving between Asian and European countries – see Becker et al. [2019]).

While cooperation on border management and anti-irregular migration action is also part of various EU–ASEAN sub-regional programmes, EU and ASEAN leaders have further developed other instruments within their regions and amongst the continents to address human mobility and policy experiences that could serve to broaden the ASEM agenda on the cross-border flows of people. The following section will present the main cooperation programmes put in place between the EU and ASEAN.

The countries of the EU and ASEAN have a long-lasting history of cooperation. The EU–ASEAN dialogue, initiated back in 1977 and institutionalised with the signing of the ASEAN–EEC Cooperation Agreement in 1980, was revised throughout the years to reflect the needs and realities of the two parties. Today, it encompasses aspects related to the mobility of people and migrants' rights, educational programmes aiming to enhance student mobility, and the development of regional qualification frameworks (within the so-called European Union Support to Higher Education in the ASEAN Region Programme, SHARE), as well as migration management, as for example the ASEAN–EU Migration and Border Management Programmes.

In light of the renewed efforts of the ASEAN leaders to build closer ties amongst the 10 Member States and establish a single market and production base, the EU has been showing support for these initiatives and has increased dialogue and cooperation programmes,



with the overall goal of enhancing the economic, social, political, and connectivity linkages between the two continents. Aspects related to people mobility, education and academic training exchanges, and the rights of migrant workers that are part of the broader economic, political, and socio-cultural cooperation are also found in the current ASEAN–EU Plan of Action 2016–2024 of the Enhanced Regional EU–ASEAN Dialogue Instrument, E-READI.<sup>5</sup>

Cooperation in the field of migration management, by supporting the ASEAN Political and Security Community, has been established for instance under the EU–ASEAN Migration and Border Management Programmes I and II, which helped improve border management and speed up trans-border movements. With financial and technical support from INTERPOL, the EU supported the development of an Integrated Border Management System in the region in order to facilitate the legal movements of goods and persons and better combat transnational crime and the illegal migration and trafficking of human beings across ASEAN. To this end, the EU stated its support for the implementation of the 2011 ASEAN Leaders’ Joint Statement in Enhancing Cooperation against Trafficking in Persons in Southeast Asia through measures such as information sharing and the use of technologies relevant to border management and document security. As initial outcomes, the EU programme helped ASEAN Member States improve cooperation amongst their border management bodies and enhanced cooperation on information exchanges between INTERPOL local offices and the INTERPOL General Secretariat (European Union Delegation Jakarta, 2013). The assistance in the area of migration and border management had been designed to address the agenda on people-to-people connectivity in ASEAN by strengthening law enforcement and cooperation at main regional transit hubs. A study on easing the visa requirements for ASEAN and third-country nationals entering the region is also part of this cooperation.

Aspects related to the rights of migrants are to be found under cooperation on broader human rights initiatives, with the EU giving full support to the ASEAN Commission on the Promotion and Protection of the Rights of Women and Children. Matters related to human rights are also reiterated under socio-cultural cooperation, with the EU engaging in policy dialogues and programmes that promote human rights, including the well-being of migrant workers (European Union Delegation Jakarta, 2013). A recent initiative with regard to the rights of migrants, particularly for women within the ASEAN region, initiated by the EU and the United Nations is the Safe and Fair programme, which addresses women’s migrant worker rights and opportunities in the ASEAN region. The project aims to eliminate violence against women and girls, a global, multi-year initiative implemented through a partnership between the ILO and UN Women with the overriding objective of ensuring that labour migration is safe and fair for all women in the ASEAN region.<sup>6</sup>

<sup>5</sup> For details see: [https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/49815/enhanced-regional-eu-asean-dialogue-instrument-e-readi\\_km](https://eeas.europa.eu/headquarters/headquarters-homepage/49815/enhanced-regional-eu-asean-dialogue-instrument-e-readi_km).

<sup>6</sup> For details see: [https://www.ilo.org/asia/projects/WCMS\\_632458/lang--en/index.htm](https://www.ilo.org/asia/projects/WCMS_632458/lang--en/index.htm).

As part of the support for the socio-cultural community, the EU is endorsing greater student mobility in the region and has initiated programmes that will contribute to the harmonisation of the recognition systems between higher education institutions in ASEAN (Interviews 5, 6). It aims to improve the comparability of university qualifications and ease the transfer of credits through the development of Qualification Framework and Assurance systems. As pointed out above, a notable example of EU–ASEAN cooperation in this field is the SHARE programme. SHARE contributes to connectivity between students and universities in the region by supporting the advancement of the ASEAN Community Vision 2025 and through harmonisation of the higher education space across ASEAN. Drawing on the EU’s experience with academic mobility within the European Community Action Scheme for the Mobility of University Students (ERASMUS+ scheme), the SHARE programme aims to strengthen regional cooperation and enhance the quality, regional competitiveness, and internationalisation of ASEAN higher education. Fostering connectivity between people within ASEAN and between the EU and ASEAN is the main goal of the programme. The SHARE programme has so far awarded over 500 scholarships to ASEAN students and university staff and organised policy dialogues, workshops, and forums attended by over 2,000 participants (EU SHARE Newsletter, 2020). Furthermore, EU–Asia academic cooperation through the ERASMUS+ programme is fostering the mobility of students and academic staff from particular ASEAN countries (and more broadly Asia), as well as providing capacity building in higher education across the partner countries from the region.

## People-to-People Mobility and Digital Transformations in Asia and Europe

Both Europe and Asia are highly engaged in the digital economy and connectivity. At the same time, there are ongoing digital cooperation programmes between the EU and ASEAN that cover matters of policy, regulation, and digital innovation ecosystems more broadly (supported by the EU–ASEAN Regional Dialogue Instrument, E-READI<sup>7</sup>).

Within the EU, in particular, the Digital Single Market envisages the free movement of persons, services, and capital and proposes that individuals and businesses can seamlessly access and engage in online activities under the conditions of fair competition and a high level of consumer and personal data protection, irrespective of nationality or place of residence.<sup>8</sup> The EU’s current digital strategy aims to make the technological transformations work for the people, primarily by investing in developing digital competences, modernising education across the EU, harnessing digital technologies for learning and for the recognition and validation of skills, and anticipating and analysing skills needs.<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> See also European Commission (2019a).

<sup>8</sup> See also European Commission (2019b).

<sup>9</sup> See also European Commission (n.d.).

The ASEAN digital economy is growing significantly, and policy measures and frameworks, including the AEC Blueprint 2025, Masterplan on ASEAN Connectivity 2025, and the e-ASEAN Framework Agreement, have been set in place by ASEAN leaders to enhance the benefits of digitalisation. In addition, Digital ASEAN, an initiative of the World Economic Forum and regional partners in ASEAN, both public and private, aims to develop the regional digital economy within ASEAN so that the benefits of the Fourth Industrial Revolution can become a force for regional economic inclusion. To this end, and similarly to the EU approach, working on building a shared commitment to training digital skills for the ASEAN workforce is one of the main objectives of the initiative.<sup>10</sup> In addition, the 11th ASEAN Forum on Labour Migration (2018) adopted the theme ‘Digitalisation to Promote Decent Work for Migrant Workers in ASEAN’. As an activity under the ASEAN Committee on the Implementation of the ASEAN Declaration on the Protection and Promotion of the Rights of Migrant Workers Work Plan 2016–2020, the forum shared good practices and discussed ideas on leveraging technology to: first, improve labour migration management; and second, provide digital services for migrant workers, with an overarching view of furthering all migrant workers’ well-being while giving due consideration to gender sensitivity.<sup>11</sup>

It is clear that the implications of increasing digitalisation for the mobility of people are manifold, creating opportunities but at the same time also raising challenges. The following section will assess the implications of digitalisation for the mobility of people.

## Digital Technologies That Can Benefit the Mobility of People

Digitalisation is making it increasingly easier to access information and connect people worldwide. Today, it is acknowledged that digital technologies offer many opportunities to simplify, secure, and accelerate migration processes. The use of digital tools and platforms has spread considerably in the field of labour migration and for the development of services for migrant workers.

Below are various issue areas where digitalisation could facilitate the mobility of people. Some of these aspects have also been raised by international organisations, such as the ILO<sup>12</sup>:

- Using apps and digital platforms to make it simpler to find jobs, connect with communities, and transfer money (remittances), e.g. by reducing banking fees, and in a more secured manner (e.g. using blockchain-powered applications to transfer and manage money). Also, using apps and online rating sites can help migrants make informed choices by allowing them to compare recruitment agencies, money transfer operators, and other service providers.

<sup>10</sup> See also World Economic Forum (n.d.).

<sup>11</sup> For details see: [https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/meetingdocument/wcms\\_648531.pdf](https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---asia/---ro-bangkok/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_648531.pdf).

<sup>12</sup> See also ILO (2018).

- Digital migration management sources can help reduce the money and time costs associated with formal recruitment processes (which might push migrants to use informal, undocumented, and unsafe channels).
- Digital management platforms for migration could also store documents, such as work contracts, payment slips, or medical certificates, thus creating a record of agreements, a so-called ‘digital trail’ as highlighted by ILO’s Triangle Programme in ASEAN (2018). This can be useful if disputes about contract terms, repayments, or other issues arise between a migrant worker and an employer or recruitment agency.
- Digital solutions that offer services to migrants could cover legal support, welfare assistance, or online training opportunities.
- Digital technologies allow migrants to share information in a timely and affordable manner. Online networks can provide peer-to-peer assistance to migrant workers and help them get organised, for example with administrative aspects related to their jobs abroad.
- Online complaint services can help migrant workers seek assistance, even when working in remote and isolated places.

## The Digital Divide and Challenges to the Mobility of People

As pointed out above, digitalisation could also trigger constraints for some categories of people on the move. Some examples include the following:

- Gaps in terms of digital skills, access to infrastructure, affordable technical devices (e.g. mobile phones and computers) and data plans (i.e. the internet) could disrupt the potential to access the abovementioned services and tools meant to help achieve fair migration.
- Digitalisation could lead to the spread of misinformation, dishonest online service providers, and limited protection of personal data and online privacy. In order to ensure the protection of data on migrant workers collected and stored online, regulations are required to guarantee the privacy and safety of users of online platforms and tools.
- Many traditional jobs may be replaced by the automatisisation and digitalisation of processes, which in turn can pose problems for some categories of migrants in accessing those jobs. Thus, considering what types of digital skills are needed in the economy and investing in education to develop the appropriate competences are key measures in bridging the digital gap.

## Conclusions

The mobility of people is of great importance for the economies of Asia and Europe. While the EU has in some respects pioneered the free movement of people and is an active promoter of academic mobility at the regional level (in principle through the ERASMUS+ scheme), ASEAN has opted for a more selective intra-regional labour mobility model, following mainly the trade in services-related mobility of skilled professionals and encouraging the cross-border exchanges of researchers and academic staff. Multiple EU–ASEAN cooperation instruments have been developed covering aspects of common interests linked to labour migration, the rights of migrants, education, and training, as well as border management policies. Building upon the policy experiences and cooperation exchanges of these two sub-regions, ASEM could further enhance the dialogue and cooperation on the mobility of labour and education between Asia and Europe, especially in light of the growing importance of the digital economies of the regions. As pointed out by the ASEM Leaders at the ‘Seminar on Enhancing Human Capital for Sustainable Digital Connectivity’ (Bangkok, 2019<sup>13</sup>), ‘the potential for the digital economy to drive inclusive and sustainable growth is substantial. It is therefore vital for the ASEM partners to fully leverage the benefits of the digital economy and work together in tackling inequality and giving equal opportunities by enabling more people through infrastructure, and training, as well as by promoting business and community engagement, and digital innovation’. This has tremendous implications for the mobility of people, as well as the labour and education markets. While the benefits of developing digital technologies for migrants are primarily linked to easier access to information about jobs abroad, safer and cheaper channels for sending remittances, as well as better protection mechanisms against malpractices, there are also challenges. Jobs are being lost to digitalisation and automation, and the digital divide risks excluding an important part of the migrant population from the labour market. To address these shortcomings, Asian and European partners could use ASEM to:

- Share knowledge, best practices, policies, and strategies for preparing the workforce for a digital-based workplace through enabling them to acquire the required digital skills, literacy, training, and re-skilling where necessary; and
- Promote lifelong learning and education, facilitate greater labour mobility, and revise labour laws and regulations to clearly reflect the transformations brought about by the digital economy, but also address challenges facing migrants (e.g. data protection, access to infrastructure).

To enhance people-to-people connectivity in the era of digitalisation, ASEM, as a dialogue and policy cooperation forum bringing Asia and Europe closer, could propose a holistic approach to mobility. Aspects covering economic mobility, academic and training cooperation, the rights of migrants, as well as control and border management, should

become part of a common vision on human mobility, which, at the same time, addresses the policy goals of the regions and the global agenda more broadly.

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