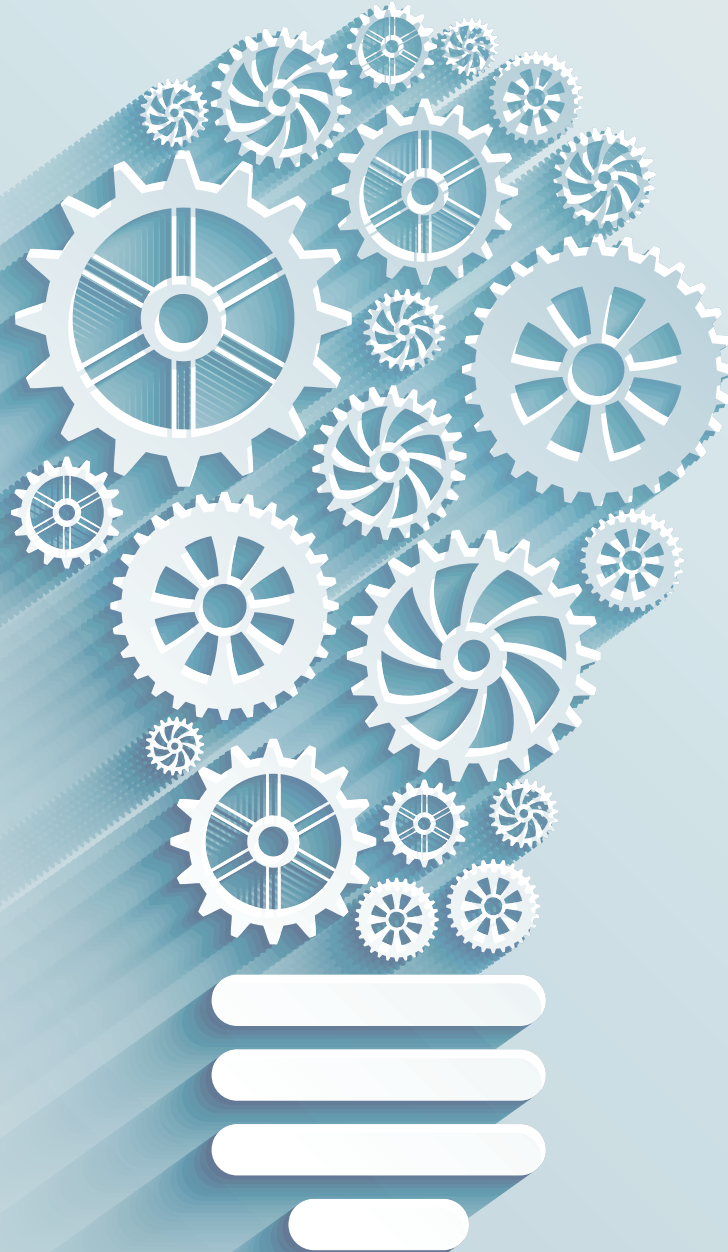




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International Institute
for Higher Education
in Latin America and
the Caribbean



**UNESCO INTERNATIONAL INSTITUTE FOR HIGHER EDUCATION
IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN**

Medium-Term Strategy (2022-2025)

November 2, 2021

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Foreword

Higher education continues to be one of the most important pending agenda items for the enforcement of the universal right to education worldwide and a key lever for the Sustainable Development Goals. UNESCO advocates for a concept of higher education that is intrinsically linked to lifelong learning opportunities for all. Access to, and success in, higher education are avenues for human development through a specific instance of a public and social good whose quality, equity, and inclusiveness have to be granted by States. The return of the investment in higher education is not only relatively high for the individual but also for society and the economy at large. Public investment in higher education thus creates well-documented externalities that, among other things, contribute to socio-economic development through health and civic outcomes, not to mention the direct effect on the labor market and the resulting environment that is prone to more knowledge-oriented economies.

On the other hand, no other education subsector has more potential than higher education to contribute to each Sustainable Development Goal (SDG), mainly through the three missions that universities pursue: teaching, research, and the contribution to social and economic development. Moreover, developing countries need to expand their professional and scientific capacities, both in the public and private sectors, to create and manage their avenues to socio-economic development; again, no other subsector is better positioned to do this than higher education.

Between 2000 and 2018, gross enrolment rates in higher education increased from 19 to 38% worldwide. Yet, in the Global South, the proportion of each cohort that gets access to higher education yearly remains low: it ranges from 9% in Sub-Saharan Africa to 52% in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO, 2021). Inevitably, the COVID crisis is having a major impact on the progress made in the concretization of the right to higher education. In some countries, most vulnerable students are suffering not only from learning loss but also socio-emotional damage and many, especially female students in developing countries, will not return when institutions reopen as the Institute has shown in past reports (IESALC-UNESCO, 2020, 2021).

This Medium-Term Strategy (2022-2025) presents how, in this context, the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-IESALC) can provide, in a post-pandemic scenario, a useful contribution to a better re-designed higher education scenario that enforces quality, equity, and inclusion in line with the SDGs. UNESCO-IESALC is the only Category I Institute devoted solely to higher education in UNESCO and in the United Nations System. While it has remained focused on the region that lobbied for its creation in 1997, like any other UNESCO Category I Institute, it is meant to have a global perspective and outreach as this Strategic Plan outlines.

Given the complexity of the higher education subsector, to which the impact of the COVID crisis has added a new layer, the opportunity to extend the benefits of the only UNESCO Category I Institute entirely devoted to higher education, to all UNESCO Member States, while retaining its main operations in the Latin America and Caribbean region, requires strategic thought. Such an exercise is also an opportunity for better alignment with the UNESCO-wide Medium-Term strategy and consequently, with the Sustainable Development Goals and the 2030 international agenda for education.

Francesc Pedró

Director

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International Institute for Higher Education
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Part I

Key Components

UNESCO-IESALC, an increasingly relevant voice in the international arena of higher education

Despite having experienced ups and downs, UNESCO-IESALC has matured over time, increased its capacities, and provided a better response to UNESCO Member States higher education needs, first in the Latin America and Caribbean region and more recently, also at a global level. Up to 2018, UNESCO-IESALC had made multiple contributions to the regional development of higher education mostly thanks to the organization and follow-up of three major regional higher education conferences. Since the COVID crisis in March 2020, the Institute has expanded its operations and identified new areas of expertise that must be further explored, notably in research and capacity building. In many respects, UNESCO-IESALC has used the opportunity created by the crisis to grow as any other UNESCO Category I Institute, for example, focusing on generating evidence for better policymaking in higher education, contributing to the development of capacities of the most important actors in this arena, providing technical support to UNESCO Member States, and advocating for the right to higher education with quality and equity, in line with Sustainable Development Goal 4.

Under the direction of the Governing Board of the Institute, with support from UNESCO Headquarters, and the capacity to respond to competitive calls to obtain additional financial extra-budgetary support, the Institute has made two significant advances over the past two years: the establishment of an analytical team made up of well-prepared and committed researchers and policy analysts; and a capacity development team that has expanded the training capacity of the Institute through a dedicated virtual campus and a series of courses that are currently being expanded. Both primarily

address the needs of higher education institutions resulting from the shift to emergency distance learning and, eventually, to a radical transformation of higher education.

The response of UNESCO-IESALC to the crisis significantly improved the relevance of its contributions, so much so that the Institute is now considered by most to be an authority in all matters related to higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean; so too increasingly beyond the boundaries of the region, as demonstrated in its major contributions to the preparation of the Third World Higher Education Conference, to be held in 2022. The Institute has therefore largely improved its public presence and expanded its partnership with the full range of actors that populate the higher education sector, from national and local governments to institutions, councils, and networks, from unions to entrepreneurs, and has devoted great effort to establishing synergies with other regional and international organizations, as well as development agencies.

While the pandemic has represented a major opportunity for the development of the Institute, the consequences of the crisis on the higher education sector may be long-lasting. This requires UNESCO-IESALC, a UNESCO Category I Institute, to contribute to the redefinition of higher education in an uncertain scenario worldwide. This involves, first, a clear commitment to the expansion of the universal right to higher education as a public good; second, the reappraisal of delivery modes and a commitment to innovation; third, the reconsideration of the crucial role that higher education is expected to play in the social and economic recovery process that will be sooner or later initiated in all countries; and fourth, the way in which

its contributions can foster progress towards the achievement of a more sustainable development, as stated in the 2030 agenda.

This strategy aims to fully embrace the scope and implications of these challenges and to offer better guidance and support to UNESCO Member States in preparing the way forward for higher education.

Mission and Vision statements

Over the years, UNESCO-IESALC has regularly revisited its vision and its mission, recognizing the expanding needs of UNESCO Member States in higher education.

Mission Statement

To promote the right to higher education through capacity development for the formulation and implementation of quality, equitable, and inclusive higher education policies at the national, regional, and institutional levels in LAC Member States, with a view to global outreach.

Vision Statement

To become the United Nations leading source for evidence, advice, and capacity development on higher education worldwide.

A wide range of Member States, university networks and associations, councils of presidents, quality assurance agencies, partners, and other stakeholders have been consulted on the relevance of these mission and vision statements. They clearly reflect the Institute's emphasis on strengthening capacity, which continues to be at the core of its activities, at both country and institutional level.

This mission statement translates into three interconnected strategic objectives, which appear below.

Strategic objectives

Strategic Objective N°1 (SO1)

Member States create and sustain policy, regulatory, and funding environments that are conducive to providing quality and equitable higher education

Strategic Objective N°2 (SO2)

Higher education institutions have their capacities strengthened for innovative and more efficient delivery with heightened commitment to internationalization

Strategic Objective N°3 (SO3)

Knowledge on higher education national and institutional policies is available as a global public good

UNESCO-IESALC's three strategic objectives are strongly inter-connected, with evidence-based research and analysis (SO3) nurturing capacity development at both national (SO1) and institutional (SO2) levels. The logic behind the inter-connection across the three strategic objectives lies in the realization that, in the context of institutional autonomy, a policy - conducive environment at national level is not enough; even in the context of wide availability of evidence, institutional management and actors' capacities are key.

UNESCO-IESALC understands the need for more efforts in the provision and dissemination of evidence for better-informed policies. Yet, those efforts are useless unless implanted in a capacity-rich environment, both at policy and at institutional levels. The best evidence is one that is effectively used to inform decision-making, which is even far more complex in institutional participatory environments, such as higher education institutions.

The implementation of these three strategic objectives is grounded in four pillars, as described below.

Four pillars

1. Actionable research and analysis

To a large extent, UNESCO-IESALC undertakes applied research on priority higher education issues and translates findings into policy-relevant evidence and training opportunities as well as into diverse products for dissemination. Research modalities include desk reviews, international surveys, country case studies and comparative analyses, as well as foresight research on higher education. What makes UNESCO-IESALC research and analyses different from those undertaken by academic institutions is that the Institute's activities should aim at improving policy formulation and decision-making rather than blue-skies research in higher education. While applied and blue-skies research are interdependent, the aim of the Institute is to conduct research and analysis that support policy and institutional developments.

To this end, the Institute will increase its efforts to develop practical tools, guidelines, and methodologies which translate its knowledge production efforts into action-oriented products. UNESCO-IESALC is mindful that the supply of knowledge products does not necessarily translate into uptake, changed policy or practice. The emphasis of this Strategy is therefore placed on applied knowledge which is fit for purpose.

2. Technical Cooperation for capacity development

Technical cooperation is integral to the UNESCO Institute's core mission. The reappraisal of higher education policies in a post-pandemic world requires sound and action-oriented technical support. UNESCO-IESALC's approach to technical support is to stress that the activities be comprehensive, covering not only the identification of policy avenues and technically robust solutions to emerging policy issues, but also that they contribute significantly through coaching and training to capacity development. Emphasis will be placed on securing an uptake or recommendations articulated in knowledge products by ensuring that countries

receive the necessary technical support. This pillar is also grounded on the assumption that, beyond knowledge production and dissemination, some knowledge services will be proactively offered to countries and institutions to resolve specific higher education-related issues on a cost recovery basis, independently from the funding source.

In this regard, the Institute will support Member States throughout the higher education policy cycle, increasingly emphasizing improvement in equity and quality, as well as promoting the internationalization of higher education systems. There are costs to knowledge sharing, with very little possibility of recovery. However, relevant knowledge made available and applied by countries does promote evidence-based planning, saving huge resources as policies and programs are built around what works. Undoubtedly, Member States and other funding partners will see value in supporting the sustainable generation and sharing of such important knowledge to address regional and global higher education needs. In this instance, the Institute will act as a clearinghouse and also tailor policy messages to audiences and occasions – more like a 'help-desk' that positions the Institute at the disposal of demand for concrete HE resources.

3. Innovative capacity strengthening

UNESCO-IESALC is building momentum in its role as a training provider for teachers and technical staff in the higher education sector thanks to the huge investment made during the pandemic in observance of the provisions of the Executive Board of UNESCO in its 209 EX session that acknowledges the imperative of providing support to front-line teachers and investing efforts in the development of competencies.

Nevertheless, there is room for expansion of its offer to respond to the needs of decision-makers and professionals as well, both in government and in agencies, networks, and individual institutions. This must be seen as an integral part of the Institute's efforts to contribute to strengthening capacities, first at a regional level and increasingly in other UNESCO regions.

The Institute is also seen as a reference when it comes to the pedagogical frameworks, processes, and technological solutions it employs to deliver training and promote the co-construction of shared knowledge among end-user groups. Fulfilling its mandate and ethos, the Institute will play its role as an honest broker of a range of approaches and experiences and offer added value as a hub for professional networks in the region and, more globally, South–South cooperation in higher education. The creation of self-regulated networks of decision-makers or researchers in higher education where peer-learning can find a natural space and the required supportive tools represents an opportunity to act as an innovation hub for professional capacity strengthening internationally.

4. Networked Advocacy and Knowledge Sharing

UNESCO-IESALC will support other teams at UNESCO, globally and locally, in their efforts to promote the right to quality, equitable, and inclusive higher education. But the advocacy efforts need to transcend the boundaries of UNESCO through bilateral and multilateral partnerships with other organizations, institutions, notably universities, and private companies committed to the SDGs and that share UNESCO's values and objectives.

The Institute also contributes to the regional evidence architecture by the systematization of data and best practices to ensure that this information on higher education is available to those who need to use it.

The Institute will deploy a knowledge - sharing and communications strategy that will support communities of practice, enriching public debates about higher education through publications and other dissemination products. In this strategy, the publication of the Institute's reports and the Institute's journal, *Higher Education and Society*, which celebrated its 30th anniversary in 2021, are critical components.

Four strategic directions

The Institute sets out four basic directions for the development of this strategy, namely:

- 1. Committing to higher education as a universal right to a public good.**
- 2. Empowering institutions and higher education systems for a more responsive, inclusive, relevant, and efficient provision.**
- 3. Nurturing innovation in higher education.**
- 4. Re-envisioning internationalization.**

The rationale for each direction is presented below.

1. Committing to higher education as a universal right to a public good

Whether higher education is or not a public good, has been extensively debated. UNESCO's position, as stated on many occasions, including past World Conferences and major Regional Conferences in Latin America and the Caribbean, is that higher education should be affirmed as a public good that yields benefits to countries and communities as well as to individuals, including economic returns. The selective nature that many school systems still have, based on a misunderstood concept of meritocracy that is blind to the impact of socio-economic inequities, no longer justifies approaches to higher education that places it out of the reach of a vast majority of citizens. The diverse benefits that accompany higher education should not be restricted to the few. Furthermore, the State has a major role to play, if not as a direct provider, at least as a trustworthy enforcer of a fundamental right and a regulator that promotes access to a much-appreciated public good.

There is an international consensus on the universal right to education, enshrined in several international treaties and declarations, as well as in

national legislation. The enforcement of this right, translated into public policies, has yielded positive outcomes both in terms of universalization of basic education and of equity of educational opportunity over the past fifty years. At first glance, higher education has also aligned with this general trend, with steady improvements in access rates following the progressive universalization of secondary education. However, a closer look reveals that the benefits of this growth have not been equally enjoyed. In low and middle-income countries, the likelihood of accessing higher education is between five and fifteen times higher for students with high socio-economic status compared to their poorest counterparts in the same country, according to UIS data. There are indications that this gap may be widening.

To sum up, there is a need to expand the discussions around the universal right to higher education and to move the international agenda forward. The time to rethink the peripheral role that the right to higher education has had in these discussions seems to have arrived. This follows on the heels of the progress towards universalization of secondary education and the quest for more equitable access to lifelong higher education opportunities worldwide, taking into consideration the major setbacks that the pandemic may be creating. In addition, as we move closer to the assessment of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, it is important that we understand and document improvements and setbacks in higher education to support follow-up actions after 2030.

Therefore, UNESCO-IESALC is committed to revisit the policy implications of considering higher education both a public good and a universal right for access to, and success in, higher education. Both access and success are still under stress following the impact of the pandemic and will continue to be so in the coming years. Major efforts in advocacy, drawing on sound evidence and eventually translated into UNESCO normative instruments, are envisaged.

2. Empowering institutions for a more responsive, relevant, and efficient provision

In a context of institutional autonomy, success in higher education is linked to the actual capacities of decision-makers, administrators, teachers, and technical and support staff. The pandemic has exposed that in many countries these capacities were not enough to ensure sustained resilience. The pandemic has also helped to revisit the traditional approach to higher education quality: research capacity is not always a good predictor of teaching responsiveness, program relevance or even of an efficient provision of higher education. A conducive policy environment does not suffice either. In the context of institutional autonomy, one of the most important keys to success lies in adaptive leadership, geared towards maximizing the opportunities for staff development. Not surprisingly, UNESCO-IESALC is experiencing a growing demand from Member States for providing technical support and capacity development for better institutional management.

As a result of financial stringency, combined with demands for improved efficiency, higher educational institutions have been forced to reduce expenditure, seek new sources of funding, and improve the utilization of existing resources. At the same time, they have had to cope with increased diversification to produce new types of graduates to meet the changing needs of the labor market, foster closer links with industry, as well as widen participation through the introduction of new delivery methods, including distance learning.

UNESCO-IESALC will redouble its efforts to provide capacity development opportunities for higher education leaders, administrators, and managers, from presidents to department chairs. These opportunities will emphasize the role that human resource development, budgeting, research opportunities, and monitoring and evaluation play in ensuring a quality provision of higher education. In addition, the Institute will work hand in hand with national and local governments to promote policy and regulatory environments conducive to a greater emphasis on institutional improvement.

3. Nurturing innovation in higher education

While the pandemic has renewed the interest in innovation in higher education, particularly in terms of delivery modes and methodologies, the drivers of this have been present in the sector for some years now. These drivers include: the diversification of the student body, with wider differences in profiles, needs and expectations; the call for improved quality of instruction to produce a more rewarding learning experience; and the growing emphasis on skills development.

Digitalization and new technological developments such as artificial intelligence, blockchain, or virtual reality offer new windows of opportunity to test new delivery modes and require, at the same time, well-established and sound pedagogical capacities. These teacher capacities are highly esteemed by learners but, paradoxically, in many places are not considered in the academic career, which is still failing to provide incentives and formal recognition to those teachers who contribute to student success through sustained innovative efforts.

There is more to innovation in higher education than the window of opportunity that digitalization and new technological developments can offer. The sector as a whole and most institutions need policy and regulatory environments that promote innovation in institutional management while commending autonomy. The pinnacle of the system, occupied by quality assurance is, needs also to recognize the importance of innovation to measure outcomes and processes.

UNESCO-IESALC, as a training provider, will be at the forefront of educational innovations in blended learning and other delivery modes. In addition, the Institute will document and analyze emerging trends in innovation, with particular emphasis on creating policy and regulatory environments prone to innovation, as well as managerial and quality assurance innovations that empower institutions, duly respecting their academic autonomy. UNESCO-IESALC will remain committed to open access information and free open-source software,

to boost accessibility and contribute to a rapidly growing set of digital public applications and services that can dramatically improve the quality of the higher education experience and promote equitable access.

4. Re-envisioning internationalization

The pandemic has halted academic mobility worldwide and, in so doing, has provided an opportunity to rethink the meaning of internationalization of higher education and the means used to pursue it. On the one hand, internationalization should be considered an integral part of the mission of any higher education institution and not merely a means to address funding shortage issues or to improve reputation.

The promotion of straightforward internationalization should also envisage new responsible forms of academic mobility taking the environment into account and also taking advantage of technological developments. Higher education should aim to democratize student mobility and make efforts to make it available to at least any postgraduate student worldwide. In this context, purely virtual mobility cannot be proposed as a substitute for the transformative life experience that goes hand in hand with physical mobility, but blended forms of mobility could be the answer that should be proposed for a more responsible, and participatory approach to mobility.

UNESCO-IESALC will continue to support the ratification process of the UNESCO global and regional conventions on the recognition of qualifications regarding higher education and become the secretariat for the Buenos Aires Convention. At the global level, the Institute will monitor new developments in virtual and blended mobility and provide tools and capacity development opportunities for the internationalization of systems, institutions, and programs.

Key value streams

A value stream can be defined as the process that creates what end-users demand and expect from the Institute. In every value stream, there are many required actions which bind to create this value or service. Understanding our value streams is important for two reasons: it enables the Institute to group products according to the process of its creation and, knowing the value stream allows the Institute to focus on a set of linked processes without distraction. The value streams represent a shift from “product” to “value” in UNESCO-IESALC’s work program. The concept of value streams is that the value is defined from the perspective of UNESCO, integrating those of multiple participant actors and sectors.

UNESCO-IESALC’s stakeholders and target end-users include ministries of education, higher education agencies, councils, as well as institutions and their networks. And the best way to bring value is through the combined strength of UNESCO-IESALC’s training, technical cooperation, research, and knowledge sharing.

Concretely, the value streams in UNESCO-IESALC’s program are a set of projects or activities that are mutually reinforcing when targeting a specific goal.

The initial choice of value streams is the result of an assessment of the value-added UNESCO-IESALC can provide to main areas of the Education 2030 Agenda, with a clear focus on higher education. This original list has been further refined using UNESCO’s 2022–2029 Strategy and 2022–2025 Program and Budget to maximize complementarity with the work of other units in UNESCO (and beyond), as well as to avoid duplication.¹

The selected value streams are:

- Stronger emphasis on the enforcement of the right to higher education through public policies

- Redoubled efforts to promote gender equity in higher education
- More effective mechanisms to promote skills development
- Better equipped higher education instructors for new pedagogies
- Better management of internationalization and student mobility
- More innovative, responsive and accountable institutions committed to the sustainable development goals
- Enhanced policy dialogue between governments, agencies, and higher education institutions
- University research that contributes to the sustainable development of countries
- More evidence to inform higher education policies

With a view to agile and adaptive planning at UNESCO-IESALC, the definition and scope of value streams may not be refined during the implementation of the biannual programs of work, but the Institute may decide to create new value streams, as well as phase out existing ones. Given the time scope of this Strategy, the need for an update could emerge, following new demands or opportunities. UNESCO-IESALC will report on results achieved on each of these value streams annually.²

Value stream 1. Stronger emphasis on the enforcement of the right to higher education through public policies

The right to higher education has been absent from the core principles on which higher education policies have been designed, particularly in developing contexts. The process of equity and inclusion in education begins with a recognition of the social, economic, and systemic advantages and barriers affecting learners, and UNESCO-IESALC has invested in a sustained effort to address such inequalities through access policies, re-

1 See section on Alignment with the Education 2030 Agenda and Alignment with UNESCO Strategy.

2 This list represents the initial value streams at the time of validation by UNESCO-IESALC’s Governing Board, in October 2021.

source allocations, targeted services, and teaching strategies.

UNESCO-IESALC will assist Member States in the development, implementation, and monitoring of active pro-poor, gender-responsive, crisis-sensitive, inclusive, and equitable higher education policies. Support will be provided for ensuring access and success for the vulnerable. UNESCO-IESALC also accompanies higher education agencies and networks in developing organizational capacity through the changes needed to institutionalize and mainstream the right to higher education and its implications in equity and inclusion.

Special attention will be given to the interconnected nature of vulnerabilities associated with gender, socio-economic status, race, ethnicity, disability, location, vulnerability to conflict and climate change, displacement, and language, which can intersect to compound disadvantages, through the lenses of universal access and youth employability.

Value stream 2. Redoubled efforts to promote gender equity in higher education

Much has been done to increase women's access to education, including higher education, where men were previously overrepresented. However, while efforts to increase access are commendable, especially from a human rights, social justice and economic development perspective, the outcomes of such increased participation are less well understood. It is therefore important to go beyond simply monitoring women's access to higher education institutions, to monitoring women's ability to fully participate, and flourish within these institutions. Research on higher education, particularly from a gender perspective, is important to provide up-to-date evidence from which to develop targeted policies and programs to address the needs of women in higher education.

Broadly speaking, the dynamics of women's engagement in higher education remain an area of concern: How many women occupy leadership positions? How many are completing advanced studies? What are the publication dynamics by

gender? What are the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on women's accomplishments in HE? These are just a few examples of the aspects surrounding women's role in higher education worth analyzing in further detail.

Whether aggregated or disaggregated, the numbers alone do not reflect how women continue to report working and studying in climates that privilege male perspectives and organizational and leadership approaches that tend to disadvantage women. Besides, the data reveal that women studying and working in post-secondary institutions hit glass ceilings or remain trapped on sticky floors, experience gender-related wage disparities; and the threat and reality of sexual harassment and violence continue to intrude on-campus work and living environments. Issues such as these, along with the complexities associated with demographic differences such as ethnic group, sexual identity, and women's socioeconomic status, help shape women's experiences in higher education and thus must be considered when assessing progress toward gender equity.

UNESCO-IESALC will contribute to UNESCO's major priority on gender equity through increased efforts in research that translate into capacity development opportunities focused on institutions of higher education. Those efforts will lead to guidelines, tools as well as training courses aimed particularly at increasing female participation in senior positions.

Value stream 3. More effective mechanisms to promote skills development

The labor market is undergoing profound transformations due to the influence of technological innovations and an increased awareness of the need to shift towards more sustainable models of economic development. To support this dynamic while at the same time promoting access to decent jobs, higher education systems need to be sufficiently responsive.

To this end, UNESCO-IESALC supports Member States in designing and implementing innovative

and contextualized mechanisms for ensuring that higher education is increasingly responsive to societal and economic demands, particularly at the local level, from a lifelong learning perspective. This is supported particularly through policy dialogue and partnership frameworks involving all stakeholders (public actors, private economic actors, civil society, academia). It also includes mechanisms for analyzing labor market data and their integration into curriculum development in higher education institutions, and for evaluating their external efficiency.

The Institute supports countries through synchronized, complementary, and contextualized functions. The most recent advances in research, including that of UNESCO-IESALC on strengthening the link between skills development and labor market needs, in the wider context of the role that higher education plays in national development plans, allows for the optimization of the relevance of technical assistance and the delivery of training through both long and short modules, according to country needs. UNESCO-IESALC also promotes and uses innovative partnership mechanisms to foster intergovernmental exchanges and South–South cooperation in this matter.

Value stream 4. Better management of internationalization and academic mobility

Internationalization is at the core of higher education. The pandemic has greatly disrupted higher education, and internationalization has not escaped its devastating effects. UNESCO has always promoted the internationalization of higher education to increase global understanding and promote peace and cooperation in a multilateral effort. This effort has included several instances of regulatory instruments, both global and regional, that have focused on lifting one of the most important barriers: recognition of qualifications.

It will take some time before traditional mobility flows settle. In the future, student mobility will take many different forms, ranging from the dominant stand-alone model of the individual consumer pursuing education abroad to the more com-

plex model of inter-institutional and intra-institutional mobility. In this landscape, virtual mobility should emerge as a means by which those unable to move physically across borders can enjoy some of the qualities and benefits of international education.

UNESCO-IESALC will promote a responsible approach to mobility—one where traditional physical mobility is available to young people at a lower cost and with a clear purpose and co-exists with virtual mobility—to make international experiences even more accessible through internationalization at home. That future also addresses some of the concerns about international student mobility, including aspects such as environmental damage and matters of personal safety and security. The Institute will also work towards developing capacities of universities internationalization efforts. In particular, the Institute will redouble its efforts to promote the ratification of the Buenos Aires Convention (2019) and ensure that Member States get technical support to enhance coordination.

Value stream 5. Better equipped higher education instructors for new pedagogies

Following the shift to emergency remote teaching to ensure pedagogical continuity during the pandemic, UNESCO-IESALC has gained experience in supporting all actors (administrators, technical staff, teachers, and students) for the transition to a digitally supported provision of higher education. This shift has paved the way for hybridization and a more intensive use of technology in classrooms, at the same time fostering a demand for new pedagogies in a rapid process that may lead to radical innovations.

UNESCO-IESALC has analyzed the drivers and barriers of these pedagogies, strengthening the message that they can be powerful tools for the transformation of higher education. However, much more effort is needed in the dissemination and development of new tools and guidelines.

UNESCO-IESALC has also expanded its capacity to provide technical support and training to higher

education instructors to enhance teaching and learning and improve the student's experience. The Institute's virtual campus is, in this respect, the forefront of how emerging technologies, ranging from AI to blockchain, and new approaches to assessment and certification, including digital micro-credentials, can be put at the service of quality teaching and learning.

Value stream 6. More innovative, inclusive, responsive, accountable institutions committed to sustainable development goals

Higher education is facing a host of challenges, including external questions regarding its value and purpose. Questions such as whether higher education institutions are operating in the public interest and are good stewards of their public resources point not only to State regulations but also to the internal capacities and quality assurance processes of each individual institution -in sum, their responsiveness and accountability.

In the current context, this social responsibility must also translate into a firm commitment to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Higher education institutions, and universities in particular, have been called upon from the outset to play a significant role in achieving them and, precisely for this reason, there are many voices that consider that their leadership role in sustainability, in training, research and extension, is in crisis. Part of this crisis is due to the heightened pressure on higher education worldwide: to do more with less. Moreover, to this pressure is now added that of doing in a sustainable manner and with a catalytic effect, that guarantees a social and economic impact in the progressive march towards a development model in line with the SDGs.

In this sense, the Institute is well - positioned to support the design of programs that allow the incorporation of the SDGs into the curriculum, research and extension agendas, as well as to promote visibility and collaboration among existing networks that have been working for the SDGs and whose efforts should be increased in this decade.

There is a global appetite for training and technical support, on the one hand, and for tools and guidelines, on the other, that can provide avenues for internal and external quality improvement and foster innovation. Strong and networked leadership are as critical as the required modernization of working methods, from planning and budgeting to monitoring and evaluation. Also, the growing hybridization of teaching methods, and an increasing demand for learning flexibility, pose a huge challenge to institutions — their digital transformation.

UNESCO-IESALC is well - positioned to support institutional development in these areas, particularly in partnership with national, regional, and international networks of universities. The Institute has a good record of cooperation with quality assurance agencies internationally that can be instrumental for this support.

Value stream 7. Enhanced policy dialogue among governments, agencies, and higher education institutions

In an era of intensifying globalization and international exchange, the relationship between national/federal governments, agencies and higher education institutions remains extremely important. This relationship governs the mechanisms and ideas around how systems of higher education are funded and organized and how they impact the governance of universities and other institutions that make up the higher education sector.

UNESCO-IESALC commends self-regulation as a mode of relationship between higher education and the State and endorses institutional autonomy as a key component of a sector that needs academic freedom to operate properly. UNESCO-IESALC has made great efforts to understand self-regulation in both the private and the higher education sectors, offering an international comparative review of self-regulation in higher education, and the role that quality assurance agencies play as buffers between governments and institutions. The Institute has also pioneered a

new self-regulation index that measures the level of self-regulation in higher education as well as making connections between self-regulation and quality and equity.

The ways in which self-regulation in higher education continue to unfold globally and the impact that it has on quality and equity in higher education, is an under-explored but highly relevant area for UNESCO, and on a broader scale, for the implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals. UNESCO-IESALC will continue to explore emerging challenges in ongoing dialogue, particularly in the post-pandemic landscape. The Institute will also promote international exchanges across countries in the global South on the broad issue of how to protect academic freedom.

Value chain 8. University research that contributes to the sustainable development of countries

The recent experience of the pandemic has shown the extent to which universities, particularly in the region, have become key players in the fight against COVID-19. Although the volume of resources devoted to research and development remains comparatively low in the region and intra-regional cooperation is scarce, as IESALC-UNESCO has shown in recent studies, it is important to assist with the consolidation of these efforts and to further align them with the SDGs. The universities' commitment to research on COVID-19 translated into strategic measures to allow efforts to be concentrated on those more immediate needs that can be best addressed by the universities, and that generally have to do with public health and technical and technological solutions sourced from engineering.

However, consortia efforts and international alliances do not seem to be in the majority and, when they do exist, they are mainly aimed at other universities outside the region, which is a relative indicator of the weakness of the Latin American research and knowledge space compared to other spaces and regions where cutting-edge research in

these areas seems to be widely recognized. There is probably still much to be done in this regard.

It is also important to note the role that the private sector has also been playing. Although funding from private sources seems to be more concentrated in a few universities and therefore lacks the capillarity that funding from public sources seems to have, there is also evidence that it has increased. Contrary to what is desirable, it does not seem to be contributing to the consolidation of open science and multidisciplinary trends in the region, given the concentration of the research agenda on clinical medicine and technical solutions, to the detriment of other areas, and the low number of international alliances that allow the socialization of the scientific knowledge generated in the region itself.

The Institute, in close cooperation with UNESCO's Science Sector, can participate in the development of the requisite capacities for university research to contribute more to innovation in the productive sector. It is precisely on this last point that a major effort must be made to ensure that university research, far from being seen as a burden or a source of expenditure, is considered a critical lever in plans for recovery and recovery after the crisis, and for leading sustainable economic and social development. Universities have a critical role to play in shaping the agenda for the social and economic recovery of the communities they serve in the context of sustainable development, where they have always been at the forefront.

Value stream 9. More evidence-informed higher education policies

UNESCO-IESALC produces research evidence on relevant topics to inform higher education policies. The Institute gathers research evidence worldwide and makes them available as global public goods. The Institute also uses the knowledge gained

through its research program to enrich its technical cooperation and training activities.

The knowledge derived from UNESCO-IESALC's program is articulated and disseminated for policymakers through publications in easily accessible formats, including operational guidelines, tools, and methodologies, and through portals and repositories. Good examples of the latter include the Higher Education Reopening Map or the ongoing efforts to design a one-stop portal for higher education data. UNESCO-IESALC's research thereby creates a foundation for higher education change and reform, informing both national and institutional policies.

UNESCO-IESALC's role as an honest broker of knowledge in the field of higher educational policies includes a commitment to present evidence in such a way that it is open for debate, easily adaptable to each context, and favors ownership of decisions by those in charge.

The Institute will continue to build on the expertise of tackling new topics and addressing knowledge gaps and emerging challenges. It achieves this through a flexible approach to its research agenda, enabling a focus on long-term substantive research topics and shorter ad hoc projects linked to developments in particular Member States or internationally.

The Institute generates new knowledge on critical issues to provide policy options in support of resilient and equitable higher education systems. Its current research focuses on the role of higher education in national development plans, the implementation of the right to higher education, and the futures of higher education. Newer topics include how higher education can adapt to and mitigate climate change and contribute to sustainable development.

Ensuring that higher education policy and implementation are informed by evidence also implies innovative data mobilization, data processing and data use, at both national and institutional levels. They are scarce at the international level.

Alignment with the Education 2030 Agenda

Contribution to Sustainable Development Goal 4

UNESCO-IESALC has a sub-sectoral approach as its mandates are restricted to higher education, encompassing universities and postsecondary technical and vocational education. A few SDG 4 targets of the Education 2030 Agenda³ have been established for higher education. The Institute's contribution to SDG 4 therefore focuses on these specific targets, although it also promotes developments in relation to cross-cutting themes, for example, gender or inclusion. Such alignment is possible through the contributions that UNESCO-IESALC makes to the global UNESCO Education Strategy.

Alignment with UNESCO Strategy

UNESCO-IESALC has been involved with the UNESCO effort to situate higher education in the international agenda, from a wider perspective of education as both a fundamental right and an enabler of other collective and individual aspirations. Thus, UNESCO's new 2022–2029 Strategy transcends sectors while highlighting education. The first of the four UNESCO Strategic Objectives pledges accordingly "to reduce inequalities and promote learning and creative societies in the digital age through quality education for all". Seven out of the nine outputs on education in UNESCO's results framework come under this first Strategic Objective.

UNESCO-IESALC four-year cycle planning exercise (2022–2025) seeks to align with the UNESCO 41 C/5 Program and Budget (2022–2025). Accordingly, UNESCO-IESALC will map its entire portfolio on all nine outputs of UNESCO's 41 C/5 results framework and will report specifically to UNESCO Governing Bodies on seven of them.

³ The 10 targets of SDG 4 can be found at www.sdg4education2030.org

List of UNESCO 41 C/5 Outputs (2022-2025)	Mapping in UNESCO-IESALC portfolio	UNESCO-IESALC statutory reporting to UNESCO gov. bodies
ED 1: Education systems are equipped to promote inclusion, address marginalization and advance rights, including in crisis-affected contexts	✓	✓
ED 2: Gender-transformative education systems empower learners, ensure safe learning environments and address the educational barriers, particularly for girls and women, exacerbated by the learning crisis	✓	✓
ED 3: Learners are empowered through transformative education to lead healthy lives, promote sustainable development and engage with the world as creative and responsible global citizens	✓	
ED 4: Learners are equipped with relevant skills to meet individual, labor market and societal demands through literacy, TVET, STEM and higher education	✓	✓
ED 5: Teachers trained and supported to address the changes generated by the COVID-19 crisis and the improvement of learning outcomes	✓	✓
ED 6: Resilience, quality and equity of education systems strengthened to flexibly respond to evolving learning environments and to better deliver on SDG 4 commitments	✓	✓
ED 7: Education policy and finance decisions to achieve SDG 4 are informed by improved coordination, data and monitoring, knowledge and innovative partnerships	✓	
ED 8: Technologies and digital innovations leveraged to ensure more inclusive, effective and relevant learning	✓	✓
ED 9: Education and learning reimagined through interdisciplinary research, foresight and public policy debate	✓	✓

Beyond the Education-specific outputs of UNESCO's Strategy and Program, UNESCO-IESALC commits to contributing to UNESCO's global priorities and priority groups.

Key Performance Indicator for Priority GENDER EQUALITY:

100% of UNESCO-IESALC projects are at least gender-responsive as per the UN Gender Equality Marker scale.

Key Performance Indicator for Priority YOUTH:

At least 25% of UNESCO-IESALC projects seek a direct impact on youth.

List of UNESCO 41 C/5 Global Priorities and Priority Groups	Markers in UNESCO-IESALC portfolio	Specific Key Performance Indicator in UNESCO-IESALC's results framework
1: Global Priority Africa	✓	
2: Priority gender equality	✓	✓
3: Priority Groups: Youth	✓	✓
4: Small Island developing states	✓	

Part II

The Strategy in Motion: Building on Stronger Foundations

The ambitious goals set in this Medium-Term Strategy require that the Institute operates on stronger foundations than the current ones. The breadth of the activities carried out since the pandemic have generated impetus and stamina that have facilitated an agile response to the emerging challenges. Nevertheless, looking to the future, it becomes clear that the translation of the value streams into projects, services, and products could be done more efficiently if the foundations of the work of the Institute were more solid.

UNESCO-IESALC faces the same unpredictable environment as do Member States. While the post-pandemic scenarios for higher education remain uncertain and planning under those circumstances requires resilience and a great dose of both flexibility and agility, there are four levers that can contribute to solidify the Institute's grounds:

- Funding
- Staff capacities
- Internal organization, and
- Partnering

1. Ensuring financial sustainability

UNESCO Category I Institutes funding has a core component and project-based resources. Core funding comes at least from the UNESCO budget and a regular contribution by the host country. UNESCO-IESALC core funding has been solely dependent on the UNESCO bi-annual financial contribution since 2015. To date, core funding roughly covers the regular costs of the Institute with a very limited number of resources (10% of the total) left to operational projects and activities and staff contracts. An increase in core funding, with multiyear commitments, would result in greater operational capacity.

In addition, UNESCO Institutes can get additional funding by providing tailor-made services and products mostly for training and technical assistance

purposes. The resulting extra-budgetary sources are equally important as they are indicative of what the funding partners expect from the Institute, but they are project-bound by their very nature.

UNESCO-IESALC will:

- Ensure that a host agreement is supplemented by an operational agreement by a host country⁴, to increase the core funding at least by 50%, and
- Implement a fund-raising strategy that increases the amount of extra-budgetary resources of the Institute, notably by:
 - Engaging in partnership agreements with donors, and
 - Providing services and products on a cost-recovery basis.

2. Aligning staff capacities with priorities

Staff is the most important resource of any UNESCO Institute. The collective expertise they bring to higher education, as well as to the more institutional and transversal functions, assures UNESCO-IESALC's relevance, capacity to adapt, and international recognition. However, the financial crisis undergone by UNESCO-IESALC in recent years resulted in posts suppressions, both in the professional and general categories, that dramatically hindered the operational capacity of the Institute -currently, the Institute has no international regular staff other than the director. Since the pandemic, the Institute has benefitted from several extra-budgetary opportunities the results of which have improved the Institute's relevance and prestige. In benefitting from these opportunities, UNESCO-IESALC has expanded the number of professionals under consultancy contracts, but the unpredictability of extra-budgetary sources makes uncertain the prospects for these professionals, resulting in high staff turn-overs and the impossibility of consolidating staff careers.

⁴ Currently, UNESCO-IESALC is located in Caracas (Venezuela) but has received no financial contribution from the country since 2015. This has impacted dramatically on the core funding of the Institute.

To address these issues, UNESCO-IESALC will:

- Review the terms of reference of locally recruited staff to adjust them to the current needs of the Institute, with the assistance of UNESCO HRM,
- Within the limits set by core funding, generate competitive contractual arrangements that attract and retain talented senior and junior professionals in line with the Institute's priorities,
- Link additional contractual opportunities to externally funded projects,
- With the cooperation of a host country, offer a scholarships program, and
- Also, in cooperation with a host country, provide in-residence opportunities for higher education researchers whose work is aligned with UNESCO-IESALC priorities.

To maintain standards of excellence, the Institute will dedicate resources to staff development and well-being, and attract the relevant skills required by the implementation of this Medium-Term Strategy. The Institute will also promote partnerships with other organizations to benefit from complementary skills.

3. Reframing the governance and internal structure of the Institute

The Institute will rely more on its Governing Board, in accordance with the competencies and experience of its members, because it is the natural channel through which the demands and expectations of the Member States of UNESCO in the region can be expressed. Under the Medium-Term Strategy more efforts will be undertaken to maximize opportunities by which the Governing Board members steer the Institute's initiatives by acting as interfaces between their countries and the Program of Work. At the same time, the Institute must recognize that the Governing Board members possess high-level expertise that can be used in several domains and activities in the region.

The Governing Board of UNESCO-IESALC will consider the creation of an international advisory committee for the purpose of providing external advice when deemed necessary on matters related to research and development in a regional and global perspective. The details of its configuration and functions will be discussed and approved by the Governing Board.

As the Institute regains impetus and resurfaces from the crisis over the past years, it is imperative to generate an internal structure that is more suited to the current needs. This will imply the constitution of several agile core teams capable of offering quick responses to emerging needs, maximizing the resources. To work efficiently, these core teams will have to be coordinated at senior level, thus giving pace to a shared, networked leadership at the Institute.

Therefore, UNESCO-IESALC will create four specialized core teams, each of which will be led by a senior professional:

- Research and analysis, responsible for the design and development of research and analytical reports,
- Capacity strengthening, responsible for course development and training,
- Knowledge management, for dissemination and advocacy, and
- Administrative support, aimed at organizing the supporting services for all core teams.

This structure assumes that in-country technical assistance will involve several teams, as both analytical and training activities may be required in different proportions following the overall goals of the support required.

The resulting specialized structure will require additional efforts in team-building and internal coordination, to ensure that the Institute operates with perfect alignment of all its teams.

4. Outreaching within UNESCO and beyond

Over recent years, communication between the Institute and UNESCO regional and local offices in the region has slightly improved. They are the natural interface between the Institute and UNESCO Member States. Therefore, it is critical that they are not only regularly informed about UNESCO-IESALC's portfolio of ongoing and planned activities but, in a two-way communication setting, feel that the higher education priorities and concerns of the Member States they are serving can be addressed by the Institute. The Institute is committed to assess and respond to the actual needs of higher education systems and institutions, which should drive the Institute's priorities. Doing so calls for great attention to needs assessments methodologies as well as maintaining direct channels of communication with ministries of education and other relevant stakeholders in higher education, which at UNESCO find their natural channel of communication through the regional and local UNESCO offices. Given the enormity and broad spectrum of HE challenges, UNESCO-IESALC cannot do everything and be everywhere. It will be selective and prioritize its interventions, often starting with a regional approach and focusing on

addressing the most binding issues to maximize effectiveness and impact. Selectivity will be determined by the intersection among Member States' needs, donor priorities and the Institute's capacity. Selectivity and prioritization will also derive from considering the potential impact of the intervention. Therefore, the Institute will redouble the efforts of cooperation with UNESCO regional and local offices, supporting them to include higher education in their agendas, with a major emphasis on the LAC region. They will be regularly informed and consulted with a view to support those having an agenda in the higher education subsector and empower those who are planning to do so.

To be increasingly present and gain recognition in the international arena of higher education UNESCO-IESALC will have to position the outcomes of its work to ensure alignment with the UNESCO response to the most pressing global issues in higher education, in coordination with other UNESCO Institutes and Centers. All this requires an innovative overall communications strategy for the Institute that increases visibility, contributes to dissemination, and thanks to a multi-way approach, funnels UNESCO Member States and other stakeholders needs and expectations.

Education 2030



4
QUALITY
EDUCATION



SDG 4: QUALITY EDUCATION

Goal 4: Ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.

Part III
From pillars to
internal transformation

The following table summarizes the relationship between pillars, strategic directions, value chains

and implications for the internal consolidation of the Institute.

Pillars

1. Actionable research and analysis
2. On-demand Technical Cooperation for capacity development
3. Innovative capacity strengthening
4. Networked Advocacy and Knowledge Sharing

Strategic Directions

1. Committing to higher education as a universal right to a public good
2. Empowering institutions for a more responsive, relevant, and efficient provision
3. Nurturing innovation in higher education
4. Re-envisioning internationalization

Key Value Streams

1. Strengthened emphasis on the enforcement of the right to higher education through public policies
2. Redoubled efforts to promote gender equity in higher education
3. More effective mechanisms to promote skills development
4. Better management of internationalization and academic mobility
5. Better equipped higher education instructors for new pedagogies
6. More innovative, inclusive, responsive, accountable, and committed institutions to sustainable development goals
7. Enhanced policy dialogue between the Government, agencies, and higher education institutions
8. University research that contributes to the sustainable development of the countries
9. More evidence-informed higher education policies

Internal Strategy

1. Ensuring financial sustainability
2. Aligning staff capacities with priorities
3. Reframing the governance and internal structure of the institute
4. Outreaching within UNESCO and beyond