

Internationalisation of Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean: In Need of Robust Policies

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Abstract

This article assesses the current process of internationalisation of higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean. Based on data and findings from different national, regional and international studies, it shows that, while the region's primary form of internationalisation is student mobility, the numbers are relatively small compared to other regions and that other strategies such as internationalisation at home are largely underdeveloped. The article concludes that, while some progress has been made in past decades, the internationalisation process needs to be consolidated and strengthened, particularly in terms of public policy at national and regional level.

Key words: Higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean; internationalisation

Cet article évalue les processus actuels d'internationalisation de l'Enseignement supérieur dans les pays d'Amérique Latine et des Caraïbes. En se fondant sur les données et les résultats de différentes études nationales, régionales et internationales, il montre que, tandis que la forme de base de l'internationalisation dans cette région transparaît à travers la mobilité étudiante, les chiffres sont relativement bas comparés à d'autres régions, et que d'autres stratégies telle que l'internationalisation à domicile sont largement sous-développées. Cet article conclut que, tandis qu'il y a eu des progrès ces dernières décennies, le processus d'internationalisation a besoin d'être consolidé et renforcé, en particulier en termes de politiques publiques aux niveaux régional et national.

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Mots clés: l'Enseignement supérieur en Amérique latine et dans les caraïbes, internationalisation

Introduction

Assessing the status and evolution of the internationalisation of higher education (HE) as a comprehensive phenomenon has not been a central issue for educational authorities and policy makers of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC). Consequently, the necessary adjustments and improvements to strategies are not being made, impeding further consolidation of the process. To date, comprehensive evaluations have mainly been initiated from outside the region. These include a World Bank report (de Wit, Jaramillo, Gacel-Ávila, and Knight, 2005); and more recently, the 1st Regional Survey on Internationalisation Trends in LAC conducted by the UNESCO Observatory on Internationalization and Networks in Latin America and the Caribbean (OBIRET) (Gacel-Ávila and Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2019), that aimed to paint a detailed picture of the different trends and characteristics of internationalisation in the region. The various Global Surveys on Internationalisation of HE undertaken by the International Association of Universities (IAU) (Knight, 2003, 2005; Egron-Polak and Hudson, 2010, 2014; Maroni, 2019), as well as different British Council reports (Ilieva and Peak, 2016; Ilieva, Killingley, Tsiligiris, and Peak, 2017; Usher, Ilieva, Killingley, and Tsiligiris, 2019) offer a comparative perspective, enabling an assessment of where LAC stands in terms of internationalisation of HE among the different regions of the world. Based on these reports, this article presents a comprehensive analysis of the internationalisation of HE in LAC. It begins by describing the region's main social and economic characteristics in order to highlight the context in which this process is evolving, that explains some of the challenges encountered.

The Social, Economic and Educational Context in Latin America and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean represent 6.75% of the global economy, with two-thirds of the region's Gross Domestic Product (GDP) provided by three large economies, namely, Brazil (ranked 8th), México (15th) and Argentina (21st). The region's annual average economic growth rate was 5% between 2004 and 2007, largely due to a boom in international commodity prices. However, following the 2008 global financial crisis, the growth rate declined to less than 1% for the period 2013 to 2017. It dropped to 0.5%¹ in 2018 and the prospects for recovery in the coming decade are uncertain (World Bank, 2020). Latin American and Caribbean countries rank low on the World

Competitiveness Index, with Mexico in 46th place, Uruguay 53rd, Costa Rica 55th, Peru 66th, Brazil 72nd, Argentina 81st, and Chile occupying the best position in the region at 33rd place (World Economic Forum, 2019). These poor rankings are partly due to heavy dependence on foreign commodity markets; a lack of integration in global value chains; and low and stagnant labour productivity², among other factors. A key factor is the so-called middle-income trap, which refers to a deficit in terms of the quality and relevance of the education sector; low productivity; social vulnerability; institutional weaknesses and low levels of environmental sustainability (OECD, ECLAC, 2019; Melguizo, NetoParra, Perea, and Pérez, 2017).

By 2018, LAC had 641.4 million inhabitants (8.4% of the global population³), 79.8% of whom were concentrated in cities, the highest percentage among developing regions (United Nations, 2019)³, with a 0.9% growth rate, below the world average (1.1%), but above that of the OECD (0.6%). The region's literacy rate is 98.5% among those aged 15 to 24, above the world average (91.7%); and its Human Development Index is 0.759, below the OECD average (0.895) (UNDP, 2019; World Bank, 2020).

Latin America and the Caribbean is classified as an upper-middle-income region (World Bank, 2020), which means an average income of between US \$3,996 and \$12,374. Regional Gross Domestic Income (GDI) per capita was US \$8,719.00 in 2018, significantly below the OECD (\$40,095) with the exceptions being Chile at \$14,670.00 and Uruguay at \$15,650. Poverty decreased significantly during 2002-2014 from 45.4% to 27.8% of the population, and extreme poverty from 12.2% to 7.2%. However, by 2019, poverty levels had risen to 30.8% and extreme poverty to 11.5% (ECLAC, 2019). Latin America and the Caribbean has been described as "the most unequal region of the world" (Bárceñas, 2016; UNDP, 2019), due to its high Gini coefficient of 0.466 in contrast to the OECD's 0.310 (CEPAL, 2019).

In Argentina, mean years of schooling stand at 11.35; with Chile at 10.48; Mexico 8.79; Colombia 8.62; Brazil 8.18; El Salvador 6.87 and Guatemala at 6.62, significantly lower than the OECD average (12) (UNESCO, 2020; UNDP, 2019). The proportion of the population aged 25 years or older that has attained HE is Chile 22%, Colombia 21.3%, Argentina 20%, Brazil 16.6% and Mexico 16.4%. The US stands at 45.1%, the United Kingdom 34.6%, France 39% and Germany at 25.7%.

The region also faces an acute skills shortage, with 36% of firms reporting that their operations are constrained by an inadequately educated workforce, in

¹ . <http://wdi.worldbank.org/tables>

² . LAC records only 40% of the labour productivity of the European Union (OECD, ECLAC, 2019). 3. <http://datatopics.worldbank.org/world-development-indicators/>

³ . Figures correspond to 2018.

144 sharp contrast with the global average of 21%; the OECD average of 14.8% and sub-Saharan Africa's average of 22.3% (OECD, CAF, ECLAC, 2015).

The global HE sector has witnessed a significant increase in access in the past three decades with a rise in the global Gross Tertiary Enrolment Ratio (GTER) from 15.6% in 1995 to 38.04% by 2018 (UNESCO, 2020). The LAC HE sector has also experienced a massive increase in enrolment in response to population growth and the expansion of the urban population. The regional GTER increased from 20% in the year 2000 to 51.76% in 2018, above the global average. The GTERs of Argentina (89.96%), Chile (88.46%) and Uruguay (63.13%) are similar to those of high-income countries (75.10%). As a result, LAC is the region with the largest private HE sector in the world that is responsible for 54% of total enrolment. Private institutions represent 85% of enrolment in Chile, 73.3% in Brazil, 57% in Dominican Republic and 48% in Colombia, while Argentina (24%) and Mexico (33%) have major public HE systems.

Nevertheless, the region has yet to overcome a wide gap in social equity, since the proportion of students from the lowest income quintile only stood at 4% in the year 2000 and increased slightly to 6% in 2013 (Ferreira, Ciro, Botero, Haimovich, and Urzúa, 2017). In 2016, only 3.6% of the students that completed HE were from this category, against 41.7% from the high-income quintile (ECLAC, 2019). In this respect, LAC has shown less progress in reducing inequality than other regions.

Eighty-four percent of LAC students are enrolled in undergraduate programmes, compared with the world average of 68%, resulting in underdevelopment in postgraduate studies. Enrolment in Master's and PhD programmes is 4.9% and 0.81%, respectively, below global rates of 10.91% and 1.37%. Furthermore, the tertiary technological sector (ISCED 5) represents only 10.24% of total enrolment, close to that of low- and low middle-income countries, as enrolment in this sector stands at 28% in upper-middle income and 21% in high-income countries. This situation is, in part, responsible for the region's skills gap. Enrolment is also unbalanced in terms of distribution by area of study, with 40% of students enrolled in social sciences; administration, business and law and only 16% in scientific disciplines and technological professions (UNESCO, 2020).

Despite the initiatives launched in the 1970s to fund scholarships for postgraduate studies abroad, the proportion of faculty with doctoral qualifications remains low, with Chile at 13.3%; Peru 7.9%; Cuba 7.44%; Mexico 14% and Colombia at 7.09%. Brazil is the exception with 41.6% (Red Indices, 2019; OECD 2017).

Another significant challenge for LAC is the low graduation rate (46%) and high dropout rate in undergraduate programmes, with students spending 36%

more time than that required to complete their degree (Ferreira, Ciro, Botero, Haimovich, and Urzúa, 2017). The reasons include the fact that the majority of students study part time; a traditional curriculum that spans five years plus a thesis, and students' poor levels of preparedness for tertiary education due to quality deficiencies in previous levels of education.

It is estimated that LAC contributed only 4% of the world's knowledge production in the past two decades (Santelices, 2010; RICYT, 2019). The region's funding for research and development is among the lowest of the world at only 0.69% of regional GDP, compared with 2.41% in North America and Western Europe. Most researchers (74%) work in higher education institutions (HEIs); with 14% in public or private companies; 11% in government institutions and 0.83% in private non-profit organisations. A minority of researchers hold a PhD (43% in Chile; 38% in Brazil and 34% in Argentina) (RICYT, 2019).

By 2019, only ten LAC research universities were among the global top 500 research universities and were located in four countries: Brazil, Chile, Argentina and Mexico (Academic Ranking of World Universities, 2019). The *Times Higher Education* (THE) rankings and *QS World University Rankings* (QS) have adjusted their methodology to design regional rankings for the region's HEIs.

In conclusion, while LAC's HE systems have made important progress in terms of enrolment and access, much remains to be done in relation to quality, equity, relevance, graduation rates, programme diversification, financing, research and innovation. These challenges constrain the internationalisation process. The OECD has recommended that LAC focus on education, skills, innovation, productivity, and social inclusion and in particular, harness international cooperation as a key development strategy (OECD, ECLAC, 2019). It is thus important for the region to take full advantage of the global internationalisation process.

Characteristics of the HE Internationalisation Process in LAC

Benefits, Risks and Obstacles

The most important anticipated benefits of internationalisation at global level are "Enhanced international cooperation and capacity building; improved quality of teaching and learning and enhanced prestige/profile for the institution" (Marioni, 2019). The last-mentioned is not a top priority among HEIs in LAC.

For institutions in LAC, the main risks are: "International opportunities only favour affluent students; the inequality in benefits in collaborative relations;

unequal benefits between partners and the prevalence of the centre-periphery paradigm" (Gacel-Ávila and Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2019). As in Africa, the top risks for individual countries are "brain drain" and "the commodification and commercialization of education" (Marioni, 2019).

While “insufficient financial resources” is globally cited as the main obstacle to internationalisation, including in LAC, the second major obstacle identified in the OBIRET Survey in LAC is the “lack of knowledge of foreign languages” (Marioni, 2019).

Public Policies to Promote HE Internationalisation

Maroni (2019, p. 109) notes that HEIs in LAC and Africa are the only ones to report that “Internationalization of higher education is not a national policy priority”. The OBIRET Survey identified “limited public funding for internationalization” and “lack of national policies and programs to support internationalization” as the two main reported external obstacles (Gacel-Ávila and Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2019, p. 46). These findings were confirmed in a series of studies by the British Council in 26 countries in different regions (Ilieva and Peak, 2016). Four LAC participating countries (Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico) obtained the lowest scores in terms of government policies to promote internationalisation, alongside Ethiopia, Botswana, Kenya, Nigeria and South Africa; while emerging countries such as Malaysia, China, India, Indonesia, Pakistan, Thailand and Vietnam obtained the highest scores. The most recent British Council studies (Ilieva, Killingley, Tsiligiris, and Peak, 2017; Usher, Ilieva, Killingley, and Tsiligiris, 2019) revealed progress in this respect in the case of Brazil, Colombia and Chile but not in Mexico, which again has a very low score. Although some LAC countries have launched important national initiatives and programmes, these generally lack continuity and long-term funding. Compared to other regions, LAC governments are among the least supportive of internationalisation in the world, far below their Asian counterparts.

In the Caribbean region, Cuba is an outstanding example of good practice in this respect, with both public and institutional policies to support internationalisation. It stands out as the country with the best results in international academic cooperation, despite the hostile international

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environment that limits its strategies. Internationalisation is a significant part of the strategic planning of the Cuban Ministry of Higher Education and is considered a transversal axis in everyday university life; as well as for the production and transfer of knowledge for scientific research. However, Insanally and Madera (2020) note the lack of public policies and funding for internationalisation of HE in other Caribbean countries.

Internationalisation as an Institutional Policy

Globally, 91% of HEIs report that internationalisation is part of their mission statement or strategic development plan; with the proportion increasing to 97% in Europe, Asia-Pacific and the Middle East. Both the IAU 5th Global

Survey (84%) and the OBIRET Survey (83%) show a lower percentage in LAC countries.

On a global scale, 68% of HEIs perceive that their academic leadership regard internationalisation as “very important”. The percentage for LAC (59%) is similar that recorded in the OBIRET Survey (53%). Eighty-four percent of HEIs in LAC agreed that internationalisation had become more important over the past three years, a similar proportion to the global count of 85% (Marioni, 2019, pp. 66-74).

Globally, 49% of HEIs reported that internationalisation is part of their institutional strategy, with 23% stating that a specific internationalisation policy or strategy has been adopted. These percentages are lower in the case of LAC (45% and 19%, respectively). Furthermore, LAC and Africa show the lowest indicators in terms of having a monitoring and evaluation framework, as well as explicit targets and benchmarks (Marioni, 2019, p. 120).

Professionalisation of International Relations Office (IRO)

In LAC, IROs have not yet gained the same status as in other regions, with the majority on the second or third tier of the institutional chart, compared with the first position occupied in Europe and Asia (Gacel-Ávila and Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2019). This further confirms the conclusion that internationalisation is less of an institutional priority in LAC than in other parts of the world. Furthermore, there tends to be high turnover in IRO personnel, and many staff members lack the required competences, especially in the public sector. These factors undermine the sustainability and viability of internationalisation strategies (Gacel-Ávila and Marmolejo, 2016).

Main Internationalisation Activities

Student mobility is the top priority for all regions, including LAC, followed by “developing strategic partnerships” and “international research collaboration”. It is worth noting that for LAC, the last-mentioned is not reported as one of the LAC, the regional indicators in this regard are among the lowest in the world.

While the proportion of mobile students grew from 2.05% in 2012 to 2.3% in 2017 at the global level, their number in LAC only increased from 1.09% to

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first three priorities, in contrast with Africa, Asia and the Pacific, the Middle East and North America (Marioni, 2019, p. 128).

Student Mobility

Although outgoing student mobility is the main internationalisation activity in 1.14%. IESALC-UNESCO (2019) noted that LAC was the region with the second lowest growth in mobility, while Central Asia doubled its volume and student mobility grew by more than a third in Southeast Asia. According to UNESCO (2019), LAC had the lowest rate in outbound student mobility

(1.22%), and the second lowest in inbound student mobility (0.75%), just above South and West Asia (0.16%).

International Mobility 2017

Regions	% of World Outbound Mobility	Outbound Mobility Ratio ⁴	% of World Inbound Mobility	Inbound Mobility Ratio ⁵
East Asia Pacific	27.12	1.98	20.40	1.49
North America and Western Europe	14.00	1.98	52.10	7.33
Central and Eastern Europe	8.5	2.33	12.40	3.39
South and West Asia	11.6	1.43	1.20	0.16
Arab States	9.20	4.33	6.20	2.95
Sub-Saharan Africa	7.20	4,76	2.30	1.71
Latin America and the Caribbean	6.40	1.22	3.7	0.75
Central Asia	5.0	12.98	0.90	2.42
Not specified	2.00	-----	2.00	-----
World	100.00	2.38	100.00	2.38

Source: UNESCO (2020)

The preferred regional destinations for LAC outgoing students are: Western Europe; LAC itself; North America and Eastern Europe, with the main countries of destination being Spain, the US, Argentina, France, Mexico, Chile, Brazil, Germany, Canada and Colombia. The IESALC (2019) reports similar trends and notes that LAC students favour the US and Europe (54%); followed by LAC (38%) and other regions (8%).

The first obstacle to student mobility reported in LAC is, unsurprisingly, the “lack of language proficiency among students”; followed by “administrative or bureaucratic difficulties, students’ family and/or job commitments, low level of interest or participation among students and curricular inflexibility” (GacelÁvila and Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2019).

The IESALC (2019) reports that 69% of international students in LAC come from the region itself, followed by 12% from the US and Europe and 19% from

⁴ . Number of students from a given country studying abroad expressed as a % of the total tertiary enrolment in that country

other regions. With regard to countries, inbound exchange students mainly come from Spain, Mexico, Colombia, the US, Germany, France, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Peru.

An interesting finding is that, LAC is the region with the third highest rate (42%) of intraregional mobility, after North America and Western Europe, and Central Asia and Eastern Europe. For all other world regions, intraregional mobility represents only a third of the total, and has been reduced by almost 9% in favour of interregional mobility. However, in LAC intraregional mobility has continued to grow (IESALC, 2019). One of the reasons is the common language of Spanish because, as noted previously, LAC students are not fluent in English.

The data show that at least ten LAC students study abroad for every one foreign student in the region. Brazil sends 2.5 times more students abroad than it receives; Chile almost three times more and Colombia eight times more. There are three exceptions to this pattern: Argentina, Dominican Republic and Costa Rica, which receive more incoming than outgoing students. The countries with the largest number of outgoing students are Brazil, Colombia, Mexico and Peru (IESALC, 2019). The IESALC (2019) notes that, a mobility deficit indicates that the HE system is not sufficiently attractive to international students due to different academic, economic or social reasons. The lack of high level academic, scientific or innovative programmes motivates LAC students to study abroad. With the exception of Cuba, Haiti and the Dominican Republic, the Caribbean island states have different geographical and linguistic characteristics from the rest of the region. However, their close ties with the US make some of these countries more attractive destinations internationally than the rest of Latin America. The Caribbean island countries have limited HE offerings, which encourages studying abroad; are an attractive destination for international HE students; and have few links with Latin American countries (IESALC, 2019).

Outbound mobility levels remain low despite efforts since the 1970s by the different governments of the region to send students abroad for postgraduate studies. Through the Science without Borders (SwB) programme, Brazil increased its outbound mobility rate from 0.52 in 2013 to 0.69 in 2017. However, the rate remains low compared with the OECD (1.6%). Despite significant national programmes, Chile has only achieved an outbound mobility rate of 1.29% and inbound mobility of 0.38%. In the case of the Caribbean countries, two different types of student flows can be identified. On the one hand, countries like Cuba, Dominican Republic and Haiti have low rates of

outbound student mobility, mainly to other LAC countries, while on the other, Grenada has very high inbound mobility (71.74%). This is due to the fact that almost three-quarters of Grenada’s HE enrolment is foreign students in the fields of medicine and veterinary studies (IESALC-UNESCO, 2019).

⁵ . Number of students from abroad studying in a given country, expressed as a % of the total tertiary enrolment in that country

In summary, the efforts made by LAC to promote outbound student mobility have not produced the expected results compared with other regions like Asia. Furthermore, there is a need for national and regional strategies to attract more international students from outside the region (Gacel-Ávila and RodríguezRodríguez, 2019).

Strategic Partnerships and Collaboration

For LAC, the top priority regions for collaboration are, in order of importance, Western Europe, LAC and North America, and Asia and Eastern Europe. Within the region, the Southern Cone, mainly, Argentina, Brazil and Chile are the most popular countries. The majority of agreements are with HEIs from within the region, followed by Western Europe, North America, Asia, Eastern Europe and Oceania. The fewest agreements are with African and Middle Eastern institutions. With regard to intraregional collaboration, the countries with the greatest number of agreements are Argentina, Colombia, Chile, Mexico and Brazil.

International Collaboration in Research

As noted previously, unlike in other regions, international research collaboration was not ranked among the three most important internationalisation activities in LAC. Fifty-six percent of the participating HEIs also reported that they lacked an institutional policy to foster international research, with most international projects being individual initiatives (GacelÁvila and Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2019, p. 106). While globally HEIs reported that 33% of international research was funded through grants from international organisations and agencies; in LAC the proportion was considerably lower (12%), confirming the lack of policy in this respect (Marioni, 2019, pp. 147, 155, 159). The British Council Report described Chile and Mexico's international research engagement as "weak" compared with Brazil, India,

Vietnam, United Arab Emirates, Oman and Greece, where it was reported as "strong" (Ilieva, Killingley, Tsiligiris, and Peak, 2017, pp. 22-24); while funding of research and international collaboration was ranked as "very low" for all participating LAC countries (Usher, Ilieva, Killingley, and Tsiligiris,

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2019, p. 15). As noted earlier, LAC's average expenditure on research and development is 0.69% of GDP, compared with 2.4% in North America and Western Europe. According to the British Council, many LAC institutions expressed their desire to invest more in research and international collaboration, but this is not a national or regional priority and financial resources are scarce (Usher, Ilieva, Killingley, and Tsiligiris, 2019).

Internationalisation of the Curriculum

Fifty-one percent of LAC HEIs stated that they did not have a policy in place for the internationalisation of the curriculum. The main obstacles cited were

"administrative or bureaucratic difficulties; inflexible institutional regulations; and lack of institutional policies" (Gacel-Ávila and Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2019). Furthermore, only 16% of HEIs in LAC have defined institution-wide learning outcomes for international/global competencies for all graduates (Marioni, 2019, pp. 196-197). It was also noted that internationalisation of the curriculum calls for proficiency in foreign languages (Marioni, 2019, p. 191). The OBIRET Survey found that, while 79% of the participating HEIs had an institutional language policy in place, only 41% required proficiency in a foreign language for admission and/or graduation for all their academic programmes (Gacel-Ávila and Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2019).

In terms of language proficiency, the Inter-American Dialogue Education Program notes that "... LAC lacks national policies for language learning; a situation that combined with the general low level of teachers, does not help to improve the levels of bilingualism, despite the efforts that have been made in the region for several decades..." (*El Espectador*, 2017). A report by the Centre for Analysis of the Inter-American Dialogue notes that LAC is 3.8 points below other regions in the English Knowledge Index of the Education First Institute (EF), although "the new generations are demonstrating a higher level". It adds that, "Deficient proficiency in English greatly limits employment opportunities, competitiveness and ability to attract foreign investment" (*El Espectador*, 2017). A lack of language proficiency is reported as one of the biggest limitations to the consolidation of internationalisation and to graduates' international profile. This situation calls for wider-ranging public policies as well as quality language instruction starting at the basic levels of the education system.

As far as collaborative international programmes are concerned, reports show that LAC occupies last position in the world in terms of joint, dual or multiple degree programmes (Egroun-Polak and Hudson, 2010, 2014; GacelÁvila, 2009, 2011). The 5th IAU Global Survey found that LAC has the lowest percentage of HEIs (40%) offering these type of programmes, compared to the global average of 57%; below North America (77%); Europe (68%); Asia and

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Pacific (60%); Middle East (59%) and Africa (46%) (Marioni, 2019, p. 144). The OBIRET Survey reported that 39% of the HEIs had these types of programmes (Gacel-Ávila and Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2019, p. 67).

Thirty-four percent of the programmes are dual degrees and 14% are joint degrees. The private sector leads (47%) the public sector (34%), mainly for undergraduate and Master's programmes; while most collaborative PhDs are offered by public institutions. The leading countries as regards these programmes are Argentina, Brazil, Colombia and Mexico; with the Dominican Republic and Peru also boasting a relatively high number of institutions offering these programmes. The main partners of LAC are France, Spain, the US, Mexico, Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, Portugal, Germany and Italy. The largest number of programmes are in the fields of Social Science and Engineering and

Technology, while Veterinary and Agricultural Sciences have the fewest (Gacel-Ávila and Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2019, pp. 67-76).

Conclusions

The analysis shows that LAC has a long way to go in terms of internationalisation of HE. While progress has been made in the past two decades, internationalisation remains marginalised by HE's main functions of teaching and research, as well as curriculum content. Public and institutional internationalisation policies need to be strengthened in order to avoid HE in LAC losing its relevance in the current global context. The studies cited in this article show that the region is lagging behind all other regions in terms of organisational structures (strategic planning and design; quality assurance and monitoring; professionalisation of management, etc.); as well as in programmatic structures (inbound and outbound student mobility; collaboration in research; internationalisation of the curriculum; collaborative international degrees; foreign language proficiency, etc.). Furthermore, LAC governments and institutional leaders place less priority on and thus offer less support to internationalisation. International relations offices occupy a low position on the institutional organogram, diminishing their capacity to participate in institutional policy making. According to the British Council, "The low scores obtained by LAC countries in internationalization policies and strategies, mostly reflect that they are still in the development of their HE systems and therefore are less focused on internationalization as a policy issue; consequently internationalization is a lower-priority policy area than in developed countries" (Usher, Ilieva, Killingley, and Tsiligiris, 2019). While Asian developing countries like China, Malaysia, Singapore, Thailand, and Vietnam are also still developing their HE systems, they have made the strategic choice to massively invest in internationalisation, as they regard this as the best strategy to ensure that their HE sectors are relevant and develop at a faster pace. Policy-makers in LAC should use internationalisation of the curriculum as an opportunity to update the curriculum, and to internationalise 154 students' profiles as professionals and citizens. Internationalisation of research would expand knowledge production, and improve its quality and relevance. The region is neglecting these areas and concentrating its efforts on student mobility, which constitutes less than 1% of total enrolment and mainly favours a small number of privileged students, mostly in private universities.

In conclusion, the underdeveloped internationalisation process in LAC can be attributed to a lack of vision on the part of policy makers and the educational authorities, who seem to have failed to acknowledge that this phenomenon is no longer an option, but a necessity. Governments in the region are also investing less in HE, as well as in research and development. This calls into question the quality and relevance of the education provided to the current and future generations, and their ability to be successful citizens and professionals in the global context.

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