

# Regional Policy Review 2024 from Third Countries not Associated to the Programme

## Latin America

REGIONAL REPORT

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Manuscript completed in November 2025

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## Introduction

*The Erasmus+ regional policy review acts as a bridge between the Erasmus+ programme and third countries not associated with it, shedding light on the policy landscape that shapes educational exchange and collaboration. By examining the interplay between local policies and Erasmus+ objectives, the document aims to foster a more cohesive and effective approach to international education, enhancing the programme's reach and impact across diverse educational systems.*

## Regional Report

The main approach of the report is aggregating the national policy framework of the third countries not associated to the Erasmus+ programme within a specific region, offering a macroscopic view of how regional policies support, complement, or diverge from the goals and practices of the Erasmus+ programme. It aims to identify common themes, challenges, and opportunities for collaboration across the region, providing insights into the broader regional stance towards international educational cooperation and mobility.

The report offers an analysis of the region's specific educational policies as they relate to the Erasmus+ programme. They examine the extent to which national policies facilitate or hinder participation in Erasmus+ activities through a regional lens, highlight successful alignments, and pinpoint areas where policy adjustments could enhance cooperation.

## Individual Country Reports

National reports from individual countries within the region are embedded into the regional report. However, country data and statistics are available in the annex. These country reports have been prepared by the Erasmus+ National Focal Points (ENFPs). The documents are important in understanding the nuances of each country's engagement with Erasmus+ and for identifying tailored strategies to improve integration and outcomes.

## Erasmus+ Priorities and Features

The regional policy review of the third countries will be underpinned by the priorities that align with the overarching goals of the European Union, particularly focusing on digitalisation, the Green Deal, inclusion and diversity, and active participation in democratic life. These priorities reflect the EU's commitment to addressing current global challenges through education and training, ensuring that the Erasmus+ programme contributes to building a more sustainable, inclusive, and digitally advanced future. It will also look at the

important features, most notably internationalisation, and how this is implemented in the regions.

**Internationalisation:** As a fundamental feature of Erasmus+, internationalisation involves promoting cross-border collaboration and cultural exchange. This facet of the programme is designed to broaden participants' horizons, fostering mutual understanding and respect among diverse cultures. Through international partnerships and mobility opportunities, Erasmus+ aims to create a global learning community that values diversity and global interconnectedness. This document explores how this important feature is implemented in the countries not associated to the programme.

*There will be six regional reports: Sub-Saharan Africa, Asia, Latin America, Caribbean, the Middle East, and the Pacific, along with annexed country reports*

## Contents

<b>1. Overview of Educational Policy in Latin America .....</b>	<b>1</b>
1.1. Higher Education and Vocational Education Policies and Agreements in Latin America .....	1
1.1.1. Higher Education in Latin America .....	1
1.1.2. Vocational Education and Training in Latin America .....	3
<b>2. EU-Latin America Partnerships and Initiatives in Education and Training.....</b>	<b>4</b>
2.1. EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) .....	4
<b>3. Moving Forward: International Education and Training for Latin America.....</b>	<b>5</b>



## 1. Overview of Educational Policy in Latin America

Latin America's higher and vocational education sectors continue to experience both growth and challenges, reflecting the region's commitment to Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4) amidst significant obstacles. This was underscored in the Extraordinary Meeting of Ministers of Education from Latin America and the Caribbean held in Santiago, Chile, in January 2024, where ministers addressed the impact of emergencies and prolonged crises, particularly the COVID-19 pandemic, on educational access and equality. The ministers noted that the pandemic exacerbated longstanding educational disparities, disproportionately affecting vulnerable and historically marginalised populations and slowing indicators related to access, coverage, and completion.

With higher education enrollment at approximately 52%, progress has stalled, especially for low-income students, with only 20% reaching tertiary education compared to nearly 60% of students from higher-income backgrounds. The ministers reiterated the urgency of SDG 4, emphasising equitable access to foundational learning, lifelong learning opportunities, and the critical role of education in sustainable development. They also stressed the need for a digitally inclusive transformation and public investment to close existing gaps such as youth unemployment, which remains around 17%. This renewed commitment aims to foster a resilient, inclusive educational landscape that addresses regional disparities and equips all students for future challenges.

### 1.1. Higher Education and Vocational Education Policies and Agreements in Latin America

#### 1.1.1. Higher Education in Latin America

Latin America is moving forward with an ambitious approach to higher education and vocational training, centred on regional cooperation, equity, and educational excellence. The Santiago Declaration, adopted at the 2024 Ministerial Meeting, exemplifies a united vision among Latin American and Caribbean education ministers to accelerate post-pandemic recovery and transformation across the region. Anchored in Sustainable Development Goal 4 (SDG 4), the declaration emphasises inclusive, equitable, and quality education with a focus on lifelong learning for all. To address significant learning losses caused by the pandemic, it calls for enhanced and sustainable investment in education to support both immediate recovery and future resilience.

The declaration highlights three priorities: restoring pre-pandemic access and quality, bridging educational gaps exacerbated by the pandemic, and introducing transformative policies that bolster resilience. Emphasising the importance of digital technology, inclusivity, and environmental sustainability, ministers aim to support the most vulnerable populations, such as rural, indigenous, and economically disadvantaged communities. This vision aligns with UNESCO's Education 2030 Agenda and encourages regional cooperation with partners like the United Nations and ECLAC, to tackle educational inequality, climate challenges, and the digital divide.

A prominent example of international cooperation in this effort is the EU–Latin America Digital Alliance, a collaborative framework that strengthens digital partnerships between Latin America and the European Union. The alliance plays a pivotal role in advancing educational and research outcomes in the region by fostering joint research initiatives, supporting digital education projects, and promoting academic exchanges. By integrating digital technologies into educational frameworks and expanding research capacities, the alliance is contributing to more resilient, future-ready education systems. This partnership exemplifies how global cooperation can drive significant advancements in education and innovation, reinforcing Latin America's role in addressing global challenges and promoting SDG 4.

In response to COVID-19, Latin American countries have accelerated digital education initiatives to sustain higher education during health emergencies. On 10 May 2020, Peru enacted Legislative Decree N° 1496 to establish virtual education frameworks for higher learning institutions. This decree empowered the Ministry of Education to invest nearly 598 million PEN (142.5 million EUR) to improve internet connectivity, enhance skills among teaching and administrative staff, and provide scholarships. These strategic investments enabled approximately 95% of universities with digital infrastructure to continue operations, significantly reducing dropout rates and maintaining student engagement.

The New Regional Convention for the Recognition of Studies, Degrees, and Diplomas in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, enacted by UNESCO in 2022, serves as a significant step toward academic integration in the region. By standardising the recognition of qualifications, the convention promotes student mobility, professional opportunities, and academic collaboration across countries. This framework enables individuals to pursue further education or employment in other signatory nations with fewer barriers, aligning directly with SDG 4.3, which focuses on equal access to quality technical, vocational, and tertiary education. The convention also aims to address educational disparities by facilitating a common regional standard, which improves equity for marginalised communities seeking cross-border opportunities in education and employment.

The Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI) plays a pivotal role in fostering cooperation and innovation in the Ibero-American region, which includes both Latin America and the Iberian Peninsula. Through initiatives that support sustainable development, social inclusion,

and cultural preservation, the OEI addresses regional challenges by promoting quality education, scientific advancement, and technological integration. The organisation actively supports projects to improve education quality, such as teacher training and curriculum development, which align with SDG 4. Its programmes often emphasise multilingual education, recognising linguistic diversity as a cultural asset and a means to strengthen regional identity and cohesion. Additionally, OEI collaborates closely with UNESCO and other international bodies to drive educational policies that uphold democratic values and enhance cross-border academic and professional mobility forward.

Programa MARCA, part of the MERCOSUR Accreditation System, supports regional academic integration by accrediting quality-assured university programmes, enhancing the internationalisation of higher education in Latin America. This initiative enables students, teachers, researchers, and administrators to engage in cross-border exchanges within accredited institutions, creating valuable opportunities for academic and cultural exchange. By 2022, Programa MARCA had expanded to include 12 academic networks, spanning various fields such as engineering, medicine, and social sciences, thus strengthening inter-institutional collaboration. This accreditation system aligns with SDG 4, aiming to increase educational quality and access through regional academic cooperation. It also fosters greater curriculum compatibility and recognition of qualifications, making academic credits transferable across participating MERCOSUR countries and further supporting student mobility and lifelong learning opportunities across Latin America.

The Núcleo de Estudios e Investigaciones en Educación Superior del MERCOSUR (NEIES) plays a crucial role in promoting research and policy dialogue on higher education within the MERCOSUR region. Established to facilitate scholarly collaboration and strengthen the region's educational policies, NEIES fosters studies on how higher education supports regional integration and sustainable development. This initiative brings together academics, researchers, and policymakers from MERCOSUR countries to discuss critical issues such as quality assurance, curricular alignment, and the socio-economic impact of higher education on regional development. NEIES also emphasises knowledge exchange, hosting conferences, publishing research findings, and providing recommendations that influence public policies aimed at enhancing access, equity, and quality in education.

The Ibero-American System for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (Siaces), established in 2018, aims to unify quality standards across higher education

institutions within the Ibero-American region, which includes Latin America, Spain, and Portugal. By fostering collaboration among national quality assurance agencies, Siaces establishes common evaluation criteria to ensure academic quality and promote equity across institutions. Siaces enables member countries to share best practices, conduct joint assessments, and create a mutual framework for recognising accredited programmes, enhancing academic mobility and trust in regional qualifications. Additionally, Siaces supports the alignment of curricula and learning outcomes, facilitating the transfer of credits and degrees across borders. Through these efforts, Siaces contributes to the professionalisation of higher education systems, ensuring they meet regional and international standards and promoting access to quality education aligned with the goals of SDG 4.

Across Latin America, national agencies dedicated to science, education, and development are playing a transformative role in building knowledge-based economies. These agencies promote advanced education, professional training, and research by administering scholarships, funding high-impact research projects, and creating networks of academic and technical expertise. Their initiatives are designed to bolster the human capital required for sustainable development, positioning Latin American countries as contributors to global scientific and technological progress.

Chile's National Agency for Research and Development (ANID) is a pivotal institution advancing the nation's scientific, technological, and educational landscape. Created under the guidance of the Ministry of Science, Technology, Knowledge and Innovation, ANID administers a range of programmes, scholarships, and grants that promote research and development across diverse fields. This agency's initiatives aim to foster high-level human capital through scholarships for Chilean students to study both locally and abroad, with significant support provided through programmes like Becas Chile. These scholarships cover tuition, living stipends, and related educational costs, with partnerships extending to international universities where students receive funding for advanced studies. Beyond scholarships, ANID funds research projects and supports the formation of research centres of excellence, especially in fields aligned with national priorities such as climate science and technology-driven innovation.

Meanwhile, Colombia's National Development Plan 2022-2026, titled 'Colombia, World Power of Life', places education at its core to drive social justice and equity. The approach emphasises the importance of transforming education through community and territorial involvement, aiming to promote inclusive, high-quality education and reduce regional disparities.

By focusing on local needs and leveraging community participation, the plan seeks to achieve territorial equity and empower diverse regions to access resources and opportunities for sustainable development.

Ecuador's Globo Común Programme, managed by SENESCYT, channels opportunities offered through international cooperation to enhance access to higher education. This programme disseminates and manages scholarships provided by foreign governments, international agencies, and cooperation entities for undergraduate, graduate, and short-term training across various disciplines. Many of these scholarships are fully funded by the cooperating parties, requiring no financial input from the Ecuadorian government. This model effectively expands Ecuadorian students' access to global educational resources, supporting their academic and professional advancement through international partnerships.

Together, these frameworks and partnerships underscore Latin America's dedication to collaborative and high-quality education. By prioritising sustainability, regional integration, and partnerships like the EU-Latin America Digital Alliance, Latin American countries are building a resilient foundation to address the current educational challenges and prepare students and professionals for a thriving, interconnected future.

### 1.1.2. Vocational Education and Training in Latin America

Latin America is shaping a robust framework to improve both vocational training and education, focusing on aligning skills development with the demands of a fast-evolving global economy. Various regional initiatives are advancing technical and vocational education and training (TVET) to support sustainable growth and provide pathways for inclusive economic participation.

The Ibero-American Programme on Technical and Technological Education (PIETT) stands as a cornerstone in this effort, aimed at enhancing the quality and accessibility of technical education across Latin America. PIETT fosters collaboration among Ibero-American countries to share best practices and modernise technical education systems, ensuring students acquire skills that are relevant in today's labour market. With a mission to close access gaps in education, particularly for marginalised communities, PIETT supports Latin America's drive to equip students with the competencies needed in the 21st-century workforce. One of PIETT's central objectives is to standardise qualifications, enabling cross-border recognition of certifications and boosting student and worker mobility across the region. This alignment fosters employability and

encourages regional integration. PIETT also prioritises infrastructure improvement, curriculum development, and teacher training to meet the growing demands of industries such as technology, renewable energy, and other emerging sectors.

Another significant player in vocational training across the region is the Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training (Cinterfor), a division of the International Labour Organization (ILO). Cinterfor supports VET systems in 29 countries across Latin America, focusing on building capacity within both public and private sectors. Its initiatives promote public-private partnerships, emphasise lifelong learning, and ensure that vocational training aligns closely with labour market needs. Cinterfor's work is essential in equipping Latin America's workforce with the skills required for emerging sectors like digitalisation and green technology, thereby contributing to economic resilience and growth.

Despite these advancements, Latin American countries face challenges in international education rankings, particularly in the areas of mathematics and literacy. Nonetheless, several nations, including Chile, Costa Rica, and Uruguay, have made significant progress through educational reforms focused on improving the quality of education, expanding technical education, and increasing investment in innovation.

Apart from regional collaboration between the EU and Latin America, bilateral agreements also play a crucial role in capacity building in vocational education and training (CBVET). For example, the Cooperation Programme between Argentine Agrotechnical Schools and French Agricultural High Schools fosters targeted exchanges in agricultural vocational education. This programme provides professional internships in the agro-industrial sector, joint teaching initiatives, and collaborative research projects, enhancing technical skills and cross-cultural knowledge transfer. Launched in 2021, it brought together 10 Argentine pre-university agricultural schools and one Argentine lyceum with 11 French lyceums, promoting mutual growth through shared innovation and practical training. The collaboration continued in 2022, with French educators visiting Argentine schools, reinforcing bilateral ties in vocational education and expanding opportunities for students and educators in both regions.

Together, these policies and programmes underscore Latin America's commitment to creating a skilled workforce that is adaptable and resilient, supporting regional economic integration and sustainable development. Through initiatives like PIETT and Cinterfor, as well as bilateral agreements, Latin American countries are not only preparing their citizens for emerging

industries but are also paving the way for a regionally integrated labour market that enhances opportunities for all.

## 2. EU-Latin America Partnerships and Initiatives in Education and Training

### 2.1. EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States)

The EU-CELAC (Community of Latin American and Caribbean States) alliance serves as a cornerstone for international cooperation in education, training, research, and innovation, reflecting a shared commitment to addressing global challenges and fostering sustainable development. Through its Action Plan, the alliance prioritises collaboration across a range of sectors, emphasising equitable access to quality education and advanced training. Key initiatives focus on enhancing academic and vocational exchanges, improving digital education infrastructures, and facilitating access to lifelong learning. The alliance also promotes mutual recognition of academic qualifications and supports initiatives that reduce educational disparities, especially for underrepresented and vulnerable groups in Latin America and the Caribbean. These efforts are rooted in a commitment to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and aim to enhance regional integration while reinforcing global mobility and cross-cultural competence among students and professionals.

In research and innovation, the EU-CELAC alliance strengthens joint initiatives that address pressing issues like climate change, public health, and digital transformation. Through co-financed research programmes and innovation projects, the alliance enables Latin American, Caribbean, and European researchers to work collaboratively on cutting-edge technologies, scientific advancements, and policy development. This cooperation extends to capacity-building programmes that promote knowledge sharing, support research infrastructure, and foster public-private partnerships across both regions. The alliance's strategic focus on research excellence and innovation underscores its role in creating resilient, knowledge-based economies and contributes to the development of solutions that can be scaled internationally.

The EU-CELAC Summit in July 2023 in Brussels offered the opportunity to generate a high-level strategic dialogue on the challenges and opportunities of bi-regional cooperation around higher education and science, technology and innovation in Latin America

and the Caribbean (LAC) and the countries of the European Union (EU). Consequently, the EU-LAC Foundation, together with the Uruguayan Agency for International Cooperation (AUCI) and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), convened an EU-LAC Knowledge Forum in Montevideo3, Uruguay, on 24-25 April 2023, with the purpose of generating inputs to feed the agenda of discussions of the high authorities of the European Union and Latin America and the Caribbean related to the Summit in the field of access to knowledge, higher education, and science, technology and innovation.

The EU-LAC Foundation is a pivotal institution fostering cooperation between the European Union, Latin America, and the Caribbean in areas of education, research, and innovation. Acting as a bridge between regions, the foundation supports initiatives that enhance mutual understanding and promote collaborative projects in higher education, vocational training, and academic exchanges. By funding joint research programmes and workshops, the foundation encourages innovation and knowledge-sharing, particularly in fields such as sustainable development, digital transformation, and social inclusion. Its efforts align with the Sustainable Development Goals, emphasising the importance of lifelong learning and inclusive access to education. Additionally, the foundation facilitates dialogues and partnerships between universities, research centres, and policymakers, fostering a collaborative environment that addresses global challenges and strengthens the research capacities of both regions. Through these initiatives, the EU-LAC Foundation plays a significant role in building a robust, interconnected knowledge economy that empowers students, educators, and researchers across Europe, Latin America, and the Caribbean.

Among other initiatives, the EU-LAC Foundation has promoted the elaboration of the 'Matrix of Objectives and Strategic Lines for the Construction of the EU-CELAC Common Area of Higher Education', to have a reference document agreed upon between bi-regional, regional, and sub-regional academic actors on the actions needed to make the EU-LAC Common Area of Higher Education a reality and to identify initiatives that are currently contributing to this agreed framework. In 2022, the Foundation will follow up on this process through the promotion of training and dialogues on open science and the contribution of university communities to the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda; two topics that were prioritised by the 'Matrix' working group in a digital meeting in 2021.

**The Trends in Higher Education in Latin America** (TRESAL) survey represents a groundbreaking initia-

tive designed to systematically gather data on the key institutional challenges and trends facing higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Convened by OBREAL Global (Observatory of Relations between Europe and Latin America) and ENLACES (Latin American and Caribbean Higher Education Area), with strategic support from the EU-LAC Foundation, TRESAL functions as a vital tool for strengthening the regional integration of higher education. By examining factors influencing LAC institutions, the survey supports informed decision-making processes and facilitates enhanced inter-regional relations with higher education systems in Europe.

The TRESAL survey is backed by an advisory committee that includes prominent higher education associations across the region, such as the Colombian Association of Universities (ASCUN), the Central American University Higher Council (CSUCA), the National Association of Directors of Federal Institutions of Higher Education in Brazil (ANDIFES), and the Association of Universities of the Montevideo Group (AUGM), as well as the EU-LAC Foundation. At the presentation of TRESAL, Dr Bonilla highlighted the survey's potential to shape a stronger educational landscape in LAC by offering data-driven insights. He proposed a set of criteria to measure the social responsibility of universities, stressing their role in addressing societal needs. This survey, therefore, is not only a tool for regional policy formulation but also a mechanism to elevate universities' commitment to societal advancement, aligning academic priorities with the region's socio-economic challenges.

### 3. Moving Forward: International Education and Training for Latin America

Higher education and training in Latin America are evolving to meet the demands of a rapidly changing global landscape, with a strong focus on accessibility, quality, and innovation. Regional initiatives such as the Santiago Declaration and the New Regional Convention for the Recognition of Studies, Degrees and Diplomas in Higher Education underscore Latin America's commitment to fostering inclusive, equitable, and quality education. These frameworks aim to harmonise educational standards, improve vocational training, and enhance student and faculty mobility, thereby expanding academic opportunities for diverse populations. Collaborative programmes like the Ibero-American Programme on Technical and Technological Education (PIETT) further strengthen the region's capacity to address labour market demands

by standardising qualifications and supporting skill development in emerging fields.

International cooperation remains pivotal to these advancements, with programmes like Erasmus+, Horizon Europe, and the EU-LAC Foundation playing key roles in Latin America's educational integration with global partners. These initiatives provide funding for academic exchanges, joint research, and training programmes that connect Latin American students, educators, and researchers with counterparts in the EU and beyond. Additionally, platforms like the EU-LAC Digital Alliance and Cinterfor (Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training) enhance digital capacity and labour market alignment, preparing Latin American graduates for success in a technology-driven economy. Through these partnerships, Latin America is building a resilient, knowledge-based future where education serves as a catalyst for sustainable development and social mobility.

It is also important to mention that Latin American countries have initiatives to provide mobility opportunities for their citizens abroad. For example, Panama's scholarship approach for international study focuses on empowering students with global educational opportunities to enhance national capacity in research, innovation, and specialised skills. Through the Don Carlos Antonio López Scholarship Programme (BECAL), Panama provides funding for university graduates to pursue postgraduate studies abroad. This programme, which is a hallmark of academic excellence, operates with financial backing from the FEEL, IDB, and the Ministry of Economy. BECAL establishes international agreements with top universities and agencies, expanding Panamanian students' access to high-quality education worldwide, ultimately enriching Panama's human capital and supporting long-term national development goals.

On the other hand, Uruguay exemplifies how a country can effectively leverage its partnership with the European Union to advance national objectives in education, research, and innovation. Through programmes like Erasmus+, Uruguay, via the Agencia Uruguaya de Cooperación Internacional (AUCI), enhances academic mobility and intercultural collaboration, offering students and researchers opportunities to gain skills and insights that benefit both Uruguay and the EU. Building on these educational foundations, Uruguay's engagement with the EU's Horizon Europe programme enables collaborative research to address global and regional challenges such as sustainable agriculture, climate resilience, and digital innovation. This dual participation not only strengthens Uruguay's educational and research capabilities but also aligns

national efforts with broader EU objectives, producing innovative solutions that address shared issues.

Moving forward, Latin America's commitment to international education and training reflects a region-wide vision of an integrated, knowledge-driven future. As Latin American countries demonstrate through targeted scholarship programmes and strategic partnerships, national initiatives are not only advancing individual academic and professional growth but also enhancing regional resilience. Through harmonised qualifications, collaborative research, and digital advancements supported by international cooperation, Latin American nations are aligning educational outcomes with the demands of an increasingly interconnected and technology-focused world. These initiatives underscore the vital role of education as both a foundation for individual empowerment and a lever for collective progress, equipping Latin America with the human capital and collaborative frameworks essential for sustainable development, economic adaptability, and social equity.

