



## **CELAC MINISTERIAL AND SENIOR AUTHORITIES DECLARATION ON HIGHER EDUCATION**

**Cartagena de Indias, October 15–17, 2025**



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We, the ministers and senior authorities responsible for higher education in the Member States of the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), meeting in Cartagena de Indias on October 15, 16, and 17, 2025, under the Pro Tempore Presidency of Colombia, convene at a historic moment of significant complexity and opportunity.

We live amid a global polycrisis marked by persistent social and economic inequalities that exclude large segments of the population; multidimensional violence affecting youth, women, rural, urban, and ethnic communities; forced migrations requiring regional responses for inclusion and protection; a climate and ecological crisis threatening the lives, territories, and economies of our countries; digital and technological gaps limiting access to opportunities; democratic tensions eroding citizens' trust in institutions; and an international arena shifting toward a new multipolar world order, in which the voice of Latin America and the Caribbean must be stronger and more unified.

Faced with this scenario, we embrace the challenge of making higher education a transformative tool aimed at overcoming the logic of meritocracy and individual excellence, focusing instead on social and territorial relevance. This requires acknowledging the historical and structural asymmetries among our peoples and the need for a system capable of closing gaps between regions, urban and rural areas, and different population groups. Higher education must be democratic not only in terms of access but also in the production and dissemination of knowledge, regarded as an essential common good for social justice, dignity, and the construction of more equitable collective futures.

In this context, we reaffirm the importance of higher education as a driver of social justice, peace, democracy, and regional integration. It is not only a space for professional training but also where visions and commitments for the future are formed; where critical thinking is cultivated, memories are preserved, intercultural dialogue is encouraged, knowledge is democratized, and cognitive and scientific sovereignty is established. Through CELAC, we assume the responsibility of consolidating a regional framework that coordinates national efforts, promotes mutual support, and amplifies our voice on the global stage.

The objective of this meeting is to adopt consensus and commitments that strengthen the role of higher education as a fundamental right, a public good, and a foundational pillar for fair, sustainable, and inclusive development.



## RECOGNIZING THAT

Higher education is a fundamental right. As such, it is immediately enforceable and non-deferrable, and its guarantee constitutes a direct and unavoidable obligation of States. This fundamental nature requires the adoption of universal, inclusive, and sustained public policies, ensuring progressive and sufficient public financing, establishing mechanisms for enforceability, and recognizing that access to this right does not depend on material conditions but on the universal principle that every person, by virtue of their human condition, deserves dignified and inclusive higher education guaranteed by the State.

Higher education is a public good. Its value extends beyond the individuals who access it, generating collective benefits for society as a whole, including sustainable and equitable development, innovation, health, social integration, equality, inclusion, democracy, a culture of peace, and environmental sustainability. Therefore, it should not be governed solely by market logic or treated as a commodity; instead, it must be oriented toward serving life, social justice, and the dignity of all peoples.

The horizon of higher education must be guided by the principle that knowledge is a right of peoples, not an individual privilege. This entails promoting the radical democratization of access to and production of knowledge, where academic excellence is also measured by its capacity to transform social realities, strengthen territorial sovereignty, and reduce structural inequalities.

The Caribbean, with its cultural, linguistic, epistemic, and territorial plurality, constitutes a vital axis for Latin American and Caribbean integration. These diversities are not obstacles but sources of wealth that expand the possibilities of building a higher education system that is more inclusive, relevant, and respectful of the multiple ways of inhabiting, knowing, and transforming the world. Likewise, the historical invisibilization of these diversities calls for decisive actions to ensure that the Caribbean occupies a central place on the regional higher education agenda as a territory of social innovation, ancestral knowledge, resilience, and peacebuilding.

The ethnic and cultural richness of Latin America and the Caribbean constitutes a heritage of knowledge, practices, and perspectives that strengthen higher education. Recognizing and ensuring the full participation of Afro-descendant, indigenous, and traditional communities are essential conditions for guaranteeing racial equality, inclusion, and social justice within the region's education systems.

Higher education institutions are strategic actors in the construction of peace, democracy, and social integration. They shape critical citizenship, build and repair community bonds, preserve collective memories, and strengthen democratic values. In contexts of violence,



polarization, and exclusion, these institutions must establish closer ties with their communities through extension and outreach programs, peace education, and social inclusion projects. These initiatives should address structural inequalities and respond to local needs through social innovation and peacebuilding—essential prerequisites for social justice, as well as the democratic and sustainable development of our peoples in accordance with their historical mandate.

It is important to establish a constant, direct, and constructive dialogue between states and higher education institutions, along with their academic communities and the networks and organizations that connect them. This ensures that public policies and decisions made by the former are grounded in reality and based on knowledge. This recognition reaffirms that higher education institutions, research centers, academic groups, and regional networks are not merely recipients of policies but also share responsibility in their design, implementation, and evaluation.

The teaching profession constitutes a fundamental part of the vital core of higher education and is decisive for its quality, relevance, and transformative capacity.

Teachers are essential agents in the production, transmission, and democratization of knowledge as a public good. They play a crucial role in fostering critical thinking and committed citizenship, as well as in building more just, supportive, and democratic societies in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Structural inequalities persist that hinder access, retention, and the full development of women and individuals of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations in higher education. These disparities are perpetuated through institutional, cultural, and social practices that sustain exclusion and violence.

Gender equity requires moving beyond mere numerical representation to achieve profound transformations in governance structures, pedagogical models, and university environments.

Guaranteeing safe educational spaces free from discrimination and gender-based violence is an indispensable condition for consolidating democratic, inclusive higher education institutions committed to social justice, in alignment with the principles of human rights, pluralism, and active participation.

The internationalization of higher education must go beyond academic mobility, to be understood as a comprehensive exercise in recognition and dialogue among the multiple diversities—cultural, linguistic, epistemic, territorial, and social—that characterize the Member States of CELAC. This internationalization should be horizontal, supportive, and inclusive, grounded in the perspectives of the Global South, and must fully respect the epistemologies developed within and emerging from these diversities.



The first internationalization effort we must pursue is within the region itself, by strengthening connections and collaboration between our institutions and communities. This will enable us to engage with extra-regional partners with greater autonomy.

Internationalization is expressed through the extension and outreach functions of higher education institutions, insofar as they enable the knowledge produced to be externalized with social relevance and responsibility, placing it at the service of general welfare, social justice, and a dignified life for our peoples.

The regional model of internationalization should focus on the circulation and return of knowledge and people, rather than brain drain, ensuring that knowledge directly contributes to the sovereign and sustainable development of the students' and researchers' countries of origin.

Plurilingualism constitutes an indispensable principle of cooperation, encompassing both the promotion of official languages and the preservation of indigenous and ancestral languages, which are living expressions of the cultural and epistemic diversity of our region.

It is essential to consolidate quality assurance systems in higher education that acknowledge the territorial, cultural, and epistemic diversity of Latin American and Caribbean countries, while addressing the structural inequalities that impact access to and the quality of education.

Quality assurance systems (in terms of relevance, excellence, and academic diversity) must be articulated flexibly to respect the autonomy of states, aiming for regional recognition of degrees and training pathways. This approach should avoid processes of homogenization or hierarchization while promoting principles of equity, cognitive justice, and integration across Latin America and the Caribbean.

Knowledge is a common good and the foundation of the scientific sovereignty of the peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean. Therefore, its production and circulation must be oriented toward serving life, equity, and collective well-being, rather than exclusive appropriation by corporations or private interests.

The horizontal dialogue among academic, traditional, community, and popular knowledge constitutes a sine qua non condition for building inclusive, democratic, and socially relevant science.

Cooperation models in higher education must be horizontal, supportive, and sustainable. They should reduce institutional and territorial asymmetries, strengthen the sovereignty of peoples, promote inclusion and support emerging institutions, as well as foster inclusive



networks. Cooperation must cease to reproduce relationships of dependence and instead build reciprocity, co-responsibility, and mutual trust.

To influence the configuration of a new multipolar, decolonial, just, and solidary world order, CELAC must consolidate common grounds for engaging with extra-regional partners through alliances oriented toward equity, reciprocity, and co-responsibility. These grounds should include two-way technology transfer, joint knowledge creation, respect for the epistemic and cultural diversity of the region, digital governance based on a rights-centered approach—including data protection, open access, and technological sovereignty—as well as fair intellectual property clauses that prevent the reproduction of new power asymmetries and guarantee cognitive justice.

The ability of States to address their needs and priorities in the field of higher education must be free from blockades and unilateral coercive measures that are contrary to International Law, the Charter of the United Nations, and the principles of UNESCO.

The declaration issued at the III CELAC-EU Academic and Knowledge Summit, formally received as part of this process, serves as the foundation for ministerial dialogue. The contributions from academia and the networks of higher education institutions of the two regional blocs, coordinated through the CELAC-EU University Council, represent a legitimate and diverse input that sustains the shared effort to consolidate a common higher education space from a regional perspective.

## **AGREE**

To safeguard higher education as a fundamental right and a public good, it is essential to direct state actions toward establishing regulatory frameworks, national and regional policies, and mechanisms that ensure equitable access, retention, and graduation. These efforts should be grounded in territorial relevance and supported by progressive, adequate, and sustainable public financing.

To promote constant dialogue with higher education institutions and with full respect for their autonomy, generation and consolidation of academic, pedagogical, extension, and outreach programs that contribute to peacebuilding, the strengthening of democracy, and social integration. These initiatives will foster collaborative networks among institutions, communities, and territories, expand opportunities for civic education, strengthen community projects, and develop peace pedagogies that address the diverse realities of Latin America and the Caribbean.

To acknowledge the strategic role of higher education and its institutions in addressing the polycrisis affecting the region, it is essential to promote the implementation of regional programs focused on collaborative, innovative, and forward-looking research. These programs should, in line with institutional autonomy, integrate scientific, technological,



social, and cultural knowledge with public policymaking. Their objectives must include providing concrete solutions to challenges such as inequality, the climate crisis, just energy transition, food security and sovereignty, comprehensive health, digital transformation grounded in a rights-based approach, peacebuilding, and the strengthening of democracy. These efforts should ensure that knowledge production leads to tangible and sustainable transformations within our societies.

To guide the actions of states in ensuring that higher education serves as a pillar of a sustainable development model with equity and social justice, where the redistribution of knowledge, research applied to social and environmental challenges, and a close connection with communities form the core of public policy.

To guide the internationalization of higher education toward practices centered on the Global South that acknowledge and engage with the cultural, epistemic, and territorial diversities of the region; prioritize Latin American and Caribbean integration as the primary dimension of collaboration before reaching out to extra-regional partners; and promote plurilingualism as a means to broaden and democratize cooperation.

To establish actions aimed at strengthening higher education in the Caribbean to close historical gaps and consolidate academic, research, and technological capacities in the region. These actions will include creating regional solidarity cooperation programs, promoting academic mobility with an intercultural approach, developing collaborative research projects relevant to the realities of the Caribbean, and encouraging plurilingualism and the preservation of ancestral languages. Strengthening higher education in the Caribbean is essential to achieving a just, equitable, and sustainable regional integration.

To promote racial equality and the recognition of Indigenous communities in higher education, acknowledging that the ethnic and cultural diversity of Latin America and the Caribbean represents an invaluable source of knowledge, practices, and perspectives that enrich educational systems.

To formulate inclusive policies that ensure equitable access, retention, and full participation of Afro-descendant students, teachers, and researchers, as well as indigenous and traditional peoples, in order to advance a more just, pluralistic, and representative higher education system capable of reversing the historical exclusions that have affected these communities.

To promote national and regional public policies that value and dignify the teaching profession in higher education by recognizing its academic, social, and ethical significance; ensuring fair working conditions; fostering continuous professional development; and encouraging active participation in building more inclusive, equitable, and high-quality education systems in Latin America and the Caribbean.



To establish effective mechanisms for preventing, punishing, and eradicating all forms of gender-based violence, including institutional protocols, comprehensive care systems, and continuous training programs. Efforts will focus on creating safe educational environments free from discrimination and violence, which are essential for consolidating democratic, inclusive higher education institutions committed to social justice, in alignment with the principles of CELAC and international human rights frameworks.

To adopt regional and national policies that ensure gender parity and equity in higher education by guaranteeing access, retention, graduation, and full participation of women, as well as individuals of diverse gender identities and sexual orientations, at all levels and in all areas of higher education institutions and their academic communities. These policies should be grounded in an intersectional approach that recognizes and dismantles structural barriers limiting academic, research, and leadership opportunities.

To establish regional cooperation mechanisms aimed at strengthening and harmonizing quality assurance systems in higher education, while respecting the autonomy of states and acknowledging the territorial, cultural, and epistemic diversity of the region. These mechanisms should focus on the mutual recognition of degrees, educational pathways, and diverse knowledge, without engaging in processes of homogenization or hierarchization. They should promote shared standards that ensure equity, social relevance, and respect for the unique characteristics of each country.

To establish technical forums for dialogue among national accreditation agencies, ministries, and higher education institutions, aiming to consolidate an inclusive, flexible, and sustainable regional quality framework.

To formulate general principles regarding the role of Higher Education Institutions in relation to Artificial Intelligence (AI), in order to guide this transformation responsibly and ethically through their research, training, and social development efforts.

To consolidate regional cooperation mechanisms that enhance the production, management, and dissemination of knowledge as a common good, within the framework of scientific sovereignty, cognitive justice, and Latin American and Caribbean integration. These mechanisms should promote collaborative research projects, innovation networks focused on sustainable development, and multidirectional technology transfer processes, recognizing the epistemic diversity of territories and encouraging the active participation of higher education institutions, scientific communities, and social actors.

To promote the creation of open repositories and the dissemination of existing ones, as well as multilingual platforms and shared ethical frameworks that ensure equitable access to knowledge and its social appropriation.



To implement models of solidarity-based academic cooperation that reduce disparities between countries and institutions, strengthen the capacities of those with less relative development, and generate joint training programs, shared degrees, and projects with regional and territorial impact.

Recognize the Latin American and Caribbean Higher Education Area (ENLACES) as an observer and guarantor of this Meeting and the resulting roadmap. This role reflects ENLACES' vocation and track record as a coordinating platform for higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean, created in 2008 at the Regional Conference on Higher Education (CRES) in Cartagena under the auspices of UNESCO and IESALC. Since then, ENLACES has evolved into a flexible and inclusive space that brings together associations of principals, university networks, higher education institutions, teachers' unions, workers' confederations, and student organizations, adopting as its guiding principles the defense of higher education as a fundamental right, a public good, and a duty of States.

To receive and analyze by the states the proposal regarding the Regional Knowledge Agency (ARCO), presented by ENLACES, which aims to promote scientific and technological cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean.

To establish common principles for relationships with extra-regional partners in the fields of educational cooperation and scientific and technological production, based on equity, reciprocity, horizontality, and equal treatment between parties. These relationships should respect the sovereignty of states and the autonomy of higher education institutions, promote the co-creation and multidirectional circulation of knowledge, and recognize the epistemic and cultural diversity of Latin America and the Caribbean. Furthermore, the active inclusion of neglected, excluded, and/or marginalized institutions and territories will be ensured, guaranteeing that international alliances effectively contribute to addressing regional and global challenges. This process should involve significant participation from academia, scientific communities, and civil society, in alignment with the principles of cognitive justice, sustainability, and scientific sovereignty.

To establish a Permanent Ministerial Roundtable on Higher Education within CELAC as a platform for political and technical coordination. This body will be responsible for advancing the commitments made, sustaining dialogue among member states, and coordinating common agendas. Additionally, the roundtable will provide an official forum for engagement with academia, including its institutions, communities, and networks, ensuring that public policies and regional strategies in higher education are developed through continuous interaction with the knowledge and lived experiences of our peoples.

To approve the CELAC Regional Roadmap on Higher Education presented at this ministerial meeting as the instrument that details the priorities defined in this Declaration, sets goals and progress indicators, and establishes participatory monitoring mechanisms.



This Roadmap will guide the joint actions of the Member States and drive the consensus reached.

## **FINALLY**

With this Declaration, CELAC reaffirms its commitment to consolidating a Regional Higher Education Space that integrates capacities, reduces asymmetries, enhances solidarity and cooperation, and propels Latin America and the Caribbean as a relevant actor on the global stage. We affirm that higher education, as a fundamental right and public good, is an indispensable condition for dignified living, social justice, democracy, and regional integration. We commit to working together to guarantee it as a pillar of the sustainable development of our peoples.

Likewise, this regional bloc asserts that the future of the region depends on its ability to make higher education a tool for equality, justice, and social emancipation. Education cannot and should not be limited to training professionals for the market; it must also cultivate critical citizens committed to defending life, democracy, the common good, and the dignity of our peoples. Therefore, we affirm that only through democratic, inclusive and regionally relevant higher education can we close the historical gaps that divide Latin America and the Caribbean and build a project of regional integration grounded in social justice.

***Explanatory note: "The Argentine Republic did not participate in the adoption of the document."***

