

TERMS OF REFERENCE

Project	Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM)
Expertise	Public Policy, Data Analysis, Programme Management
Expertise Group	Education

- 1. Designation** : Policy and Evidence Integration Manager
- 2. Reporting to** : Deputy Director for Programme and Development, SEAMEO Secretariat, and SEA-PLM Programme Manager

3. Background

The Southeast Asia Primary Learning Metrics (SEA-PLM) is a regional large-scale learning assessment and capacity-building programme designed by and for Southeast Asian countries to improve relevant and equitable learning outcomes for students in basic education. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic and school closures, SEA-PLM 2019 data revealed a critical foundational skills crisis across Southeast Asia, with millions of children unable to read and comprehend basic texts by the end of primary school. Significant disparities in literacy and numeracy proficiency levels between countries highlight a deep learning crisis exacerbated by existing inequities in many schools and communities. These foundational skills are vital for children to develop 21st century and higher-order skills, to remain in school, to access development and job training opportunities, and to become healthy, productive, and resilient members of the ASEAN community.

1. SEA-PLM supports member countries to develop robust learning assessment systems and monitor student learning outcomes, promoting equitable and meaningful education for all children across the region. Learning data is critical for the improvement of policies and practices, and the SEA-PLM programme enables deeper understanding of the factors contributing, or impeding, learning in the region. ¹

2. By providing regional tools that effectively measure learning outcomes and generate data to inform educational policies, SEA-PLM will help provide strong indicators and metrics to measure progress of learning among Grade 5 students in the primary education in Southeast Asia in the context of post-Covid learning recovery situation. Through contextually and culturally appropriate tools, SEA-PLM may contribute to provide baseline data on learning loss and capture various learning recovery strategies that will help shape policy making in a post-Covid context in the region. To strengthen regional cohesion and solidarity, SEA-PLM provides systemic opportunities for participating countries to closely collaborate in several aspects such as defining regional standards for learning, building technical capacities, developing robust regional instruments and procedures, and setting several rounds of assessment.

SEA-PLM, led by its Co-Chairs, was initiated as a joint collaboration between the SEAMEO Secretariat and the UNICEF East Asia and Pacific Regional Office (UNICEF EAPRO) to fill the lack of primary grade assessment tools in Southeast Asia that is based on shared values and national curriculum frameworks, and respond to Education 2030 goals. SEA-PLM is participated by the Ministries of Education of Southeast Asia and supported by partners who contribute to its long-term success.

¹ UNESCO / International Association for the Evaluation of Educational Achievement (IEA) (2022). *The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on education: international evidence from the Responses to Educational Disruption Survey (REDS)*. Retrieved from <https://unesdoc.unesco.org/ark:/48223/pf0000380398>

3. The second round of SEA-PLM took place in 2024, assessing students in seven participating countries (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Timor-Leste and Viet Nam); results will be released in 2025. Beyond the data, the SEA-PLM programme seeks to advance the use of data in strengthening basic education policies and practices, known as Initiative 2. Through this Initiative 2 framework, the programme offers a tailored suite of collaboration opportunities, resources, and services designed to meet specific national needs. To commence this collaboration, starting in early 2025, the SEA-PLM Regional Secretariat seeks to conduct a series of engagements and country missions and engage interdepartmental teams within the Ministries of Education and partners to identify areas for collaboration, ensuring resources and efforts are targeted towards national opportunities and complementary to ongoing initiatives to strengthen foundational learning outcomes.

4. Objective and Purpose of Assignment

The Co-Chairs, SEAMEO Secretariat and UNICEF EAPRO, are committed to working in accelerating evidence-based reforms and actions to improve foundational learning outcomes in the region through the SEA-PLM programme.

In 2025, SEA-PLM aims to strengthen its regional- and country-level presence through impactful and relevant initiatives informed by the SEA-PLM data and evidence. The Policy and Evidence Integration Manager will take the lead amplifying SEA-PLM's efforts to advance data-driven and evidence-based informed policymaking and practices at the primary level and above to advance basic education standards and frameworks in ASEAN. The position will facilitate actions at national and regional levels that aim to synthesize evidence from SEA-PLM surveys, methodology, and other existing and new learning evidence to inform policy development and systems improvement. This role ensures that the programme's data-driven insights are effectively communicated, disseminated, and integrated into regional and national education strategies, with a focus on promoting equity, quality, and inclusiveness in learning opportunities.

The position will be part of the SEA-PLM Regional Secretariat, housed within the SEAMEO Secretariat reporting directly to SEAMEO Secretariat's Deputy Director for Programme and Development, and providing key updates to the Co-Chairs, led by the SEAMES Director and UNICEF EAPRO's Regional Education Advisor, working in close collaboration with the SEA-PLM Secretariat (SEAMES and UNICEF EAPRO). The position is stationed at the SEAMEO Secretariat office in Bangkok, Thailand.

5. Scope of Work

The Policy and Evidence Integration Manager will be the lead officer within the SEA-PLM Regional Secretariat to deliver and implement the SEA-PLM component under the EmpowerSAGE project. In collaboration with partners and the Secretariat, the Manager will lead and supervise the design, implementation, and reporting on the supported work across SEAMEO Member Countries under the Initiative 2 framework.

6. Duties and Responsibilities:

The main tasks of the Policy and Evidence Integration Manager are:

I. Evidence-to-Policy Integration and Advocacy

- A. Lead work with national governments in identifying promising and evidence-based initiative for SEA-PLM support under Initiative 2
- B. Translate existing research, data and evidence (including SEA-PLM assessment findings) into actionable policy insights and recommendations
- C. Engage with government officials, development partners, and stakeholders to promote evidence-based policy adoption and integration
- D. Develop policy briefs, presentations, and other advocacy materials to support decision making, based on national policies, priorities, data gaps and national capacity

II. Evidence Synthesis and Knowledge Generation

- A. Lead the synthesis of existing and new evidence to identify key trends, gaps, and opportunities
- B. Collaborate with technical experts to ensure findings aligned with global, regional, and national education goals and objectives
- C. Oversees the development of knowledge products, including reports, research papers, and policy toolkits

III. Capacity Building

- A. Design and implement capacity-building activities to help countries use existing and new evidence in policymaking
- B. Organize country-level workshops and regional forums to disseminate findings and share best practices
- C. Facilitate dialogue among policymakers, researchers, practitioners, and development partners to foster collaborative approaches to education reform

IV. Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning (MEL) and Reporting

- A. Support the monitoring and evaluation of system and school policy actions
- B. Liaise and coordinates with national focal points, implementers, and partners
- C. Regularly report on progress and challenges in integrating evidence into system- and school-level policies and practices
- D. Provide updates to the SEA-PLM Regional Secretariat and co-chairs, the SEA-PLM Regional Steering Committee, and other governance bodies
- E. Supervise the administrative and programmatic reporting to SAGE team on project progress, financial expenditures, and M&E

7. Deliverables:

The Policy and Evidence Integration Manager will contribute to the achievement of the following outputs:

- Support the development of High-quality national and regional policy briefs, knowledge products and messages aligned with and showcasing SEA-PLM findings, other evidence and reforms' implementation
- Successful conduct of the pilot programs in countries under the Initiative 2 framework, including design, implementation support, M&E documentation of lessons learned
- Updated national needs analysis and capacity-building programs tailored to country needs and aligned with Initiative 2 framework.
- Updated Initiative 2 programme management tools, framework and solutions
- Review of main system policies and school practices in core areas of interest to advance foundational learning through the advancement of completion, analysis, and reporting of system-level questionnaires
- Project progress reports

8. Working modalities:

The Manager is expected to lead, participate, and engage in various in-country missions, in-person workshops, and virtual meetings in coordination and collaboration with the Secretariat, country teams, and national partners.

9. Qualifications

- Advanced university degree in a relevant field (e.g. Education, Public Policy, Social Sciences, or a related field);
- Demonstrated knowledge in management and implementation of complex international and regional programmes;
- At least 7 years of experience in policy analysis, education research, or program management, preferably in the ASEAN region;
- Proven ability to translate research and evidence into actionable policy recommendations;
- Experience working with regional organizations, governments, and development partners;
- Familiarity with international education frameworks, such as the SDGs and the Education 2030 goals;
- Fluency in English; proficiency in one or more Southeast Asian languages is desirable;
- Preferably citizen of any SEAMEO Member Country