

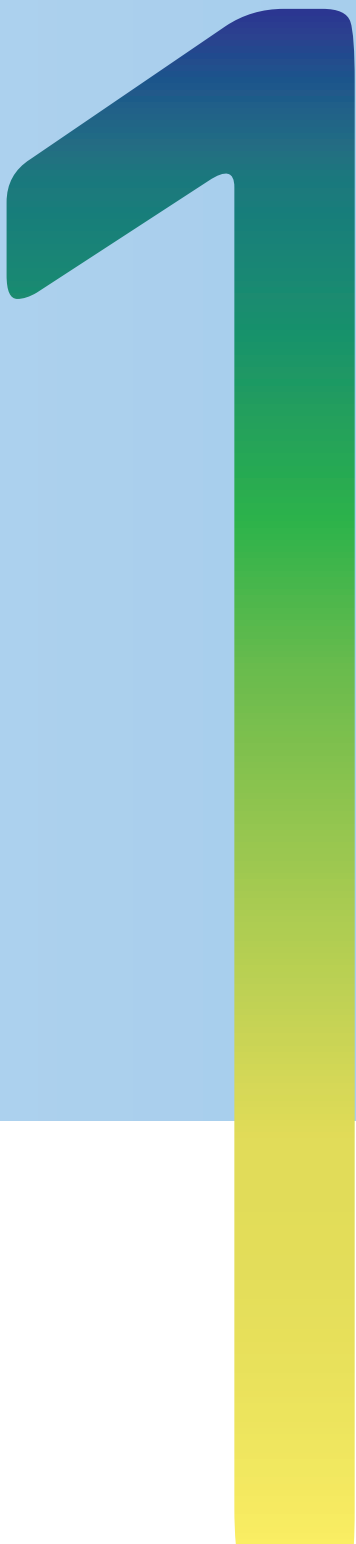


United Nations
Educational, Scientific and
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International Institute for
Higher Education in
Latin America and the Caribbean

WORKING
PAPERS



HIGHER EDUCATION MOBILITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN: Challenges and Opportunities for a Renewed Convention on the Recognition of Studies, Degrees and Diplomas



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MOBILITY IN LATIN AMERICA
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Degrees and Diplomas**



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IESALC



International Institute for
Higher Education in
Latin America and the Caribbean

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**HIGHER EDUCATION MOBILITY IN LATIN AMERICA AND
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INTRODUCTION

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This study stems from the need to recognize the importance and scope of academic mobility in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) thereby contributing to the development of a diagnostic of its current status and recent development, as well as to conduct a holistic analysis of the challenges and opportunities present in the framework of the New Regional Convention for the Recognition of Higher Education Studies, Degrees and Diplomas in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) sponsored by UNESCO and endorsed by Member States, and the Global Convention¹.

Given the multifaceted nature of migration- of which academic mobility is one aspect - it is not easy to identify data sources that allow for proper measurement. Additionally, the concept of academic mobility lacks a single definition, which, together with the wide spectrum of modalities that it covers (mobility to obtain a degree, mobility for credit, mobility for research, etc.), making it difficult to quantify and analyze it.

For this reason, for the purposes of this study, the concept of academic mobility (teachers, researchers and students) has been restricted to those foreigners enrolled in tertiary or higher education in a country of which they are not nationals, for purely academic, scientific and / or professional purposes. The methodology applied for the collection and presentation of data is that used by national and international organizations, particularly by the UNESCO Institute for Statistics.

Moreover, the study is limited to voluntary academic mobility and does not refer to forced mobility, unless clearly stated in the data sources consulted, which would include students with refugee status, persons displaced by development and other displaced persons².

The study is structured in five parts. The first gives the context of academic mobility in the region, and the particular issues that arise. The second analyses regional estimates of student mobility in LA compared to other regions. It also examines to what extent student mobility favours destinations in this region or if, on the contrary, there is preference for countries in other regions. As to be expected, the case of small island developing states located in the Caribbean is considered separately, given their particularities. This is followed by a brief analysis of academic mobility and research links, highlighting the need for more and better data. The third summarizes the multiplicity of initiatives in the region to promote mobility and also addresses the difficulties encountered, notably low public investment, fragmentation and inadequate information mechanisms. The fourth part first examines the challenges and opportunities for regional mobility and then introduces the UNESCO regional conventions in an attempt to capture the value of these instruments and their increasing importance for the future. In particular, the contribution that the New Regional Convention for the Recognition of Higher Education Studies, Degrees and Diplomas in Latin America and the Caribbean,

¹ It is an international normative instrument for recognition of studies, degrees and diplomas with global reach (to be adopted at the 40th UNESCO World Conference), and whose implementation will be done in coordination with the principles of the existing Regional Conventions and the 1993 Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies and Qualifications in Higher Education. For more information, see <https://en.unesco.org/news/making-history-importance-new-global-convention-recognition-higher-education-qualifications>

² @ONU_es (June 19, 2019). Desertification, land degradation or drought already affect 169 countries in the world. [Tweet] Recovered from https://twitter.com/dw_espanol. The Internal Displacement Monitoring Center (IDMC) noted that in 2017, 1.3 million people affected by the drought have already moved around the world.

sponsored by UNESCO could make if it were to significantly improve its operations, and the development of regional public policies to achieve greater impact than that currently reported on academic mobility in LAC. Finally, the report offers conclusions that indicate possible directions to be taken for strengthening the capacity of both Member States and higher education institutions in order to promote academic mobility at the regional level.

This Report was prepared by the technical team of the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC). The report preparation process was led by Francesc Pedró who coordinated the drafting and preparation of the analysis of the current status of mobility in the region. José Antonio Quintero wrote the chapters on the present context and future challenges and opportunities for mobility. Débora Ramos wrote the chapter on initiatives to promote regional mobility. Elizabeth Sosa contributed to the section on obstacles to mobility. Ayuramí Rodríguez was responsible for the Chapter on the Renewed Convention as a window of

opportunity to promote mobility. Finally, Sara Maneiro coordinated the design, layout and printing process.

The UNESCO-IESALC team wishes to thank the following specialists and administrators for their comments and revision of this document: Rodolfo Barrere (Coordinator of The Network for Science and Technology Indicators –Ibero-American and Inter-American – RICYT, Argentina); Sylvie Didou (Center for Research and Advanced Studies at the National Polytechnic Institute/ South Unit/Department of Education Research, Mexico); Jocelyne Gacel-Ávila (Regional Observatory on Internationalization and Tertiary Education Networks at the Universidad de Guadalajara, México); Nancy Montes (Coordinator of the Ibero-American Network of Higher Education Indicators -Red IndicES, Argentina); Félix García Lausín (Ibero-American Knowledge Space / General Secretariat for Ibero-America. Spain) and Álvaro Maglia (Association of Universidades Grupo Montevideo, Uruguay).

Caracas, September 2019.

ACADEMIC MOBILITY CONTEXT AND ISSUES

The most open and prosperous cultures resulted from the crossroads of migratory flows where there was mutual fertilization and the overcoming of the barriers that often lead to alterity. While, at first, migratory flows were almost exclusively marked by economic determinants, the diversification of the factors causing these flows continued to increase (Castles, De Haas, & Miller, 2013). One factor was the desire, since the 60s, to obtain or complement the higher education received in the home country with an experience abroad. The importance of academic mobility has quickly increased and up until now, it is the most important axis of higher education internationalization with a constant focus on quality and relevance.

In the 60s and 70s, the main higher education discussion stemmed from the belief that increased investment in mobility would contribute significantly to the economic wealth of nations. Some countries felt that the increase would better serve the needs of labor markets and economies. Others, for whom education planning and human resources were closely linked to economic planning, saw it as a way of improving State capacity. In the 1980s, the debate took on a pessimistic outlook and it was often argued that the expansion of higher education had gone too far and that the skills of graduates no longer responded to the needs of the society and a post-industrial economy. So that, by the end of the twentieth century, the connections between higher education

and the world of work featured among the key issues of the emerging debate, where higher education was being challenged to consider its relevance to the world of work more systematically than in the past, given the acceleration in globalization, movements and trade in capital, goods and services, technology and cultural practices throughout the world, and which was now impacting the labor market.

It is precisely in this global, multicultural and highly competitive scenario that internationalization, defined as the process of integration of the international, intercultural and global dimension in the purpose, functions or provision of higher education (Knight, 2004), has become a strategic means to innovate and increase the relevance of higher education, as well as to improve its prestige and, particularly in the United States, the United Kingdom and Australia (the three main destinations of international students), to improve income³. As a result, new institutional development strategies sought to integrate the international dimension - in a systemic and transversal way - in all its policies⁴. However, the different meanings of internationalization (Buckner, 2019), as well as the bureaucratic structures of higher education institutions, have given rise to institutional development policies that do not always correspond to a true internationalization effort (Seeber, Cattaneo, Huisman, & Paleari, 2016). An example of this is the importance of the wave of university rankings⁵ (Mmantsetsa,

³ In 2017, the estimated contribution of international students to the economy of the United States was 42 billion dollars (Institute of International Education, 2018).

⁴ The I Regional Survey on trends of internationalization in tertiary education in Latin America and the Caribbean, study conducted by the Regional Observatory on Internationalization and Networks in Tertiary Education (OBIRET) of the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribe (IESALC), points out that 83% of the tertiary education institutions surveyed, report having internationalization integrated in their mission / vision, as well as in the strategic objectives of their institutional development plans.

⁵ The Times Higher Education ranking, for example, in addition to linking the indicator of international students enrolled with some others, assigns to the internationalization level of each university a weight of 7.5% of the overall grade, a significant value within the total evaluation for classification.

Wells, & Hazelkorn, 2013; Mmantseta, Wells, & Silvia, 2014) for some institutions and how it distracts them from the true spirit which should be behind any action⁶ of internationalization.

Additionally, the dynamics of internationalization - with academic mobility as its core activity- have been creating a panorama of increasing complexity and not without its ups and downs. This is the case, particularly, of the issue of the recognition of qualifications in the context of student mobility. For students studying for full-degree programs⁷ abroad, the challenge of ensuring that the qualification granted is recognized in their home countries by the relevant government agencies and by the institutions and professional associations, cannot be ignored. Although it is encouraging to see that more and more agencies, both governmental and non-governmental, have expanded their mandate and improved their experience in the evaluation of academic qualifications obtained abroad, there are still many countries that do not have this capacity, which represents a very high risk for students, on the one hand, and for mobility funders, on the other, whether they are states or families.

Contrary to popular belief, the majority of students who go abroad do not have sponsorships and fully assume the expenses of their education by providing huge sums of money to the main receiving countries and their universities (Altbach & Engberg, 2014). For example, 95% of Chinese students studying abroad in 2012 did so with their own resources⁸. A similar phenomenon is empirically observable in LA although with enormous variability. In Mexico, for example, 48% of student mobility abroad in the 2015-2016 academic year was financed by

families (Maldonado, Cortés, & Ibarra, 2016). The little data available for LA suggests that public financing is scarce, fragmented and, consequently, ineffective.

The globalization of higher education, with its concomitant phenomena of borderless education, distance education and diverse providers, also adds greater uncertainties to this already complex and worrying panorama of academic internationalization. In this regard, UNESCO has for decades promoted regional conventions for the recognition of studies, degrees and diplomas of higher education in the six regions of the world, in an attempt to encourage countries to ensure that the credentials of higher education abroad are recognized and so allow knowledge and talent to flow and foster mutual understanding and economic and social development at international level. More recently, UNESCO has taken decisive steps to adopt a Global Convention that adequately frames academic mobility in this context of increasing globalization.

Despite these aims, the application of regional conventions has not had the expected results so far. First of all, the application of these instruments provides a regional framework of universal principles and norms for the recognition of studies, degrees and diplomas, but there are no legal obligations for the signatory parties. In the particular case of the Regional Convention for the Recognition of Studies, Degrees and Diplomas of Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) which entered into force on June 14, 1975, the requirements for validation were not specified nor did it discriminate between the recognition for academic purposes or exclusively for professional practice, and this

⁶ A study conducted by the International Institute of Education, with the support of the Government of Australia and the CAPES of Brazil, showed that, of the 158 Brazilian institutions studied, 31% of respondents were unaware of the budget allocated to Internationalization by the institutions of those that were part.

⁷ In 2011, the United States of America exceeded the number of foreign students enrolled in undergraduate programs thus breaking the historical balance that always favored fourth level studies.

⁸ According to the report published by China Education Online, the number of Chinese students studying abroad for 2012 was estimated at 400,000, which was 60,000 more than what was recorded in 2011 of which 380,000 were self-funded. In: <https://wenr.wes.org/2013/03/wenr-march-2013-international-student-mobility-trends-2013-towards-responsive-recruitment-strategies> [Retrieved on June 20, 2019].

has undermined the effectiveness of its application. The fact that the legal systems of LAC countries -with few exceptions- by expressly enabling norms of a constitutional and / or organic character, grant the power to recognize and validate studies, also contributed to the hindering of the applicability of the Regional Convention, titles and diplomas obtained abroad to public higher education institutions, understanding that such power rests with the academic autonomy of the latter.

Some questions arise when we take a retrospective look at the last 30 years in relation to Latin American and Caribbean student mobility: Have international higher education and student mobility lived up to expectations and potential, particularly if you consider that, of the 220 million international students worldwide, the region only mobilized 2.3% in 2017? What are the factors that favor or discourage student mobility in the region? Will the New Regional Convention for the Recognition of

Studies, Degrees and Diplomas of Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean favor intra-regional mobility beyond the 3.5% it now registers? Will the New Regional Convention provide the 38% of students who stayed in the region to study in another country the subsequent recognition of their academic credentials? Will the New Regional Convention, accompanied by other incentives, favor the incoming flow of foreign students and contribute to reversing the negative balance that the region shows? What, in short, are the factors that will increase the importance of the renewed Convention?

To answer these questions, a diagnostic of the current state of academic mobility in the region and the impact of the New Convention will be required and, based on this analysis, a better evaluation can be done of the current and future challenges in the region. The aim is to reposition it with due urgency in the regional and international public educational agenda.

II. ACADEMIC MOBILITY IN THE REGION: CURRENT STATUS AND TRENDS

This chapter responds to some basic questions about academic mobility in the region to assist in diagnosing its current status, recent evolution and future prospects, using data mainly from the UNESCO data base (UNESCO Institute for Statistics, 2019). Secondly, it assists with determining the scope of the mobility by comparing its volume with that of other regions, highlighting the pace and direction of its evolution in recent years. Thirdly, it analyzes the extent to which academic mobility has as its primary destination countries in the same region or if, on the contrary, countries located in other regions. An exclusively regional analysis would run the risk of overlooking the fact that regional mobility, from a globally perspective, is not only the result of a concerted effort to promote it, but equally or more so, of the socio-economic and educational contexts of each of the countries and their public policies, particularly in relation to scientific research. Fourthly, the different models that emerge from this analysis are presented, showing the diversity of behaviors. The chapter ends with an analysis of the determinants of mobility.

II.1. Evolution of academic mobility in the region in the international context

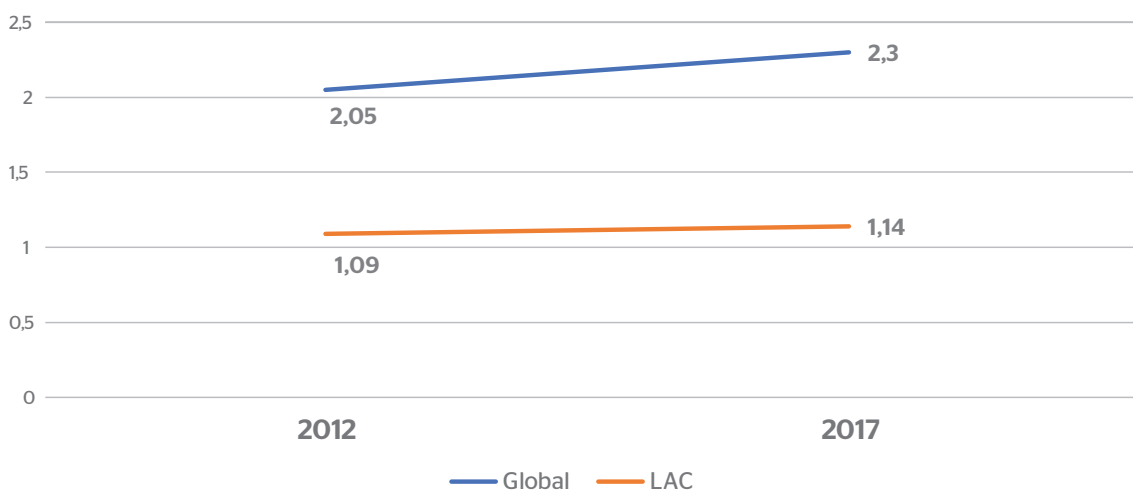
The number of students in higher education continues to increase both globally and regionally. In just five years, between 2012 and 2017, the global figure increased from 198 to 220 million, representing a growth of 10%. In LAC, the growth has been even greater, from 23.7 to 27.4 million, representing an increase of approximately 16% for the same period. However, attendance rates grew by 20% globally in that period, while in the region they increased by 15%. It should be borne in mind that the gross enrollment rate in higher education is 51% in the region,

above the world average of 38% and 45% average in OECD countries. Using the international terminology coined by Trow (1973, 2007), higher education in the region has massified and in the process of universalization. Higher education, therefore, is expanding worldwide and in LAC, although other regions are leading in this trend in terms of percentage participation. As the size of higher education systems increases, the opportunities for international mobility also increase.

Indeed, global academic mobility continues to increase and there is every indication that it will continue to do so in the future, although the advance for the region is much slower than for the rest of the world, see Graph 1 for 2012-2017, which shows that the number of higher education students who have undertaken studies in another country has grown, far beyond the expectations of increase in participation at this level. At the global level, the total displacement of higher education international students moved from 2.05% to 2.3%, that is, from 4 to 5 million in just five years. The increase in the region has been much smaller: from 1.09% to 1.14% or, in figures, from 258 thousand to 312 thousand students. This is the second region in the world with the lowest increase in mobility, quite different to the increases experienced by the countries in Central Asia where the volume has almost doubled, or Southeast Asia where it has more than tripled.

To what extent does mobility include other countries in the same region or, conversely, countries in other regions? North America and Western Europe together constitute the majority destination of international students and receive approximately 50% of the total of 5 million that are mobilized

GRAPH 1.
Percentage of higher education students who have moved to another country outside LAC and within LAC, 2012-2017.



Source: IESALC, with data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019).

worldwide every year. LAC is one of the least attractive destinations internationally. Of the 5 million students, only 176,000, 3.5% of the total choose a country in this region as their destination. Of these, 69% come from the region, an additional 12% from North America and Western Europe, and the rest from other regions.

The preferred destination for LAC students is not the region itself, but mainly North America and Western Europe, as

Figure 2 shows. Of the 312 thousand students who migrated from a LAC country to study in another in 2017, 120 thousand (38%) remained in the region itself while 170 thousand (54%) chose North America or Western Europe as their destination. This situation contrasts significantly with what happens precisely in North America and Western Europe where 80% of the students stay in the same region. However, LAC is the third region with a higher intra-regional mobility, in percentage terms, after North America

GRAPH 2.
Destination of higher education students, globally, to and from LAC, 2017.



Source: IESALC with data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019).

and Western Europe, on the one hand, and Central Asia and Eastern Europe (42%), on the other. In all other regions of the world, intra-regional mobility represents one third of the total.

II.2.

Mobility flows to and from the region

During the period 2012-2017, LAC experienced greater intra-regional mobility, in contrast with most other regions which experienced a reduction, registering an increased number of students who moved to other regions from their home country. In the global context, intra-regional mobility went down by almost 9% in favor of inter-regional mobility, in what seems to be a sustainable trend in the future. LAC is an exception to this global trend, since intra-regional mobility has continued to grow, although the percentage increase has been only 2.56% and practically zero between 2016 and 2017, indicating perhaps the increase in mobility to other regions and, consequently, a reduction in intra-regional mobility.

What has been the experience of countries in the region that have higher education systems with a greater volume of students? The prototypical model of the region is a negative mobility balance. In other

words, the number of outgoing students is higher than that of incoming students. This is the case of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Honduras, and very likely to be the case of most countries in the region. For Brazil and Honduras, however, it should be noted that the balances are positive for students from the same region. In other words, despite having negative overall balances, fewer students from these two countries moved to other countries in the region than those received.

In general, a mobility deficit can be considered indicative of a system that is not sufficiently attractive to international students for various reasons (academic, economic or social) and moreover (or for the same reason) experiences the displacement of important contingents of students to other countries. To give an idea of the magnitude of the deficit, one can surmise that for Mexico, the deficit is barely 20%, but Brazil, for example, sends 2.5 times more students outside the country than it receives, Chile almost 3 times more and Colombia more than 8 times more. Although there is no reliable data, one can say that in most of the countries of the region the extent of the deficit is probably more than 10 to 1, in other words, at least 10 students migrate to other

GRAPH 3.
Difference between the number of foreign students in the country and students who migrate from that country to another whether within or outside of the region, 2017.



Source: IESALC with data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019).

countries for each foreigner who enters the national higher education system.

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However, as can be seen in Graph 3, there are three exceptions to this prototypical behavior: Argentina, the Dominican Republic and Costa Rica. In these three cases, the balances are positive, indicating that many more students enter these three countries than those who leave to go abroad. The available data is not sufficient to find an explanation that equally applies to all three countries. It seems clear that the positive balances are the result of different combinations between the attractiveness that countries and their higher education systems may have for foreign students, and the real will and ability of the students of the country of origin to move abroad.

It is also characteristic of the region that most of the international students come from other countries in the same region. The figures show that, in the cases of the larger systems, which correspond to the countries with higher population and income, at least about three quarters of the international students who go there, come from other countries in the region. This varies according to the host country, but Spain and the United States feature as the two most important countries of origin for those students. Again, an exception is Brazil where only 42% of international students come from other countries in the region. The most important contingent comes from Portugal, the United States, Spain and a significant number of African countries.

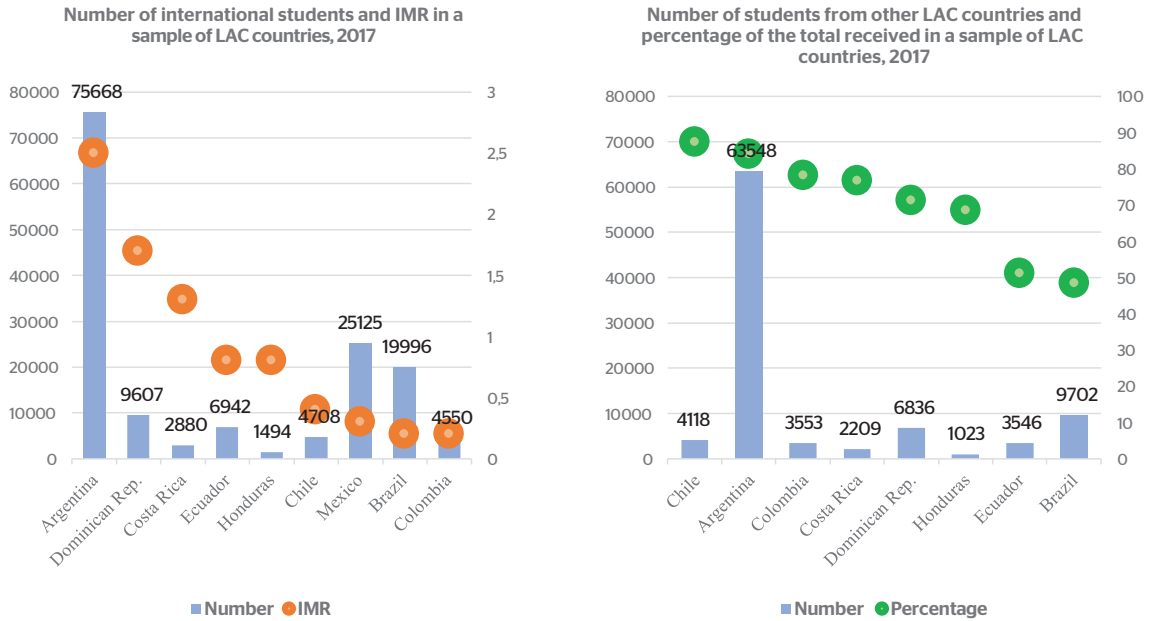
A more detailed analysis of the flow of international students to LAC, using Graph 4 as a reference, shows first that Argentina alone attracts as many students as the rest of the countries of the region overall. Various reasons could explain this vast difference, including the enormous capacity and size of the Argentine system, the fact that there is no tuition fee as well as the active policies mainly at the institutional level. The other two countries that attract a very large

number of students are Mexico and Brazil, as well as the Dominican Republic. However, it is important to contextualize this data in relation to the respective capacity of each country's systems, something that can be measured through the IMR indicator, as reflected in the Graph. The Inbound Mobility Rate (IMR) expresses the ratio between the number of foreign students entering the country and the total number of students enrolled in that same country. Through the IMR it is possible to observe that the behavior of the countries of the region is very variable: on the one hand, countries such as the Dominican Republic, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Honduras, despite receiving relatively low absolute numbers of foreign students (when compared to Argentina, Mexico or Brazil), on considering their relative size, one can say that they host a very significant percentage of foreign students. On the other hand, in the case of Mexico, Brazil, Colombia and Chile, one can say in terms of their ability to absorb foreign students that they could, if they wanted, admit a much higher number than they currently host.

Graph 4 also allows us to review the question from the perspective of receiving foreign students from the same region. Argentina emerges again as the great pole of attraction, and it is also clear that of the vast majority of the students it receives, 84% come from the same region. In the case of Chile, the percentage is even higher, almost 87%. This behavior is characteristic of the region: most of the remaining countries host mainly foreign students from the same region of percentages above 70%. Ecuador and Brazil are the only exceptions, the latter being the only country in the region where a little more than half of its foreign students (51.5%) do not come from the region but from other countries, notably from Portugal and the United States, Spain and several sub-Saharan countries, not only Portuguese-speaking.

Graph 5 shows the volume of students leaving the region to go abroad. Numerically,

GRAPH 4.
Number of foreign students studying in LAC, IMR (Inbound Mobility Rate),
and number and percentage from the same region, 2017.

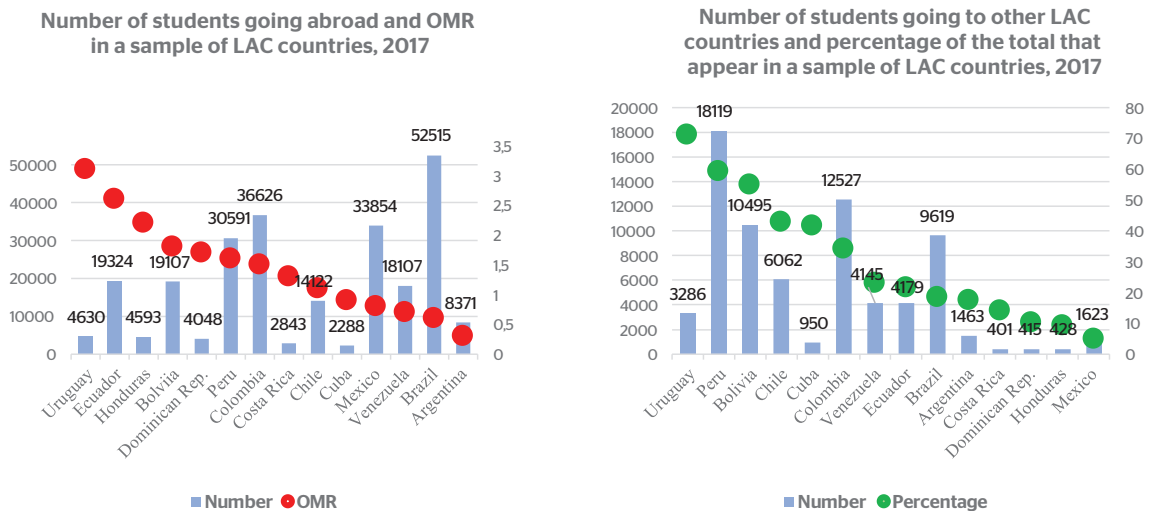


Source: IESALC with data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019).

the countries where the largest student quotas come from are Brazil, Colombia, Mexico, and Peru, in that order. What is more important is to pay attention to the significance of the volume of these numbers using the OMR (Outbound Mobility Rate) values, that is, the ratio between the number of

students who go abroad to the total number of enrolled students. The OMRs show that the countries where outbound students travel abroad in order of significance are Uruguay, Ecuador, Honduras, Bolivia, the Dominican Republic and Peru, where the OMR is greater than 1.5%. In contrast,

GRAPH 5.
Number of LAC students going abroad, OMR (Outbound Mobility Rate),
and number and percentage of them remaining in the same region, 2017.



Source: IESALC using data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019).

countries with systems of large volume and capacity such as Argentina, Brazil or Mexico, have the lowest OMRs in the region, below 1%. The size of these systems is undoubtedly a determining factor. The case of Argentina is peculiar because, being the country that receives more foreign students, it is among the ones with the least number of outbound students. In fact, it has the highest IMR in the region and, paradoxically, the lowest OMR, of just 0.3%.

II.3.

Behavioral diversity within the region

The paradox is that the larger higher education systems in the region, which receive foreign students primarily from other countries in the region, send most of their students to countries outside the region, notably to the United States, but also to Spain (Portugal in the case of Brazil) as well as to other European systems, including Germany, France, Italy and the United Kingdom. For example, half of the students who leave Mexico go mainly to the United States, but only 4% of them go to other countries in the region; Argentina sends 17% to other countries in the same region, Brazil 18%, Colombia 33% and Chile 43%. Countries with higher percentages than these are countries that, in turn, receive very low numbers of foreign students. In sum, the countries of the region benefit by the presence of foreigners who come mainly from the region. However, students from those countries that benefit most from this inflow, prefer destinations in the United States and Western Europe.

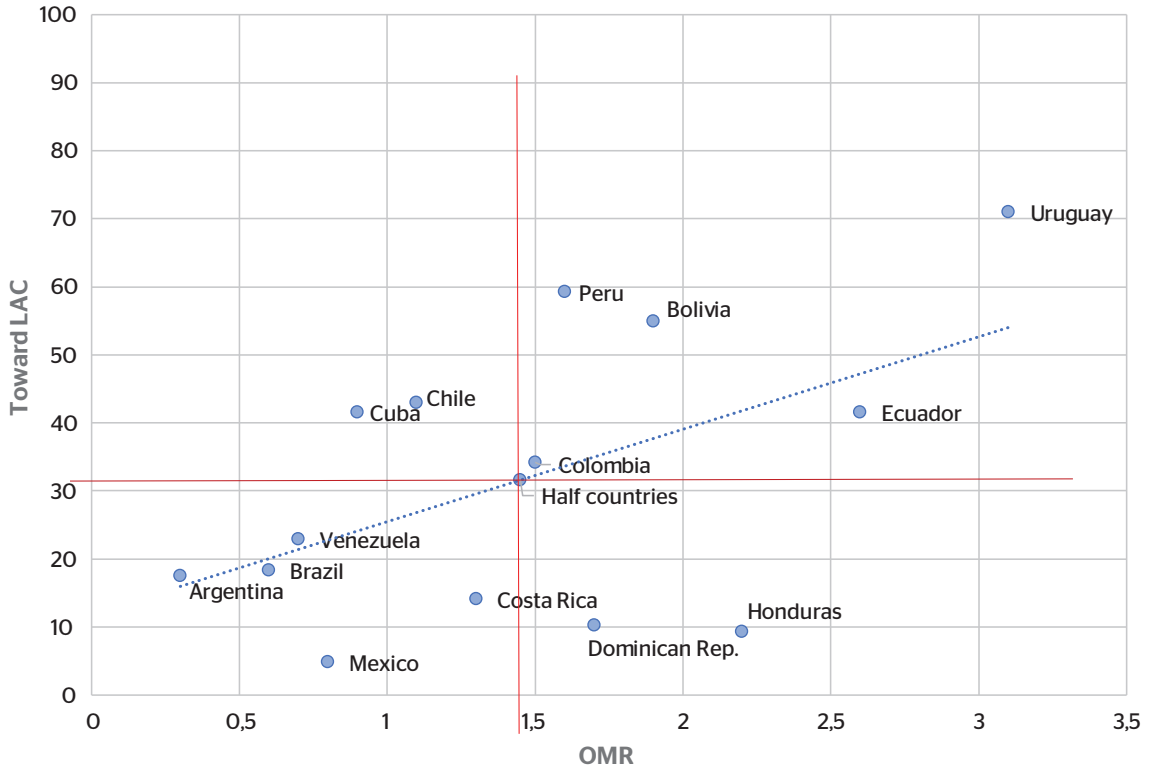
Therefore, one can hardly speak of a homogeneous pattern among students from the countries of the region. Graph 6 shows a clear trend: the higher the percentage of students from a country that goes abroad, the greater the proportion of them staying in the region. A detailed examination, however, shows that this correlation allows us to infer the fact that countries that have the highest and best-funded higher education systems, which send most of their students

to countries in other regions (again, more than 50%), paradoxically, are the main recipients of students from the remaining LA countries, which constitute the vast majority of their foreign students. Undoubtedly, the academic and financial maturity of these systems, as well as the growing international research links they have, would help explain their greater tendency to use mobility to connect with higher education systems even more academically advanced. Although Brazil has the characteristics of this second model, it is an exception in the sense that most of its foreign students do not come from the region, but from the United States, Portugal, Spain and a large number of sub-Saharan countries.

On the other hand, those countries where the percentage of students who go abroad (OMR) is higher than the average for the region, usually countries with smaller systems and capacity, their outgoing students are much more likely to stay in the region. No doubt, two of the most important explanatory factors are public investment in mobility assistance and the relative cost of stays in other countries in the region compared to North America and Europe. In this sense, the exceptions of the Dominican Republic and Honduras are notable, with high percentages of students who go abroad and preferably outside the region.

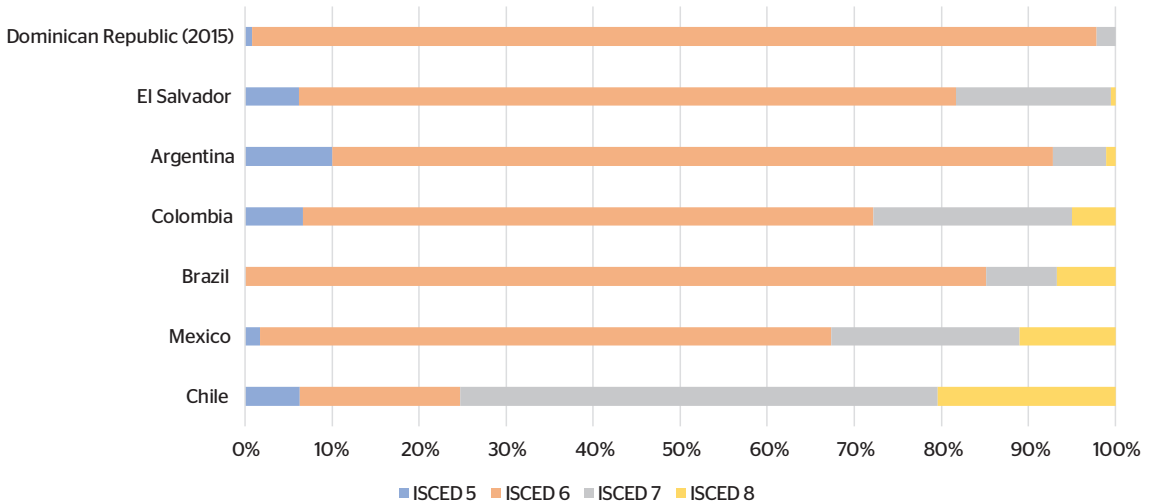
We can complete the above by introducing a perspective that is even more complex: how students select their destinations according to the level of the study program they wish to follow. This perspective is very important because it indirectly sheds light on the perceptions of foreign students about the quality of the programs offered in different countries. Outside of this notable exception, the region is attractive, mainly for undergraduate students, but not for postgraduate and doctoral students, who go mostly to the United States and Europe.

GRAPH 6.
Relationship between OMR and percentage of students going to other countries in the region, 2017.



Source: IESALC with data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019).

GRAPH 7.
Percentage of full-cycle international students who completed their previous educational level - secondary education - in a different country from the one they are studying at the time the information is released according to ISCED level, 2016.



Source: IESALC with data from the IndicES network (analyses 2018) available in <http://redindices.org/indicadores>

II.4. The particularity of the island states of the Caribbean

In terms of academic mobility, the Caribbean island states can be divided into two large groups. There are those whose dynamics are interdependent with other countries in Latin America. This is the case of Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the analysis of whose flows was included in previous sections. The other states, however, have their own distinctive dynamics in relation to the continental Caribbean. The difference in dynamics is explained, to a large extent, by the language difference (English and Dutch, versus Spanish) and size which, in most cases, constitutes a brake on the development of a national system of higher education and, at the same time, an incentive for the establishment of regional higher education initiatives such as The University of the West Indies. The distinctive behavior of this second group of countries should also be analyzed taking into account that, on average, participation rates in higher education are much lower than in the other countries of the region, with values equivalent to half of the regional average, with significant differences among them⁹.

When comparing this group of Caribbean island states with Latin American countries, there are three fundamental characteristics: a limited in-country higher education offer that encourages the outward mobility of students; the configuration of the Caribbean as an internationally attractive destination for higher education students; and, finally, the low mobility that exists between these very countries and their negligible link with Latin America.

First, the limited offer of higher education in this group of Caribbean island states explains why the percentage of their higher education students who decide to continue their studies abroad is very high: this represents 16% of the total compared to a 1.4%

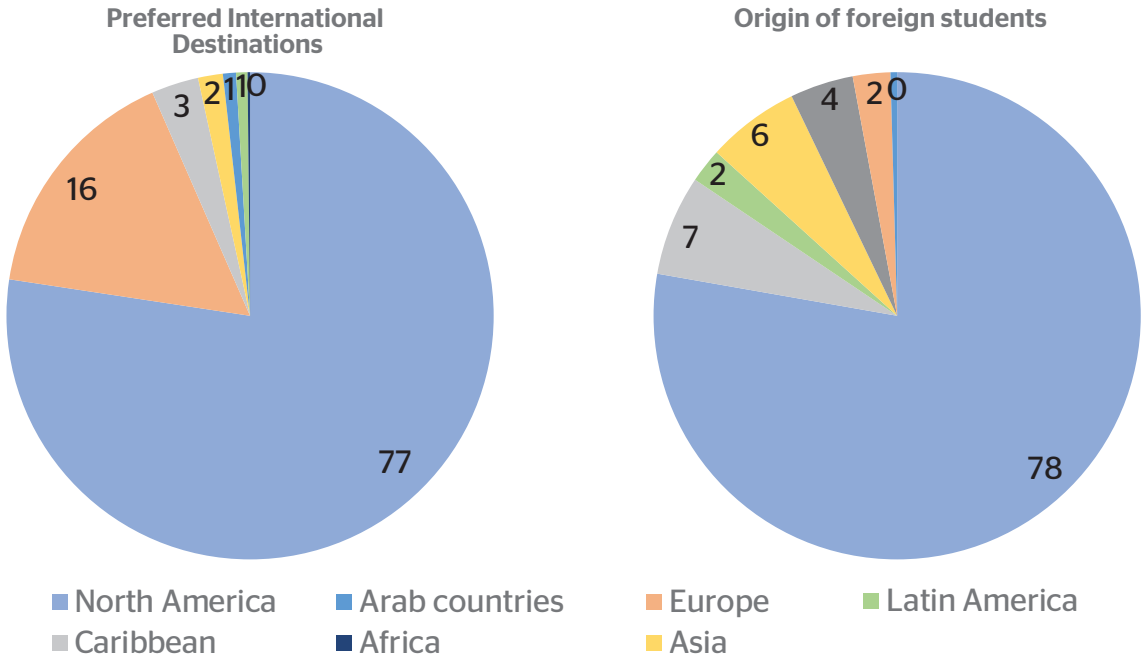
in the case of Latin America. Accordingly, there is the need to highlight the enormous interdependence that exists regarding North American higher education, as shown in Figure 8. Not only are more than three quarters of the students leaving to study abroad, but the same proportion of the students who choose to follow higher education programs in these Caribbean island states come from North America. The beneficiary country par excellence is the United States, where 61% of the students are headed. But the United States is also the country of origin for most of the students who come to the Caribbean, representing 68% of the total foreign students. That said, as is the case in Latin American countries, the second preferred destination is Europe, which hosts 16% of students who go abroad. Overall, therefore, 93% of Caribbean students leave for North America or Europe, which represents a much higher proportion than in the case of Latin American countries where the equivalent value, even though equally important, is only 54 %.

Secondly, also unlike in Latin America, there is a country, Grenada, which has become a very important destination for students from practically all over the world, particularly in medical and veterinary studies. Programs award US degrees at a fraction of the cost of the same programs offered there. As Graph 9 shows, this attraction is such that, all told, this country attracts more students than it sends abroad. In Aruba, the British Virgin Islands, Grenada and Saint Lucia there is a greater offer of programs, where 30% of higher education students are foreigners and come from all regions of the world without exception, with significant contingents from Asia and Africa. Grenada is the main attraction pole, with a concentration of 87% of the foreign students that opt for the Caribbean.

Thirdly, paradoxically, despite the international attractiveness of the offer, regional exchanges are very limited. The Caribbean

⁹ The availability of higher education statistics in several of these countries is also very limited.

GRAPH 8.
International destinations preferred by Caribbean students and origin of international students of higher education in the Caribbean countries, 2017.

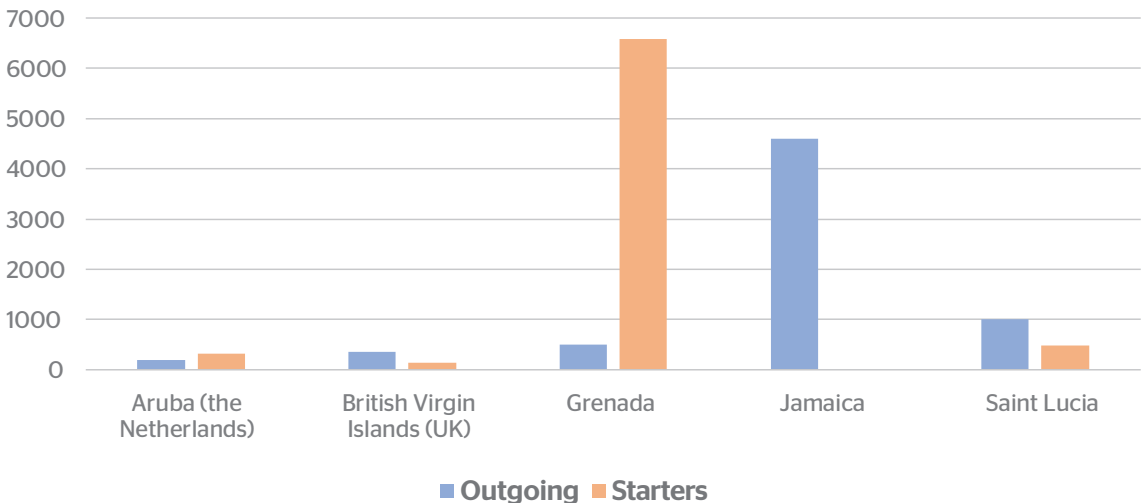


Source: IESALC with data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019).

is the third preferred destination for students moving to other countries, but this option is only taken up by 3% of students from the Caribbean itself. Seen from another perspective, only 7% of international

students in these countries come from the region itself. The geographical proximity with respect to Latin America does not compensate for the significant brake that the language differences constitute: 0.8%

GRAPH 9.
Number of international students in the country and students leaving the country in Aruba, British Virgin Islands, Jamaica, Grenada and Saint Lucia, 2017.



Source: IESALC with data from the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2019).

of the students that leave the Caribbean countries choose Latin American countries. In order of priority, these countries include Brazil, Ecuador and Argentina. Conversely, only 2% of foreign students come from Latin America.

In short, with the exception of Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, in terms of

academic mobility, the Caribbean island states are configured as a group with a differential dynamic with respect to the rest of the region. Its geographical and linguistic characteristics explain this, but also what it offers, which, with its close ties with the United States, makes some of its countries more internationally attractive destinations in higher education than those in Latin America

III. THE PROMOTION OF REGIONAL MOBILITY: INITIATIVES AND OBSTACLES

The previous analysis, may mistakenly give the impression that public policies for the promotion of regional mobility are non-existent or ineffective. This is certainly not the case: the previous analysis examines the student flows, both incoming and outgoing, but cannot adequately evaluate public policies because the existing data is not enough for results to be adequately measured. So, to add a political perspective to the above analysis, the intention of this chapter, in the first instance, is to analyse the principal elements involved in student mobility, which is indispensable for the evaluation of policies and initiatives. It will then give a review of existing initiatives, at the institutional, national and regional levels to promote mobility, particularly within the region. Finally, to give a full perspective, the main obstacles facing these initiatives will also be reviewed.

III.1.

Main factors influencing mobility

Even though the field continues to expand (Wells, 2014), the increasing volume of empirical research on the factors influencing international student mobility is sufficient to group them into four broad areas: educational, economic, political-cultural, and linguistic. Each of these areas is briefly examined below.

First of all, there is sufficient international evidence to be able to affirm that the international mobility of students is fundamentally based on the perception of differences in the quality of the provision of higher education (Wei, 2013; Weisser, 2016). This perception can be based on the lack of an adequate higher education provision in the country of origin or, as is more often the case, on the prestige of the institution chosen in the country of destination and the

expectation of the student or his family on the return of the investment by studying there (Abbott & Silles, 2016). The increasing attention that the media gives to national and international rankings of higher education institutions has a notable impact on the public image of institutions and, at the global level, of the countries where the critical mass of prestigious centers is higher. These are aspects that affect student decisions (Gacel-Ávila, 2017; Marconi, 2013). In fact, international rankings increasingly give more weighting in their qualifications to the internationalization efforts of institutions including the percentage of international students in their classrooms. Governments, for their part, both for political and economic reasons, are not oblivious to this dynamic and often generate financial incentives for internationalization, encouraging resources for increasing the presence of foreign students in universities.

The weighting of economic factors is also very important. According to the literature, there are three economic factors that most directly affect decisions on mobility (Beine, Noël, & Ragot, 2014). The first is the level of economic development of the destination country, inevitably linked to the student's expectation of being able to have a better working future there than in the country of origin. The second relates to an estimate of the living expenses and tuition in the institution of destination. The third, which can have a direct and very important influence, is the consideration of the return rates on the investment.

A third group of factors is related to the political and cultural profile of the country of destination (Perkins & Neumayer, 2014). Undoubtedly, the cultural, and in some cases religious affinity as well as the sense of

stability of the country and its institutions can offer the student the perspective of a safer and nurturing environment and, therefore, more likely to facilitate his/her studies. Empirical research also indicates that the climate and even the university environment, broadly speaking, of the place of destination are factors that also weigh on the decisions of the students (Rodríguez González, Bustillo Mesanza, & Mariel, 2010).

Finally, the language of instruction is also a critical determining factor for students (Kahanec & Králiková, 2011). The importance of the English language has increased in recent decades and, inevitably, Anglophone countries (which also are those with the best international image in higher education systems), or even others which are not, but offer a great variety of English-language programs (such as the Netherlands or Sweden), are seeing the increase in their attractiveness. The low quality of English language teaching in the school systems of the region is a significant limitation for Latin American students and can explain, to some extent, why many of those seeking an international experience are forced to stay in the region.

III.2. Initiatives, policies and programs for the promotion of regional mobility

An analysis of the determining factors shows that, in addition to the perceived quality of higher education systems and institutions, economic factors are very relevant. Is the region being too prolific with initiatives and programs that, using various means and different modalities, try to generate opportunities to fully or partially finance the mobility of students. These programs and initiatives can be classified as institutional, national, bilateral and multilateral. The basic features of each category is outlined herebelow.

Institutional initiatives

In the region, a significant number of higher education institutions have developed their own policies to promote internationalization and mobility. The objectives are multiple: to raise their status, generate income, and diversify their institutions by attracting international students and academics, promoting visits or outgoing and incoming student mobility (Sánchez Barrioluengo & Flisi, 2017). Institutional policies¹⁰ include processes that include the offer of full or partial scholarship programs or financial support that institutions provide to their students.

The findings of the OBIRET Survey (Gacel-Ávila, 2018) in this regard show that 62% of the institutions surveyed offer a program of scholarships or financial support for student mobility. However, only 6% offer full scholarships, 43% grant partial scholarships, and 13% grant both partial and full scholarships. Of all the institutions, 38% do not offer any kind of support to their students.

One of the findings of the Survey is that, while there is a multiplication of international activities in the institutions, these are normally the result of isolated individual initiatives and actions, marginal to institutional development policies and not aligned with institutional priorities, considering the reactive and unplanned nature of the management of internationalization processes. This is indicative of the lack of institutionalized and professionalized organizational structures to plan and evaluate these types of processes. Although a significant percentage of institutions have internationalization as a priority in their development plans, the majority (53%) report that they have not established the corresponding operational plans related to internationalization processes and, although the majority

¹⁰ This issue about institutional policies regarding internationalization processes, and consequently international academic mobility, has been extensively documented both regionally and globally. A sample of this is found in the bibliographic repositories of the Regional Observatory on Internationalization and Networks in Tertiary Education (OBIRET), of the Regional Network for the Promotion of the Internationalization of Higher Education in Latin America (RIESAL) and in those of RIMAC (Network on Internationalization and Academic-Scientific Mobility).

indicate having increased their budget item for internationalization support, there is still a non-negligible percentage (20%) of institutions which do not dedicate specific budget lines for momentum and sustainability.

The institutional cooperation efforts of inter-institutional network initiatives to overcome some of the inadequacies of solely individual initiatives therefore acquire greater importance. These include:

- The mobility programs of the AUGM (Association of Universities of the Montevideo Group), financed by the 39 member universities from the six member countries (Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Chile, Paraguay and Uruguay). These programs are for students, teachers, and postgraduate students;
- The Student Mobility and Administrative Academic Mobility Programs of CRISCOS (Council of Rectors for the Integration of the Central West Sub-region of South America), comprising universities from the Northeast of Argentina, South of Peru, North of Chile, Southwest of Paraguay and all of Bolivia. The Student Mobility Program (PME) has been implemented since 1998, with the Administrative Academic Mobility Program (PAA) coming on board later.
- The University Exchange Programme (PIU) created by the CINDA network (Inter-university Center for Development) to facilitate and support exchange of undergrad and graduate students, teachers, academics and management staff from member universities. It offers undergraduate and graduate students, on an ongoing basis, the opportunity to pursue a degree or participate in face to face or virtual programs at CINDA member universities. It also provides information on available internships and other activities in which academics and management staff can participate in areas of relevance to their university functions.

- The MACROUNIVERSITY Network Post-graduate Mobility Program established in 2002 to create a space for academic cooperation, exchange and consolidation of 32 public universities in 19 countries.
- The Academic Education Mobility Program (PAME) of the Union of Universities of Latin America and the Caribbean (UDUAL), consisting of a total of 180 universities from 22 countries with the objective of contributing to the development of an international experience to enrich the training for undergraduates and strengthen higher education institutions (HEIs), through the establishment of strategic alliances.

Of all the mobility programs described above, only the PAME-UDUAL program has a global reach in the region but, compared to the regional student population, the number of mobility opportunities it offers is very small and are limited to UDUAL member universities.

National policies

National policies supporting mobility in higher education demonstrate the political will of countries to develop a workforce with global skills and to strengthen international relations through educational diplomacy (Farrugia, 2017). It includes mobility initiatives that are supported by economic mechanisms (scholarships or credits) sponsored by both the government and other agencies, i.e. state - funded mobilities promoted by public bodies, usually Ministries of Education or Foreign Affairs of each country.

In the region, large-scale national programs and scholarship initiatives have been developed in the first place, such as the “Ciência sem Fronteiras” Program, which operated from 2011 to 2015 and financed 70,000 undergraduate and graduate students in Brazil to study in centers and universities in more than 40 countries. The Program was an initiative of the Brazilian government, whose main objective was to

increase the presence of Brazilian students, professors and researchers in institutions of excellence abroad, as well as to increase the presence of foreign students and academics in Brazilian institutions. The program focused on disciplines the government considered critical for the country's growth, including science, technology, engineering and mathematics.

Mexico is another example of revitalization of incoming mobility to Latin America and the Caribbean through scholarship programs offered by both sending and receiving countries. In 2017, CONACYT awarded scholarships to some 3,500 foreign students, essentially Latin American graduate students. Other important sending countries in the region that have had high growth from 2005 to 2015 are Ecuador and the Dominican Republic, with figures growing 1.5 times during that period. In Ecuador, recent reforms of higher education stimulated student interest in study abroad and made them more affordable. Government investments to improve access to and the quality of higher education, as well as a growing economy and increased availability of scholarships for graduates (outgoing mobility) have improved students' readiness to study in other countries.

Bilateral international cooperation programs

These initiatives are formalized by signing bilateral institutional agreements or between countries in the region, in which the recipients are undergraduate and graduate students. As a general rule, they facilitate short international mobility programs, aimed at developing links between the national scientific community and their counterparts abroad, based on mutual interest in areas of research priority.

The following are some notable examples of this type of initiative. However, it must be pointed out that some are active and others have either merged or have been discontinued.

The programs listed continue to impact positively on student mobility:

- The Colombia - Argentina Academic Mobility Program (MACA) is an agreement signed between the Colombian Association of Universities (ASCUN) and the National Interuniversity Council (CIN) of Argentina. Beneficiaries are degree program and undergraduate students who have passed 40% of the undergraduate curriculum and who are under 30 years old.
- The Mexico-Argentina Youth Exchange Program (JIMA) is the result of an Agreement of Academic, Scientific and Cultural Collaboration (2005) between the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (ANUIES) of Mexico and the CIN of Argentina with the objective of promoting exchange of Mexican and Argentinian students from universities party to the Program to pursue undergraduate studies during a semester in the partner country.
- The Mobility Program for Academics and Management between Argentina and Mexican Universities (MAGMA) is a program that promotes the mobility of management and academics between Mexico and Argentina. The recipients are teachers (both teachers and assistants) and the management and non-teaching staff of institutions members of ANUIES of Mexico and CIN of Argentina.
- As of the second semester in 2017, the MACA, JIMA y MAGMA programs have been replaced by the PILA Program (Latin American Exchange Program) which seeks to promote the exchange of undergraduate and postgraduate degree students, as well as academics, researchers and management staff of member universities and higher education institutions, with a view to enhancing their academic, professional and comprehensive training, as well as to promote higher

education internacionalization and strengthen the bonds of cooperation. The program is a product of the Academic Exchange Agreement between Colombia, Mexico and Argentina signed by ASCUN, ANUIES and CIN.

- Another active and ongoing program is the Brazil-Mexico Mobility Program (BRAMEX) which facilitates the exchange of undergraduate students in all areas between Brazil and Mexico funded by the National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education of Mexico (ANUIES) and the Coimbra Group of Brazilian Universities (GCUB).

Multilateral regional mobility programs

These programs are promoted by various international exchange networks, alliances, association agreements and regional organizations. Examples of these programs are those initiated by the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC), the European Union - Latin America and the Caribbean (EU-LAC), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) and the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) comprising countries seeking to support economic growth, leverage their resources, strengthen cultural ties and share regional best practices. They all have an impact on the education sector, through their direct and indirect contribution to regional academic mobility.

Another modality is the regional cooperation efforts that foster transnational ties in a variety of areas, including education. Examples are the academic mobility programs of the MERCOSUR Educational Sector (SEM), including the Regional Academic Mobility Program for Accredited Programs (MARCA), the Undergraduate Student Mobility Pilot Program of the EU Support Project for the MERCOSUR Mobility Program in Higher Education co-financed by the EU

and the MERCOSUR Comprehensive System for the Promotion of Quality Postgraduate Programs.

Another example is the Pacific Alliance Student and Academic Mobility Platform which is a scholarship program of the Pacific Alliance aimed at contributing to the formation of human capital and academic integration in Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru. The program, which has been in effect since 2012, is available to 259 universities in member countries and has already awarded 2,240 scholarships.

A third example is the Pablo Neruda Academic Mobility Program for teachers and postgraduate students (Masters and Doctorate Levels). The Program was created as an Ibero-American Initiative by the XVII Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government in Chile in November 2007 to promote the development of the Ibero-American Knowledge Area (EIC). Participating higher education institutions form networks of at least three universities belonging to three of the participating countries: Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Spain, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay and the Central American subregion. Similarly, the Ibero-American Scholarship Program, which, like the Pablo Neruda, was created within the framework of the Ibero-American Knowledge Area, in 2010/2011, provides financial support for the completion of undergraduate studies at universities in Latin America, as well as mobility for research professors. The scholarships granted are financed by Banco Santander.

The initiatives described above came out of the agreements adopted by the XXIV Ibero American Summit of Heads of States and Governments, held in the city of Veracruz (Mexico), in December 2014, within the Ibero American Academic Mobility

¹¹ The Campus Iberoamérica project which facilitates the mobility of students, researchers and workers among the 22 Ibero-American countries with a view to enhancing their studies, research and/or work activity in other countries in the region, is promoted by the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) and the Ibero-American University Council (CUIB). The Campus-Iberoamérica platform may be accessed at: <https://www.segib.org/cooperacion-iberoamericana/campus-iberoamerica/>

Framework – Campus Iberoamérica¹¹ which seeks to bring together under one multi-program and multi-fund umbrella, and with common rules, the gamut of the resources of the numerous mobility initiatives in the region, in order to simplify the search for those mobility programs that best respond to the preferences of persons interested in academic mobility.

The Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) promoted the Academic Mobility and Exchange Program (PIMA) for undergraduate students with the support of the Junta de Andalucía (Spain). The program is structured around thematic networks comprising institutions from at least three member countries participating in the Program, with a guarantee of recognition by the home university, of the studies carried out by students at another university in the network.

Finally, we must speak of the Cooperation and Mobility Program in Higher Education ERASMUS MUNDUS, of the Executive Agency for Education, Audiovisual and Culture of the Commission of the European Union. This program seeks to promote European higher education; reinforce and improve the career prospects of students; promote intercultural understanding through cooperation with third countries in harmony with the European Union's foreign policy objectives and so contribute to the sustainable development of higher education in third countries. This program includes consortia of institutions of higher education in Europe and third countries, mobility at various higher education levels and also a scholarship system. The program offers financial support to institutions and scholarships for people to study undergraduate, master's, doctoral, postdoctoral programs, and academic mobility of administrative and teaching staff.

III.3. Obstacles to mobility support initiatives

Given the multiplicity of initiatives, of which a sample has been included in the above section, one can say that the region is not lacking in opportunities to promote mobility. States have created initiatives aimed at improving the attractiveness of their systems and establishments, inserting themselves in internationalized circuits, through the creation of disciplinary networks and international cooperation schemes (Didou Aupetit, 2014; Gacel-Ávila & Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2018). As far as possible, they have tried to ensure that their mobility support policies do not promote brain drain but, on the contrary, revert to the development of the country's own human resources (Gérard & Sanna, 2017). Also, it has been well documented that an effective way to boost student mobility is by supporting endogenous internationalization projects, proactively linked to the strengths and development plans of the institutions rather than with external opportunities (Didou Aupetit, 2018).

However, the data is far from depicting a successful scenario at the regional level: student preferences are decidedly in favor of the United States and Europe. The main brake on regional mobility is, therefore, the existence of poles of academic attraction outside the region, which give rise not only to the well-known phenomenon of brain drain (Didou Aupetit & Gérard, 2009), but also to lost opportunities for the construction of a Latin American knowledge space, science and research. Beyond this, what are the obstacles to regional mobility reaching levels similar to those of other regions? The existing literature, as well as the results obtained in different forums, suggest that these difficulties are basically four: the level of regional investment in mobility, the fragmentation of initiatives, their inconsistency and the limited information available.

There is the fixed opinion in the region that public investment in programs for mobility is low. The reality is that there are no figures available to quantify it comparatively, but, in general, it seems clear that the financing of mobility has to be from private sources given that public investment is largely for subsidizing institutions which are autonomous, and goes mainly to the payment of payrolls of teaching and non-teaching staff. In fact, the volume of higher education students who receive non-refundable financial aid from their Governments is extremely low: it ranges from 1.5% in the Dominican Republic to a maximum of 37.4% in Chile, with an average of 17%¹². If, to access higher education in their own country, public contributions are so low, a better scenario for public investment in mobility cannot be expected. This explains why the greater volume of financial support initiatives for mobility are either institutional or multilateral.

The previous overview of the heterogeneity of existing initiatives in the region suggests great wealth and variety, but it is also indicative of great fragmentation and dispersion. If public resources for mobility made available by States are scarce, one might wonder if in this scenario, fragmentation adds value or, on the contrary, reduces it. On the one hand, institutional initiatives multiply and overlap until they reach the paradoxical point where an institution can have simultaneous agreements with the same institution in another country that overlap because the frameworks are different. On the other hand, regional initiatives seem to duplicate efforts instead of developing complementary strategies. It seems clear that the absence of a sufficiently relevant shared knowledge space project that could establish a coherent framework in which the different initiatives are registered and made meaningful, since those that

exist seem to compete with rather than complement each other, contributes to a situation that does not promote mobility but translates into inefficient investment of program resources.

The inconsistency of the initiatives makes this situation worse. Quite frequently, with the political ups and downs and recurring economic crises, initiatives that seemed solid, change their nature and direction or simply disappear, reducing the sustainability and public confidence in these initiatives.

A fourth obstacle, which mainly prejudices the individual student, is the lack of clear and comprehensive information mechanisms on existing mobility support opportunities. Although there are increasingly more institutions that provide some kind of technical internationalization service, where they exist, they tend to focus more on attracting foreign students and less on channeling available opportunities to their own students, which is also a daunting task considering the fragmentation and dispersion of initiatives. A similar phenomenon happens at the national level: some countries have higher education internationalization units but there are very few national information office initiatives that catalogue and disseminate all existing opportunities, for both national and foreign students who wish to continue their studies at some institution in the country. The lack of public commitment to this necessary dissemination work makes us understand why one of the few initiatives existing at the regional level was created by Universia under the auspices of Banco Santander. Also noteworthy is the very likely implications that the lack of adequate information and dissemination mechanisms may have on equity in access to mobility financing opportunities.

¹² There is data only for Uruguay, Mexico, Ecuador, Cuba and Brazil (Red Indices, 2019), in addition to the two countries mentioned.

IV. LOOKING AHEAD: CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES

As we have shown, academic mobility in the region is gradually moving towards a new stage. Some external factors are clearly emerging that can represent challenges and opportunities at the same time for higher education systems in the sense that they can promote the consolidation of a shared knowledge, science and research space or, conversely, put an end to it. Given these challenges, the renewal of a cooperation instrument such as the Regional Convention for the Recognition of Higher Education Studies, Degrees and Diplomas in Latin America and the Caribbean can act as a true platform for the revitalization of regional mobility.

IV.1. External factors that can influence regional mobility

Without fully understanding all the contextual changes that the world is experiencing, globally and also regionally, we can still anticipate some of the factors that may have even greater impact on academic mobility. The most notable are: demographic transformation, migration, technological development, the emergence of new poles of academic attraction and, finally, the process of setting up a regional knowledge space. Each of these can be considered, equally a challenge and an opportunity.

Demographic transformations

According to demographic projections, fewer people will be born in Latin America and the Caribbean, and will live longer. The co-relation of both phenomena means that the natural growth of the population is increasingly slow, until the year 2068 when, according to projections of the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Center (CELADE), for the first time since 1950, the total population of the region will

decrease from 794 to 793 million. On the other hand, while in 2017 the proportion of older people in Europe reached almost 25% of the population, a percentage 2.1% higher than in Latin America and the Caribbean, projections indicate that by 2040 this ratio would decrease to 1.5%, and that by 2050 the elderly in Latin America and the Caribbean will represent 26% of the total population (ECLAC, 2018). This means that, by the middle of this century, the region could reach the same stage of the aging process that is currently observed in developed countries.

What are the implications for the previous higher education scenario? The first, and most important, is the progressive change in student profiles: the percentage of adult students will be increasing, many of them seeking opportunities for professional recycling and others for cultural development and personal growth. The emergence of this mass of potential students is driven, not only by the higher life expectancy of the population, but also as a result of new technologies which increase production and reduce work time, making more free time available. Much of that time will be redirected to education (postgraduate study, change in career path, short courses of different kinds, etc.). Similarly, competitiveness at the workplace and the growing demand for increasingly complex skills, also encourage the use of lifelong learning.

Also, one cannot help but think about the fiscal implications and the resulting pressure on the financing of education due to the demand for other public services, with a higher per capita cost, such as pensions or healthcare, which will impact on the availability of resources for the education sector. This pressure will only be resolved in favor

of higher education in those countries where governments develop policies that favor the democratization of higher education and the implementation of systems that favor lifelong education. In those countries where this does not happen, higher education will require greater efforts from families and individuals.

Migration

The region has traditionally been a departure point for migration, mainly (70%) to the United States, but the volume of migrants moving within the region is increasing. We should be reminded, as UNESCO (2017) has repeatedly been doing, that the right to education of migrants and refugees must be recognized and exercised. That we need to be reminded of this principle, recognized in international treaties and conventions, is indicative that the usual practices are far from it.

Now, while the “border walls” are a reminder of the policies that countries establish in an attempt to curb immigrant access to their territories, the underlying dynamics have always left the door open to mobility and migrant intellectuals. The reasons for this flexibility are well-documented in the literature, the most important being the trade market which involves student mobility¹³ and the importance of recruiting talents by emerging knowledge-based societies¹⁴.

Although the estimates foresee a significant deceleration of the annual growth of 5.7% recorded between 2000 and 2015 in global student mobility, the number of outgoing students worldwide is still expected to increase by an average of 1.7% per year between 2015 and 2027¹⁵. Consequently, those countries which traditionally receive international students, will continue to grant access facilities to their territories, by virtue

of the enormous profits for their economies reported from receiving foreign students.

However, the political rivalry between the United States and China, the cybersecurity concerns of several pivotal countries, the shorter and more volatile economic cycles (especially those affecting the region), the increase in migration for reasons of development or climate and the growth of xenophobic behaviors in Europe, are some of the factors that will impact more restrictive immigration policies and academic mobility flows to other emerging destinations.

Technological developments

Technology is changing the economy, politics and society at an unknown rate so far. Higher education institutions have to transform to adapt to this paradigm shift. However, what will happen to those institutions of higher education that lag behind? Will they compete with cross-border academic providers that strengthen their appeal with the use of cutting-edge educational technologies such as virtual reality? What will happen when cross-border providers can offer full degree programmes in which all the subjects that are part of the curriculum have been developed and accompanied with optimal educational resources - with both copyright and support systems - to favor individualized learning? What if these qualifications were offered in Spanish and / or Portuguese, and costing only a slightly higher fraction than that of pursuing an equivalent degree in the countries of the region?

It is expected that the number of students enrolled in these courses offered by cross-border providers will continue to increase. Already in 2017, the number of cross-border online students was estimated to be 13 million (OECD, 2018), but there is no

¹³ Estimated at 7.2 million students by 2025.

¹⁴ The World Bank estimated in 2000 “that a third of foreign students studying in the United States of America did not return to their countries.” Similarly, in 2013, the National Science Foundation, based in the United States of America, discovered that more than 9 out of 10 Chinese students who graduated with a US doctorate remained in the United States five years after completing their program. However, this last trend begins to reverse <https://monitor.icef.com/2018/02/increasing-numbers-chinese-graduates-returning-home-overseas/> [Accessed July 2, 2019].

¹⁵ <https://monitor.icef.com/2018/02/new-study-forecasts-slown-growth-in-international-student-mobility/> [Accessed July 2, 2019].

clear data on the scope and impact of this virtual mobility. In this scenario, the difficulties reported for the recognition and revalidation of studies, titles and diplomas at the national level will also increase, since these apply more to face-to-face instruction.

The emergence of new poles of academic attraction

The mobility poles are those geographical destinations which group institutions considered “poles of knowledge” with enormous potential for academic attraction. On one hand, they constitute an important presence in academic contribution to the mainstream of global literature in a particular specialization, and therefore the prestigious site they have won; and on the other, because these institutions become an obligatory reference due to the academic tradition they enjoy and have maintained over time. For Latin Americans, the academic pole would be institutions in the United States of America and France, and for the Caribbean subregion, England and France would be the main destinations of academic mobility.

However, changes in the dynamics of academic mobility are anticipated with large higher education centers emerging worldwide. India, for example, already has 799 universities and China 2,880, with seven of them now in the top 200 positions in the Times Higher Education world university ranking (2018). Both China and India have robust and important higher education infrastructure. In a globalized context, both countries have the potential to attract a large number of students from other parts of the world. By 2015, China was able to attract 397,635 students as a result of a centralized government initiative of the Chinese Scholarship Council (Lavakare, 2018). This trend will only grow in the future¹⁶, thanks to state diplomacy proactivity- with strong

economic support - to turn the Asian giant into a new world academic reference.

Similarly, new research and training modalities point to the exploration, understanding and optimization of knowledge through virtual knowledge networks. Traditional academic institutions are giving way to virtual knowledge networks, in which scientists are virtually mobilized without having to be burdened about nationality, institutional bureaucracies, the market, the political-economic determination of knowledge, etc. They move in an epistemologically shared barrier - free universe, except for those imposed by technology, which creates links that foster relationships of trust and collaboration among its members, and in the long run, favor future physical mobility towards the poles which concentrate on new knowledge or strong research activity. These virtual knowledge networks identify suitable terrain for setting up in those destinations that contain a greater number of scientists, namely: Israel with 8,337 researchers per million inhabitants (2013)¹⁷, South Korea with 6,533, Japan with 5,194, Germany with 4,355, Canada with 4,493, United Kingdom with 4,107, United States of America with 3,984, France with 4,124, Russia with 3,084, Malaysia with 1,780, Turkey with 1,188 and China 1,071¹⁸.

Therefore, some countries are already promoting themselves as new poles of academic mobility for the future, a forecast that already counts, as in the case of Malaysia, with government support with a view to making the country the sixth most important destination worldwide for international university students in 2020. Spain is also witnessing a strong attraction of foreigners to its territory, not so much because of its national higher education internationalization strategy but for the international prestige that some of its universities have and

¹⁶ In 2016, it attracted 442,773 international students, “so it now competes with Canada for fourth place as a target market, just behind the US, United Kingdom and Australia. Only five years ago, China could have been considered an important sending market”.

¹⁷ Estimates of the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (2015).

¹⁸ Relatively low figure given its high population density. However, China ranks third on the annual list (Clarivate Analytics) of the most cited researchers globally.

the financial support Banco Santander gives to mobility from the region to this country¹⁹.

Of course, the emergence of English as a lingua franca in these new poles of academic attraction does not facilitate mobility for the region. In fact, the level of English language proficiency of students in the region is far from being appropriate to facilitate their international mobility, as has been recognized on many occasions by the students themselves and their institutions - in fact, the lack of language skills is identified by them as the main obstacle to mobility. Secondly, the fact that Spanish is, in fact, the lingua franca of the region also makes it very difficult for universities to offer courses in English to attract international students for whom Spanish is a barrier. The growing importance of Spanish as a second language in schools internationally represents an important opportunity for internationalization, and many foreign students are attracted to the institutions of the region precisely for this reason.

Towards a regional knowledge, science and research space?

The creation and consolidation of the European Higher Education Space explains, to a large extent, why academic mobility rates within Europe have no equivalence in any other region. In this context, mobility is just one more piece in the construction of networks of prestigious centers that can compete globally in research and development.

Despite multiple attempts, the possibility of a regional knowledge, science and research space does not seem to have been consolidated in Latin America and the Caribbean (Gacel-Ávila, 2015). In 2006, the Ibero-American Council of Universities (CUIB), the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) and the Ibero-American General Secretariat (SEGIB) had already started the

journey of the Ibero-American Knowledge Area, which has given rise to multiple initiatives.²⁰ Likewise, in 2008, the II Regional Conference on Higher Education promoted the creation of the Latin American and Caribbean Higher Education Space (ENLACES) as a regional platform from which to mobilize and articulate concrete actions of solidary academic cooperation that promote knowledge of the characteristics, trends and problems of higher education in the region.

A regional space that coordinates the actions of promotion of science and research, duly funded, could make sense for academic mobility efforts within the region. If this space, whatever its called, does not crystallize, academic mobility will continue to be directed fundamentally towards poles of attraction in other regions, for obvious reasons.

IV.2. The Renewed Convention, a window of opportunity for greater and better regional mobility

The recognition of degrees and studies has been one of the main instruments contributing to the promotion of the mobility of persons between countries and that supports cooperation among nations. Since its inception, UNESCO has committed to promoting academic mobility, which is directly related to the recognition of studies, degrees and diplomas of higher education, and among its activities, has incorporated meetings of experts to assess and diagnose the status of this issue worldwide. In its Constitution, approved in 1945, it is already indicated as one of its objectives: “to help the conservation, progress and dissemination of knowledge [...], encouraging cooperation among nations in all branches of intellectual activity and the international exchange of representatives of education, science and culture”.

19 https://www.eldiario.es/edcreativo/blog/Santander-empresa-invierte-educacion-superior_6_914518541.html

20 The Ibero-American Knowledge Space was reinforced by the Ibero-American Summit of Heads of State and Government in 2014, when it was established a priority area of Ibero-American cooperation. In this regard, mention should be made of the recent creation of the Ibero-American System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (SIACES).

In response to this mission, UNESCO has promoted various normative instruments for higher education. In the case of Latin America, the 1974 UNESCO Convention for the Recognition of Higher Education Studies, Degrees and Diplomas in Latin America and the Caribbean and, for the rest of the Member States, the Recommendation on the Recognition of Studies, Degrees and Higher Education Diplomas (1993) and the future Global Convention for Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications (2019). In order to achieve the latter, an agenda for review and update of the first generation regional conventions was presented to transform them into documents that incorporate concepts relevant to the challenges posed by the 21st century for higher education. These improvements in first-generation texts preserve important principles such as the right to education as a human right, higher education as an exceptionally rich cultural and scientific heritage for both individuals and society, the preservation and strengthening of identity and cultural diversity of the countries respecting the specific nature of their educational systems, the promotion of lifelong learning, the democratization of education and the adoption and application of educational policies that allow a structural, economic, technological and social change.

Similarly, the so-called second generation conventions (revised and updated texts) have been built on the basis of the principles of:

- Transparent information in quality assurance processes for higher education.
- Open information mechanisms on higher education institutions and programs.
- Building trust among the different national institutions and competent recognition authorities.

- Greater shared understanding of recognition processes and procedures that are fair and reasonable

To date, three new Regional Conventions have been adopted: Europe (Lisbon Convention, 1997), Asia and Pacific (Tokyo Convention, 2011) and Africa (Addis Convention, 2014). A new Convention for Recognition in the Arab States is also about to be finalized and refining the final details for the future Global Convention on the Recognition of Higher Education Qualifications, which will be presented to the General Conference for adoption at its 40th session in November of 2019.

The Regional Convention Renewal Process

The issue has gained special relevance in Latin America and the Caribbean in recent years due to the constant changes in national and international contexts of higher education, as well as the rapid increase in professional and academic mobility, institutional diversification and increase in number of Quality Accreditation processes. In this regard, one of the issues of concern to the region is the quality assurance of training for recognition, more so given that there are no specialized mechanisms in the region, such as NARIC / ENIC or MERIC²¹ which inspire confidence due to the fact that they are based on up-to-date and transparent information on the contents of the curricula and profile of qualifications, so that this assurance falls mostly on national agencies.

UNESCO promoted the adoption of the Regional Convention for the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education for Latin America and the Caribbean, which was adopted on July 19, 1974, in Mexico City. The 1974 Regional Convention was in fact a global milestone by virtue of its considering academic

²¹ ENIC-NARIC is an Alliance of networks created by European Council and UNESCO to implement the Lisboa Convention and develop policies and practices for the recognition of qualifications. The acronyms stand for European Network of Information Centres in the European Region (ENIC) and NARIC for National Academic Recognition Information Centres in the European Union. The MERIC network (Mediterranean Recognition Information Centres) favours and increases the recognition of qualifications within the Mediterranean Region, and raises the quality of vertical and horizontal mobility in the higher education systems of the involved countries.

equivalence not as equal content but as recognition of training of similar value. However, regardless of whether it has been signed by the countries and, in some cases, whether it has been ratified, the instrument has not been operational. It only covers 11 countries of the total 33 in the region. In fact, it does not apply in some countries that are important because of their university enrollment, the number of students enrolled and graduated in foreign countries, the movement of professionals and whether they are party to other regulatory UNESCO instruments. For example, Argentina never acceded to the Convention, even though it signed 15 UNESCO International Conventions between 1957 and 1997. Brazil, with 20 Conventions currently in force, and Chile, with 10, signed it, but subsequently denounced it.

The practice of UNESCO regional conventions includes the creation of regional committees to review and establish the desirability of their application in the countries. The Secretariat has been in charge of the creation of the Committee at the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC), and still is. The Regional Committee met on twelve occasions from the time of signing the convention until 2005, when the preparation of draft recommendations was proposed for a review of the text with the dual purpose of amending and adapting it. In 2015, there was a High-Level Meeting of Ministers of Education in Brasilia where the Member States of the region agreed to develop a new Regional Convention taking into account the current challenges in higher education matters especially in the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, as well as the need for strengthening schemes of regional education systems that ensure quality.

Discussions at the High Level Meeting highlighted the difficulties faced by the countries of the region in terms of recognition of qualifications. Among them are:

- the difficulty of defining processes (for example, the difference between Recognition and Validation varies between countries);
- the high level of student mobility and problems related to the determination of the legitimacy of the qualifications presented by the students;
- the difficulty in establishing reliability and trust between countries;
- the lack of uniformity, and the consequent lack of confidence regarding the quality of diplomas and degrees; and
- the lack of transparency required to ensure quality.

Discussions indicated the need to establish broader systems and mechanisms at the regional level, with a view to facilitating the recognition of qualifications, including:

- the need for greater reciprocity (the role of bilateral and multilateral agreements is essential in this regard);
- the need for qualification frameworks, to help regulate both academic and professional qualifications;
- the need for harmonization, to give regional value to qualifications; and
- the need to take advantage of the current willingness of countries to develop transnational cooperation.

In compliance with the request emanating from the States, IESALC organized a Working Group comprising experts addressing the representativeness and diversity of the region, as well as the participation of international and regional organizations. This process of exhaustive review, debates and discussion, allowed for greater participation by the attending representatives, thus allowing for the preparation of a draft

convention that would address current needs and take on board the diversity of the region for greater acceptance. The draft was presented at two intergovernmental consultation meetings as a preliminary step to the International Conference of States in Buenos Aires in July 2019.

Opportunities offered by the Renewed Convention

So far, mobility has functioned as a way to complement and strengthen learning, which leads to the acquisition of skills and knowledge in an international dimension that will in turn generate an impact on their productivity and, therefore, on social transformation of societies. Meanwhile, in practical terms, recognition is the mechanism to ensure that this mobility is efficient and effective, clear and easily accessible. To fulfill this purpose, there should be a balance between two fundamental roles, a welcome or open-door role and a role of access to protection or oversight. These roles benefit all the actors involved, students, academics, researchers and institutions of higher education, which at the end of the mobility process should result in increased capacities and improved productivity of the societies.

One of the achievements of the processes of university education transformation in Latin America and the Caribbean has been the discovery of the need and the possibility of the various institutions working together, not necessarily to standardize, but rather to strengthen systems and institutions in a common area of good practice to fulfil the mission of the university. Integration understood at the institutional, national, regional and international levels can lead to better results if efforts are combined, priorities shared and resources applied appropriately.

Currently, progress has been made in numerous bilateral agreements, which reflect the effort and commitment of some governments, but these do not cover the entire re-

gion, including new areas dedicated to international cooperation and internationalization of training, both within the universities themselves and in government agencies. However, despite the profusion of signed agreements, there are still obstacles that prevent the treaties from being translated into concrete actions. The region continues to lag behind in the global context compared to the countries that 40 years ago were behind Latin America in this area. In order to facilitate better regional integration, it is crucial that academic mobility is adequately protected, both by arrangements between countries and between institutions, that guarantee reciprocity based on mutual trust and on the transparency of information about the contents of the curricula and the accreditation of their quality.

That is why the achievement of the signing of the renewed Convention should be seen not only as a new milestone for higher education in the region, but also that it is happening in a crucial and challenging time. After 45 years, an agenda capable of agglutinating the existing strengths is preserved, preserving the diversity expressed in the region, trying to reduce its weaknesses and move towards a common goal, expressed as the establishment of unity in the region, diversity, balanced, symmetrical and relevant integration, based on solidarity cooperation.

The role of IESALC

For IESALC, the ratification of this convention represents an opportunity to reaffirm its mission as a specialized agency of UNESCO with the mandate to support the governments of the region to achieve their objectives in higher education. In this context, IESALC undertakes to continue supporting the implementation of the renewed Convention through the following actions:

- prepare a strategy to approach governments seeking the highest ratification of States to the Convention;

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- provide necessary technical assistance to governments and competent national authorities on the applicability of the Convention and its implications;
- develop the necessary tools to facilitate the operationalization of the Convention, generating reference frameworks and general guidelines;
- establish alliances that allow for the sharing of experiences and good practices, offering spaces for participation to higher education institutions as well as articulation between them and governments in relation to the recognition of diplomas; and
- monitor the effects of the Convention on academic mobility.

V. CONCLUSIONS

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1. *Academic mobility is an important component of the global landscape of higher education. The information presented and the dynamics analyzed indicate that it will continue to increase in coming years and that the attraction poles will diversify.*
2. *On a regional scale, LAC presents some singularities. The most important is that more students migrate to other regions than those who move to other countries in the same region. Consequently, the region is now a destination that receives mainly students from the region itself, with Argentina hosting just over half of all those who move. Also characteristic of the region is the displacement of more students to other regions, particularly to the United States and Europe, than those who choose to remain within their confines. There are, however, some countries that manage to attract more foreign students than those that leave their bosom; This is the case in Argentina, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic and, notably in view of its size, Grenada. The major systems of higher education that are the ones that receive more students from the region itself are those from which a greater proportion to other regions, particularly at the postgraduate and doctoral levels. In essence, the attractiveness of the region is limited to undergraduate students from countries in the same region, with the exception of Chile, which is the only country with a majority of foreign students pursuing postgraduate or doctoral studies.*
3. *The initiatives (institutional, national, bilateral and multilateral) to promote regional mobility do not seem to have sufficient consistency to become an engine for intra-regional mobility. Considering that, together with the cultural and linguistic proximity, the two most important determinants of decisions on international student mobility are the quality differential of the institution or system of the country of destination and, secondly, the financial costs, Current initiatives do not seem to be going in the right direction. In the region, there are considerable problems linked to the low level of public investment in academic mobility, fragmentation, duplication and disintegration of existing programs, inconsistency and lack of sustainability over time and, finally, the low dissemination of information on existing mobility support opportunities. It is quite possible that the lack of appropriate information strategies has negative effects not only on the perceived quality of higher education in the countries of the region, but also on equitable access to these opportunities.*
4. *Mobility in the region faces contextual factors that can represent challenges and opportunities: demographic changes, migration, technological developments, the emergence of new poles of academic attraction and, finally, the process of creating a Regional Knowledge Space. The latter, if reinforced, can become the great engine of regional mobility; otherwise, it will be bereft of meaning.*
5. *The renewed Convention addresses these challenges and opportunities and can be a platform for promoting mutual trust between institutions and higher education systems in the region, and promote mobility. Countries must be aware that promoting mobility per se is meaningless. Recent history demonstrates that academic mobility makes sense only when political speeches on regional integration*

are supported by financially well-endowed programs to promote the existence and consolidation of academic networks. In this way, academic mobility, starting with that of researchers, will be the cause and effect of regional integration and social cohesion. It is, therefore, in

the context of this process of shaping new regional academic spaces that it will be possible to develop a Latin American knowledge space, for which mobility would operate as a strategic engine for its revitalization.

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