The 2019 East and Southeast Asia Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO, which was co-organized by the Korean National Commission for UNESCO and the city of Jeonju, took place from 28 to 30 August in Jeonju, Republic of Korea (RoK), with the support of the Ministry of Education.

This Jeonju meeting was held as a follow-up to the 2018 Asia-Pacific Regional Meeting of National Commissions for UNESCO, co-hosted in Gyeongju, Republic of Korea, in September 2018 by the Korean National Commission for UNESCO and the UNESCO Bangkok Office. One of the outcomes of the 2018 Gyeongju meeting was an agreement among the participating Asia-Pacific National Commissions to hold a similar regional meeting every two years, with a sub-regional meeting in between, as a way to facilitate exchanges and cooperation. As such, the sub-regional Jeonju meeting was organized to prepare for the next Asia-Pacific regional meeting, and to explore joint activities among National Commissions in order to increase the visibility of UNESCO in East and Southeast Asia.

More than seventy delegates attended the meeting, from twelve National Commissions in the region, as well as the UNESCO Secretariat, two UNESCO Regional Offices, and five Category 2 Centers based in RoK. Participants explored, first, current achievements and challenges in the implementation of the SDGs in East and Southeast Asia, before discussing key issues facing UNESCO at global, regional and national levels, in order to propose joint projects among National Commissions in the region in response.

In this respect, the Korean National Commission for UNESCO proposed a joint research project among National Commissions in Asia and the Pacific, together with the Korea Legislation Research Institute, focusing on how to strengthen the contribution of National Commissions to UNESCO’s role in standard-setting. The Viet Nam National Commission for UNESCO proposed a joint project on mutual support for the promotion, management and preservation of World Cultural Heritage Sites in East and Southeast Asia. The UNESCO Bangkok Office suggested the idea of a project on integrating intangible cultural heritage into education, and the Secretariat introduced capacity-building opportunities for National Commissions.

During the meeting, participants from the Secretariat gave an update on the progress of the Strategic Transformation underway at UNESCO. Participating National Commissions shared the view that the Strategic Transformation has had a successful start and reaffirmed the important role that National Commissions can play in taking it forward. In this regard, participants welcomed the establishment of the National Commissions’ Unit, which was recently created in the Sector for Priority Africa and External Relations at the Secretariat.