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Trajectory and policies for inclusion in higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean in the context of the pandemic

Two decades of progress and challenges

Juan Pablo Valenzuela
Natalia Yáñez



**COVID-19
RESPONSE**



Norwegian Ministry of
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Abstract

Higher education brings many benefits for the development of people and countries, which is why access to this level of education has been one of the most widely discussed educational policies at the international level over the past two decades. Global access to higher education has improved significantly in that time, with the gross enrolment rate (GER) increasing from 19% in 2000 to 38% in 2018 (UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (IESALC), 2020). However, access remains highly unequal, with important population groups lagging behind. The situation is similar in Latin America and the Caribbean, where coverage has increased from 23% in 2000, to 41% in 2010 and 52% in 2018. However, in accordance with the region's social inequality matrix as proposed by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2016), certain population attributes (particularly socioeconomic status and gender, but also geographical location, ethnicity and race, and disability) are associated with an enormous gap in access to higher education (ECLAC, 2016).

It is expected that the global COVID-19 pandemic will exacerbate unequal access to higher education and create significant challenges for the region. The aim of this study is to monitor progress towards the inclusion of the most vulnerable groups in higher education, by identifying targeted policies and trends in relevant indicators over the past two decades and highlighting the challenges that the pandemic poses in terms of achieving quality higher education that provides equal opportunities for all and ensures no one is left behind.

Introduction

Higher education brings many benefits for the development of people and countries, which is why access to this level of education has been one of the most widely discussed educational policies at the international level over the past two decades. Global access to higher education has improved significantly in that time, with the GER increasing from 19% in 2000 to 38% in 2018 (UNESCO-IESALC, 2020). However, access remains highly unequal, with important population groups lagging behind. The situation is similar in Latin America and the Caribbean, where coverage has increased from 23% in 2000, to 41% in 2010 and 52% in 2018. However, in accordance with the region's social inequality matrix as proposed by ECLAC (ECLAC, 2016), certain population attributes (particularly socioeconomic status and gender, but also geographical location, ethnicity and race, as well as disability) are associated with an enormous gap in access to higher education (ECLAC, 2016).

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A mixed methodology was used for this study. Firstly, secondary literature was reviewed to determine the evolution of higher education in the region as a whole and for each of the main aspects of inclusion, to identify national policies designed to promote the inclusion of population groups according to their individual, socioeconomic or geographical attributes, and to determine the impact of the pandemic in these areas. Secondly, quantitative analyses on the evolution of access to and graduation from higher education courses according to attributes that increase the vulnerability of certain groups were based on ECLAC's specific estimates for 2000, 2010 and 2019, which in turn were based on household surveys in 15 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean.

In addition to the introduction, this document consists of six sections. The next section discusses how, in the past two decades, equal opportunities for young people in Latin America and the Caribbean have become embedded within the challenge of increasing access to and retention in higher education, issues that form part of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and Sustainable Development Goal 4 on ensuring quality education for all. The second section highlights the positive evolution of access to higher education in the region prior to the outbreak of the pandemic in 2020 and analyses critical factors for ensuring greater inclusion in this level of education. The third section describes the evolution of indicators of participation in higher education among the youngest population in 15 of the region's countries for 2000, 2010 and 2019/2020 and identifies conditions of vulnerability —such as household income, gender, geographical area, and ethnicity and race— that affect young people's access to and completion of degree courses and programmes. The fourth section discusses different policies, grouped according to the main dimensions of vulnerability in the region, that are designed to promote inclusion in Latin American and Caribbean countries and have become embedded in university and non-university higher education. The fifth section analyses the challenges posed by the COVID-19 pandemic in terms of inclusion processes and the measures taken to address them, and recognizes that the pandemic's effects will be long-lasting and that measures implemented in different areas of higher education should be aligned with existing initiatives not only in this sector but in schools, because upper secondary education completion rates continue to be the most important factor in guaranteeing the right to higher education with equal opportunities. The final section contains several conclusions and sets out the challenges that must be overcome in order to foster greater inclusion in higher education in the region, particularly in the aftermath of the pandemic.

I. Towards the universal right to higher education as the axis of a policy for inclusion

Higher education brings enormous benefits for individuals and wider society. It leads to better jobs with higher salaries, improves health conditions and promotes active engagement with environmental and other challenges facing society. Furthermore, tertiary education is closely linked to the development of individual development projects and promotes participation in the knowledge society, lifelong learning, and more effective adaptation to the profound changes affecting society.

In wider society, higher education as a key driver of knowledge and research that promotes progress and harnesses innovation not only fosters development and wellbeing but facilitates their intergenerational transmission. In recent years, the issue of improving access to higher education has acquired greater urgency across the world, partly because of the sector's close links with innovation and the knowledge society, which are fundamental to sustainable development, and partly because the new industrial revolution has created demand for workers with new skills and knowledge (UNESCO-IESALC, 2020a).

However, such opportunities may not be distributed equitably, and given the lifelong effects of education it is possible that unequal access to, retention in and completion of higher education may in fact deepen social and welfare development inequalities.

In light of this, policy makers and educational institutions have an even greater responsibility to guarantee equal and equitable opportunities in access to and completion of quality tertiary education, which is a major concern for populations that have historically been neglected or left behind. The objective of universal access to higher education requires everyone to have equal opportunities to participate in an education system, regardless of their background. By implication, social class, gender, race, sexual orientation, ethnicity, and disability should not be barriers to higher education (UNESCO, 2006).

This global objective for education is based on basic human rights, which state that higher education should be equally accessible to all on the basis of individual capacity, as set out in the UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education, which is now the legally binding international

instrument that covers the right to education comprehensively (UNESCO, 2007). At a time where there are high levels of coverage in tertiary education among people of high socioeconomic status, universal higher education is a challenge in terms of the right to education, and access based only on merit may largely reflect class origins (Sandel, 2020).

Evidence from around the world, and Latin America and the Caribbean in particular, regarding the dramatic increase in access to higher education—over 50% of young people can now access higher education courses—suggests that many population groups have been left behind, breaching their right to education. It is therefore imperative for progress in equity and inclusion in higher education to be monitored continuously, and for policies and strategies to be strengthened and enhanced in order to guarantee equal opportunities in accessing higher education and ensure that no one is left behind or prevented from completing a quality programme.

This commitment is linked closely to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which reiterates the importance of ensuring access to and completion of quality education and promoting lifelong learning opportunities for all (UNESCO, 2016). Of note, target 4.3 of the internationally agreed 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development requires signatory countries to “ensure equal access for all women and men to affordable and quality technical, vocational and tertiary education, including university”.

However, as discussed below, such a commitment requires equitable access to higher education for all, including vulnerable groups. Moreover, it implies that training courses must be of high quality, with policies and strategies in place to support students to complete their courses and acquire the skills and knowledge necessary to ensure that access to education becomes a driver for individual and social change.

II. Overview of higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean

A. A period of rapid growth with great variation between the countries of the region

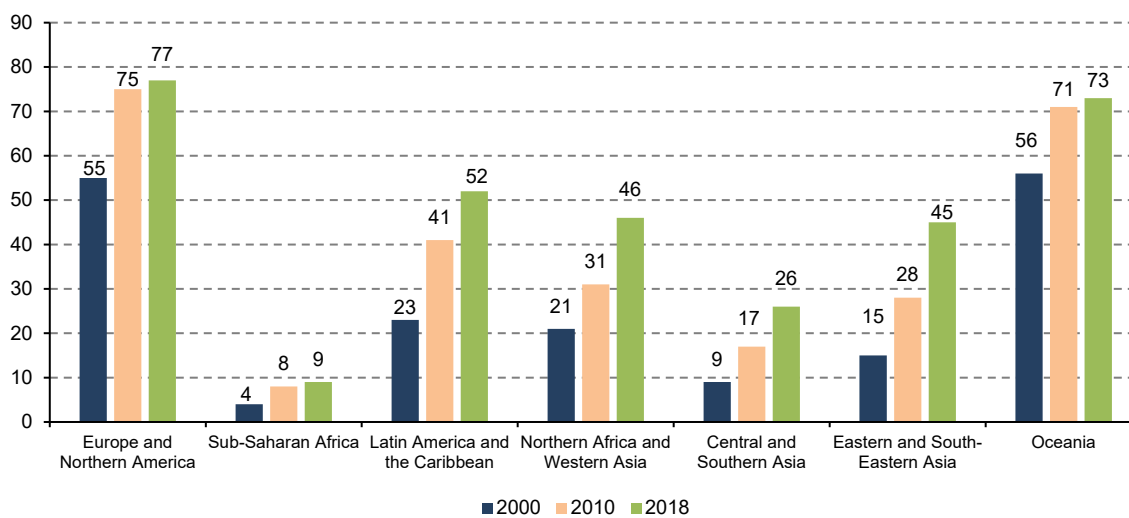
The largest increase in global higher education coverage has occurred in the past 20 years. According to the UNESCO Institute for Statistics (UIS), the GER¹ was 19% in 2000, 30% in 2010, and 38% in 2018. This rapid growth varied considerably between global regions (see figure 1): coverage in Europe, North America and Oceania exceeded 50% in the year 2000, averaging over 70% by 2018, while in Sub-Saharan African countries it was still below 10% in 2018. Latin America and the Caribbean also experienced rapid growth, with data from 2018 for 20 countries showing that the GER almost doubled between 2000 and 2010 and increased from 23% to 41% in only 10 years, while between 2010 and 2018 growth continued at a slower pace, with the GER reaching 52% in 2018.

Aside from rapid growth in the region, the UNESCO-UIS estimates point to significant variations between the countries in terms of their current GER and the dynamics of the past two decades. Of the Caribbean countries for which more extensive data was available, some had experienced a significant drop in the GER between 2010 and 2019 (Aruba and Bermuda), others had maintained a slightly lower GER over the past decade (Jamaica and Saint Lucia), and Grenada had a high GER that increased over time to over 50%, which means it has achieved universalization according to the Trow scale (2006). In the 18 Latin American countries for which some data was available, the increase in the enrolment rate has been extensive (occurring in all countries) and intensive (increasingly rapidly). By contrast, in Central American countries —except Costa Rica and Panama— the GER lags behind the regional average. In

¹ The gross enrolment rate (GER) is the total number of people enrolled in undergraduate higher education programmes as a proportion of the total population aged between 18 and 24. Although it is a widely used indicator internationally, it is susceptible to several estimation biases; for example, if the youth population is in rapid decline, this may produce an overestimation of the enrolment rate.

2019, across the entire subregion of South and Central America, six countries had a GER of over 50%: Argentina (90%), Chile (90.9%), Colombia (55.3%), Costa Rica (57.7%), Peru (70.7%) and Uruguay (63.1%). Table 1 shows that the rapid change of the past two decades has resulted in universalization in all these countries, with the exception of Argentina.

Figure 1
Evolution of the gross enrolment rate in higher education in different regions of the world, 2000–2018
(Percentages)



Source: Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO-UIS).

Analysis of the GER by gender produces similar findings, and results obtained from the UNESCO-UIS databases for the region are consistent with previous studies showing that the enrolment rate was higher among women than men, a gap which continued to widen over time compared to the population average, which was 1.9 percentage points in 2000 for the countries of the region, 5.2 in 2010, and 7.0 in 2019. The same trend is observed in almost all Latin American and Caribbean countries, the exceptions being Mexico and, at times, Peru and El Salvador, where gender differences had become less pronounced by the end of the 2010s.

Table 1
Latin America and the Caribbean (29 countries): evolution of the gross enrolment rate in higher education^a
(Percentages)

Subregion/country	Whole population 18-24 years old			Women only		
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019
The Caribbean^b						
Aruba	29.7	37.3	15.6	35.7	43.9	20.7
Antigua and Barbuda	...	16.7	...	...	24.2	...
Bermuda	...	30.7	19.0	...	41.4	22.9
Barbados	40.6	69.8	...	59.4	95.8	...
Belize	14.7	21.9	25.0	18.2	26.9	31.3
Grenada	...	64.5	104.6	...	75.3	116.2
Guyana	7.6	11.7	...	...	16.3	...

Subregion/country	Whole population 18-24 years old			Women only		
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019
The Caribbean^b						
Jamaica	15.1	26.8	27.1	19.5	37.8	34.7
Saint Lucia	13.9	12.4	15.4	21.3	17.8	20.9
Suriname	12.6	...	...	15.7	...	...
Trinidad and Tobago	6.1	...	...	7.3	...	...
Latin America						
Argentina	54.0	73.2	90.0	65.0	87.8	112.8
Brazil	18.2	43.5	...	20.1	49.3	...
Chile	35.4	67.9	90.9	33.8	70.3	97.9
Colombia	24.5	39.4	55.3	25.3	41.3	59.7
Costa Rica	...	45.8	57.7	...	51.1	63.6
Cuba	22.0	94.9	41.4	23.9	118.6	51.0
Dominican Republic	...	48.6	59.9	41.6	59.8	77.0
Ecuador	...	39.8	44.9	...	45.3	48.4
El Salvador	21.4	26.1	29.4	22.5	27.4	31.2
Guatemala	9.2	19.6	21.8	7.8	20.0	23.6
Honduras	13.1	19.5	26.2	14.7	20.9	30.3
Mexico	20.5	27.6	41.5	19.5	27.3	42.3
Nicaragua	17.4	...	...	18.4	...	...
Panama	41.3	44.3	47.8	52.4	53.7	58.6
Peru	33.8	...	70.7	30.3	...	72.7
Paraguay	15.9	34.6	...	18.5	40.9	...
Uruguay	33.9	51.2	63.1	43.5	58.0	...
Venezuela (Bolivarian Repepublic of)	28.7	79.3	...	34.1	100.3	...
Average for Latin America and the Caribbean^c	23.1	41.3	52.7	25.0	46.5	59.7
Average for high-income countries^c	55.1	72.9	75.7	58.6	81.3	84.4

Source: Institute for Statistics of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO-UIS).

^a Data not available for the same countries for all years studied.

^b The distribution of countries by Caribbean and Latin American subregions is the same as that used by UNESCO-UIS.

^c Averages estimated by UNESCO-UIS.

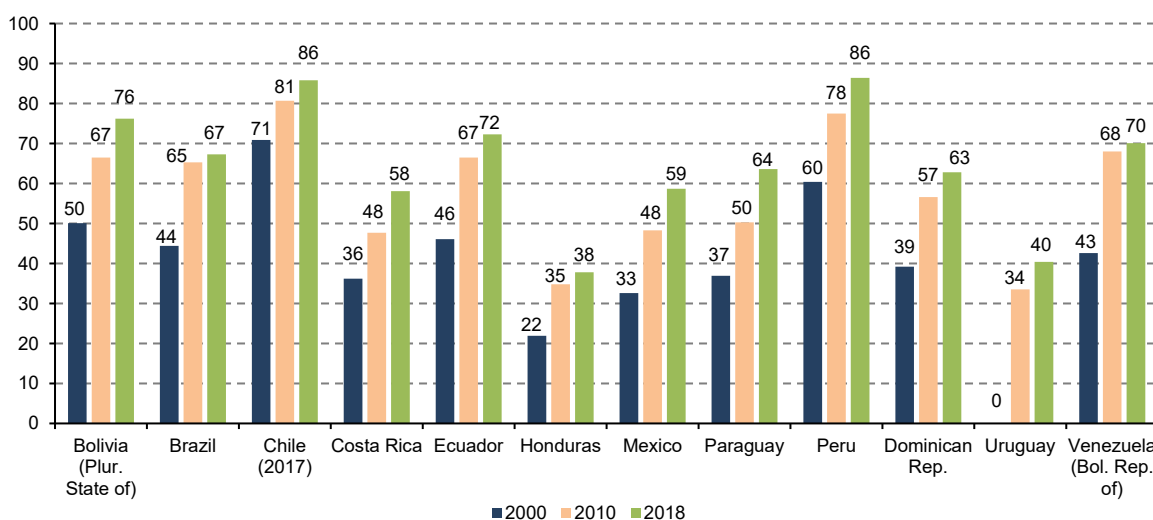
B. Gaps in the school system are replicated in higher education

As completion of secondary education is an essential prerequisite for entering higher education institutions (HEIs), the major disparities in secondary education completion rates between the countries of the region, different student groups, and levels of learning according to families' socioeconomic status create inequalities in access to higher education and affect access to the highest quality programmes and the likelihood of graduation from technical courses and university degree programmes. In this regard, the action that has been taken to make quality school education available to all children represents an important step towards achieving higher education with equal opportunities and ensuring that no one is left behind.

By the end of the 2010s, 13 of 19 countries in the region had introduced compulsory upper secondary education. However, there is a long way to go to improve schooling (Acosta, 2021), and the disparity between countries remains wide; for example, in Chile the enrolment rate among young people aged between 15 and 17 years was 99.5%, but in Honduras it was only 76.9% (Information System on Educational

Trends in Latin America (SITEAL, 2019). Even more critical is the need to guarantee successful universal educational trajectories (Acosta, 2021), and despite the improvement in upper secondary completion rates between 2000 and 2018, significant discrepancies remained among countries in the region, as shown in figure 2. While in Peru and Chile in 2018 almost nine in 10 young people completed secondary education—the minimum level of education required to enter an increasingly complex global labour market and/or pursue a formal course of study in a HEI— more than four in 10 young people failed to achieve this in Costa Rica (58.1%), Mexico (58.7%), Honduras (37.8%) and Uruguay (40.4%).

Figure 2
Latin America (12 countries): evolution of upper secondary completion rates in 2000, 2010 and 2018^a
(Percentages)



Source: F. Acosta (2021), based on UNESCO-UIS data.

^a For Chile, the estimate for the past year is the same as for 2017.

While the increase in secondary enrolment in many countries is a positive development, the process has been protracted, and despite widespread advances very few countries have achieved the goal of universalization (Acosta, 2021). Despite a significant increase in the average completion of lower secondary education (equal to nine years of schooling), which stands at 82.5% for 12 countries in the region based on data up to 2018, the average upper secondary education completion rate was only 65%, highlighting the poor progress made in respect of this indicator. A third of students failed to complete this level of education, with gaps of at least 20 percentage points between lower and upper secondary completion rates in Brazil, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico and Uruguay.

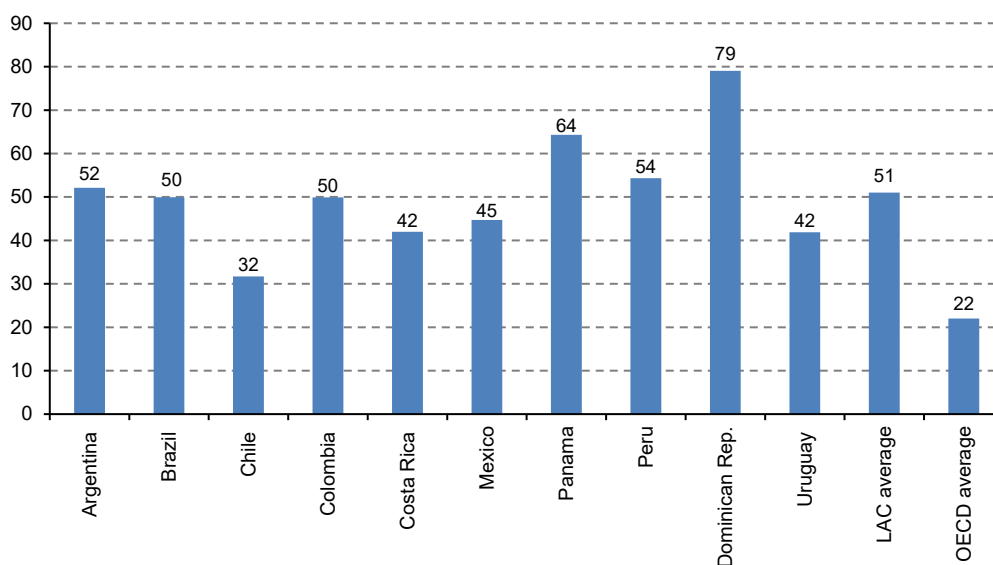
Moreover, secondary education in the region is affected by high levels of horizontal segmentation that sustain or deepen educational segmentation linked to socioeconomic status. In other words, the increase in enrolment at this level of education has been achieved through starkly contrasting policies that have a direct impact on the quality of education delivered in different settings and produce inconsistent results in terms of students' readiness to enter higher education and the labour market. This historical problem in the region's secondary education system has improved over time with the aim of increasing enrolment. However, as mentioned previously, it has not resulted in mass secondary completion rates and has increased segmentation in terms of the quality of provision, which is closely linked to the socioeconomic characteristics of families. Acosta (2021) further concludes that there are wide disparities in secondary education completion

rates within individual countries, and highlights gaps affecting rural areas—for example, in Mexico and Honduras—and inequalities linked to families' socioeconomic status, which is the biggest determinant of differences between student groups.

In addition, the quality of learning in secondary education is a critical factor in terms of equal access to and completion of higher education courses, and it is increasingly the case that a higher education qualification is the only way to gain an advantage in terms of job opportunities, financial status and social mobility. Haimovich (2017) reports that the average return on incomplete higher education courses is 35% relative to secondary education.

The active participation of the region's countries in the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in the past few years provides an insight into the learning achievements of secondary students; skills in reading, mathematics and science are assessed at age 15, when the majority of students are enrolled in secondary education. Figure 3, which is based on data from the Centro de Información para la Mejora de los Aprendizajes (CIMA) (CIMA, 2021), shows the percentage of students that performed poorly in reading tests. In 2018, an average 51% of students in the countries studied did not achieve the minimum standard, in contrast to an average of 22% of students in the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD). Poor performance in reading is a problem in almost all the countries to a greater or lesser extent: in the Dominican Republic almost eight in 10 students failed to meet the minimum standard, compared to only six in 10 in Panama. In the other five countries, performance in reading was in line with the regional average, but in Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico and Uruguay between three and four in 10 students failed to meet the minimum standard. The region's education outcomes are even worse in mathematics: the OECD average for poor-performing students in this subject is very similar to the average for reading (24%), while in the 10 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, an average of 65.3% of students have a poor level of knowledge, with a range between 90.6% for the Dominican Republic and 50.7% for Uruguay.

Figure 3
Students with poor performance in reading, according to the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA), 2018^{a,b}



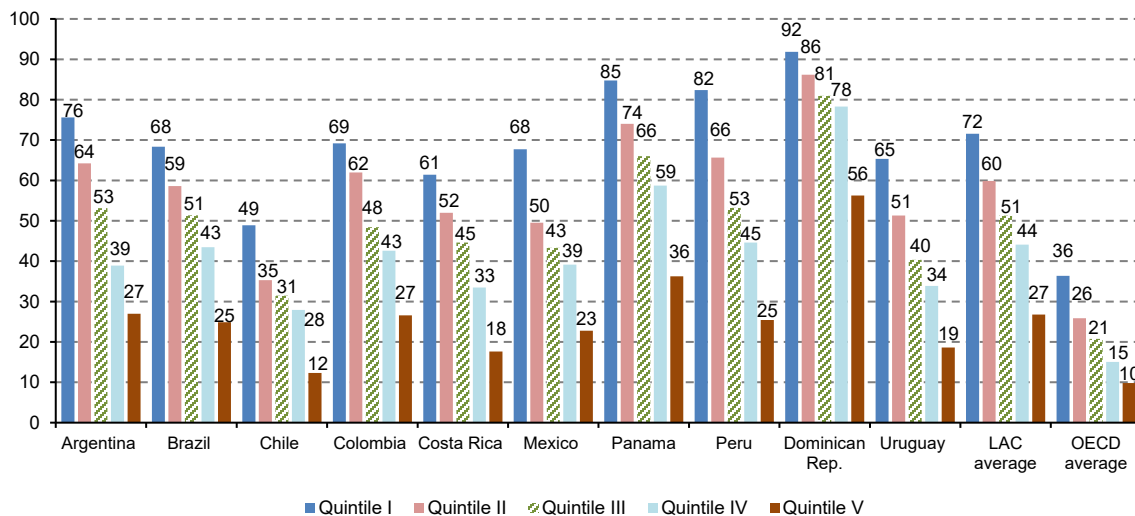
Source: CIMA/IDB. Available [online] <https://cima.iadb.org/es/regional-overview/learning/PISA>.

^a For Argentina, only students in Buenos Aires were assessed.

^b Poor-performing students are defined as those achieving less than level 2 in an assessment that is considered basic. Test results are grouped into 6 levels of performance.

In addition to the relatively heterogeneous nature of performance in reading, a combined analysis of the indicator of poor-performing students in reading and the socioeconomic level index (SLI) reveals deep inequalities within countries (see figure 4). In Latin America and the Caribbean, the proportion of poor-performing students more than double the OECD average, with seven in 10 students in the most vulnerable 20% performing poorly, compared to less than four in 10 in OECD countries. This inequality is also linked to families' socioeconomic status, but to a lesser extent: the proportion of poor-performing students in the highest quintile is one in four in Latin America and the Caribbean, compared to one in 10 in OECD countries. In all countries of the region, there are significant disparities between SLI quintiles, which are widened when comparing the lowest four quintiles with highest quintile, which can access learning opportunities of much higher quality than other students, a discrepancy that is less pronounced in OECD countries. These results show that students in the region face an uphill struggle to access and remain in higher education and highlight deep inequalities in access to prestigious and high-quality educational centres and programmes, which have an overrepresentation of students from higher-income families.

Figure 4
Poor-performing students in the PISA reading test by SLI quintile
and cultural index defined by PISA-OECD, 2018
(Percentages)



Source: CIMA/IDB. Available [online] <https://cima.iadb.org/es/regional-overview/learning/PISA>.

C. The challenge of graduation from higher education: moving beyond access

One of the major problems affecting the region is that a high percentage of students entering HEI courses do not graduate, with vulnerable students being the worst affected. In the mid-2010s, a regional average of one third of students completed their courses on time, and among people between 25 and 29 years of age who had enrolled in a HEI programme at some point, only 46% had graduated, 22% had dropped out and 32% were still studying. The graduation rate varies enormously in the region: in Mexico and Peru it was 65%, while in Honduras, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Costa Rica, it was under 40% (Haimovich, 2017).

Failure to graduate from higher education means that many of its expected benefits, such as better financial and job prospects and improved social mobility and wellbeing may be minimal or non-existent. Szekely (2016) concludes that for the working-age population in the region, 38.6% of those entering higher education failed to graduate. This is consistent with a recent study by García de Fanelli and Adrogué (2021), which applied the same indicator to Argentina, Chile and Uruguay for 2017 and showed that the percentage of non-graduating students in each country was 38.9%, 25.4% and 36.7%, respectively.

An analysis of the close relationship between the economic return on different higher education courses and the quality of the institutions delivering them is presented below. For example, in the case of Peru (Urzúa, 2017), once the cost of tuition fees is deducted the estimated net return on a programme at a non-selective university was 23.6% higher than the return on immediate entry into work after secondary school; for courses delivered by a moderately or highly selective university, the net return increased to 44% on average. When the direct costs of a degree in higher education are factored in, the return is significantly lower. For the many young people who drop out of higher education, the return on incomplete education may be minimal or negative.

Another issue relating to efficiency in the management of higher education systems in the region is the excessive length of time it takes to graduate. On average, students have to extend their allotted timeframe by 36% before obtaining a technical or vocational qualification. Once again, there is considerable variation between countries, with students in Paraguay, Ecuador and Mexico requiring only an additional 10% of their allotted time and students in Haiti and Honduras requiring almost double (Haimovich, 2017). This pushes up the cost of technical or vocational training for the State and for families, reduces the efficiency of public and private resources for the sector, and undermines the benefits of higher education for individuals and society.

D. Vertical and horizontal inequality in the provision of higher education

The region has a high level of vertical inequality in higher education (distributed between types of higher education institutions according to institutional complexity, the type of degree awarded and the scope of the programmes). Over 80% of undergraduate students are enrolled in programmes delivered by HEIs and lasting a minimum of four years (HEI/Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI) indicators), and enrolment in shorter courses delivered by Vocational Institutes or Technical or Technological Centres (ETPs) is limited, except in Chile, Colombia and Peru, where at least one third of students in HEIs are enrolled in ETPs (Sevilla, 2017). It is perhaps paradoxical that the average enrolment rate in this sector is far higher than in OECD countries, accounting for 44% of total enrolments (Avitabile, Bobba and Pariguana, 2015). Graduation from such courses is cost-effective, and Urzúa (2017), using data from Peru and Chile, reports that the net individual return on non-university technical or vocational programme once tuition fees are excluded may be much higher than on university degrees in some subjects (Urzúa, 2017); in Peru, the average return on such programmes is higher than for university degrees.

There is an increasingly diverse educational offering in the region, with students attending short courses or university programmes (Sevilla, 2017). Ferreyra (2017) reports that in Colombia, poor-performing students on low incomes tend to enrol in short courses and programmes offered by lower-performing HEIs, especially those in the private sector.

This situation partly reflects the difficulties many families and students face in obtaining sufficient information about the labour market and supports the hypothesis that technical qualifications are associated with lower social status than university degrees (OEI, 2021). Access to public funds for private entities offering technical courses is a further challenge that needs to be addressed, because in countries where higher levels of public funding are available to public and private providers in the form of grants or loans, enrolment in technical courses accounts for a greater proportion of total enrolment in HEIs.

The literature refers to the marked horizontal inequality in the region (differences in the characteristics of courses offered by similar institutions), which results in major differences between similar courses offered in different modalities, or between institutions with similar characteristics. One of the main problems in the region is that the increase in higher education coverage is driven partly by enrolment in low-quality courses in HEIs with poor standards (OEI, 2021).

Brazil is a case in point in this regard. The number of students in HEIs increased from under 3 million in 2000 to over 8 million in 2017 as a result of structural reforms to boost low enrolment rates by the turn of the millennium and intersectoral policies to promote the mass inclusion of vulnerable groups, such as people on low incomes, indigenous groups, and Afrodescendants. The network of Federal Technological Institutes, the National Apprenticeship System and PRONATEC (the National Programme for Access to Technical Education and Employment) were strengthened. Measures to promote mass access and equal opportunity in tertiary education were underpinned by two complementary funding strategies: first, the obligation of private institutions to provide free or reduced tuition to the poorest students, and second, a coordinated affirmative quota policy, which was introduced in 2012 in all federal HEIs to ensure that 50% of places were allocated to young people who may be vulnerable due to their low income or ethnic and racial background (Mercadante, 2019).

The impact of these policies on greater inclusion and equity in higher education enrolment are evident in several indicators. For example, in 2002 only 0.3% of young people between 18 and 24 years of age from the poorest quintile were in higher education, but this proportion had increased to 4.7% by 2015; furthermore, one third of young Afrodescendants who had completed secondary education enrolled in an HEI in 2017, compared to a minority at the turn of the millennium (McCowan and Bertolín, 2020).

Several important challenges lie ahead in terms of increasing enrolment rates. Growth has been concentrated in for-profit and not-for-profit institutions of the private sector, which accounts for 75% of enrolment, and online provision plays an ever-increasing role. In 2005, online courses accounted for only 2% of enrolment but this had increased to 24.4% by 2015 and 44.7% by 2019; as shown in table 2, this situation is not unique to Brazil, as other countries in the region also showed evidence of a rapid increase in distance learning in higher education over the same period. Even before the pandemic imposed the switch to online learning, it undoubtedly allowed for a rapid increase in enrolment among vulnerable groups in remote areas, but there are important questions to be asked about the quality of online courses in terms of how effective they are in developing the technical and professional knowledge and skills necessary to prepare students for the world of work. In their analysis of trends in higher education in Brazil, McCowan and Bertolín (2020) state that "The disparities of quality and prestige within the system —on account of institutional type, disciplinary area and mode of delivery (face-to-face or distance)— have meant that most disadvantaged students entering the system have ended up with worse outcomes than their more advantaged peers. What we have, therefore, is a kind of qualifications inflation but with no improvement in the positioning of those from marginalized groups in society" (McCowan and Bertolín, 2020, p. 25).

A further observation regarding Brazil is that the added value in learning achieved during the university period was much higher among students with higher socioeconomic status, which reflects inequalities not only in terms of access to different courses, but also in terms of the quality of learning in higher education (McCowan and Bertolín, 2020).

Table 2
Latin America and the Caribbean (9 countries): students enrolled in the first year of higher education
in distance learning programmes, 2010, 2015 and 2019
(Percentages)

	2010	2015	2019
Argentina	3.2	2.2	1.9
Brazil ^a	19.4	24.4	44.7
Chile	0.8	3.2	4.4
Colombia	16.4	16.1	23.8
Cuba	0.6	0.6	6.6
Dominican Republic ^c	12.7	8.0	13.8
Honduras	...	18.7	31.3
Mexico ^b	...	15.5	18.9
Uruguay	...	0.0	0.0

Source: Red IndicES. Ibero-American Network of Higher Education Indicators of the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI). Available [online] <http://www.redindices.org/indicadores-comparativos/indicadores-comparativos-estudiantes>.

^a For Brazil, the first year corresponds to data for 2013.

^b For Mexico, 2015 corresponds to data for 2016.

^c For the Dominican Republic, the first year corresponds to data for 2011 and the final year to data for 2017.

E. Links with the world of work and productivity

Higher education leads to better and more stable jobs and higher salaries. The average income of university graduates in the region puts them in the top 10 – 20% of the highest earners in their respective countries, and those who complete higher education courses can expect, on average, a 104% return compared with those who have only completed secondary school (Ferreya and others, 2017). However, behind these results there is variation depending on the type of institution (universities, vocational institutes or technical centres), the course and subject area studied, and the quality of the institution. Urzúa (2017) analyses this variation with respect to Chile and Peru, and identifies that the highest average net return in Peru is from science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) areas in university and non-university courses, while the return on education, health and social science degrees is minimal or negative. It is also worth noting that, on average, short university courses bring the highest returns, but courses delivered by public universities, or Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) were generally more cost-effective than those offered by private providers.

In the case of Chile, the average net return on higher education is similar for two- and four-year technical courses and higher for university courses. As is the case in Peru, STEM subjects in any institution type are the most cost-effective in financial terms, although business studies, healthcare and law were similarly cost-effective at university degree level. Courses in education, the humanities and the social sciences bring relatively low returns, regardless of the type of institution. The analysis for Chile is consistent with previous studies in that it shows the enormous diversity among HEIs with similar characteristics, and a comparison between institutions with the 25% lowest returns and those with the 75% highest returns reveals that some are more than twice as cost-effective.

For the region as a whole, the most prestigious and selective universities and courses associated with the highest social status and salary had a lower proportion of students from vulnerable groups, making it doubtful that the origin gap can be closed through widespread access to higher education (McCowan and Bertolín, 2020; Ferreya et. al., 2017).

In terms of the characteristics associated with institutional quality, it is evident that there is a close link with higher income. In the case of Chile, institutions with a longer history of accreditation by the relevant national agency achieve better returns for each additional year of accreditation; in Peru, highly and moderately selective universities with similar courses offer nearly double the returns of their non-selective counterparts; for the courses offered by technical institutes and centres, the difference was less marked (Urzúa, 2017). These results suggest that many HEI courses do not provide the knowledge and skills necessary to achieve the objectives of higher education.

This failure to deliver the skills needed for the world of work is not confined to less prestigious institutions and may be widespread. For example, by 2017, students of business administration and law in Mexico accounted for 38% of all graduates, but 20% were not in work and 56% thought that they were overqualified for their current job (OECD, 2019).

III. Trajectory of inclusion in accessing and completing higher education according to vulnerability linked to income, sex, geographical location and ethnicity/race

Two main indicators will be used to analyse trends in indicators of inclusion in higher education, one of which relates to access and the other to completion. Students' vulnerabilities will be discussed in terms of attributes that are personal (gender and ethnicity/race), socioeconomic (measured in terms of the richest and poorest quintiles of household income), and geographical. These indicators show the efforts undertaken by the countries in the region over the past 20 years to promote inclusion and equal opportunities in higher education.

A. Household income

Several comparative reports have shown that the starkest disparities in access to education are linked to the socioeconomic status of households, a finding that is echoed in this paper. The average attendance rate for countries in the region with data for the period 2000–2019 shows that, in the early 2000s, only one in 30 people between 20 and 25 years of age in the poorest 20% of the population were in higher education, while for the same age group in the richest 20% of the population, the proportion was one in three. In other words, coverage was ten times higher in the richest quintile than in the poorest, with an absolute gap of 30 percentage points in the attendance rate. A similarly extreme relative gap was observed in the other age groups in 2000, but the percentages of the population between 26 and 30 years of age and 31 and 35 years of age (see table 3) were higher.

Trends in access to higher education among the most vulnerable, in this case the poorest 20% of the population, show that the attendance rate has increased across both decades, particularly among the younger population (between 20 and 25 years of age). In 2000, on average only 3.3% of this group were in higher education, while in 2010 it was 6.5% and in 2019, 9.2%. This is a reflection of three

important results in terms of the average for the poorest quintile: i) despite the increase, the average for countries in the region in 2019 means that fewer than one in 10 young people between 20 and 25 years of age was enrolled in higher education institutions; ii) although the increase was sustained across both decades, the pace slowed between 2010 and 2019 compared to the previous decade; and iii) the gap in the attendance rate between the poorest and richest quintiles did not narrow but actually widened between 2000 and 2019, because although the attendance rate improved by 5.9 percentage points over the entire period for quintile I, it improved by 7.9 percentage points for quintile V. These results are relatively similar for the other age groups studied (see tables 4 and 5). The stark inequalities in educational opportunities linked to socioeconomic status are evident, and strategies aimed at increasing coverage in higher education for the poorest groups have continued to make progress, but at a rate that is too slow to close the gap in this indicator with respect to the richest quintile.

Table 3
Latin America (14 countries): evolution of the average higher education attendance rate
by extreme income quintiles and age groups, 2000–2019^a
(Percentages)

	Income quintiles						Difference 2019–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Quintile I			Quintile V			Quintile I	Quintile V
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019		
20 to 25 years	3.3	6.5	9.2	33.8	39.2	41.7	5.9	7.9
26 to 30 years	1.0	2.0	2.6	15.0	17.5	17.2	1.6	2.2
31 to 35 years	0.4	0.7	0.8	7.4	9.2	8.6	0.4	1.3

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Simple average of the percentages for Argentina, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

Analysis of the evolution of this indicator for the population aged between 20 and 25 years for the period 2000 to 2019 in the 14 countries for which data was available (see table A1 in the annex) reveals four distinct groups: i) those that have barely seen any increase in the attendance rate among the most vulnerable or richest groups (Argentina,² Colombia, El Salvador, Panama and Uruguay); ii) those in which the attendance rate is increasing at a similar rate in quintile I and quintile V (Peru); iii) those in which the attendance rate increased more rapidly in the richest quintile (Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and Paraguay); and iv) a group consisting of Mexico and Chile, where the attendance rate during the period studied increased more rapidly in the most vulnerable quintile, lessening the absolute gaps with respect to the most vulnerable population. The case of Honduras is somewhat unique in that there was no discernible improvement in the attendance rate among the most vulnerable population, despite very low levels of coverage of less than 1% in this group at the start of the period.

Furthermore, the analysis shows that only in four of the 14 countries did the attendance rate in the population between 20 and 25 years of age reach at least 10% in 2019: Argentina (15.9%), the Plurinational State of Bolivia (13.2%), Chile (27.5%) and Peru (17.6%). In all these countries, except for Argentina, the increase in the attendance rate among the most vulnerable occurred almost entirely during the period studied; in the Plurinational State of Bolivia it occurred mostly during the period 2000–2010, while in Chile and Peru, the rate of progress was faster during the 2010s than in 2000. By contrast, in Honduras, El Salvador and Uruguay, the same indicator remained very low at the end of the period studied, reflecting the minimal progress made.

² Of these five countries, Argentina was the only one that, as early as the year 2000, had a high level of coverage among students in the extreme income quintiles.

For the group aged between 26 and 30 years (tables A2 and A3 in the annex), there was a much more modest increase in the attendance rate during the period under consideration than for the group aged between 20 and 25 years, and the rate of change was more rapid in the fifth quintile than in the most vulnerable quintile. In Argentina and Chile, the biggest increase in the attendance rate was observed among the most vulnerable 20% of the population, especially in the period 2000–2010. Changes in the attendance rate for the population aged between 30 and 35 years are relatively minor across all countries.

Table 4
Latin America (15 countries): evolution of the average percentage of the population completing four or more years of higher education by extreme income quintiles and age groups, 2000–2020^a

	Income quintiles						Difference 2020–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Quintile I			Quintile V			Quintile I	Quintile V
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020		
20 to 25 years	1.0	1.9	4.3	17.3	23.2	24.5	3.3	7.2
26 to 30 years	1.4	2.4	6.5	34.5	44.0	48.2	5.1	13.6
31 to 35 years	1.4	1.7	4.2	36.6	44.7	51.1	2.7	14.6

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Simple average of the percentages for Argentina, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic and Uruguay.

An analysis by income quintile of the evolution of the percentage of the population completing four or more years of higher education (see table 4) shows that among the richest quintile, and across all age groups, there was a steady increase in the percentage of young people who completed one of these courses, a trend that was more pronounced in the period 2000–2010 than in the subsequent decade. Over the same period, there was also a gradual increase among the poorest quintile, but numbers remained low: in 2000 in 1.4% of people aged between 26 and 30 years in the poorest quintile had completed four or more years of higher education; by 2020 this had only increased to 6.5%, and a significant proportion of this increase can be explained by the fall in household incomes caused by the COVID-19 pandemic.

These results point to a rapid increase in the coverage of graduates from long-term vocational courses in the region, but it is heavily skewed towards the richest at the expense of the poorest. This is primarily due to the increased social mobility resulting from completion of higher education courses, because on graduation most students would move into higher income quintiles in their respective countries. In this context, this indicator is not a true reflection of the likelihood of graduation among students from different social backgrounds, but it does serve as a proxy indicator of the social mobility generated by higher education.

Examining distribution by country (see tables A4 and A6 in the annex), the above conclusions apply to all countries, with even higher numbers of students completing four years of higher education in the richest quintile in countries with the highest coverage in secondary education and the highest net coverage rate (NCR) in enrolment, as observed in all subgroups of the population studied (between 20 and 35 years of age). In Peru and Chile in 2020, for example, in quintile V, 68.3% and 71.5%, respectively of young people between 26 and 30 years of age had completed a programme lasting four or more years.

B. Distribution of educational attainment by sex

In the countries of the region, the higher levels of educational attainment of girls compared to boys in school are reflected in higher rates of completion of secondary education and in several higher education indicators, a phenomenon known as the “female advantage” (Niemi, 2017). Firstly, for the period 2000–2019 across all age groups (see table 5), the NCR increased among men and women, particularly those aged between

20 and 25 years of age. However, in the past decade it has become more difficult to sustain the growth of the previous decade, which benefited from more tax revenue and stronger economic growth (García de Fanelli, 2019). This caused the higher education attendance rate to grow more slowly in the period 2010–2019 compared to 2000–2010 for all age groups and in both genders (see table 5).

Secondly, participation is consistently higher among women than men, with the gap widening gradually over the whole period: in 2000, the simple average of the attendance rate in the countries of the region for women between 20–25 years of age was 16.3%, while for men it was only 13.7%. This gap of 2.6 percentage points in 2000 increased to 3.5 in 2010 and 3.8 in 2019. Higher rates among women are also seen in the other age groups studied.

Table 5
Latin America (14 countries): evolution of the average higher education attendance rate
by sex and age group, 2000–2019^a
(Percentages)

	Sex						Difference 2019–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Men			Women			Men	Women
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019		
20 to 25 years	13.7	18.2	21.0	16.3	21.7	24.8	7.3	8.5
26 to 30 years	6.7	8.2	8.8	6.1	8.9	9.3	2.1	3.2
31 to 35 years	3.0	3.8	3.8	2.9	4.3	4.5	0.8	1.6

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Simple average of the percentages for Argentina, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

Of the 15 countries with data for Latin America and the Caribbean, the average was higher for women than for men among the population completing a higher education programme of four or more years (see table 6). The indicator shows a steady increase among male and female students for all age groups studied. Despite this, the average percentage of completion in both groups was low: by 2020, only 18.7% of men between 31 and 35 years of age had completed at least four years of study, while among women the average was 22.8%.

The increase was similar for the periods 2000–2010 and 2010–2020, so completion rates have continued to improve over time among men and women. However, the female completion rate increased at a faster rate for all age groups than the male completion rate for period as a whole. In 2000, 11.2% of men and 13.3% of women aged between 26 and 30 years had completed a programme of four or more years, a difference of 2.1 percentage points that increased to 4.1 points in 2010 and 5.6 in 2020.

Table 6
Latin America (15 countries): evolution of the average percentage of the population completing four
or more years of higher education by sex and age group, 2000–2020^a

	Sex						Difference 2020–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Men			Women			Men	Women
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020		
20 to 25 years	5.4	7.7	9.1	7.6	10.8	13.0	3.7	5.4
26 to 30 years	11.2	15.2	18.8	13.3	19.3	24.4	7.6	11.2
31 to 35 years	11.9	15.3	18.7	12.5	17.6	22.8	6.8	10.3

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Simple average of the percentages for Argentina, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

An analysis of the situation in the individual countries reveals a high degree of heterogeneity (see tables A7 to A9 in the annex). On the one hand, seven countries saw a high growth rate over the whole period among men and women. In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Mexico, Panama and Paraguay the increase was greater among women than men, while in Peru there was rapid growth among students of both genders, resulting in a very similar graduation rates by 2020 (38.9% for men and 37.9% for women among students aged 26 to 30 years) and, in Chile, there was a greater increase for both groups in the period 2010–2020 than in the previous decade.

By contrast, the situation was highly variable in the other eight countries, with some experiencing barely any growth during the period studied (Argentina and Uruguay) and others where growth was concentrated in a single decade (in Costa Rica and Ecuador between 2000 and 2010, for women and men; in El Salvador for both genders but only between 2010 and 2020, and in Honduras only among women, between 2010 and 2020).

Differing trajectories for each gender pose a significant challenge in terms of increasing access and graduation rates among men that in most countries originates in school, where there is a wide gap in secondary education completion rates between men and women.

1. Moving beyond the female advantage in education coverage

Despite the lower access and graduation rates in higher education among men, there are significant inequality gaps affecting women in higher education, as well as a persistent wage gap between professional women and their male counterparts. As highlighted in the UNESCO-IESALC report "Women in higher education: has the female advantage put an end to gender inequalities?" (UNESCO-IESALC, 2021), the many differences affecting women reflect the deep inequalities and glass ceilings that begin in early childhood and persist throughout women's lives, and which are reinforced through the stereotypes that prevail within families, schools, higher education and the workplace (ECLAC, 2019).

The UNESCO-IESALC report highlights at least five major global inequalities that affect women in higher education: i) the lower proportion of female researchers and of women in managerial and leadership positions; ii) the increased vertical segregation in higher education institutions, with a lower proportion of women holding academic posts at each level of education; iii) a wide discrepancy with respect to academic publications, particularly prestigious ones, that is linked to asymmetrical research funding; iv) a lower proportion of women in undergraduate careers in STEM subjects with the highest earning potential, which partly explains why the "female advantage" in higher education has not improved the economic situation for women (Niemi, 2017); and v) a reduction in the number of scientific publications during the pandemic.

Research and institutional reports that include data for Latin America and the Caribbean show that all the gaps described above are present across the region. In terms of salaries, working women with more than 13 years of schooling earned 26% less than their male peers in 2014, even though higher numbers of women enter and graduate from higher education than men (ECLAC, 2016).

Women are less likely to study STEM subjects in higher education, especially information and communications technologies (ICT) and engineering, with the situation remaining static over the last decade, as shown in table 7. Table 7 also shows that, in all countries for which data is available, women account for only a small proportion of enrolment in ICT courses, with no country reporting progress in this regard over the decade, while only Cuba and Uruguay reported an enrolment rate surpassing 40% among women in engineering, industry and construction courses in 2019.

However, the fact that women bear the brunt of cultural expectations, gender bias and caring responsibilities for family members explains why less than a third of students enrolling on related courses such as education and health are men. Gender equality in the distribution of university courses

and job opportunities is only possible if there is a more equitable division of household labour that would make it possible to overcome the current state of extreme inequality in the region; in Latin America, 77% of unpaid work is performed by women (ECLAC, 2019).

Unless rapid progress can be made in addressing gender stereotypes, the unequal distribution of social roles, and professional segregation, there is a risk that gender gaps may widen as a consequence of the accelerated advance of the industrial revolution, which has increased the demand for scientific and information technology skills (ECLAC, 2019; Muñoz, 2021).

Table 7
Latin America and the Caribbean (13 countries): women enrolled in higher education
by STEM subjects, 2010 and 2019^a
(Percentages)

	2010			2019		
	Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	ICT	Engineering, industry and construction	Natural sciences, mathematics and statistics	ICT	Engineering, industry and construction
Argentina	54.4	18.8	25.4	62.2	16.8	33.8
Brazil ^a	50.5	15.1	32.8	48.2	13.6	33.5
Chile	48.1	13.5	19.7	45.6	11.2	20.2
Colombia	49.6	29.7	30.8	53.7	20.8	32.2
Costa Rica	...	...	...	51.0	20.9	33.9
Cuba	50.8	36.0	36.7	59.9	31.9	41.1
Dominican Republic ^a	...	...	...	54.1	16.9	27.6
El Salvador ^a	...	...	...	55.5	23.5	25.0
Honduras	...	...	...	49.7	28.4	35.9
Mexico	52.5	33.2	25.8	49.4	23.7	29.3
Panama	59.5	37.8	30.7	60.8	29.4	38.4
Paraguay	...	...	...	56.4	...	38.6
Uruguay	66.8	15.9	28.2	58.1	15.8	40.8
Latin America and the Caribbean	53.6	23.6	29.9	52.5	18.0	30.8

Source: Red IndicES. Ibero-American Network of Higher Education Indicators of the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI). Available [online] <http://www.redindices.org/indicadores-comparativos/indicadores-comparativos-estudiantes>.

^a For Brazil, the initial data correspond to 2013; for Costa Rica, to 2018; and for El Salvador and the Dominican Republic, to 2017.

Although women accounted for 45.8% of academic researchers in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2017 (cited in UNESCO-IESALC, 2021), they were first authors in only 36.4% of academic publications in South America (Bendels and others, 2018). Moreover, women have to contend with a glass ceiling that hampers their efforts to become university professors: in 2018, although over 50% of graduates were women, the percentage of female professors in higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean was just over 40%, although the figure has increased steadily since 1995. The lower proportion of women in top management positions shows that there is a second glass ceiling, and a study of nine countries in the region reported that in 2020 only 18% of public universities had a female rector (cited in UNESCO-IESALC, 2021).

C. Geographical location

Geographical location is another factor that exacerbates exclusion and inequality in higher education. Students living in isolated, remote and rural areas and smaller towns and cities find it harder to attend face-to-face learning in higher education centres, which are concentrated in urban and more populated

areas. According to Ferreyra (2017), students in Latin America and the Caribbean tend to study in HEIs close to home. For example, in Colombia 73% of higher education students enrol in HEIs in the province where they attended secondary school. Moreover, distance learning does not always provide an effective solution in rural areas because it requires reliable Internet access and connectivity, adequate technological devices, and a study space at home that allows students to engage in technical and vocational training for the duration of the course.

In 2000 the countries of the region experienced a huge discrepancy in the average higher education attendance rate between rural and urban areas (3.7% and 18.1%, respectively) among people between 20 and 25 years of age (see table 8). The gap was equally stark among those aged between 26 and 35 years, although this age group had a lower rate of participation in higher education than younger age groups. Throughout the period studied, net higher education coverage grew steadily in rural areas, reaching 7.7% in 2010 and 10.8% in 2019. Despite an increase of 7.1 points between 2000 and 2019, the gap with respect to urban areas did not narrow, and these areas saw an increase of 8.3 points over the period. Similar features were observed in the group aged between 26 and 35 years, reflecting a gap in access to higher education between rural and urban areas that widened between 2000 and 2010 and narrowed only slightly between 2010 and 2019. It is safe to say that even after two decades the region continues to suffer from a significant geographical divide and the trend suggests that it will not be reversed quickly.

Table 8
Latin America (13 countries): evolution of average higher education attendance rate
by geographical location and age group, 2000–2019^a
(Percentages)

	Geographical location						Difference 2019–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Urban			Rural			Urban	Rural
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019		
20 to 25 years	18.1	23.7	26.4	3.7	7.7	10.8	8.3	7.1
26 to 30 years	8.0	9.9	10.3	1.4	1.9	2.9	2.3	1.6
31 to 35 years	3.7	4.9	4.6	0.6	1.2	1.4	0.9	0.8

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Simple average of percentages for Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

An evaluation of the situation in 13 countries in the region based on data from the household survey (see tables A13 to A15 in the annex) shows that the gap between rural and urban sectors is extensive and has persisted or widened. However, analysis of the attendance rate for the population between 20 and 25 years of age identifies three positive cases. The first is Chile, where coverage in rural areas increased (by 15.6 percentage points) more than in urban areas (11.9 percentage points) between 2000 and 2019, reducing the geographical divide from 16.3 to 12.6 percentage points. This is the consequence of increasing secondary education completion rates across the country, as well as large-scale funding mechanisms for higher education through grants, scholarships or loans. The same factors may explain the sustained increase in rural coverage in Peru, which rose by 11 percentage points between 2000 and 2019, although this did not close the gap with respect to the urban sector, where coverage increased by 13.1 percentage points over the same period. It is worth noting the experiences of Costa Rica and Uruguay, because although data is not available for the entire period for these countries, in 2019 the divide between rural and urban areas narrowed, albeit with lower overall access rates than Chile and Peru.

The average rate of completion of courses lasting four or more years (see table 9) reflects the enormous difficulty students faced in rural areas at the beginning of the 2000s, when only 2.5% of the population between 26 and 30 years of age had completed a course of that length, compared to 15.4% of their urban counterparts. The trend observed in the following two decades shows a consistent improvement in coverage in rural areas, increasing from 5.4% in 2010 to 9.7% in 2020. However, the rate of progress was outstripped by urban areas, such that the gap of 12.9 percentage points in 2000 for this age group had increased to 15.5 percentage points by 2020. A similar pattern can be seen when comparing the other age groups of young people in the region. It may be that the geographical divide cannot be reversed, since urban areas tend to offer greater economic opportunities than rural areas, which in turn encourages new graduates to migrate to cities and centres with larger populations. This indicator therefore says more about where professionals and technicians choose to live after graduation than it does about shifts in students' social origin, and as such it may over-estimate the graduation gap due to the geographical location of students at the beginning of their studies.

Table 9
Latin America (14 countries): evolution of the average percentage of the population completing a programme of higher education lasting four or more years by geographical area and age group, 2000–2019^a

	Geographical location						Difference 2019–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Urban			Rural			Urban	Rural
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019		
20 to 25 years	8.2	11.3	12.8	1.7	3.2	5.8	4.6	4.2
26 to 30 years	15.4	20.4	25.2	2.5	5.4	9.7	9.8	7.2
31 to 35 years	15.2	19.8	24.2	2.7	4.3	7.4	9.1	4.8

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Simple average of the percentages for the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

D. Ethnicity and race

Ethnic and racial inequalities are one of the structural axes of social inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean, and racism is central to a persistent and self-perpetuating culture of privilege (ECLAC/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), 2020). In Latin America, one in five inhabitants is of African descent, and the proportion is much higher in Haiti (95.5%), Brazil (50.9%) and Cuba (35.9%); 8.5% of the population belongs to an indigenous people, although this varies greatly between the countries of the region, exceeding 10% of the population in some cases, such as the Plurinational State of Bolivia (48%), Guatemala (45%), Mexico (21.5%) and Peru (12.5%). Given the historical exclusion of these groups, it is unsurprising that they experience higher levels of poverty and other inequalities in areas such as health, education, work and social protection.

School indicators show that indigenous peoples and Afrodescendants continually lag behind in terms of education, a fact that can only partially be explained by their greater social vulnerability (Bellei and others, 2015 and Valenzuela and others, 2017). Among Afrodescendants, gaps in education coverage have narrowed steadily over time and are minimal at primary level but significant at secondary level and even more so at the tertiary level (ECLAC/UNFPA, 2020). Moreover, in many countries the gaps affecting Afrodescendants are more pronounced among boys and young men than among their female peers.

The gaps that affect indigenous groups in terms of access to education are more severe than those affecting Afrodescendants, with the deepest inequalities affecting rural areas and men belonging to indigenous groups (Corbetta and others, 2018). Moreover, there are marked disparities in learning

among indigenous students compared to non-indigenous students in most countries in the region, as is evident from the results of the Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (TERCE) test carried out by UNESCO in 2013 (Valenzuela and others, 2017).

The lower secondary education completion rate and the lower quality of learning make it more difficult for Afrodescendants and indigenous young people to access and remain in higher education. In this regard, the sustained efforts made by many countries in the region to define legal and regulatory frameworks and introduce affirmative policies and targeted strategies to overcome the historical exclusion of these groups in terms of access to and retention in higher education assume great importance.

Two policies proposed in recent years to increase the representation of Afrodescendants and indigenous people in HEIs are of particular interest. One is the introduction of allocations or quotas in public institutions, and the other is the award of scholarships in private institutions (Corbetta and others, 2018). The aim of these strategies is not only to increase education coverage in the relevant groups, but to reinforce a rights-based approach to education for populations who are vulnerable because of ethnicity or race.

In countries that have conducted household surveys that permit a representative analysis of the relevant population,³ the simple average of the attendance rate by age group and ethnicity and race (see tables 10 and 12) shows a sustained positive trend. However, this has not lessened the gaps in terms of absolute coverage observed in early 2000 with respect to the comparator, particularly among young indigenous people, because the increase in enrolment in higher education between Afrodescendants the non-Afrodescendent and non-indigenous population is similar for the periods 2000–2010 and 2010–2019, with a significant lag among the indigenous population in the last decade.

For the countries studied (see table 10), it can be concluded that for the non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendent population, which serves as a reference group, the increase in the attendance rate over the two decades occurred mainly in the youngest age group (between 20 and 25 years of age), where coverage among countries for which data is available increased by 8.6 percentage points between 2000 and 2020, while in the 26–30 age group (see table 11) it increased by only 1.0 percentage point and by 0.5 of a percentage point in the 31–35 age group (see table 12). A comparison of the evolution of the enrolment rate for the indigenous population for the same period shows that it is only half that of the reference group and that the increase was confined to the period 2000–2010 with no significant increases thereafter. However, in countries for which data is available, the case of Chile is of interest owing to the significant increase observed in both sub-periods that narrowed the gap in the attendance rate with respect to the reference group from 6.6 points in 2000 to 3.8 points in 2019 among the youngest students, resulting in similar attendance rates between the reference and indigenous population for other age groups by late 2019.

Furthermore, the Plurinational State of Bolivia is of interest in this regard, as it achieved a significant increase in the attendance rate of 10.3 percentage points among the younger indigenous population (between 20 and 25 years old) in the period 2000–2019. However, this was still lower than the increase observed in the reference population, so there was a net increase in the total gap with respect to the attendance rate for the reference group in 2019 compared to the year 2000.

With regard to the attendance rate among Afrodescendants (see table 10), great variation was observed in those countries with some available data (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama and Uruguay) and the evolution over time could only be analysed in some of these countries. However, it is clear that, among the five countries with data for 2019, the gap with respect to the (not-indigenous or Afrodescendants) reference group is similar to that affecting indigenous students, and that the increase

³ Because household survey samples are not representative for countries with small groups of indigenous and Afrodescendent populations, data is available only for a small group of countries in the region.

in the attendance rate was similar to that of the reference group, such that the original gap was neither reduced nor widened. In Panama, the attendance rate in 2019 among the 20–25 age group in the African descent population (24.6%) was similar to that of the reference group (25.1%).

Of the five countries for which it is possible to compare the attendance rate for the indigenous and African descent populations, in four of them coverage is higher among the African descent population than among the indigenous population (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Panama); only in Uruguay is it higher among the indigenous population. Likewise, in almost all these countries, the attendance rate among the indigenous or Afrodescendant populations is much lower than it is among non-indigenous or non-Afrodescendant populations, demonstrating a widespread need to maintain and strengthen strategies to close the gap while taking additional steps to support the indigenous population, which lags further behind than the Afrodescendant population. In this context, Chile's experience of the indigenous population may be of interest to other countries in the region, since in 2019 it achieved similar attendance rates at HEIs among indigenous and non-indigenous groups with high levels of coverage.

Table 10
Latin America (9 countries): evolution of average higher education attendance rate
by ethnicity and race, population aged 20–25 years, 2000–2019
(Percentages)

	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant			Indigenous			Afrodescendants			Difference 2019–2000 (in percentage points)		
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant	Indigenous	Afrodescendants
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	21.0	30.8	38.1	10.6	17.1	20.9	...	...	...	17.1	10.3	...
Brazil	17.1	21.5	24.1	9.8	9.7	9.7	5.8	10.1	12.6	7.0	0.0	6.7
Chile	20.0	30.7	32.7	13.4	19.9	28.9	...	...	...	12.7	15.6	...
Colombia	...	15.8	17.8	...	...	8.3	...	...	13.5	...	...	...
Ecuador	15.7	24.7	23.5	4.3	6.3	9.9	5.1	14.6	11.6	7.7	5.7	6.5
Mexico	...	17.7	22.3	...	11.0	12.6	...	...	...	...	...	...
Nicaragua	9.7	11.8	...	0.6	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Panama	18.6	18.0	25.1	...	...	9.0	...	...	24.6	6.5	...	...
Uruguay	14.9	19.0	18.9	...	14.8	9.6	...	3.7	6.3	3.9	...	...

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

Table 11
Latin America (9 countries): evolution of average higher education attendance rate by ethnicity
and race, population aged 26–30 years, 2000–2019
(Percentages)

	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant			Indigenous			Afrodescendants			Difference 2019–2000 (in percentage points)		
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant	Indigenous	Afrodescendants
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	15.8	12.8	12.7	4.6	6.8	4.3	...	...	...	-3.1	-0.4	...
Brazil	7.7	9.7	11.9	4.7	9.9	5.6	3.7	5.9	7.2	4.2	0.8	3.6
Chile	5.1	10.4	10.5	5.4	6.8	10.0	...	...	...	5.3	4.6	...
Colombia	...	7.6	8.1	...	...	3.5	...	...	6.2	...	...	...
Ecuador	6.4	9.5	7.4	3.4	6.2	3.0	1.5	6.7	9.4	1.0	-0.3	7.9
Mexico	...	3.2	4.7	...	1.9	2.3	...	...	...	...	...	...
Nicaragua	3.2	3.2	...	3.5	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Panama	9.5	6.9	8.8	...	...	6.2	...	...	7.9	-0.8	...	...
Uruguay	9.0	11.3	9.4	...	7.2	7.5	...	2.2	2.9	0.4	...	...

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

Table 12
Latin America (9 countries): evolution of average higher education attendance rate
by ethnicity and race, population aged 31–35 years, 2000–2019
(Percentages)

	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant			Indigenous			Afrodescendants			Difference 2019–2000 (in percentage points)		
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant	Indigenous	Afrodescendants
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	5.9	5.1	4.2	2.3	3.9	3.8	...	...	...	-1.7	1.5	...
Brazil	5.0	5.5	7.3	0.0	2.4	3.8	2.9	4.0	4.9	2.3	3.8	2.1
Chile	1.4	3.4	3.6	1.9	1.6	4.2	...	...	...	2.2	2.3	...
Colombia	...	4.0	4.8	...	...	2.4	...	...	2.6	...	...	...
Ecuador	3.0	4.6	3.3	2.9	2.5	0.5	2.9	4.9	1.3	0.2	-2.4	-1.5
Mexico	...	1.3	2.1	...	1.2	1.1	...	...	...	...	...	...
Nicaragua	1.8	1.9	...	4.4	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Panama	4.7	4.6	3.7	...	...	2.8	...	...	4.6	-1.0	...	...
Uruguay	3.3	5.6	3.5	...	4.4	1.6	...	1.7	2.4	0.2	...	...

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

An analysis of the evolution of the percentage of the population that has completed a higher education programme lasting four or more years by age group and ethnicity and race shows that, despite significant differences between the countries for which data is available (table 14) over the whole period, the average percentage of the non-indigenous and non-African descent population with a degree-level qualification is at least double that of the indigenous or African descent population aged between 20 and 35 years (see tables 13–15).

In 2020, completion rates in Uruguay were fairly similar between indigenous and non-indigenous groups. In Chile, although the completion rate is persistently higher among the non-indigenous group than among the indigenous population, the rate in the latter group has grown rapidly among the population between 20 and 25 years of age across both decades, but because the rate of growth among the population between 26 and 35 years of age slower, the gaps in completion rates observed at the beginning of 2000 have still not been closed.

In Brazil and Mexico, advances were made in the two sub-periods among the indigenous population, but much more slowly than among the non-indigenous population, resulting in a widening of the gap between the two groups. For the population between 26 and 35 years of age, the age group that is completing higher education, in Mexico the completion rate among the indigenous population in 2020 was only half that of the non-indigenous population, while in Brazil it was only one third. The Plurinational State of Bolivia made considerable progress but only for the period 2000–2010, since when it has stagnated.

Of the countries for which data is available, there is a significant gap affecting the Afrodescendent population, but there is a high degree of heterogeneity between these countries. Although Ecuador did not close the gaps observed in the early 2000s, it is worth mentioning because disparities with respect to the non-Afrodescendent and non-indigenous population have closed rapidly, in contrast with the minimal progress made in improving low coverage among the country's indigenous population.

Table 13
Latin America (9 countries): evolution of the percentage of the population aged between 20–25 years completing a program of four or more years of higher education, by ethnicity and race, 2000–2020

	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant			Indigenous			Afrodescendants			Difference 2020–2000 (in percentage points)		
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant	Indigenous	Afrodescendants
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	7.3	12.6	11.9	2.8	6.3	7.5	0.0	...	...	4.6	4.7	...
Brazil	8.0	16.2	15.0	2.0	4.4	2.6	1.7	5.9	6.6	7.0	0.6	4.9
Chile	7.1	9.2	13.6	2.3	3.7	9.9	...	...	...	6.5	7.6	...
Colombia	...	8.6	10.8	...	...	3.1	...	...	5.6	...	...	...
Ecuador	7.3	11.4	8.9	0.9	2.7	5.1	3.1	6.0	3.0	1.6	4.2	-0.1
Mexico	...	11.1	13.7	...	6.4	10.4	...	...	...	...	...	...
Nicaragua	4.1	6.6	...	0.6	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Panama	7.2	9.4	12.8	...	...	2.9	...	...	11.6	5.6	...	...
Uruguay	4.5	4.4	4.6	...	3.0	4.6	...	0.6	1.3	0.1	...	...

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

Table 14
Latin America (9 countries): evolution of the percentage of the population aged between 26–30 years completing a program of four or more years of higher education, by ethnicity and race, 2000–2020

	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant			Indigenous			Afrodescendants			Difference 2020–2000 (in percentage points)		
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant	Indigenous	Afrodescendants
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	19.1	27.8	28.9	4.7	13.2	11.7	...	...	...	9.8	7.0	...
Brazil	12.7	23.6	30.5	1.2	8.0	9.2	2.8	8.6	12.9	17.8	8.0	10.1
Chile	14.4	21.6	37.6	4.9	7.7	20.7	...	...	...	23.2	15.8	...
Colombia	...	14.5	17.8	...	...	5.0	...	...	10.9	...	...	...
Ecuador	13.3	20.8	22.6	4.3	5.7	3.2	12.0	5.9	15.6	9.3	-1.1	3.6
Mexico	...	20.3	27.4	...	10.5	15.6	...	...	...	...	...	...
Nicaragua	5.6	9.7	...	3.5	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Panama	15.3	19.0	29.6	...	...	6.2	...	...	18.0	14.3	...	...
Uruguay	11.7	12.1	14.5	...	3.9	10.7	...	1.0	8.9	2.8	...	...

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

Table 15
Latin America (9 countries): evolution of the percentage of the population aged between 31–35 years completing a programme of four or more years of higher education, by ethnicity and race, 2000–2020

	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant			Indigenous			Afrodescendants			Difference 2020–2000 (in percentage points)		
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendant	Indigenous	Afrodescendants
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	13.9	25.2	29.3	8.8	13.5	13.4	0.0	...	...	15.4	4.6	...
Brazil	13.0	22.8	31.7	9.2	10.1	15.4	3.0	8.6	13.3	18.7	6.2	10.3
Chile	12.9	19.2	35.6	3.0	8.1	22.0	...	...	...	22.6	19.0	...
Colombia	...	14.7	17.9	...	...	6.1	...	...	10.2	...	...	...
Ecuador	12.8	14.9	17.8	5.0	2.7	3.5	6.9	9.7	17.5	4.9	-1.5	10.7
Mexico	...	16.0	24.8	...	8.4	13.5	...	...	...	...	...	...
Nicaragua	4.6	8.6	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...	...
Panama	13.5	21.2	28.9	...	...	6.0	...	...	19.1	15.4	...	...
Uruguay	11.3	12.8	16.3	...	6.5	14.5	...	2.0	8.0	4.9	...	...

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

IV. Public policies for inclusion in access to higher education in some countries of Latin American and the Caribbean

Latin America and the Caribbean has been characterized by historical and structural inequalities. This inequality is underpinned by an undiversified production matrix and an entrenched culture of privilege (ECLAC/UNFPA, 2020). Inequalities are evident in the differential living conditions to which people are exposed. Intersectionality is therefore of fundamental importance in producing a contextualized analysis of the topic that is the focus of this section: public policies for inclusion in higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean. According to UNESCO, young people from families with low socioeconomic status tend to belong to more than one vulnerable group. They often experience discrimination due to multiple factors, and their socioeconomic vulnerability is compounded by the mutually reinforcing nature of the disadvantages that affect them (UNESCO, 2019; ECLAC/UNFPA, 2020).

Given the social inequality matrix in the region (ECLAC/UNFPA, 2020), it is expected that targeted policies that promote inclusive access to higher education among people of low socioeconomic status will also benefit students from rural areas, female students, students from the LGBTI community, students belonging to indigenous and Afrodescendent populations, and students with a disability.

This section provides an overview of the public policies adopted by some countries of Latin America and the Caribbean to promote the inclusion of underprivileged groups, such as students living in situations of economic vulnerability, students belonging to an ethnic or racial group that has historically been discriminated against, women students, students living in rural areas, and students with a disability.

Measures to promote the inclusion of these students can be divided into a) financial and b) non-financial. Financial measures consist of financial support, scholarships and access to loans. Non-financial measures consist of different policies or courses such as admissions quotas for priority groups. It is clear that financial measures predominate in countries for which data is available, particularly the award of scholarships to students who fulfil certain criteria.

An analysis based on a review of public policies for inclusion in higher education in 15 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean is presented below. Although the concept of intersectionality was applied as a way of understanding the social inequality matrix in the region (ECLAC/UNFPA, 2020), for analytical purposes the policies were classified according to five dimensions of inclusion in higher education, in the following order: i) socioeconomic status; ii) gender; iii) geographical area; iv) ethnicity and race; and (v) disability status.

Table 16 shows that all the countries for which information was available have developed strategies to support the inclusion of students exposed to high levels of socioeconomic vulnerability. Some countries (Argentina, Brazil, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Ecuador and Uruguay) have pursued universal free education policies restricted to public institutions, as well as scholarship and/or loan schemes. It is therefore relevant to identify whether there is any requirement to attend a public institution or whether the financial measure extends to private institutions, and whether support is available for tuition fees only or also for living expenses.

Table 16
Latin America and the Caribbean (15 countries): public policies for inclusion in access to higher education

Country	Socioeconomic level	Gender	Geographical area	Ethnicity and race	Disability status
Argentina	X	X		X	X
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	X			X	X
Brazil	X			X	X
Chile	X		X	X	X
Colombia	X		X	X	X
Costa Rica	X				
Dominican Republic	X				
Ecuador	X	X		X	X
El Salvador	X				X
Jamaica	X				
Mexico	X	X		X	
Panama	X	X			X
Paraguay	X			X	X
Peru	X	X		X	
Uruguay	X			X	

Source: Original work based on Ministry of Education of Argentina, 2021, 2017 and n/a; Tavela, Catino and Forneris, 2019; PROUNI, 2021; Da Rocha and Pizzio, 2018; Carneiro and Bridi, 2020; Government of Brazil, 2021; Pires, Sampaio and Poma, 2020; the Ministry of Education of Brazil, 2018b and 2018c; the Undersecretariat of Higher Education of Chile, 2021; ICETEX, 2021; the Ministry of Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Dominican Republic, 2021a and 2021b; the Government of the Dominican Republic, n/a.; SITEAL, 2019; the Government of Mexico, 2021a, 2021b, 2021c and 2021d; the Ministry of Education of Peru, 2021 and 2019; the Jamaica Tertiary Education Commission, 2021; the Ministry of Education of Chile, 2021; the Government of Chile, 2021; Junta Nacional de Auxilio Escolar y Becas (JUNAEB), 2021; Salmi, 2019; the Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation of Ecuador, 2017; Dirección General de Desarrollo Social y Asignaciones Familiares (DESAF), 2021; the Ministry of Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; the Government of El Salvador, 2019; García de Fanelli and Adrogué 2019; the Solidarity Fund (2021); the Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, n/a; the Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation of Ecuador, 2017; Marúm, 2016; Consejo Nacional de Ciencia y Tecnología (CONACYT), 2021; Programa Nacional de Becas y Crédito Educativo (PRONABEC), 2021a and 2021b; the Ministry of Education of Peru, 2021a and 2021b; the Vice-Ministry of Higher Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; the Ministry of National Education of Colombia, 2017; UNESCO, 2018; Instituto para la Formación y Aprovechamiento de Recursos Humanos (IFARHU), 2020.

Policies that focus on gender and geographical area are rare, although a number of valuable experiences could be replicated in order to increase women's access to and retention in higher education courses and promote women's enrolment in STEM courses. It is striking that only Argentina

includes transvestites and transgender persons in its higher education inclusion policies. The lack of targeted policies in this area supports UNESCO's statement that LGBTI people are systematically excluded and discriminated against, particularly in educational establishments (UNESCO, 2021). The case of Argentina is noteworthy because the country has made it a priority to broaden the scope of access policies for educational institutions to ensure that they promote the inclusion of individuals in accordance with their gender identity. In this way, it is possible to move beyond gender binarism (according to which a person can only identify as female or male) and the gender assigned at birth is not relevant if the person no longer feels that it represents who they are.

Two out of three of countries were found to have specific policies according to ethnicity and race, disability, and, in a smaller proportion, for Afrodescendants. No specific courses were aimed at migrants, despite the fact that they constitute a very vulnerable and group that is steadily increasing in size. This is a priority that the countries of the region must address as a matter of urgency.

In accordance with the data accessed as part of the literature review and through various online resources, data exists for 15 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean that are implementing or have implemented public policies promoting the inclusion in higher education of students with high levels of socioeconomic vulnerability (for more information, see annex 3). Aside from these policies, it is important to note that in Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Ecuador and Paraguay, higher education in public institutions is free of charge, which removes a significant barrier to access and retention for students from low, medium-low and medium socioeconomic groups. Most of the countries for which data was obtained had financial inclusion measures, such as scholarships that are reserved for students from low-income families who are nationals of the country funding the programme and have an excellent academic record. For academic courses that are not free of charge, scholarships in all countries cover the cost of tuition fees and some cover living expenses and equipment.

Although most of the countries studied do not have free public higher education, they offer scholarship schemes that are primarily intended for students from poor socioeconomic backgrounds who attend public institutions and have a good academic record in secondary and/or higher education. Colombia has developed a programme of financial support for students. The Instituto Colombiano de Crédito Educativo y Estudios Técnicos en el Exterior (ICETEX) is a Colombian Government agency that promotes access to higher education by providing loans to students from poor socioeconomic backgrounds with a good academic record. Students who take out a loan can enrol in public and private higher education institutions (ICETEX, 2021).

Chile, Costa Rica and Peru also provide loans for students attending public and private higher education institutions. In Brazil, loans only available for courses at private institutions, because tuition is free of charge at public institutions.

Chile is unusual in the sense that its Government has provided free education to 60% of students from low-income families since the mid-2010s. Students can choose to pursue their university studies in public or private higher education institutions, provided that they can demonstrate the quality of the education provided in accordance with certain criteria, including a minimum level of accreditation and proof of not-for-profit status. In addition, State-funded scholarships and loan schemes can be allocated for studies in public or private institutions, thus providing large-scale access to funding sources.

Only Argentina, Brazil and Chile were identified as having developed non-financial measures for socioeconomic inclusion. Argentina and Chile have two similar programmes, the Nexos Educational Linkage and Cooperation Programme in Argentina and the Higher Education Access Programme (PACE) in Chile (see annex 3 for more information). It is recommended that these programmes, particularly PACE, be used as a reference for the implementation of non-financial measures in other countries in the region. Brazil has developed non-financial measures including the Universities and Technical and Secondary Education Institutions Quota Scheme, which aims to ensure access to public

universities for students from low-income families. Half of the available places must be filled by students whose monthly household income per capita is equal to or less than 1.5 times the minimum wage, while the remaining places can be filled by students whose income is higher than 1.5 times the minimum wage. In addition, they must have attended secondary education in public educational institutions (Carneiro and Bridi, 2020; Government of Brazil, 2021).

In terms of gender, only five countries had public policies for inclusion aimed at addressing specific vulnerabilities among women: Argentina, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama and Peru (see annex 3 for more information). All of these policies made provision for scholarships and, like scholarships awarded on the basis of socioeconomic level, most of them covered tuition fees and in some cases living expenses. However, this benefit is granted to different target groups. In Mexico, the main criterion for accessing the benefit is to be a mother and head of the household; in Peru, the aim is to increase the enrolment of women in STEM subjects, as it is only intended for those studying science, technology, engineering or mathematics. In Ecuador and Panama, scholarships are available for single and teenage mothers, and for victims of gender-based violence. Argentina has taken an innovative approach in creating the PROGRESAR scholarships in 2020 (see annex 3 for more information), which are aimed at people of sexual diversity, particularly transvestite and transgender students, as a new priority group.

Chile and Colombia were identified as having developed inclusion policies based on geographical area (see annex 3 for more information). Chile has seven government funding policies that provide scholarships to students living in remote geographical areas. Some cover living expenses and others provide free accommodation. In Colombia, Regional Centres for Higher Education (CERES) have been set up by the Ministry of Education since 2003 with the objective of expanding higher education coverage beyond the cities. This is a non-financial measure that promotes more equitable access to higher education by geographical area. It has been difficult to implement, because despite high levels of enrolment initially, funding for it has been reduced by the national authorities and coverage has diminished as a result.

The issue of access to higher education for ethnic and racial groups tends to be embedded into policies targeting the lowest socioeconomic groups and students with different ethnic and racial backgrounds. There is a predominance of financial policies, and although this is an important step forward, it is not enough. As highlighted by Corbetta and others (2018), most of the policies make provision for scholarships that ensure access to higher education but nothing more. There is therefore a need to design and implement government policies aimed at retaining indigenous and Afrodescendants in higher education.

In relation to the question of policies for inclusion based on ethnicity and race, data was obtained for nine countries: Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay and Peru (see annex 3 for more information). The review carried out shows that all the countries selected have adopted numerous financial measures to promote inclusion, most of which make provision for scholarships. Of the 17 initiatives reviewed, all except one (in Uruguay) list the country's indigenous peoples as a priority group. One of the requirements in all these countries is that the student must provide official documentary evidence of his or her indigenous heritage. Seven initiatives place students benefiting from the scholarship into a specific group according to racial origin, the largest of these being Afrodescendants. Uruguay's policy is not restricted to financial measures and takes a more comprehensive approach to access to higher education for the Afrodescendent population. These initiatives form part of the programmes of Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Uruguay.

In terms of policies aimed at students with a disability, current data was obtained for nine countries: Argentina, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, El Salvador, Panama and Paraguay (see annex 3 for more information). This policy area is clearly in a category of its own, as there is a much greater diversity of policies, both financial and non-financial. With regard to non-financial policies,

Brazil, Chile, Colombia and El Salvador undertake to make adjustments and offer technical assistance to students with disabilities so that they can participate in the admissions tests for higher education. Only one programme, in Brazil (Inclusion Programme, see annex 3), was as providing resources to federal universities to help them adapt to the requirements of teaching and learning for students with disabilities, and this programme could serve as a reference for other countries in the region.

In the financial sphere, three programmes support tuition fee policies for people of low socioeconomic status, including students with disabilities, such as the Social Scholarship for Special Educational Needs in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the University for All Programme (ProUni) in Brazil and Credit for Communities with Constitutional Protection in Colombia. One of the advantages of the latter is that it provides funding for living expenses as well as tuition fees.

Finally, four programmes provide scholarships to partially fund living expenses, the only criteria being that students must be vulnerable in some way, such as low socioeconomic status or disability. Such programmes are important in the Plurinational State of Bolivia and in Ecuador, because although free higher education is offered in public institutions, students with disabilities incur additional costs. Similar programmes exist in Chile and Panama.

In summary, most of the public policies that have been implemented to promote the inclusion of vulnerable students in higher education consist of financial measures. Specifically, these are scholarships that cover tuition fees and, in some cases, living expenses. These findings align with those of Salmi and d'Addio, who state that governments focus on grants and scholarships to promote the inclusion in higher education institutions of students with low income, indigenous or Afrodescendent students, students from rural and remote geographical areas, female students, and students with disabilities (Salmi and d'Addio, 2020). Non-financial measures are rare, although a few were identified in Brazil, Chile, Colombia and El Salvador. It is imperative to design and implement public policies for inclusion in higher education in which non-financial measures complement financial ones.

Countries that were studied from the perspective of policies for inclusion in higher education should take into consideration that access is not the same as completion. In fact, there is evidence that students from low-income families are less likely to complete higher education than students from high-income families (Zhou, 2019). For the most part, students of low socioeconomic status have to combine their studies with a job and are unable to devote themselves fully to their academic work. While financial measures may enable them to access higher education, scholarships covering tuition fees are not enough to ensure that they complete their programme. Therefore, it is essential to include additional non-financial measures such as preparatory courses, mentoring and tutoring, and remedial courses.

Although most countries have legislation and regulations that promote inclusion in higher education, public policies are not specific enough in encouraging equitable access to higher university and technical education and training. The fact that a country has legislation regarding inclusion in higher education does not necessarily mean that there are State programmes and policies that support it in practice.

A final consideration is that this document focuses on public policies and does not include courses run by specific universities or technical training centres. The rationale for this is that public policies provide the best indication of the local agenda and countries' own perception (Lobelle, 2017) of their response to national issues in terms of the wellbeing of their citizens and vulnerable groups.

V. Challenges for equality and inclusion in higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean in the context of the pandemic

A. General context of the pandemic in the education sector

In early 2020, the COVID-19 pandemic resulted in almost total closure of the entire school and higher education system across the world, a situation that is unprecedented in the past century. Latin America and the Caribbean also imposed closures, including in higher education, leaving 97% of students facing total or partial closure of their institutions for an average of 56 weeks as of September 2021 (World Bank, 2021). The first year of the pandemic had a devastating effect on health and social conditions in many countries and on the global economy. In Latin America and the Caribbean, the gross domestic product contracted by 6.8% in 2020 —the largest decline in the region in 60 years (World Education Forum (WEF), 2021)— and there was a sharp fall in the employment rate and labour participation, which disproportionately affected the most vulnerable groups and women, whose labour participation dropped to 2002 levels (ECLAC, 2022).

Nearly two years on, in late 2021 and early 2022, the pandemic is still a major source of concern and uncertainty worldwide, with new variants resulting in recent months in the highest levels of infection of the entire period, with no clear plan for bringing it under control. In late 2021 a partial recovery reversed some of the previous year's decline, resulting in average growth for the region of 6.2%, even though 30% of the jobs lost the previous year had not been reinstated (ECLAC, 2022). The disproportionate effect on women is clear from their unemployment levels, which rose from 9.5% in 2019 to 11.8% in 2021, while the unemployment rate among men was 6.8% in 2019 and 8.1% in 2021; i.e. in terms of unemployment, the gender gap increased by one point. Projections for 2022 suggest that economic recovery will be slow, especially in South American countries, with unemployment rates remaining stagnant at 2021 levels (ECLAC, 2022).

In terms of reopening education, the region was the last to return to face-to-face learning and has kept distance learning systems in place for the longest period of time. A United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) report (2021a) of November 2021 showed that on average, schools in the region remained closed 71% of the time in the period 2020-2021, with significant variations reported by countries almost two years since the start of the pandemic. At the same time, a growing body of international literature has highlighted the significant deterioration in learning and social and emotional wellbeing caused by the closure of educational establishments, which disproportionately affected the most vulnerable students (Education Quality Agency, 2021; Christakis, Van Cleve and Zimmermann, 2020).

UNESCO's system for monitoring the reopening of higher education shows that, by mid-2021, education centres in 11 of the 22 countries in the region for which data was available remained closed, 10 countries were delivering education in hybrid form, and only in Nicaragua were all education centres delivering face-to-face education. The same report states that, by late 2021, only three countries had not reopened any education centres (Jamaica, Haiti and Honduras), 18 were delivering education in hybrid form, and only Uruguay had returned fully to face-to-face education.

In early 2020, against the backdrop of the mass closure of HEIs and schools at a time of great uncertainty, the higher education sector was ill-prepared to cope with the challenges facing it, particularly the urgent need to establish distance learning for most students and make the transition to online education (Salmi, 2020). However, the prolonged duration of the pandemic has meant that several measures, policies and strategies have been developed gradually by national education authorities and HEIs and through international cooperation to address areas where COVID-19 has the greatest impact on higher education, particularly in terms of learning, social and emotional wellbeing, funding, and supply and demand.

Moreover, the pandemic has deepened the sense of urgency regarding at least three pre-existing critical challenges that must be overcome in order to progress towards more inclusive and equitable higher education. Firstly, there is a need to ensure that improved access and coverage have the effect of increasing the higher graduation rate, because in social and economic terms, failure to obtain a technical or professional qualification from HEIs prevents the fulfilment of individual and societal expectations of higher education as mechanism for social mobility and wellbeing. Secondly, there is a need to ensure the quality of HEIs and training courses, because higher coverage rates among the most vulnerable groups in low-quality courses mean that, once again, the objectives of higher education for all will not be met. Finally, it is essential that the knowledge, competencies and skills acquired in higher education match the demands of the productive sector, where cross-cutting skills, digital competencies and a focus on lifelong learning play a central role, as they are essential for new jobs created by the industrial revolution 4.0 (OEI, 2021).

The response to these challenges should be guided by the same two principles behind efforts to address the early impacts of the pandemic. The first of these is to guarantee the right to education for all within a framework of equal opportunities and non-discrimination; and the second is the principle of leaving no student behind so as to prioritize support for those whose personal or socioeconomic circumstances make it more difficult for them to continue to engage in training in this new context (Peró, 2021).

B. Main effects and impacts of the pandemic on equality and inclusion in higher education: an ongoing evaluation

Work is being done to determine the effects of the pandemic on equality and inclusion in higher education and the international statistics required to assimilate the results are awaited. However, it is assumed that the pandemic will have enormous repercussions at an aggregate level, with students from the most

vulnerable groups being worst affected, particularly students with low incomes, students living in rural areas, students belonging to groups that have historically been excluded, and students with disabilities; it is anticipated that female students will encounter many difficulties (Salmi, 2020; IDB, 2021).

A recent study by the World Bank (2021) highlighted three dimensions in which COVID-19 will have negative effects on higher education, some of which can be said to have the greatest impact on inclusion in higher education.

Firstly, the effects that the pandemic has had, and will continue to have, on teaching and learning processes. The shift towards distance education, reduced access to connectivity and greater difficulties in accessing technological support create an enormous gap in access to the new format of virtual learning and the social and emotional support mechanisms that have become essential for many students (Salmi, 2020). Students in higher education who live in isolated and rural areas will be most affected, and face-to-face education is particularly important in areas with limited connectivity.

At the same time, the pandemic has resulted in a deterioration in the quality of education, because the new context requires teaching and learning strategies to be adjusted and mechanisms put in place to support teachers and students to deliver education in a virtual format and cope with higher levels of anxiety and stress. The impact of the pandemic is expected to be significantly worse in low-quality university and non-university centres, which tend to have a rudimentary infrastructure and limited academic resources, making it harder for them to adapt to the new context; in many cases, the only source of funding for such institutions is family contributions in the form of tuition fees.

To reflect on the events of the first year of the pandemic in terms of technological innovation in teaching and learning processes, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) organized the forum "Accelerated digitalization: what the pandemic taught education" (Torrico, 2021), which set out three core concepts that are relevant to the situation in the region. The first recognises that there were enormous challenges in higher education training even before the pandemic, because technology is revolutionizing jobs and professions in terms of the skills required and the ways in which they are learnt. The second was that the main barrier to online learning was not a lack of connectivity or digital devices, but universities' underpreparedness for the transition to online learning. The third concept relates to the fact that most online learning consisted of face-to-face classes delivered via digital platforms, without any adaptation in teaching approach or personal interaction. In conclusion, the digital transformation of higher education institutions must be prioritized as a matter of urgency, and there is a need to reinforce lessons learned from the pandemic and move beyond the idea that face-to-face university courses are the only way to acquire advanced skills.

One quality-related question that should be considered in addition to recently published reports is what will happen to the competencies of students in technical and technological higher education institutions offering courses of two to three years' duration (Sevilla, 2017) whose social composition tends to include more vulnerable students, in relative terms, than that of universities. Due to these courses being extended, all or most of the training for recent student cohorts will have been delivered as distance learning, which has made it more difficult to acquire the competencies and skills necessary to perform well in the workplace at a time when internships are not possible.

The second dimension in which the pandemic could have a differential impact on higher education students is entrance and graduation examinations. With regard to entrance exams, in countries such as Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru, examinations at the end of secondary school form the basis of applications to selective higher education institutions and courses that are more likely to be publicly funded (Ferreyra and others, 2017). Interruptions to teaching and learning, the predominance of distance learning, and the significant disparities between students according to socioeconomic or geographical attributes have accentuated unequal access to university centres and courses for the most vulnerable population groups.

With regard to graduation from higher education programmes, the socioeconomic problems encountered by countries and families, which disproportionately affect the most vulnerable groups, are expected to lead to an increase in the temporary or permanent dropout rate, especially those in the most vulnerable groups, who are more likely to leave higher education anyway. It is expected that these effects will increase over time, because prolonged periods of distance learning that have a differential effect on students, the drop in household income, and the precariousness of school-based education for new cohorts of students applying to and entering HEIs could adversely impact this indicator for years to come among vulnerable students.

Box 1

The role of universities in supporting the school system during the pandemic to reduce its negative impact on inclusion

In view of the profoundly negative effects of the pandemic on the school system and in order to ensure that progress is made towards achieving equal opportunities in higher education now and in the future, during the pandemic a number of universities in Latin America and the Caribbean took on the important task of mitigating the impact on schools and their pupils by adopting what Reimers (2021) calls the linkage and promotion of innovation between both levels of education in order to “better rebuild” the future of education. Examples of such cooperation in the region during the pandemic were discussed in a recent publication by Reimers and Marmolejo (2021). For example, Colombia's Escuela de Administración, Finanzas e Instituto Tecnológico (EAFIT) collaborated with the Ministry of Education to develop a digital teaching platform that would support the distance learning strategy during the pandemic. The Universities of Chile and the Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile took part in a social round table with the Government to develop responses to the pandemic. In Brazil, the Getulio Vargas Foundation worked with the municipal education secretariats on strategies to be implemented during the pandemic.

Source: F. Reimers (2021), “¿Cómo puede la universidad contribuir a construir un futuro mejor durante la pandemia de la COVID-19?” [“How can universities help to build a better future during the COVID-19 pandemic?”], *Revista Iberoamericana de la Educación*, 86(2), 9-28. Available [online] <https://doi.org/10.35362/rie8624690>; y F. Reimers y F. Marmolejo (Eds.) (2021), *University and School Collaborations during a Pandemic*. Switzerland: Springer.

The third dimension relates to the implications for supply and demand in higher education arising as a consequence of COVID-19. It is possible that public sector funding for higher education institutions will not keep pace with the extra resources needed to address the social and economic crisis caused by the pandemic, making it more difficult to retain the most vulnerable students in higher education. Moreover, the private sector offering, which accounts for more than half of the enrolment in the region, risks being reduced because in many countries in the region funding for the sector comes from tuition fees paid by families and is not backed by large scale public funding mechanisms such as scholarships or loans. Such a decline would matter less in countries where the private sector participates in the principal State funding mechanisms for students and families, as is the case in Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica and Peru which have a loan system (although only in Chile can private institutions participate extensively in State-funded high-coverage scholarships) (Ferreya, 2017).

A recent report by the IDB, the Pan American Association of Educational Credit Institutions (APICE) and the UNESCO International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (UNESCO-IESALC), analysed the financial response to the COVID-19 crisis in terms of higher education. Information was gathered from the national authorities responsible for the sector and from the funding bodies in charge of coordinating loans and scholarships, as well as from public and private universities. The evidence shows that five of the seven governments that took part in the study developed different funding modalities for higher education institutions, while the two countries that failed to put any mechanism in place did so for budgetary reasons (Costa Rica) or because they lacked the necessary competencies (Mexico). The financial support strategies adopted were the allocation of additional direct transfers (Colombia, Peru and Dominican Republic) or the

reallocation of resources (Chile). However, of the five countries with financial support programmes, only Chile and the Dominican Republic had mechanisms designed for private HEIs, even though more than 50% of enrolment in the region is in the private sector, which have higher numbers of vulnerable students than public institutions.

Furthermore, it is worth noting the efforts made by four of the seven governments reporting information for the study (Colombia, Costa Rica, Peru and the Dominican Republic) to develop new funding or financial relief strategies to facilitate the access of vulnerable students to the new academic cycle after the start of lockdown. For example, Colombia made an additional contribution to the national budget of nearly USD 30 million to provide continuity for vulnerable young people in public HEIs during the second semester of 2021 through the total or partial payment of tuition fees, an initiative that was expected to benefit 661,000 students (IDB, 2021).

The World Bank study asked higher education Educational Credit Institutions (ICE) about the measures they had put in place to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, and the responses indicated that such measures were aimed at promoting access and the retention of students in the subsequent academic cycle. It is important to note that, although there are many private ICEs, most of them have low coverage in terms of loan and scholarship support. Most relevant in terms of student coverage are the national public institutions that administer different loan schemes and scholarships with State support, for which students at public and private HEIs are eligible, as in the cases of Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica and Peru. In the case of the Dominican Republic, public sector scholarships are available for high-performing vulnerable students at public or private HEIs, and a non-profit organization administers loans for students attending public or private institutions.

Among the main measures implemented by the ICEs in the context of COVID-19, it is important to mention the introduction of a broader range of payment facilities for loans, as well as the offer of new short- and long-term loans with public funding, although the evidence showed low demand for these compared to the newly introduced non-reimbursable scholarship schemes, which were in high demand.

Of the seven countries in the study, all had publicly funded scholarship programmes in 2020, but only four allowed some of these to be allocated to students from private HEIs (Brazil, Chile, Peru and the Dominican Republic). In Peru and the Dominican Republic, the coverage of scholarships allocated across the total enrolment was very low at 6% and 0.9%, respectively; only in Chile was there a high level of coverage at 26% of total enrolment, while in Brazil it was 10.4%. With respect to State-funded loans, only Chile and Colombia had high coverage relative to the total enrolment in higher education in 2020 of 26% and 16%, respectively; in both cases, loans could be granted to students at public or private institutions.

Private and public HEIs were very active in implementing different mechanisms of financial and non-financial support to students, which included reductions in tuition fees, increased payment facilities (measures implemented by 90% of private universities and 60% of public universities participating in the study); clearance of debt, an increase in scholarships awarded by HEIs, and the allocation of emergency grants; the latter three measures were used less frequently and were more common in public HEIs. The commonest non-financial support strategy aimed at supporting the continuity of virtual academic study focused on improving connectivity and access to technological equipment for online education.

Finally, student demand for higher education will be affected. According to the World Bank report (2021), the biggest effect on inclusion will result from higher levels of unemployment and loss of household income due to the pandemic, with many families and students no longer being able to afford the high direct and indirect costs of higher education and increasing numbers of students prioritizing work over education for a period. Once again, this situation will become critical in countries with no or few public support mechanisms for private HEIs and is likely to result in a higher dropout rate and a lower rate of enrolment among vulnerable groups, widening the gaps discussed in the previous section

for the 2010-2019 period, although the situation may differ greatly from one country to another. The increased vulnerability of private HEIs to household finances is reflected in the fact that, on average, 84% of the funding for private universities in seven countries in the region comes from tuition fees paid by students (IDB, 2021).

Moreover, it is conceivable that the effects of the pandemic on the school system will indirectly affect demand for higher education, which would widen the gaps in higher education inclusion indicators in the countries of the region. This would have an impact on the quality of student learning and on school coverage rates, increasing dropout rates and reducing the likelihood of students completing secondary education and entering higher education. Based on recent developments in school systems in the region, Neidhöfer, Lüstig and Tommasi (2021) estimate that the secondary school completion rate could be reduced by as much as 14% compared to the pre-pandemic situation, an effect that will be more pronounced among students whose parents have a low level of education. These results are consistent with previous World Bank simulations at the global level (Azevedo and others, 2020), which estimated that in a scenario where education systems were closed for the entire year 2020, the dropout rate could increase by 15%.

Given that the higher secondary education graduation rate is the factor responsible for more than 78% of the increase in higher education coverage in the region among 18–24 year olds (Ferreya and others, 2017), the reduction in the secondary education completion rates represents a structural deterioration of the system that is likely to result in a significant drop in enrolment of new cohorts in higher education, especially in the most vulnerable groups. Moreover, the pandemic will not only result in unequal access of new cohorts to this level of education due to lower high school graduation rates, but the increased inequality in learning among students in the region will increase the gap in higher education graduation rates and future job opportunities with significant long-term effects, especially among lower- and middle-income groups, the indigenous and Afrodescendent population, and male students, who perform less well academically in school and in higher education compared to their female peers.

1. COVID-19 affects female students disproportionately

As mentioned above, the pandemic will have a profound effect on students who are already at a disadvantage in terms of completion of secondary education and retention in higher education, with male students more at risk than their female peers. However, numerous studies have shown that the pandemic has created enormous inequalities for women, both at school and in terms of access to and retention in higher education.

Women have borne the brunt of the pandemic, particularly those who are of an age to participate in the education system. Women are much more likely to shoulder the bulk of household chores and care for children and elderly and sick relatives. Being forced to stay at home for long periods has increased the risk of domestic violence towards women; this is reflected in women's observations and is more likely in low-income households, as highlighted by Frisancho and Vera-Cossío (2021). Moreover, the drastic effects of the pandemic on the labour market in 2020, which improved only slightly in 2021 and is not expected to recover to pre-pandemic levels until 2022 (ECLAC, 2022), were felt particularly acutely by women, who struggled to take advantage of educational opportunities, as did family members in female-headed households.

C. Background to developments in inclusive access to higher education in the first year of the pandemic

Statistics regarding the effect of the pandemic on higher education are being generated at the international level and for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. However, nine countries in the region (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay)

already have household survey results for the first year of the pandemic (2020). In these countries, the attendance rate is for the population between 20 and 25 years of age, since most students in higher education are in this age group and those who matriculated in 2020 are most likely to have left higher education as a result of the pandemic. Tables 17 to 20 show the trend in this indicator for 2019 and 2020, and the rate for 2015 is included in order to show the medium-term trend. This indicator reflects the early effects of the pandemic on the enrolment of the youngest students in higher education, both in general terms and according to the five inclusion indicators analysed previously: income quintile, gender, geographical area, ethnicity and race.⁴

The aggregate comparison of the simple average for the nine countries shows that there was no change in the attendance rate between the first year of the pandemic and the previous year; however, analysis of the individual situation in each country revealed a high degree of heterogeneity between the nine countries, with the attendance rate in 2020 reduced compared to 2019 in Argentina (-5.0 percentage points), Colombia (-1.0), Ecuador (-0.1), Paraguay (-2.1) and Peru (-3.5). In four of the five countries the attendance rate fell to pre-2015 levels. By contrast, the attendance rate in Chile and Uruguay increased between 2019 and 2020 for the entire population between 20 and 25 years of age.

A comparison of the evolution of different equality indicators for the five countries that experienced a decline in the aggregate attendance rate among the population aged 20 to 25 years for 2020-2019 reveals two additional aspects of the heterogeneity between countries. The first is that the decline in the attendance rate is observed across different dimensions of inclusion and is not confined to any particular one, which may reflect a structural deterioration in the higher education system as a result of the pandemic. Even when the decline in the attendance rate for the entire population between 20 and 25 years of age was minimal, as in Ecuador, it was linked to socioeconomic level, gender, geographical area and ethnicity and race.

Another feature shared by this group of countries is that the extent of the decline was consistent with attributes of greater vulnerability with the exception of gender, and in four countries the decline among men was more marked than that observed among women. In fact, the decline was more pronounced among students from the richest quintile than among the most vulnerable groups, and in urban areas more than rural ones. Data on ethnicity and race is only available for two of the five countries but shows that in Colombia the attendance rate among indigenous and Afrodescendent groups was similar to that for non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendent groups, while a decline was only observed among the indigenous population.

These initial partial results must be analysed with caution, partly because several countries in the region do not yet have statistical information available and also because the results for the second year of the pandemic (2021) may be worse than those for 2020, reflecting even lower levels of access and performance in higher education in the short and medium term (Salmi, 2020; World Bank, 2021).

These projections seem to be consistent with the first partial reports of the ministries of education or social development in some countries in the region regarding recent trends in secondary and higher education coverage, which have shown a decline in Brazil (UNICEF, 2021b), Colombia, Mexico (Fernandez and others, 2021) and Peru; Chile experienced a steep decline in total undergraduate enrolment in higher education in 2020, although this was reversed in 2021 (National Centre for Distance Learning (CNED), 2022).

⁴ For income and gender indicators, information is available for nine countries, and for geographical area, it is available for only eight. Few countries have representative data on ethnicity and race.

Table 17
Latin America (9 countries): evolution of the average higher education attendance rate of the population aged 20–25 years by extreme income quintiles during the first year of the pandemic
(Percentages)

	Total			Quintile I			Quintile V			Difference 2020–2019 <i>(in percentage points)</i>		
	2015	2019	2020	2015	2019	2020	2015	2019	2020	Total	Quintile I	Quintile V
Argentina	25.4	28.0	23.0	15.8	15.4	10.4	45.9	47.2	34.3	-5.0	-5.0	-12.9
Chile	33.0	32.3	35.6	26.5	27.5	27.9	48.2	44.2	53.9	3.3	0.4	9.6
Colombia	18.0	17.2	16.1	5.4	5.4	8.0	36.4	35.7	34.0	-1.0	2.6	-1.7
Costa Rica	24.0	24.4	24.9	5.0	8.3	10.1	55.4	49.2	51.6	0.4	1.8	2.4
Ecuador	17.4	21.6	21.5	6.6	8.3	10.5	32.5	39.1	37.7	-0.1	2.2	-1.5
Mexico	17.7	19.6	21.0	5.9	6.4	10.3	31.6	33.8	33.7	1.4	3.9	-0.1
Paraguay	22.3	23.0	20.9	6.5	6.8	8.2	44.4	42.5	35.1	-2.1	1.4	-7.4
Peru	27.6	30.3	26.8	12.4	17.6	16.4	39.8	45.4	37.8	-3.5	-1.2	-7.6
Uruguay	16.6	18.1	24.0	1.8	2.3	5.7	41.4	43.7	55.3	5.9	3.3	11.6
Simple average	22.4	23.8	23.8	9.5	10.9	11.9	41.7	42.3	41.5	-0.1	1.0	-0.8

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

Table 18
Latin America (9 countries): evolution of the average higher education attendance rate of the population aged 20–25 years by sex during the first year of the pandemic
(Percentages)

	Men			Women			Difference 2020–2019 <i>(in percentage points)</i>	
	2015	2019	2020	2015	2019	2020	Men	Women
Argentina	21.0	22.3	18.8	29.9	33.8	27.6	-5.0	-3.6
Chile	31.9	31.0	34.3	34.1	33.6	37.0	3.3	3.3
Colombia	17.4	17.0	15.7	18.6	17.3	16.5	-1.0	-1.3
Costa Rica	20.5	21.3	22.4	27.3	27.9	27.8	0.4	1.1
Ecuador	16.1	20.4	20.0	18.7	22.7	23.1	0.0	-0.3
Mexico	18.8	19.9	20.9	16.7	19.4	21.1	1.4	1.0
Paraguay	17.8	19.0	16.4	26.9	26.9	25.0	-2.1	-2.6
Peru	27.8	29.6	25.4	27.3	31.0	28.2	-3.5	-4.2
Uruguay	13.9	14.7	20.8	19.3	21.7	27.4	5.9	6.1
Simple average	20.6	21.7	21.6	24.3	26.0	26.0	-0.1	0.0

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

Table 19
Latin America (8 countries): evolution of the average higher education attendance rate of the population aged 20–25 years by geographical area during the first year of the pandemic
(Percentages)

	Urban			Rural			Difference 2020–2019 <i>(in percentage points)</i>	
	2015	2019	2020	2015	2019	2020	Urban	Rural
Chile	34.3	33.6	36.3	21.7	21.0	30.1	2.7	9.1
Colombia	21.7	20.5	19.9	3.7	3.7	4.5	-0.6	0.8
Costa Rica	27.6	26.5	26.3	13.8	18.4	20.9	-0.2	2.5
Ecuador	21.5	26.9	24.9	7.1	8.4	13.7	-2.0	5.3
Mexico	20.7	22.9	23.7	7.0	8.3	11.0	0.8	2.7
Paraguay	26.9	28.7	25.6	13.1	11.5	11.2	-3.2	-0.2
Peru	30.4	32.5	28.3	14.8	17.6	18.0	-4.2	0.4
Uruguay	17.0	18.3	24.4	9.0	15.3	15.5	6.1	0.2
Simple average	25.0	26.2	26.2	11.3	13.0	15.6	-0.1	2.6

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

Table 20
Latin America (5 countries): evolution of the average higher education attendance rate of the population aged 20–25 years by ethnicity and race during the first year of the pandemic
(Percentages)

	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendants			Indigenous			Afrodescendants			Difference 2020–2019 <i>(in percentage points)</i>		
	2015	2019	2020	2015	2019	2020	2015	2019	2020	Non-indigenous and non-Afrodescendants	Indigenous	Afrodescendants
Chile	33.5	32.7	36.0	28.1	28.9	33.0	...	...	...	3.3	4.0	...
Colombia	18.9	17.8	16.2	8.7	8.3	6.5	12.7	13.5	11.8	-1.7	-1.9	-1.7
Ecuador	18.9	23.5	23.8	4.1	9.9	9.0	8.3	11.6	11.6	0.3	-0.9	0.0
Mexico	19.7	22.3	22.9	13.0	12.6	15.9	...	...	...	0.6	3.3	...
Uruguay	17.5	18.9	25.9	10.9	9.6	18.1	2.3	6.3	7.7	7.1	8.5	1.4

Source: ECLAC, based on the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

VI. Challenges and proposals for strengthening inclusion in higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean in uncertain times

A. In the overall framework of the progress made on inclusion in higher education

1. Prioritizing the completion and quality of secondary education to improve inclusion in higher education

Studies of the region show that completion of secondary education is the most important factor in improving access to higher education among all student groups and is a necessary if not sufficient prerequisite for continuing in education. Despite the significant advances made in terms of this indicator, one in three young people in the region fails to complete this level of education, and there are significant differences between countries. At the same time, the rate of increase in enrolment slowed in the 2010s compared to the previous decade, which is why it is important to recognise that any major policy aimed at increasing coverage, equality and inclusion in higher education would need to build on the progress already made and that there is a need to act more quickly to ensure that all young people can complete secondary education as a minimum. An example of this is Uruguay, where the net coverage rate in higher education increased slowly over the period, with less than 50% of young people completing secondary school, even though the country has free public higher education with no academic selection process.

At the same time, the quality of learning, knowledge and skills acquired during primary and secondary education have a direct impact on ensuring the right to higher education with equal opportunities, both in terms of admissions at this level and in terms of the type and quality of the programme undertaken and the likelihood of completing it. At the end of the 2010s, an average of 51% of secondary school students participating in PISA in the countries of the region did not meet the

minimum standard of knowledge in reading required to enter the world of work; in mathematics, the percentage was 65.3%. There were significant disparities depending on the socioeconomic and cultural background of the students' families. There is therefore an urgent need to improve the quality of schooling, not only to promote the right to quality schooling for all children and young people in every country in the region, but also to ensure greater equity in higher education and maximize its role as an effective mechanism for social mobility and equal opportunities. Otherwise, access to and retention in the highest quality programmes will be highly dependent on socioeconomic background and the enormous origin gaps in the region will be replicated in higher education.

These two challenges are becoming more critical in the context of the pandemic, because students are dropping out of education temporarily or permanently, and the deterioration in learning among children, adolescents and young people in the school system will have a huge impact over the next few years in terms of entry to and retention in higher education for these cohorts of students. This is mainly due to the prolonged closure of the majority of educational institutions during 2020 and 2021, as well as the marked asymmetry between the most vulnerable students with respect to the availability of technological resources, environmental conditions, and the ability of families to support distance education during the pandemic. For example, a UNICEF report (2021b) on Brazil indicates that during 2020 about 3.7 million children between four and 17 years of age – 10% of the total number of children in this age group – were unable to receive distance education, despite being enrolled in the school system.

2. Making further progress on targeted policies for inclusion for vulnerable groups and general policies on access to higher education

During the last two decades most countries in the region have steadily increased their rates of access to and graduation from HEIs among vulnerable population groups. The accumulated evidence shows that these advances are due not only to higher secondary education completion rates, but also to numerous strategies aimed at increasing access to higher education for all and affirmative strategies and policies focusing on the most vulnerable groups in terms of income, rurality, indigenous and/or Afrodescendent origin, and disability. The results of these broad and targeted policies ensured that the gaps in coverage between vulnerable and non-vulnerable population groups did not widen.

The results demonstrate that it is important to strengthen targeted and affirmative strategies to address persistent and significant gaps. As discussed above, the largest gap pertains to socioeconomic background, with similar but narrower gaps pertaining to geographical area and ethnicity and race.

However, the countries with the highest overall coverage in higher education, such as Chile, Peru or the Plurinational State of Bolivia, have made rapid progress towards coverage among vulnerable groups, demonstrating that universal access strategies promote greater inclusion. Of relevance here is the principle of universalism that is sensitive to differences, as identified by ECLAC in the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development (ECLAC, 2020) and according to which public policies, including those relating to education, must adopt a dual perspective and promote coordinated progress. This encompasses universal access to social services following a rights-based approach, as well as policies that actively aim to overcome existing gaps and inequalities and ensure no one is left behind, and affirmative action to break down access barriers for individuals and groups experiencing different forms of inequality, discrimination and exclusion.

3. Gender equality poses significant challenges that are different for women and men

One of these challenges is the need to change institutional and cultural practices within schools and higher education institutions that affect the development opportunities and choices of female students at an early stage by creating enormous inequality in the distribution of wellbeing between men and women and by undermining the potential for economic and social development (ECLAC, 2019).

It is essential to change the cultural stereotypes embedded within families, educational centres and society as a whole, where patterns of bias are skewed towards women, reinforcing the lower participation of men in careers and jobs in social fields such as education and health and of women in careers with increased future demand that offer better salaries, such as those linked to STEM subjects. There is an urgent need to make rapid progress in rebalancing the distribution of unpaid labour within families, both in terms of domestic chores and the care of children, adolescents, elderly people and those with disabilities. Failure to move towards policies of shared social responsibility for care will hinder improvement in women's quality of life and restrict equitable opportunities for women to work; the new context of the industrial revolution 4.0 could exacerbate the inequalities affecting women instead of providing an opportunity for more equitable development (ECLAC, 2019).

In addition, in higher education there is a need to promote the institutional policies of higher education centres as well as specific policies on STEM subjects from a gender perspective that integrates affirmative action and gender mainstreaming (Muñoz, 2021). Such policies include narrowing the gap in the recruitment of women academics in university degree courses, particularly in subjects where women are underrepresented, and greater participation in leadership positions in HEIs, including a larger number of women rectors. It is important to ensure that the demands of an academic and scientific career are compatible with family responsibilities and encourage institutional efforts to promote a more equitable distribution of family duties between men and women, and not just an adjustment that favours one gender.

Moreover, the UNESCO-IESALC 2021 report proposes to respond to men's lower level of interest in school and higher education and place more emphasis on improving the learning environment, which negatively affects men to a greater extent. Similarly, consideration should be given to working conditions, productivity and salaries, as well as the social modification of stereotypes, so that over time a greater proportion of men enrol in technical and professional courses relating to social functions and care, areas in which women have primary responsibility.

4. Making more rapid progress in quality assurance in higher education

The massification of higher education must be accompanied by strenuous efforts to raise quality standards in HEIs and their vocational and technical courses. Moreover, action must be taken to ensure that courses equip students with skills required for the private and public productive sector, promote cross-cutting skills that facilitate integration into new jobs, and foster the capacity to continue learning throughout life and take an active part in the collective challenges of the time. Such efforts should focus primarily on courses attended by vulnerable students, otherwise higher education cannot fulfil its potential to improve social mobility, equal opportunities and greater productivity for society as a whole.

The highest priority, therefore, is to make progress in the evaluation, reconfiguration and improvement of distance courses, which are one of the main modalities of coverage in many countries in the region, particularly among the vulnerable students. In addition, COVID-19 has resulted in distance education becoming the universal methodology for the continued delivery of higher education, and the situation post-pandemic will not simply revert to previous modalities without harnessing the innovations of the past two years.

In addition, it is important to identify mechanisms and best practice to reduce the dropout rate and the excessive duration of higher education courses in some countries in the region, factors that disproportionately affect vulnerable students. Progress on these issues will allow for greater efficiency and equity in higher education, reducing its public and private cost and increasing programme coverage.

5. Lifelong learning

Lifelong learning is a major challenge for higher education in terms of upskilling and reskilling. More and more young people and adults need continuous training because the increasing automation and digitization of production processes demand increasing numbers of technicians and professionals who possess the skills required for jobs in technological fields (mainly cloud computing, artificial intelligence and data analysis), and the pandemic has accelerated the need to improve digital skills across the entire workforce. In this sense, training does not end with a higher education degree, but must be continuously updated with new skills to ensure effective performance in jobs that are constantly changing. It seems appropriate to consider shorter, sequential courses and strategies for large-scale continuous training that would facilitate work transitions and harness the opportunities and changes in the industry and the labour market.

Universities, technological centres and interinstitutional partnerships are in a unique position to facilitate this change, promote the transition to the labour market, reduce unemployment resulting from digitalization and encourage social development (UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning (UNESCO-IUIL), 2020), but the evidence before and during the pandemic shows that very few HEIs are reconfiguring their training offering to equip future graduates with better skills or empower them to acquire new ones so that they can adapt to rapid shifts in the labour market (OEI, 2020).

6. The strategic role of short technical and vocational guidance programmes

The evidence for OECD countries shows that close to half of enrolment is in technical courses, many of them of short duration; however, in the region, these currently only account for 15% of total enrolment. Evidence for some countries, such as Peru and Chile, indicates that these courses may be more profitable than university courses. Such courses tend to have many positive features: they are of shorter duration and less expensive, they can be linked with other, more advanced follow-up courses to ensure continuous training or with secondary vocational training courses, and they have strong links with the labour market that allow for authentic experiences such as internships.

At the same time, many challenges identified before the pandemic must be addressed in order to establish technical and vocational training, such as: i) the need for coordinated efforts between actors in the education system and the productive sectors to identify skills demand and strengthen systems of labour information and intermediation that are responsive to gender inequalities; ii) the need to ensure interinstitutional coordination and the representativeness of relevant actors as well as mechanisms for skills certification and the evaluation and monitoring of programmes; and iii) the need to foster closer institutional links between public and private providers and create synergies between them.

B. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and the progress made on inclusion in higher education

1. Closing the learning gaps caused by the pandemic and reintegrating students who have dropped out of school

There is an urgent need to define national strategies aimed at reversing the enormous effects of the pandemic on learning and on school dropout rates, otherwise a whole generation will pay the price over a lifetime. In striving to meet these objectives and in addition to national policies, it is important to develop interinstitutional partnerships between subnational education authorities and education institutions to develop effective networks for collaboration and learning. HEIs could play a uniquely positive role in supporting, designing, and implementing certain strategies. There are different forms of remedial education, such as individualized mentoring, intensive support courses, temporary streaming according to learning level, distance learning reinforcement, and social and emotional

support to improve the self-esteem and self-efficacy of those students most likely to drop out of education. It is important to establish personal links to students who had to drop out of formal education, identify the factors that might enable them to resume their studies, support them in returning to school and high school, and strengthen the initiatives of “second chance” schools. Consideration should also be given to support initiatives offered by HEIs for students entering higher education who have significant gaps in the knowledge and skills they should have acquired during secondary education and who have not been able to progress to the required level due to school closures, particularly students coming from vocational secondary education.

2. Closing the gap in skills that were not acquired during HEI training as a result of the pandemic

The OEI (2021) set out an interesting proposal that makes sense in the context of the pandemic regarding the role of continuing education in addressing gaps in technical and professional skills and competencies by focusing on micro-credentials, many of which are now offered online with flexible learning modalities (Kato, Galan-Murs and Weko, 2020). Some micro-credentials can be acquired through massive open online courses (MOOCs) that have become more relevant in recent years. Another modality is “bootcamps” or intensive courses that prepare students for entering the labour market, for example in areas such as computer programming. However, few universities currently offer these forms of training. Another relevant initiative in the context of the pandemic that should be strengthened in future to allow for greater flexibility in educational trajectories is the development of mechanisms of accreditation for skills acquired in formal and non-formal settings.

3. Finding innovative funding solutions while public resources are restricted

A recent joint report by the IDB, IAEC and UNESCO-IESALC (IDB, 2021) regarding the financial management of higher education during the pandemic in the countries of the region describes the commitment of governments, lending institutions and HEIs to identify emergency measures aimed at ensuring the continuity of education during and after the initial phase of the pandemic. However, the organizations that coordinated the study highlight the importance of making structural changes to ensure that post-emergency funding requirements are sustainable, especially in the context of greater financial restrictions imposed by the national authorities and within families, which require innovative solutions that do not impact negatively on the progress made in terms of coverage and equity in the region over the past two decades.

Different measures have been proposed in terms of government funding. Firstly, it has been proposed to make innovative adjustments to the subsidies awarded to HEIs with the aim of widening the participation of public and private bodies and, secondly, to extend the terms and reduce the interest rates on loans offered through HEIs or directly to students.

Higher education institutions are encouraged to diversify their funding sources to reduce financial risk, for example, by providing services and consultancies to public and private institutions. It has also been suggested that they expand their educational offering by harnessing new technologies and distance education and promoting the development of shorter courses and digital qualifications that fulfil the requirements of the public and private productive sector.

Moreover, it is recommended that governments and entities providing financial support to students incorporate innovative and sustainable financial instruments, including through the implementation of scholarships, with shared responsibility for encouraging student access and retention; improve joint-debtor (guarantor) models for low-income families; promote loans with co-payment contingent on the beneficiary's income; and improve systems in higher education that provide information on the labour market, as well as early warning systems for at-risk students and psychological and academic support in order to increase retention and graduation rates among the most vulnerable groups.

4. Strengthening inter-institutional cooperation

To learn from best practice, improve coordination in the use of resources and improve access to, retention in and completion of programmes among all students, especially the most vulnerable. Several valuable experiences were developed before and during the pandemic that should be replicated in the medium term. A Colombian initiative mentioned in the IDB, IAEC and UNESCO-IESALC report (IDB, 2021) fosters links between the Government, HEIs and the educational credit institution (ICETEX) to coordinate a comprehensive support strategy during the pandemic consisting of strategies relating to: i) regulations that allowed for flexibility and focused on the obligations of HEIs in the context of the pandemic; ii) digital preparedness plans within different public and private HEIs; iii) mental health programmes for students of public and private HEIs; iv) the creation of hardship funds and guarantee funds to which private HEIs may apply, new ICETEX educational credit facilities, and aid and fee-free plans for public universities.⁵

To identify best practices and innovations to overcome the challenges of inclusion in higher education so that the extraordinary initiatives of some higher education institutions can be adapted and scaled up in other HEIs, it is essential to strengthen the institutional management of national and subnational higher education authorities in the relevant countries. For example, in 2021, the rector of the University of Minas Gerais in Brazil described the enormous progress her institution had made on inclusion over the past few years: while only 17% of 25-year-olds had access to higher education nationally, in her state 67.4% had access in 2019 and enrolment in federal universities more than doubled between 2015 and 2018, with high coverage among the most vulnerable and among Afrodescendants (UNESCO-IESALC, 2020b).

The pandemic has facilitated the development of many real-time opportunities to share experiences and best practice, develop new skills, and identify challenges and possible effective responses to them. In the region, UNESCO, UNESCO-IESALC, ECLAC, IDB, OEI and other institutions have excelled at such initiatives, although several important interinstitutional networks already existed with the aim of strengthening inclusion in higher education in the region, such as the Inter-university Network for Higher Education and Indigenous and Afrodescendent Peoples in Latin America (ESIAL) and MetaRed (Fundación Universia's network for university digitalization at the Ibero-American level). These efforts should be maintained and strengthened in the region to facilitate the establishment of regular monitoring and evaluation systems, as well as the identification of mechanisms to promote and facilitate their replicability.

It is also essential to maintain and build on the lessons learned during the past few years in the interinstitutional coordination of different social sectors, for example, the coordination of ministries and public services in the health and education sectors, and entities providing social support to the most vulnerable populations. A crisis like the pandemic challenges public institutions to respond with consistency, and the region has experienced this in areas such as priority vaccination for educational communities, strategies for the gradual reopening of face-to-face learning, and —of particular importance in the current phase— remedial learning and restoring social and emotional wellbeing among students, their families and those who work in education.

⁵ Since 2010, the Pan American Association of Educational Credit Institutions, in partnership with ICETEX in Colombia, joined forces with 20 HEIs to design and implement the MAIE (Comprehensive Student Support Model) project, in which they developed shared strategies for providing student mentoring in order to reduce the dropout rate and offering discounts on tuition fees to increase coverage and retention in higher education.

5. Preparing for future uncertainty

As we enter 2022, it is not clear how COVID-19 will evolve, but experts predict that it will become an epidemic with less severe effects on health and society. It is vital to be prepared to respond effectively to adverse shocks and mitigate the enormous costs of the pandemic, which will continue to affect the most vulnerable population groups disproportionately, reversing many the gains made in equality and inclusion in school and higher education. It is essential to universalize digital competencies to develop distance teaching and learning processes, ensure widespread connectivity and provide high-quality electronic devices for all students across all geographical areas. Furthermore, there is a need to strengthen institutional, financial and management mechanisms so that any response to new situations is comprehensive, timely, and not dependent on the responses put forward by individual institutions, as this only serves to deepen the disparities and exclusion addressed by previous initiatives. In the context of an increasingly uncertain future dominated by major collective challenges, it is important to strengthen collaboration between different ministries and different levels of government—particularly in the fields of health, education and social development—, establish public-private entities, and reinforce the role of research and university centres in addressing critical challenges such as vaccine production, distance learning and learning recovery in a short timeframe.

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Annexes

Annex 1

Methodological design

Given that the document delves into the review of inclusion-oriented policies, next comes the description of the search strategy used.

First, a bibliographic search was conducted using academic search engines, specifically metasearch engines from Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile and the University of Chile, and articles from indexed journals were selected. Search terms were initially general and became increasingly specific, which is why the first were “inclusion”, “higher education”, “tertiary education”, “equity” and “public policies”, which were also entered in English and Portuguese. The period considered in the search went from 2015 until the present day, with a view to knowing the most recent practices and policies on educational inclusion in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Google Scholar was also used to conduct the same search detailed previously.

Methodologically, it was based on the Interuniversity Development Centre’s “Educación superior en Iberoamérica 2016” (“Higher education in Ibero-America – 2016 Report”) edited by Brunner and Miranda. The authors’ work was based on national reports drafted by specialists in the field from the following countries: Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay. All are available on the website of the Interuniversity Development Centre (CINDA) and were reviewed in the search for inclusive higher education policies in the fields mentioned previously, with a focus on whether other categories of students in vulnerable situations emerged. As the reports were from the year 2016, it was analysed whether the public policies found were still in force. Those that were not were excluded and others that had been incorporated in recent years were included. Additionally, e-mails were sent to various researchers who had contributed to drafting the national reports to request further information than what could be found online.

Then, “inclusion higher education Latin America and the Caribbean” was entered, both in Spanish and English. Some documents from international organizations such as UNESCO, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the Lumina Foundation were found. Another search strategy was to review the bibliographies given in articles and reports found.

Finally, a search was conducted by country, both at a general level, e.g., “public policies inclusion higher education Colombia”, and a specific one, e.g., “National Programme for University Grants Argentina”. The search was carried out both in Spanish and in English (and, in the case of Brazil, in Portuguese). In many cases, the search led to State institutions and, in most, to the corresponding ministry of education. It should be noted that a great deal of the information contained in this report was obtained from the websites of some countries’ ministries of education.

No information was available online for most of the Caribbean countries. Only in the case of Jamaica was pertinent information on inclusive higher education programmes and policies identified.

Secondly, for the additional quantitative analyses on the evolution of access and graduation in higher education programmes according to different criteria of exposure to the greater vulnerability of the population, ECLAC conducted specific estimates for the years 2000, 2010 and 2019, on the basis of household surveys available for 15 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Two indicators were considered by ECLAC. The first was the attendance rate for the population aged 20 to 25, as well as that aged 26 to 30 and 31 to 35, which made up more than 90% of the students of the region’s undergraduate higher education institutions. The second was the graduation rate for programmes in higher education institutions lasting at least four years, mainly offered by universities, for the same age groups, or in other

words, the percentage of the population in that age group that earned professional qualifications of that nature every year. The idea was to supplement the information on access with that on graduation, given that dropout in higher education institutions is a major issue in the region, all the more intense within a population that meets some criteria associated with more unequal development opportunities. In any case, the indicators were considered on the basis of the wider answers to reflect the national average and not merely the survey sample.

There were five criteria for reviewing inclusion in higher education: i) income levels, for which the previous indicators for the population of the first and fifth income quintiles were considered, i.e., the poorest and wealthiest 20% of the population; ii) sex, considering the differences between men and women; iii) geographic aspects, determining the differences between urban and rural places of residence; iv) ethnic status and v) racial status. These last two characteristics were jointly analysed, differentiating whether the population identified itself as belonging to an indigenous or Afrodescendent group, compared to the population that had neither of those two characteristics. Contrary to the mapping of existing inclusive policies, in the quantitative section, an analysis on members of the population with disabilities was not included, as that information was not available for the statistical analysis. Given that the survey samples, especially in relation to ethnicity and race were not representative for some of these characteristics, or even applied in each country for all the periods analysed, some analyses were not conducted for some countries. For example, there is no information comparing the evolution of the indicators in rural areas in Argentina.

With a view to analysing some of the first effects of the pandemic on the attendance rate in higher education, similar estimates were carried out for the countries in which surveys were conducted in 2020 (Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay) so as to compare the evolution of inclusive processes with the year preceding the pandemic (2019). The estimate of that indicator for 2015 is included with a view to comparing these results with the track they were on before the pandemic. The analyses were carried out only for the net enrolment rate within the population aged 20 to 25, as it is in younger groups that greater impact is hoped for, given that they are the ones that include the greatest number of students enrolled in higher education in the region.

Both for the general evolution and that achieved to search for some of the first effects of the pandemic on enrolment in higher education, the indicators were analysed for the simple average of the countries in the region on the basis of the information available, as well as at the country level. This gives the best picture of the differences between the countries in the region, as it means the average does not overwhelmingly represent the largest countries.

Annex 2

Descriptive tables of the situation in the countries of the region by condition and age group

Table A1
Latin America (14 countries): evolution of the attendance rate in higher education for the population
aged 20 to 25 by income quintile extremes, 2000–2019
(Percentages)

	Income quintiles						Difference 2019–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Quintile I			Quintile V			Quintile I	Quintile V
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019		
Argentina	13.1	15.6	15.4	42.8	41.5	47.2	2.3	4.4
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	1.5	12.7	13.2	31.4	41.6	49.3	11.6	17.9
Brazil	1.9	4.9	5.1	34.8	36.1	40.4	3.1	5.6
Chile	5.1	15.8	27.5	43.2	53.5	44.2	22.4	1.0
Colombia	1.8	3.1	5.4	32.6	37.3	35.7	3.5	3.1
Costa Rica	...	4.7	8.3	...	48.3	49.2	...	...
Ecuador	4.3	9.4	8.3	29.3	42.5	39.1	4.0	9.8
El Salvador	1.9	1.5	3.7	35.7	38.0	39.2	1.8	3.5
Honduras	0.9	0.2	0.4	23.2	27.1	36.0	- 0.4	12.7
Mexico	1.4	5.1	6.4	30.5	31.9	33.8	5.0	3.3
Panama	3.7	5.4	8.0	40.1	31.5	38.1	4.4	- 2.0
Paraguay	1.2	2.6	6.8	25.1	32.6	42.5	5.6	17.4
Peru	3.8	8.4	17.6	29.7	40.6	45.4	13.8	15.7
Uruguay	2.0	1.9	2.3	40.4	47.0	43.7	0.4	3.3
Simple average	3.3	6.5	9.2	33.8	39.2	41.7	5.9	7.9

Source: The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of the Household Survey Databank (BADEHOG).

Table A2
Latin America (14 countries): evolution of the attendance rate in higher education for the population
aged 26 to 30 by income quintile extremes, 2000–2019
(Percentages)

	Income quintiles						Difference 2019–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Quintile I			Quintile V			Quintile I	Quintile V
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019		
Argentina	4.0	7.1	7.4	16.0	19.7	26.5	3.4	10.5
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	0.0	2.8	2.7	23.1	18.5	18.5	2.7	- 4.6
Brazil	1.0	1.9	2.0	15.5	15.6	18.9	1.1	3.4
Chile	0.9	5.1	6.5	12.4	14.7	13.7	5.7	1.2
Colombia	0.5	1.0	1.6	12.3	17.6	16.7	1.2	4.4
Costa Rica	...	1.3	2.3	...	24.6	26.3	...	...
Ecuador	1.8	4.4	4.6	13.3	16.7	12.6	2.8	- 0.7
El Salvador	0.3	0.0	0.5	14.0	16.4	13.5	0.2	- 0.5
Honduras	0.2	0.0	0.3	14.0	15.9	15.8	0.2	1.8
Mexico	0.0	0.5	0.8	7.0	7.5	7.9	0.8	0.9
Panama	2.7	1.7	3.2	19.0	12.8	12.5	0.5	- 6.5
Paraguay	0.8	0.0	3.2	15.9	20.7	23.5	2.4	7.6
Peru	0.2	2.0	1.1	11.0	14.0	15.1	0.9	4.1
Uruguay	1.0	0.7	0.8	21.5	30.3	19.7	- 0.2	- 1.7
Simple average	1.0	2.0	2.6	15.0	17.5	17.2	1.6	2.2

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A3
Latin America (14 countries): evolution of the attendance rate in higher education for the population aged 30 to 35 by income quintile extremes, 2000–2019
(Percentages)

	Income quintiles						Difference 2019–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Quintile I			Quintile V			Quintile I	Quintile V
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019		
Argentina	1.8	2.5	2.9	7.8	9.6	10.9	1.1	3.1
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	0.0	1.2	0.3	11.4	8.4	7.7	0.3	- 3.7
Brazil	0.9	1.1	1.2	9.9	9.5	13.1	0.3	3.2
Chile	0.1	1.1	2.2	3.7	6.2	5.4	2.0	1.7
Colombia	0.2	0.5	1.0	5.6	9.7	10.7	0.8	5.1
Costa Rica	...	0.2	0.6	...	16.9	16.2	...	...
Ecuador	1.0	1.4	0.2	5.2	10.3	6.9	- 0.8	1.7
El Salvador	0.0	0.0	0.2	6.7	3.9	4.2	0.2	- 2.5
Honduras	0.1	0.0	0.0	6.4	8.6	6.9	- 0.1	0.5
Mexico	0.0	0.1	0.0	6.1	4.1	4.8	0.0	- 1.3
Panama	0.5	1.2	1.2	10.7	8.8	6.0	0.7	- 4.7
Paraguay	0.0	0.0	0.3	7.4	9.5	11.8	0.3	4.4
Peru	0.0	0.7	0.4	7.1	8.6	7.0	0.4	- 0.1
Uruguay	0.2	0.2	0.2	8.0	15.2	9.4	0.0	1.4
Simple average	0.4	0.7	0.8	7.4	9.2	8.6	0.4	1.2

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A4
Latin America (15 countries): evolution of the percentage of the population aged 20 to 25 that completed a four-year or more higher education programme by income quintile extremes, 2000–2020

	Income quintiles						Difference 2020–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Quintile I			Quintile V			Quintile I	Quintile V
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020		
Argentina	4.1	3.4	4.2	19.8	23.6	27.0	0.1	7.2
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	0.0	3.4	7.7	14.5	22.2	22.7	7.7	8.2
Brazil	0.2	1.9	1.7	18.8	32.5	29.5	1.5	10.7
Chile	1.5	2.8	7.3	18.9	23.3	27.4	5.8	8.5
Colombia	0.8	0.8	3.5	22.1	27.0	25.5	2.7	3.4
Costa Rica	1.3	1.1	1.9	18.8	29.1	19.2	0.6	0.4
Dominican Republic	1.1	0.8	1.3	10.3	15.7	14.7	0.2	4.4
Ecuador	1.7	1.5	3.7	16.1	26.6	17.4	2.0	1.2
El Salvador	1.1	1.0	1.0	17.8	20.7	29.7	- 0.1	11.9
Honduras	0.2	0.1	0.0	12.1	11.3	15.7	- 0.2	3.6
Mexico	0.2	2.2	4.5	12.2	25.1	26.7	4.2	14.6
Panama	0.1	1.8	2.0	20.0	23.2	26.9	1.9	6.9
Paraguay	0.0	1.2	2.2	7.7	14.3	21.7	2.2	14.0
Peru	2.5	6.3	23.1	35.5	40.6	49.0	20.7	13.5
Uruguay	0.5	0.1	0.5	14.6	13.5	13.8	0.1	- 0.8
Simple average	1.0	1.9	4.3	17.3	23.2	24.5	3.3	7.2

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A5
Latin America (15 countries): e of the percentage of the population aged 26 to 30 that completed a four-year or more higher education programme by income quintile extremes, 2000–2020

	Income quintiles						Difference 2020–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Quintile I			Quintile V			Quintile I	Quintile V
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020		
Argentina	7.1	6.6	11.5	40.8	53.8	41.5	4.4	0.7
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	0.0	2.7	14.2	34.7	48.5	49.7	14.2	15.0
Brazil	0.3	1.3	2.8	29.9	46.4	56.2	2.5	26.3
Chile	1.6	3.0	14.0	41.1	53.7	71.5	12.4	30.4
Colombia	1.2	1.2	5.6	39.5	42.8	41.9	4.3	2.4
Costa Rica	0.7	0.7	2.8	35.1	49.4	40.5	2.1	5.4
Dominican Republic	1.0	1.2	2.8	27.4	35.0	39.4	1.7	11.9
Ecuador	2.0	4.5	5.0	31.4	47.5	45.0	3.0	13.6
El Salvador	1.2	0.3	1.9	38.0	37.3	46.7	0.7	8.7
Honduras				18.9	21.7	30.8	...	11.9
Mexico	0.1	1.3	4.1	34.0	52.2	55.1	4.0	21.0
Panama	2.1	0.8	3.5	41.6	48.3	53.6	1.4	12.0
Paraguay	0.0	2.3	3.6	20.6	27.5	45.3	3.6	24.7
Peru	2.2	7.2	17.5	49.8	59.6	68.3	15.3	18.5
Uruguay	0.2	0.3	1.4	34.9	36.3	37.1	1.2	2.2
Simple average	1.4	2.4	6.5	34.5	44.0	48.2	5.1	13.6

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A6
Latin America (15 countries): evolution of the percentage of the population aged 31 to 35 that completed a four-year or more higher education programme by income quintile extremes, 2000–2020

	Income quintiles						Difference 2020–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Quintile I			Quintile V			Quintile I	Quintile V
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020		
Argentina	11.4	2.7	3.6	50.9	56.5	62.2	- 7.8	11.3
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	0.0	3.7	7.5	35.1	49.3	59.2	7.5	24.1
Brazil	0.2	1.3	1.9	33.2	47.3	60.8	1.7	27.6
Chile	0.8	1.7	10.9	44.4	53.4	72.4	10.1	28.0
Colombia	0.5	1.0	5.0	40.9	46.4	43.6	4.5	2.7
Costa Rica	1.5	0.2	3.7	39.1	51.8	51.4	2.3	12.3
Dominican Republic	1.5	1.2	4.5	34.0	37.7	32.5	3.0	- 1.5
Ecuador	1.4	2.6	5.3	27.7	38.7	44.3	3.9	16.5
El Salvador	1.0	0.2	1.3	40.8	38.3	44.8	0.3	4.0
Honduras	0.1	0.0	0.3	22.0	27.8	30.5	0.2	8.5
Mexico	0.0	1.2	3.1	29.2	45.3	54.3	3.1	25.2
Panama	0.7	2.5	1.5	41.8	53.4	57.7	0.8	15.9
Paraguay	0.0	0.0	3.8	23.8	28.9	50.7	3.8	26.9
Peru	1.6	5.8	8.8	50.4	58.6	61.2	7.1	10.8
Uruguay	0.5	0.7	1.5	35.2	37.7	41.2	1.0	6.0
Simple average	1.4	1.7	4.2	36.6	44.7	51.1	2.7	14.6

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A7
Latin America (14 countries): evolution of the attendance rate in higher education
for the population aged 20 to 25 by sex, 2000–2019
(Percentages)

	Sex						Difference 2019–2000 <i>(in percentage points)</i>	
	Men			Women			Men	Women
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019		
Argentina	20.0	20.4	22.3	27.5	29.6	33.8	2.3	6.3
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	15.8	28.0	33.7	17.1	27.8	35.6	17.9	18.5
Brazil	10.6	13.4	15.3	12.7	17.4	19.1	4.7	6.3
Chile	21.2	29.1	31.0	18.1	30.5	33.6	9.7	15.5
Colombia	12.6	15.7	17.0	12.0	15.9	17.3	4.4	5.3
Costa Rica	...	21.1	21.3	...	25.3	27.9	...	...
Ecuador	13.5	20.3	20.4	15.8	26.2	22.7	6.9	7.0
El Salvador	13.5	13.3	17.1	13.8	16.8	17.5	3.5	3.7
Honduras	7.8	9.6	14.1	9.3	12.0	14.1	6.3	4.9
Mexico	12.9	16.6	19.9	13.3	15.8	19.4	6.9	6.1
Panama	15.4	14.8	18.5	21.8	21.0	26.6	3.1	4.9
Paraguay	9.0	11.8	19.0	14.6	19.0	26.9	10.0	12.3
Peru	14.5	25.1	29.6	16.9	24.5	31.0	15.1	14.1
Uruguay	11.2	15.0	14.7	18.6	21.7	21.7	3.4	3.1
Simple average	13.7	18.2	21.0	16.3	21.7	24.8	7.3	8.5

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A8
Latin America (14 countries): evolution of the attendance rate in higher education
for the population aged 26 to 30 by sex, 2000–2019
(Percentages)

	Sex						Difference 2019–2000 <i>(in percentage points)</i>	
	Men			Women			Men	Women
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019		
Argentina	9.4	11.6	14.6	9.0	15.4	16.8	5.2	7.8
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	13.3	12.8	11.2	8.0	10.1	10.4	- 2.1	2.4
Brazil	5.3	6.8	8.5	6.3	8.5	9.7	3.2	3.5
Chile	6.1	10.7	10.7	4.2	9.5	10.2	4.6	5.9
Colombia	5.1	7.6	7.7	3.8	7.6	7.9	2.6	4.1
Costa Rica	...	11.4	12.4	...	12.1	13.5	...	...
Ecuador	6.3	8.9	8.1	5.9	9.4	6.3	1.8	0.4
El Salvador	5.3	5.3	5.4	5.1	5.4	5.3	0.0	0.2
Honduras	3.8	5.0	5.1	4.8	5.4	8.2	1.4	3.4
Mexico	3.9	3.3	4.1	2.0	2.6	3.9	0.2	1.9
Panama	8.8	5.0	7.2	10.3	8.7	9.2	- 1.5	- 1.1
Paraguay	6.3	6.9	10.6	5.7	9.7	11.0	4.4	5.3
Peru	5.5	8.4	9.6	4.7	6.7	7.6	4.1	3.0
Uruguay	8.1	8.4	8.1	10.0	12.9	10.0	0.0	0.1
Simple average	6.7	8.0	8.8	6.1	8.9	9.3	2.1	3.2

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A9
Latin America (14 countries): evolution of the attendance rate in higher education for the population aged 31 to 35 by sex, 2000–2019
(Percentages)

	Sex						Difference 2019–2000 <i>(in percentage points)</i>	
	Men			Women			Men	Women
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019		
Argentina	4.2	5.2	7.1	3.9	6.3	8.7	2.9	4.7
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	3.7	5.1	4.4	4.5	4.5	3.9	0.6	- 0.7
Brazil	3.4	4.0	4.8	4.6	5.3	6.9	1.4	2.4
Chile	1.8	3.8	3.5	1.0	2.7	3.9	1.6	2.8
Colombia	2.1	3.7	4.6	2.1	4.3	4.5	2.6	2.4
Costa Rica	...	5.7	6.2	...	7.2	9.0	...	...
Ecuador	3.0	4.4	2.8	3.1	4.5	3.0	- 0.2	0.0
El Salvador	2.5	1.5	2.5	2.0	1.1	1.1	0.0	- 0.9
Honduras	2.8	2.8	1.6	1.7	3.1	3.6	- 1.3	1.9
Mexico	2.1	1.5	2.0	1.2	1.1	1.6	- 0.1	0.4
Panama	3.8	3.4	3.6	5.6	5.8	4.0	- 0.2	- 1.6
Paraguay	3.2	3.5	3.8	1.7	4.9	5.9	0.7	4.2
Peru	3.0	3.9	2.8	2.5	2.7	3.3	- 0.2	0.8
Uruguay	2.9	4.2	3.1	3.5	6.4	3.6	0.2	0.1
Simple average	3.0	3.8	3.8	2.9	4.3	4.5	0.8	1.6

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A10
Latin America (15 countries): evolution of the percentage of the population aged 20 to 25 that completed a four-year or more higher education programme by sex, 2000–2020

	Sex						Difference 2020–2000 <i>(in percentage points)</i>	
	Men			Women			Men	Women
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020		
Argentina	6.2	7.5	9.0	11.0	12.4	10.7	2.8	- 0.3
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	5.3	10.0	11.4	5.4	12.5	15.5	6.0	10.1
Brazil	3.8	8.6	7.4	6.1	12.7	12.3	3.6	6.2
Chile	6.5	8.4	11.4	7.2	9.1	15.0	4.9	7.8
Colombia	5.9	7.7	8.3	8.3	9.4	10.3	2.4	2.0
Costa Rica	6.5	8.3	5.6	6.6	12.6	8.7	- 0.9	2.0
Dominican Republic	2.6	3.6	2.8	6.7	7.9	7.0	0.2	0.4
Ecuador	5.4	8.3	6.4	8.0	13.1	10.0	1.0	2.0
El Salvador	5.8	5.8	10.0	7.5	8.3	12.3	4.2	4.8
Honduras	4.3	3.4	4.9	3.7	4.3	7.6	0.6	3.9
Mexico	4.3	8.6	11.6	4.3	11.4	13.9	7.3	9.7
Panama	5.0	5.8	7.1	9.4	12.8	15.0	2.1	5.6
Paraguay	2.9	4.8	7.9	2.9	5.0	14.6	5.0	11.7
Peru	12.4	21.2	29.3	20.3	25.9	36.2	16.9	15.9
Uruguay	3.2	3.2	3.3	5.8	5.3	5.2	0.1	- 0.6
Simple average	5.4	7.7	9.1	7.6	10.8	13.0	3.7	5.4

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A11
Latin America (15 countries): evolution of the percentage of the population aged 26 to 30 that completed a four-year or more higher education programme by sex, 2000–2020

	Sex						Difference 2020–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Men			Women			Men	Women
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020		
Argentina	14.6	22.2	15.4	22.3	28.9	25.6	0.8	3.3
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	12.2	24.0	28.1	12.5	23.8	33.6	15.9	21.1
Brazil	6.9	13.3	16.6	9.0	17.8	23.4	9.7	14.4
Chile	14.3	19.4	35.6	13.5	21.3	37.0	21.3	23.5
Colombia	11.7	13.4	14.2	12.3	15.7	17.1	2.5	4.8
Costa Rica	9.2	13.9	11.5	11.9	20.2	17.8	2.3	5.9
Dominican Republic	8.0	7.6	8.3	11.9	19.2	19.9	0.2	8.0
Ecuador	11.8	17.7	15.4	13.6	21.0	24.6	3.5	11.0
El Salvador	12.5	10.4	15.8	12.1	12.7	18.9	3.3	6.8
Honduras	6.1	6.2	9.4	5.0	6.5	15.1	3.3	10.1
Mexico	11.3	17.3	23.2	8.1	18.3	24.9	11.9	16.8
Panama	13.9	13.8	19.6	16.7	23.6	27.7	5.7	11.0
Paraguay	5.9	9.2	19.9	7.7	13.0	25.4	14.0	17.6
Peru	20.7	31.3	38.9	27.1	32.8	37.9	18.3	10.9
Uruguay	8.1	8.1	9.8	15.3	14.5	17.5	1.7	2.3
Simple average	11.2	15.2	18.8	13.3	19.3	24.4	7.6	11.2

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A12
Latin America (15 countries): evolution of the percentage of the population aged 31 to 35 that completed a four-year programme or more in higher education by sex, 2000–2020

	Sex						Difference 2020–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Men			Women			Men	Women
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020		
Argentina	19.2	21.7	22.2	25.5	30.6	30.2	3.0	4.7
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	12.0	24.0	27.9	10.8	19.5	32.5	15.9	21.7
Brazil	7.3	12.9	18.0	9.5	17.5	23.6	10.7	14.1
Chile	14.0	19.3	33.7	11.3	17.3	34.7	19.8	23.4
Colombia	11.6	13.8	13.7	12.3	15.4	17.2	2.1	4.9
Costa Rica	11.9	16.4	15.9	11.5	19.0	20.3	4.0	8.8
Dominican Republic	12.2	9.2	9.2	11.7	19.1	19.3	- 3.0	7.6
Ecuador	11.9	14.1	13.5	12.5	14.0	18.7	1.6	6.2
El Salvador	13.1	11.0	15.7	12.0	12.2	14.1	2.6	2.1
Honduras	7.2	6.4	7.2	5.1	8.2	13.3	0.0	8.2
Mexico	10.3	14.7	21.2	5.9	13.2	21.5	10.8	15.6
Panama	10.7	16.6	20.7	16.2	25.3	26.3	10.0	10.1
Paraguay	7.0	10.8	20.4	5.8	10.8	24.4	13.3	18.6
Peru	20.9	29.2	28.8	24.4	27.0	26.2	7.9	1.8
Uruguay	8.8	9.7	11.7	13.7	14.5	19.7	2.9	6.1
Simple average	11.9	15.3	18.7	12.5	17.6	22.8	6.8	10.3

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A13
Latin America (13 countries): evolution of the attendance rate in higher education for the population aged 20 to 25 by geographic zone, 2000–2019
(Percentages)

	Geographic zone						Difference 2019–2000 <i>(in percentage points)</i>	
	Urban			Rural			Urban	Rural
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019		
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	22.4	34.7	42.0	0.8	6.5	6.7	19.6	5.9
Brazil	13.2	17.0	18.9	2.4	4.6	5.6	5.7	3.2
Chile	21.7	31.7	33.6	5.4	14.5	21.0	11.9	15.6
Colombia	15.3	19.8	20.5	2.8	2.7	3.7	5.2	0.9
Costa Rica	...	28.0	26.5	...	14.1	18.4	...	...
Ecuador	19.3	28.7	26.9	4.2	9.7	8.4	7.7	4.2
El Salvador	20.4	21.5	23.8	2.9	4.0	6.9	3.4	4.0
Honduras	14.9	19.0	22.0	0.9	2.2	4.0	7.1	3.1
Mexico	15.9	18.9	22.9	2.0	6.0	8.3	7.0	6.2
Panama	23.3	21.3	26.4	8.4	10.5	12.7	3.0	4.3
Paraguay	16.8	20.8	28.7	4.2	5.9	11.5	11.9	7.3
Peru	19.4	28.7	32.5	6.6	9.8	17.6	13.1	11.0
Uruguay	14.9	18.6	18.3	...	10.1	15.3	3.3	...
Simple average	18.1	23.7	26.4	3.7	7.7	10.8	8.3	7.1

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A14
Latin America (13 countries): evolution of the attendance rate in higher education for the population aged 26 to 30 by geographic zone, 2000–2019
(Percentages)

	Geographic zone						Difference 2019–2000 <i>(in percentage points)</i>	
	Urban			Rural			Urban	Rural
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019		
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	14.7	14.5	13.8	0.8	2.4	1.5	14.7	14.5
Brazil	6.4	8.5	10.1	1.8	2.0	2.4	6.4	8.5
Chile	5.8	10.8	11.0	0.4	3.9	5.1	5.8	10.8
Colombia	5.5	9.2	9.2	1.1	1.1	1.5	5.5	9.2
Costa Rica	...	14.7	15.5	...	6.3	5.7	...	14.7
Ecuador	8.0	11.0	9.2	1.8	4.2	1.9	8.0	11.0
El Salvador	7.5	7.5	7.5	0.8	1.2	1.4	7.5	7.5
Honduras	7.2	9.3	9.8	1.1	1.1	1.9	7.2	9.3
Mexico	3.5	3.5	4.9	0.4	0.9	1.0	3.5	3.5
Panama	12.5	8.3	9.3	4.3	3.8	4.8	12.5	8.3
Paraguay	8.7	11.8	13.9	2.0	2.1	4.4	8.7	11.8
Peru	6.8	8.9	9.8	0.4	1.7	1.9	6.8	8.9
Uruguay	9.0	11.2	9.3	...	1.8	4.1	9.0	11.2
Simple average	8.0	9.9	10.3	1.4	1.9	2.9	8.0	9.9

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A15
Latin America (13 countries): evolution of the attendance rate in higher education for the population aged 31 to 35 by geographic zone, 2000–2019
(Percentages)

	Geographic zone						Difference 2019–2000 <i>(in percentage points)</i>	
	Urban			Rural			Urban	Rural
	2000	2010	2019	2000	2010	2019		
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	6.3	5.9	4.9	0.0	1.3	1.6	-1.4	1.6
Brazil	4.5	5.1	6.5	1.4	1.9	1.6	2.1	0.2
Chile	1.6	3.6	3.9	0.2	0.5	1.4	2.3	1.2
Colombia	2.6	4.8	5.6	0.2	0.9	0.5	2.9	0.4
Costa Rica	...	8.5	8.5	...	3.1	5.5	...	...
Ecuador	3.8	5.6	3.8	1.1	1.8	0.6	-0.1	-0.6
El Salvador	3.1	1.7	2.5	0.5	0.4	0.4	-0.6	0.0
Honduras	3.3	5.5	4.2	1.1	0.4	0.6	0.9	-0.5
Mexico	2.0	1.5	2.2	0.2	0.5	0.5	0.2	0.3
Panama	6.8	5.5	4.1	1.2	2.6	2.8	-2.6	1.6
Paraguay	3.6	6.0	6.8	0.8	1.1	1.3	3.3	0.5
Peru	3.7	4.1	3.6	0.4	0.3	0.7	-0.1	0.3
Uruguay	3.3	5.6	3.5	...	0.4	1.0	0.2	...
Simple average	3.7	4.9	4.6	0.6	1.2	1.4	0.9	0.8

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A16
Latin America (14 countries): evolution of the percentage of the population aged 20 to 25 that completed a four-year or more higher education programme by geographic zone, 2000–2020

	Geographic zone						Difference 2020–2000 <i>(in percentage points)</i>	
	Urban			Rural			Urban	Rural
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020		
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	7.1	14.3	15.5	0.8	1.5	5.9	8.4	5.0
Brazil	5.7	11.9	10.9	0.5	2.6	3.1	5.2	2.6
Chile	7.7	9.3	13.6	1.3	4.0	10.0	5.9	8.7
Colombia	9.0	10.9	11.2	1.5	1.0	2.5	2.2	1.0
Costa Rica	9.1	13.2	7.5	2.3	5.2	5.7	-1.6	3.3
Dominican Republic	6.2	6.7	5.3	1.9	3.0	2.8	-1.0	1.0
Ecuador	9.1	13.7	9.4	1.4	3.1	5.3	0.2	3.9
El Salvador	9.9	10.2	15.4	1.5	1.6	4.3	5.5	2.8
Honduras	7.0	6.7	9.3	0.3	0.8	2.4	2.3	2.1
Mexico	5.1	11.8	14.5	0.9	3.4	6.6	9.4	5.6
Panama	9.5	11.3	13.3	2.3	5.2	5.2	3.8	2.9
Paraguay	4.3	6.3	13.6	0.6	2.3	6.9	9.3	6.3
Peru	20.6	27.5	34.9	6.3	8.4	19.7	14.3	13.4
Uruguay	4.5	4.3	4.4	...	2.3	1.4	-0.1	...
Simple average	8.2	11.3	12.8	1.7	3.2	5.8	4.6	4.2

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A17
Latin America (14 countries): evolution of the percentage of the population aged 26 to 30 that completed a four-year or more higher education programme by geographic zone, 2000–2020

	Geographic zone						Difference 2020–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Urban			Rural			Urban	Rural
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020		
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	16.5	28.9	35.6	2.4	9.2	12.8	19.1	10.5
Brazil	9.1	17.4	22.3	1.0	2.9	5.2	13.2	4.2
Chile	15.6	21.9	38.0	2.5	6.3	19.3	22.4	16.8
Colombia	15.1	17.6	18.4	2.2	1.7	4.3	3.4	2.1
Costa Rica	15.7	21.6	16.9	3.5	8.6	8.3	1.2	4.7
Dominican Republic	14.4	15.9	14.9	1.5	5.2	10.2	0.5	8.7
Ecuador	17.3	24.2	24.4	2.3	6.2	10.3	7.1	7.9
El Salvador	17.6	16.4	24.2	2.2	2.6	5.4	6.6	3.2
Honduras	9.3	11.7	18.2	1.2	1.0	3.1	8.9	1.9
Mexico	11.7	21.4	28.0	0.8	5.5	9.1	16.3	8.3
Panama	20.8	23.7	27.4	5.7	8.1	12.2	6.6	6.5
Paraguay	10.7	15.6	27.5	1.3	3.3	13.1	16.8	11.8
Peru	30.6	37.7	43.2	5.8	9.2	12.8	12.6	7.0
Uruguay	11.7	11.7	13.9		5.8	9.1	2.2	
Simple average	15.4	20.4	25.2	2.5	5.4	9.7	9.8	7.2

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Table A18
Latin America (14 countries): evolution of the percentage of the population aged 31 to 35 that completed a four-year or more higher education programme by geographic zone, 2000–2020

	Geographic zone						Difference 2020–2000 (in percentage points)	
	Urban			Rural			Urban	Rural
	2000	2010	2020	2000	2010	2020		
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	16.1	26.8	35.3	2.2	6.6	6.6	19.2	4.4
Brazil	9.7	17.2	23.2	0.9	2.9	4.7	13.5	3.8
Chile	14.2	20.0	36.0	1.7	5.4	17.3	21.8	15.6
Colombia	14.7	18.1	18.6	3.0	1.8	3.3	3.8	0.4
Costa Rica	16.4	23.6	21.0	5.0	8.3	10.9	4.5	5.9
Dominican Republic	16.1	17.6	15.5	4.3	4.5	9.5	- 0.5	5.2
Ecuador	16.2	18.0	20.2	2.7	4.3	5.4	4.0	2.7
El Salvador	18.2	16.3	21.3	1.6	2.4	4.1	3.1	2.5
Honduras	10.6	13.4	15.6	1.4	1.2	3.7	5.0	2.3
Mexico	9.9	17.3	25.7	1.5	3.4	6.4	15.7	4.9
Panama	18.9	26.6	28.7	4.5	8.3	9.5	9.8	5.0
Paraguay	9.6	15.8	29.9	1.8	2.4	9.1	20.2	7.3
Peru	30.2	34.2	32.4	4.0	5.4	6.0	2.2	2.0
Uruguay	11.3	12.6	16.0	...	3.8	7.3	4.6	...
Simple average	15.2	19.8	24.2	2.7	4.3	7.4	9.1	4.8

Source: ECLAC, on the basis of BADEHOG.

Annex 3

Inclusive public policies providing students exposed to situations of greater vulnerability with access to higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean

In this annex, public policies providing special access to higher education to students exposed to situations of greater vulnerability in the region such as low socioeconomic status, sex, territory, ethnic and racial status and disability are presented. For each of these aspects, when the information was available, the financial and non-financial measures rolled out by States are presented. Most are Latin American.

A. Socioeconomic status

Next, special public policies on access to higher education according to students' socioeconomic status are described for 15 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean.

Table A19
Latin America (15 countries): special government policies on access to higher education according to priority socioeconomic status

Country	Public policies for priority socioeconomic status
Argentina	Manuel Belgrano Strategic Scholarship Programme PROGRESAR scholarships NEXOS Programme for Educational Articulation and Cooperation Bicentennial National Scholarship Programme (PNBB) National Nursing Training Programme (PRONAFE) National University Scholarship Programme (PNBU)
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Social Solidarity Scholarship
Brazil	University for All Programme (ProUni) Quotas Policy Student Loan Fund (FIES) National Student Assistance Programme (PNAES) Bolsa Permanência Programme (PBP)
Chile	Ranking System New Millennium Scholarship Juan Gómez Millas Scholarship Ranked University Admission Exam (PDT) Scholarship Academic Excellence Scholarship Technical Excellence Scholarship Scholarship for the Children of Education Professionals (BHP) Access to Higher Education Programme (PACE) Food Scholarship for Higher Education (FSHE) State-Sponsored Credit (CAE) Gratuity Policy University Credit Solidarity Fund (FSCU)
Colombia	ACCES Undergraduate Credit – You Choose 0% "More Colombian than Ever" credit line "Talent of My Territory" funding line
Costa Rica	National Scholarship Fund (FONABE) Post-Secondary Scholarship
Dominican Republic	The Ministry for Higher Education, Science and Technology's National Scholarship Programme Incentive Programme for Higher Education (IES)
Ecuador	Eloy Alfaro National Scholarships

Country	Public policies for priority socioeconomic status
El Salvador	Salvadorean Solidarity Scholarships
Jamaica	Audrey Roberts Scholarship
Mexico	Federal Sustenance Scholarship Youths Building the Future Scholarship Elisa Acuña Sustenance Scholarship
Panama	Distinguished Rank Scholarship (priority is given to more economically vulnerable students) Educational Economic Assistance Programme
Paraguay	2021 Higher Education Scholarships
Peru	Scholarship 18 Programme (in the context of the National Scholarship and University Credit Programme (PRONABEC))
Uruguay	Solidarity Fund Scholarship

Source: Personal elaboration on the basis of the Ministry of Education of Argentina, 2021; Tavela, Catino and Forneris, 2019; Ministry of Education of Argentina, n.d; PROUNI, 2021; Da Rocha and Pizzio, 2018; Carneiro and Bridi, 2020; Government of Brazil, 2021; Pires, Sampaio and Poma, 2020; Ministry of Education of Brazil, 2018b; Ministry of Education of Brazil, 2018c; Subsecretariat for Higher Education of Chile, 2021; the Colombian Institute of Educational Credit and Technical Studies Abroad (ICETEX), 2021; Ministry for Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Dominican Republic, 2021; Government of the Dominican Republic, n.d; Ministry for Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Dominican Republic, 2021b; Information System on Educational Trends in Latin America (SITEAL), 2019; Government of Mexico, 2021; Government of Mexico, 2021b; Government of Mexico, 2021c; Government of Mexico, 2021d; Ministry of Education of Peru, 2021; Ministry of Education of Peru, 2019; Jamaica Tertiary Education Commission, 2021; Ministry of Education of Chile, 2021; Government of Chile, 2021; National Board of School Aid and Scholarships (JUNAEB), 2021; Salmi, 2019; Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology & Innovation, 2017; General Directorate of Social Development and Family Welfare (DESAF) of Costa Rica, 2021; Ministry of Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; Government of El Salvador, 2019; Adrogué and García de Fanelli (2019); Solidarity Fund, 2021; Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, n.d.; Institute for HR Training and Development (IFARHU), 2020.

1. In **Argentina**, there are five scholarship programmes, the Manuel Belgrano Strategic Scholarship Programme, the PROGRESAR scholarships, the Bicentennial National Scholarship Programme (PNBB), the National Nursing Training Programme (PRONAFE) and the National University Scholarship Programme (PNBU). In addition to these, there is a non-financial measure called the NEXOS Programme for Educational Articulation and Cooperation. Below, information is given on each of the Government's inclusive measures.
 - (i) **Manuel Belgrano Strategic Scholarship Programme:** these scholarships are awarded by the Argentinian State to students of low socioeconomic status so they can enrol in university or technical courses focusing on a strategic discipline that targets the development of the country (food, environment, computer and information science, energy, gas, mining, mobility and transport, and oil). The scholarship covers a period of 12 months and can be renewed (Ministry of Education of Argentina, 2021).
 - (ii) **PROGRESAR scholarships:** these scholarships are to enable young persons from families of low socioeconomic status, aged 18 to 24, to complete their studies in primary and secondary education and pursue higher education (whether university or higher technical education). In the case of students who are already enrolled in higher education, the age limit is extended to 30. The scholarship programme includes the completion of compulsory education (primary and secondary) and an incentive to pursue higher education and professional teacher training courses. Other requirements that students must meet are to be Argentinian, not be the benefactors of a national, provincial or regional welfare programme and not have a personal or family income exceeding the equivalent of three minimum salaries (Ministry of Education of Argentina, 2021; 2019).
 - (iii) **Bicentennial National Scholarship Programme (PNBB):** for high-achieving Argentinian students from low-income families, aged 18 to 30 (35 for those who are already enrolled in higher education), who enrol in a course related to applied, exact or basic sciences in national and provincial universities, national university institutes or national teacher or technical training institutes. The scholarship amounts to USD 112 a year (Ministry of Education of Argentina, n.d.).

- (iv) **National Nursing Training Programme (PRONAFE):** a scholarship for nursing studies available to high-achieving Argentinian students from low-income families aged 18 to 30. For those who are already enrolled in higher education when they apply, the age limit is extended to 35, and for those pursuing studies in national technical training institutes, there is no age limit. Students enrolled in private higher education institutions can also obtain scholarships. The amount of the scholarship varies from USD 192 to USD 467 a year (Ministry of Education of Argentina, n.d.).
 - (v) **National University Scholarship Programme (PNBU):** for high-achieving Argentinian students from low-income families, aged 18 to 30 (there is no age limit for those already pursuing studies in higher education), who enrol in a course related to health sciences, human sciences and social sciences in national and provincial universities, national university institutes or national teacher or technical training institutes. The amount of the scholarship varies from USD 112 to USD 176 a year (Ministry of Education of Argentina, n.d.).
 - (vi) **NEXOS Programme for Educational Articulation and Cooperation:** the purpose of this programme is to connect economically vulnerable youth completing secondary education with university education. The programme includes tutorials at the secondary level (recognition of the different institutional options and the provision of university education, strategies for entering university life, early vocational training and support with educational pathways), educational innovation (development of educational materials, didactic sequences and evaluation strategies) and lifelong training and learning strategies (Tavela, Catino and Forneris, 2019).
2. The Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of **Bolivia** requires that the private universities of the country award the **Social Solidarity Scholarship**. This scholarship covers one academic year and can be renewed (Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, n.d.). The specific requirements for applying for the scholarship vary from university to university. Universities must award scholarships to 10% of newly enrolled students. Scholarships are intended for students who, for financial and social reasons, cannot pay for their university studies (Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, n.d.).
 3. In **Brazil**, public higher education is free. The country has inclusive policies that are both financial and non-financial. Financial policies include the University for All Programme (ProUni), Student Loan Fund (FIES), National Student Assistance Programme (PNAES) and Residence Scholarship Programme. Non-financial measures include the Quotas Policy. Below, information is provided on each inclusive government measure in Brazil.
 - (i) **University for All Programme (ProUni):** for Brazilian students having obtained at least 450 points in the National High School Examination (ENEM). They must meet some of the following requirements: a) have attended secondary school through a scholarship awarded by that school (either private or public); b) be a person with a disability; c) be a public schoolteacher requesting a scholarship for undergraduate courses (in this case, there is no need to retake the ENEM). The programme offers full and partial scholarships (50%) for private higher education institutions. Full scholarships are for students with a gross family income equivalent to up to 1.5 minimum salaries, while partial ones are for students with a salary equivalent to up to three minimum wages (ProUni, 2021; Da Rocha and Pizzio, 2018).
 - (ii) **Student Loan Fund (FIES):** a scheme implemented by the Ministry of Education that funds the higher studies of students who are already enrolled in paying higher education institutions and are struggling to pay for their studies. They are offered loans that partially cover their fees and that must be repaid once their studies are completed (Pires, Sampaio and Poma, 2020; Ministry of Education of Brazil, 2018b).

- (iii) **National Student Assistance Programme (PNAES):** for low-income students enrolled in undergraduate courses in federal higher education institutions. The programme helps students with accommodation, food, transport, health, digital inclusion, culture, sport, childcare and teaching support. This assistance is provided by the higher education institutions in which they are enrolled (Ministry of Education of Brazil, 2018c; Pires, Sampaio and Poma, 2020).
 - (iv) **Bolsa Permanência Programme:** this programme provides financial help to students of low socioeconomic status, quilombola⁶ and indigenous, who are enrolled in federal higher education institutions. Students must have a per-capita family income that does not exceed 1.5 times the minimum wage, be enrolled in undergraduate programmes with an average workload equal to or greater than five hours a day and not take more than two standard semesters of the undergraduate courses in which they are enrolled to graduate. It is paid through a card and amounts to USD 77 a month for students of low socioeconomic status and USD 174 a month for indigenous students. This programme constitutes a complementary action to foster good academic achievements (Ministry of Education of Brazil, 2018c).
 - (v) **Quotas Policy:** the purpose of this policy in universities and federal technical and secondary education institutions is to guarantee low-income students places in public universities. Half the places must be occupied by students with a monthly per-capita family income equal or inferior to 1.5 times the minimum wage and the other half with an income exceeding 1.5 times the minimum wage. The students must have been enrolled in public secondary schools (Carneiro and Bridi 2020; Government of Brazil, 2021).
4. In **Chile**, too, financial and non-financial inclusive policies are implemented. Financial policies include the New Millennium Scholarship, Juan Gómez Millas Scholarship, Ranked University Admission Exam Scholarship, Academic Excellence Scholarship, Technical Excellence Scholarship, Scholarship for the Children of Education Professionals (BHP), Gratuity Policy, State-Sponsored Credit (CAE) and University Credit Solidarity Fund (FSCU). Non-financial policies include the Access to Higher Education Programme (PACE), Ranking System and Food Scholarship for Higher Education (BAES).
- (i) **New Millennium Scholarship:** for low-income students (they must be part of the lowest-earning 70% of the country's population) who have a high school grade point average (GPA) above 5.0⁷ (and wish to study at a higher technical education institution, professional institute, technical training institute, university or armed forces school). The scholarship also has 250 special quotas for students with disabilities who have meritorious academic achievements (high school GPA above 5.0). This scholarship funds studies at accredited higher education institutions⁸ and has two funding methods, depending on the socioeconomic status of the student: a) for students belonging to the lowest-earning 70% of the country's population, it funds up to USD 790 of the annual course fees, and b) for students belonging to the lowest-earning 50% of the population in the country, it funds up to USD 1,133 of the annual course fees (Subsecretariat for Higher Education of Chile, 2021).

⁶ Quilombola communities are groups with their own cultural identity, formed through a historical process that started with the era of slavery in Brazil. These communities maintain a strong connection with their history, as they perpetuate their customs and ancestral culture. Moreover, they embody resistance to various forms of dominance.

⁷ The grading scale in Chile ranges from 1.0 to 7.0, 4.0 being a passing grade.

⁸ External evaluation process mandatory for autonomous higher education institutions in Chile. It certifies the quality of their processes and results. The body in charge of this evaluation is the National Accreditation Commission (CNA).

- (ii) **Juan Gómez Millas Scholarship:** for students belonging to the lowest-earning 70% of the country's population with meritorious academic achievements (an average of 500 points in the language and mathematics tests of the higher education admission exam) who wish to study at an accredited higher education institution. It funds up to USD 1,515 of the annual course fees (Subsecretariat for Higher Education of Chile, 2021).
- (iii) **Ranked University Admission Exam (PDT) Scholarship:** for students who obtain either a national rank in the PDT or the average for the language and mathematics tests and who enter higher education the year following their completion of secondary education, who belong to the lowest-earning 80% of the country's population and do not come from paying private high schools. Their higher studies must be pursued at accredited institutions. It funds up to USD 1,515 of the annual course fees (Subsecretariat for Higher Education of Chile, 2021).
- (iv) **Academic Excellence Scholarship:** for students belonging to the lowest-earning 80% of the country's population and the best 10% of pupils to leave their high school. They must enter higher education (only at accredited institutions) the year following their completion of secondary education. They must not come from paying private high schools. It funds up to USD 1,515 of the annual course fees (Subsecretariat for Higher Education of Chile, 2021).
- (v) **Technical Excellence Scholarship:** for students belonging to the lowest-earning 70% of the country's population and who are among the best pupils leaving high school (GPA above 5.0 and ranked) in 2017, 2018, 2019 or 2020. They must choose a technical course at a technical training centre, professional institute or university, or a professional course offered by a professional institute. It funds up to USD 1,185 of the annual course fees (Subsecretariat for Higher Education of Chile, 2021).
- (vi) **Scholarship for the Children of Education Professionals (BHP):** a scholarship that funds up to USD 657 of the annual course fees. Students must belong to the lowest-earning 80% of the country's population, have an average of 500 points or more in the Language and Mathematics University Admission Tests and a high school GPA above 5.5. Their parents must also be professors or teaching assistants⁹ in municipal, subsidized private or delegated administration education establishments (Subsecretariat for Higher Education of Chile, 2021).
- (vii) **Gratuity:** for students who belong to the lowest-earning 60% of the country's population and who are enrolled in State or private universities within the Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities (CRUCH)¹⁰ or in accredited non-profit higher education institutions (García de Fanelli and Adrogué, 2019). Students are also considered part of this group if they enrol in public or private professional institutes and technical training centres that meet some of the accreditation criteria.
- (viii) **State-Sponsored Credit (CAE):** a benefit for students who have proven academic achievements and require funding to pursue higher education studies at accredited public or private institutions. This loan is granted by the financial system and has two sponsors: a) the higher education institution where the student is studying (during the time of their studies) and b) the State (until the loan is completely repaid, once the student has completed their studies) (García de Fanelli and Adrogué, 2019).

⁹ Educational staff carrying out at least one role of a professional, paraprofessional (support with teaching and learning and/or administrative management) or auxiliary-support (care, protection, maintenance and cleaning of educational establishments) nature.

¹⁰ The Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities is a body that gathers the rectors of 30 universities throughout the country.

- (ix) **University Credit Solidarity Fund (FSCU):** for low-income students. It funds up to 100% of the course fees of students belonging to the lowest-earning 60% of the country's population and 100% to 50% of those of students between the lowest-earning 60% and 80% of the country's population (García de Fanelli and Adrogué, 2019).
 - (x) **Access to Higher Education Programme (PACE):** this programme enables students of a low socioeconomic status and remarkable academic performance in secondary school to access higher education. It includes continuous support and preparation activities for students in the last two years of secondary education enrolled in participating education establishments to prepare them for higher education, such as special quotas guaranteed by the higher education institutions that have an agreement with the Ministry of Education (29 universities, one technical training centre and one professional institute). Similarly, it includes support activities during the first year of the course (Ministry of Education of Chile, 2021).
 - (xi) **Ranking System:** this consists in the incorporation of the student's relative position in high school, or, in other words, their rank, to the university admission system. When this rank is considered one of the admission requirements for higher education, students who stand out from their peers in terms of their academic performance during secondary education are favoured. The purpose of including this ranking system is to reward the efforts made by students during their secondary education, regardless of the education establishments they attended or their socioeconomic status (García de Fanelli and Adrogué, 2019).
 - (xii) **Food Scholarship for Higher Education (BAES):** this scholarship funds some of students' food costs through an electronic card that provides them with USD 42 a month during ten months. The cards can be used in supermarkets and other food shops. Students must belong to the lowest-earning 60% of the country's population, want to study at an accredited higher education institution and have obtained one of the following scholarships or loans: Bicentennial Scholarship, Juan Gómez Millas Scholarship, Academic Excellence Scholarship, Ranked University Admission Exam Scholarship, Professorial Vocation Scholarship, Scholarship for the Children of Education Professionals, New Millennium Scholarship, Technical Excellence Scholarship, Disability Scholarship, University Credit Solidarity Fund, State-Sponsored Credit or the gratuity policy. The scholarship is administered by the National Board of School Aid and Scholarships (JUNAEB) (Ministry of Education of Chile, 2021; Government of Chile, 2021).
5. In the case of **Colombia**, only financial policies promoting the inclusion of students of low socioeconomic status in higher education were found. These take the form of loans to cover course fees.
- (i) **ACCES Undergraduate Credit – You Choose 0%:** for Colombian students in situations of poverty who are registered in the SISBEN¹¹ social welfare system, enrolled in a professional technical, technological or university course at a higher education institution recognized by the Ministry of Education, have sat the Saber 11 exam,¹² taken before leaving high school, and obtained at least 300 points, and have a sponsor. The loan funds enrolment and course fees and maintenance costs (office supplies, books, computer, Internet connection, etc.) (ICETEX,¹³ 2021).

¹¹ System for the Identification of Potential Beneficiaries of Social Programmes.

¹² It consists of five tests: critical reading, mathematics, social and citizenship studies, biology and English. The scoring scale ranges from 0 to 500 points (Colombian Institute for the Promotion of Higher Education – ICFES, 2021).

¹³ An entity of the Colombian State that promotes higher education by granting educational credits (and collecting them), with its own or third-party funds, mainly to members of the population who have scarce economic prospects and a good academic performance (Salmi, 2019).

- (ii) **“More Colombian than Ever” credit line:** the requirements are to be Colombian, be a strata 1, 2 or 3 student, be registered with SISBEN, score above 210 in the Saber 11 exam, be enrolled in a professional technical, technological or university course at a higher education institution recognized by the Ministry of Education and reside in one of the following Colombian departments: Amazonas, Arauca, Cauca, César, Caquetá, Chocó, Port of Buenaventura, Guainía, Guaviare, La Guajira, Nariño, Norte de Santander, Putumayo, San Andrés y Providencia, Vaupés or Vichada. Moreover, students must have a sponsor. The loan funds enrolment and course fees and maintenance costs (office supplies, books, computer, Internet connection, etc.) (ICETEX, 2021).
 - (iii) **“Talent of my Territory” funding line credit:** the requirements are to be Colombian, be a strata 1, 2 or 3 student, score above 210 in the Saber 11 exam, be enrolled in a professional technical, technological or university course at a higher education institution recognized by the Ministry of Education and reside in the special industrial, port, biodiversity and eco-tourism district of Buenaventura. Moreover, students must have a sponsor. The loan funds enrolment and course fees (ICETEX, 2021).
6. In **Costa Rica**, there is the **Post-Secondary Scholarship**, financial help for Costa Rican students in situations of poverty or extreme poverty¹⁴ who are already enrolled in or wish to enrol in technical, university or university-adjacent¹⁵ courses (whether public or private) at a higher education institution recognized both by the Higher Council of Education and the National Council of Higher Education (CONESUP). Students can apply for this scholarship once they have finished high school, from the age of 17. They must be registered in the National Information System and Unique Registry of Beneficiaries (SINIRUBE) and enrol in at least two subjects of their chosen course. The amount is paid on a monthly basis and varies according to the number of courses they take: if they enrol in up to three subjects, they receive USD 84 a month and if they enrol in up to four subjects, USD 134 a month (DESAF, 2021; Ministry of Public Education of Costa Rica, 2021).
7. The **Dominican Republic** has two financial policies, the Ministry for Higher Education, Science and Technology’s (MESCyT) National Scholarship Programme and the Incentive Programme for Higher Education (IES).
- (i) **MESCyT’s National Scholarship Programme (Scholarships for the Higher Technical, Undergraduate and Postgraduate Levels):** for low-income, high-achieving students (Ministry for Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Dominican Republic, 2021a).
 - (ii) **Incentive Programme for Higher Education (IES):** for Dominican students aged 18 and above who pursue their studies at public schools located in rural or poor areas, are enrolled at national universities and do not have the financial means to pay for their studies. Families are provided with a credit card via the Progressing with Solidarity programme (PROSOLI),¹⁶ charged with an amount covering enrolment fees and the purchase of books and study supplies (Government of the Dominican Republic, n.d.; Ministry for Higher Education, Science and Technology of the Dominican Republic, 2021b; SITEAL, 2019).

It should be noted that, in all the countries reviewed, one of the requirements students had to meet to obtain financial aid from governments was to be a national of the country in which they lived.

¹⁴ It covers the costs of food and other material basic needs such as public services and clothing, among other things. Household income per capita is calculated (DESAF, 2021).

¹⁵ Higher education institutions that offer full two or three-year courses to students who have completed their upper secondary education (last two or three years of secondary school, generally started at 16 and intended to prepare students for the FARO tests so they can obtain their secondary-education baccalaureate).

¹⁶ The Dominican Republic’s main welfare programme. It includes conditional cash transfers, socio-educational support and links with State programmes and services. Its action framework includes identification, full health services, education, human and citizenship training, food security, nutrition and income generation, habitability and protection of the environment and access to information and communication technologies (ICTs).

8. In **Ecuador**, public institutions offer free university and polytechnic education. The country has the **Eloy Alfaro National Scholarship** programme for students of low socioeconomic status who wish to take a technical, higher technological or university course at an Ecuadorian higher education institution. They must meet the following requirements: be beneficiaries of the Human Development Bonus (BDH) and welfare benefits and belong to the “vulnerable” or “highly vulnerable” group under the Social Registry. It funds up to three years of technical or technological education and up to six years of university education. The scholarship provides the equivalent of the prevailing unified basic salary (USD 400 in 2021) per month to cover maintenance costs (food, accommodation, basic services, transport, etc.) and the cost of study materials. This money is paid on a monthly basis for the duration of the university course. Moreover, the scholarship covers travel costs for scholarship recipients residing in the Galapagos Islands, amounting to an annual sum of USD 195, for the duration of students’ studies (Secretariat of Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation, 2017).
9. In **El Salvador**, the **Salvadorean Solidarity Scholarships** enable low-income students to pursue undergraduate or postgraduate studies in the country. They must also meet the following requirements: a) have a baccalaureate; b) have completed their secondary education at a public or private institution at which they received a scholarship covering 50% or more of the total cost of their studies, at least for the last two years; c) score at least two points above the national average in the Secondary Skills and Learning Assessment (PAES) or have a good average in the baccalaureate; d) pass the knowledge and psychological tests required by the higher education institutions at which they are to study and meet admission requirements; e) prove that they have limited financial means (which cannot exceed a monthly income equivalent to three minimum salaries), and, finally, f) if the student is already pursuing studies in higher education, he/she must demonstrate that he/she ranks in the top 50% of his/her class (Government of El Salvador, 2019).
10. In the case of **Jamaica**, only one government policy promoting the inclusion of socioeconomically disadvantaged students was found. This is the Audrey Roberts Scholarship, which is for high-achieving students of low socioeconomic status who wish to take a university course in the humanities at the University of the West Indies.¹⁷ The funding provides USD 1,600 a year during a full academic year (Jamaica Tertiary Education Commission, 2021).
11. As for **Mexico**, there are financial policies, specifically scholarships, to include students of low socioeconomic status in higher education courses.
 - (i) **Federal Sustenance Scholarship**: it provides USD 179 a month to students from households with an income equal to or below the general poverty line who are enrolled in a bachelor’s degree or university higher technical course at any of the country’s public universities and who do not have another scholarship from the Government (Government of Mexico, 2021a).
 - (ii) **Youths Building the Future Scholarship**: for students in situations of poverty living in areas with high levels of violence and who belong to indigenous or Afrodescendent peoples. They must be 29 at most and have an income per capita that is under the poverty line income.¹⁸ Moreover, they must be enrolled in one of the national education system’s priority¹⁹ higher education institutions. Maintenance amounts to USD 120 a month during the ten months of the academic year (Government of Mexico, 2021b).

¹⁷ The University of the West Indies is a higher education institution financed by 15 Caribbean governments: Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, the British Virgin Islands, the Caiman Islands, Dominica, Grenada, Jamaica, Montserrat, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Trinidad and Tobago.

¹⁸ Total value of a food basket and non-food basket per person per month.

¹⁹ These institutions are situated in areas where the population is mainly indigenous or Afrodescendent, places where marginalization abounds or there is a great deal of violence. They include intercultural universities, indigenous teacher training schools, intercultural teacher training schools, rural teacher training schools and Universidades para el Bienestar Benito Juárez García.

- (iii) **Elisa Acuña Sustenance Scholarship**: for students whose income is equal to or under the current poverty line income. Also for the children of Mexican armed forces personnel who are retired, were killed in combat or have a disability as a result of acts of service (Government of Mexico, 2021c). Students must be enrolled at public higher education institutions (except the Escuela Nacional de Antropología e Historia (ENAH), Instituto Politécnico Nacional (IPN), Universidad Autónoma Metropolitana (UAM), National Autonomous University of Mexico (UNAM) and Universidad Pedagógica Nacional (UPN)) to enrol in bachelor's degree, professional certification or university higher technical courses. Another requirement is not having previously completed higher education studies or received another scholarship from the Government (Government of Mexico, 2021d).
12. **Panama** has the **Educational Economic Assistance Programme**, which consists of non-refundable economic contributions for students who need financial support to pay for their studies (basic, secondary and higher education). Furthermore, there is the **Distinguished Rank Scholarship**, which, while not a special policy for students of low socioeconomic status, prioritizes them in the selection process. This scholarship is for students leaving secondary school with a high or average academic performance (GPA equal to or above 4.5, the grading scale in Panama ranging from 1 to 7) who wish to pursue higher studies at one of the official universities. They must be Panamanian or have resided in the country for at least ten years. It amounts to USD 200 a month, paid over the duration of the course (IFARHU, 2020).
13. In **Paraguay**, free public higher education is offered by all public universities, as well as the Instituto Superior de Bellas Artes, Instituto Nacional de Educación Superior, teacher training institutes and Instituto Nacional de Salud (Vice-Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2021). In Paraguay, **2021 Higher Education Scholarships** are awarded to Paraguayan students who reside in the country. They have two modalities. Both scholarships are for academic costs, cover one academic year and can be renewed.
- (i) For undergraduate courses, students must have left secondary school between 2017 and 2020 and be enrolled in a course accredited by the National Agency for the Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (ANEAES), as well as come from low-income families and have a secondary school GPA of at least 3²⁰ (Ministry of Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; Vice-Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2021).
- (ii) For teacher training studies, students must come from low-income families, have a secondary school GPA of at least 3 and be enrolled in an initial teacher training course at an official teacher training management institute (Ministry of Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; Vice-Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2021).
14. In the case of **Peru**, only one government policy for students of low socioeconomic status was found. This is the **Scholarship 18 Programme**, which provides grants to high-achieving young people aged 16 to 22, having attended public secondary schools and having scarce financial means,²¹ so they can pursue higher education studies, whether technical or university. The programme includes support in the form of tutorials (Ministry of Education of Peru, 2021b). The amount of money provided by the scholarship varies from USD 238 to USD 357, depending on students' places of residence and the location of the higher education institutions they attend. The scholarship, which is renewed each semester, includes a study allowance and the cost of the higher education admittance exam, enrolment, access to an English course, a Notebook, stationery, transportation, food and accommodation (Ministry of Education of Peru, 2021b; Pires, Sampaio and Poma, 2020; Ministry of Education of Peru, 2019).

²⁰ In Paraguay, a grading scale from 1 to 5 is used, 3 being a passing grade.

²¹ This must be verified through the Household Focalization System (SISFOH).

15. In **Uruguay**, there is the **Solidarity Fund Scholarship** for Uruguayan or foreign students who reside in the country, are of low socioeconomic status and wish to enrol in courses at the University of the Republic, the Technological University of Uruguay or institutions backed by the General Directorate of Professional Technical Education. This scholarship fully covers course fees and students can apply until they reach the age of 32 (Solidarity Fund, 2021).

B. Sex

Next, special public policies on access to higher education according to sex are presented for five Latin American countries. In the case of Argentina, people are also included on the basis of their gender identity.

Table A20
Latin America (5 countries): special government policies on access to higher education according to sex^a

Country	Public policies according to sex
Argentina	PROGRESAR scholarships
Ecuador	Eloy Alfaro National Scholarships
Mexico	Mother Head of Family Scholarship
Panama	Economic Assistance Programme for the victims of gender-based violence and their children
Peru	Scholarship for Undergraduate Women in Science

Source: Secretariat for Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation of Ecuador, 2017; Marúm, 2016; National Council on Science and Technology (CONACYT); 2021; PRONABEC, 2021a and 2021b; IFARHU, 2020.

^a In the case of Colombia, Luis Enrique Orozco, a tenured lecturer at Universidad de Los Andes, Colombia, and Director of the UNESCO Chair on Higher Education and Indigenous and Afrodescendent Peoples in Latin America, was consulted and said there were no inclusive higher education policies according to gender.

1. In **Argentina** in 2020, the **PROGRESAR scholarships** included a new priority group, transvestites and transgender persons. The scholarship is to enable them to complete their studies in primary and secondary education and continue on to higher education (whether university or higher technical). The scholarship programme includes the completion of compulsory education (primary and secondary) and an incentive for higher education and professional teacher training courses. Other requirements students must meet are to be Argentinian; not be the beneficiaries of a national, provincial or regional welfare programme and have a personal or family income that does not exceed three times the minimum wage. Moreover, the target demographic of this scholarship is women of up to 30 years of age with children aged 18 or under at the head of a single-parent household (Ministry of Education of Argentina, 2021; 2019). However, unlike for the other priority groups concerned by this scholarship, there is no age limit for transvestites or transgender persons who apply for this benefit.
2. In **Ecuador**, public institutions offer free university and polytechnic education. The **Eloy Alfaro National Scholarship** programme was implemented for:
 - (i) Female students who are single or widowed mothers with children who are minors or adults in situations of disability and who qualify as “highly vulnerable” or “vulnerable” under the Social Registry.
 - (ii) Female students who were teenage mothers and qualify as “highly vulnerable” or “vulnerable” under the Social Registry.
 - (iii) Female victims of gender-based violence who qualify as “highly vulnerable” or “vulnerable” under the Social Registry.

Moreover, they must want to take a technical, higher technological or university course at an Ecuadorian higher education institution. The scholarship funds up to three years of technical or technological education and up to six years of university education. The allocated monthly amount is

equivalent to the prevailing unified basic salary (USD 400 in 2021) to cover maintenance costs (food, accommodation, basic services, transport, etc.) and the cost of study materials. This money is provided on a monthly basis for the duration of the university course. Additionally, the scholarship covers travel costs for scholarship recipients residing in the Galapagos Islands, amounting to an annual sum of USD 195, for the duration of students' studies (Secretariat for Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation of Ecuador, 2017).

3. **Mexico** has the **Mother Head of Family Scholarship** awarded by the National Council on Science and Technology (CONACYT). It offers support so mothers who are the heads of their families can complete their professional training (higher technical, university or bachelor's) at public higher education institutions listed in CONACYT's National Registry of Scientific and Technological Institutions and Companies (RENIECYT). They must study full time. Maintenance is USD 197 per month, as well as a single annual amount of USD 98 to cover the cost of study materials, allocated at the beginning of the academic year. Moreover, the scholarship includes medical services at the Institute for Social Security and Services for State Workers (ISSSTE) for recipients and their children. The requirements are to reside in Mexico, not have a partner living in the same residence, have at least one child who is under 18, not have a university degree or certificate and not benefit from any other support from CONACYT. In the case of applicants who are regular students of any other higher education programme, they must not have failed any subjects and must have a GPA equal to or above 8.0, the grading scale ranging from 1 to 10 (Marúm, 2016; CONACYT, 2021).
4. In **Panama**, there is the **Economic Assistance Programme for the victims of gender-based violence and their children**, which consists of non-refundable economic contributions for students who need financial support to pay for their studies (basic, secondary and higher education) and who have suffered gender-based violence (IFARHU, 2020).
5. In **Peru**, the **Scholarship for Undergraduate Women in Science** is awarded for science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) courses. It is for high-achieving female Peruvian students, in particular, who occupy the top five ranks of academic achievement in their mathematics, science and technology courses. Additionally, they must have finished secondary education in 2020. Students coming from private schools must prove they are of low socioeconomic status. This scholarship covers the whole academic programme until the obtention of a degree or equivalent qualifications. Maintenance includes a study allowance and covers the cost of the admission exam, enrolment, English courses, technological equipment, transport, accommodation and food, among other things (PRONABEC, 2021a y PRONABEC, 2021b).

C. Territory

Next, the special public policies on access to higher education according to the territory are presented for two countries.

Table A21
Chile and Colombia: special government policies on access to higher education according to the territory

Country	Public policies according to the territory
Chile	Territorial Integration Scholarship (BIT) Aysén Scholarship (BA) Patagonia Aysén Scholarship (BPA) Magallanes Scholarship (BM) Island Households Programme Student Family Residence Programme (PRFE) Island Residence Scholarship (BRINS)
Colombia	Regional Centres for Higher Education (CERES)

Source: JUNAEB, 2021; Ministry of National Education of Colombia, 2017.

1. **Chile** has seven government policies to promote the inclusion in higher education of students residing in remote geographic areas through financial mechanisms.
 - (i) **Territorial Integration Scholarship (BIT)**: this benefit amounts to USD 1,254 (sum of reference) a year, paid in up to ten instalments, to enable students from Aysén, Magallanes, Palena Province, Easter Island and the Juan Fernández Islands²² to relocate to the city where they will pursue their higher education studies, as in their places of residence there is not an adequate educational provision. Students must have a secondary education GPA equal to or above 5.0 and be in at least the 80% bracket in the Social Registry of Households (JUNAEB, 2021).
 - (ii) **Aysén Scholarship (BA)**: an annual amount of USD 1,767 (sum of reference), paid in up to ten instalments, for students residing in Aysén and taking a higher education course at an institution recognized by the Chilean State and based in the region. Students must have a secondary school GPA equal to or above 5.0 and be registered in the Social Registry of Households. Moreover, they must prove that they received all of their secondary education in Aysén (JUNAEB, 2021).
 - (iii) **Patagonia Aysén Scholarship (BPA)**: an annual amount of USD 2,365 (sum of reference), paid in up to ten instalments, for students residing in Aysén, but studying at higher education institutions recognized by the Chilean State outside the region. This scholarship also includes the Food Scholarship for Higher Education (BAES) benefit. Applicants must be registered in the Social Registry of Households and have a secondary school GPA equal to or above 5.5. Moreover, they must prove that they received all of their secondary education in Aysén (JUNAEB, 2021).
 - (iv) **Magallanes Scholarship (BM)**: an annual amount of USD 1,352 (sum of reference), paid in up to ten instalments, for students residing and pursuing higher education studies at an institution recognized by the Chilean State located in Magallanes. They must have a secondary school GPA equal to or above 5.0 and be in at least the 80% bracket in the Social Registry of Households. Moreover, they must prove that they received all of their secondary education in the region (JUNAEB, 2021).
 - (v) **Island Households Programme**: food and accommodation is provided to students from Easter Island and the Juan Fernández Islands who have to move to the continent to pursue higher education studies. Students must be registered in the Social Registry of Households and enrolled in a higher education institution recognized by the Chilean State (JUNAEB, 2021).
 - (vi) **Student Family Residence Programme (PRFE)**: this programme provides accommodation in the houses of host families to students who must move from their place of residence to pursue higher education. It also provides food and educational support. To access the benefits of this programme, students must live in a commune with a rurality percentage equal to or above 50%, be registered in the Social Registry of Households and be enrolled in a higher education institution recognized by Chile (JUNAEB, 2021).
 - (vii) **Island Residence Scholarship (BRINS)**: for students who live in Easter Island or the Juan Fernández Islands and are enrolled at a higher education institution recognized by Chile and located on the continent. The amount is USD 1,184 (sum of reference) a year, paid in up to ten instalments, to fund their accommodation. Moreover, students must be registered in the Social Registry of Households (JUNAEB, 2021).

²² All these Chilean territories have a very small population and are relatively isolated from the major urban population centres in the rest of the country.

2. In **Colombia**, the **Regional Centres for Higher Education (CERES)** were implemented by the country's Ministry of National Education. Their purpose is to decentralize the provision of higher education, extending institutions' reach to the entire country. Their ultimate goal is to guarantee equitable access in territorial terms (Ministry of National Education of Colombia, 2017).

D. Ethnicity and race

Next, the special public policies on access to higher education according to ethnicity and race are described for ten Latin American countries. It is important to clarify that many of the policies presented in this section are the same as those presented in the part on socioeconomic status, except for some small changes. This is due to the intersectionality that characterizes the inequality matrix in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Table A22
Latin America (10 countries): special government policies on access to higher education according to ethnicity and race

Country	Public policies according to ethnicity and race
Argentina	National University Scholarship Programme (PNBU)
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Social Solidarity Scholarship
Brazil	Quotas Law Residence Scholarship Programme
Chile	Indigenous Residence Scholarship (BRI) Indigenous Scholarship (BI)
Colombia	Credit for communities under constitutional protection (ICETEX) "Talent of my Territory" funding line credit Black Community Scholarship Fund Álvaro Ulcué Chocué Indigenous Communities Fund
Ecuador	Eloy Alfaro National Scholarships
Mexico	National Institute of Indigenous Peoples (INPI) Higher Education, Master's and Degree Support Scholarships for the Indigenous Students of Mexico Youths Building the Future Scholarship
Paraguay	2021 Higher Education Scholarships
Peru	Indigenous Amazonian Communities (CNA) Bilingual Intercultural Education (EIB)
Uruguay	National Plan for Racial Equity and for Afrodescendants

Source: Carneiro and Bridi, 2020; Government of Brazil, 2021; Ministry of Education of Brazil, 2018c; ICETEX, 2021; Government of Mexico, 2021a; Government of Mexico, 2021b; Ministry of Education of Peru, 2021b; Pires, Sampaio and Poma, 2020; JUNAEB, 2021; Secretariat for Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation of Ecuador, 2017; Ministry of Education of Argentina, 2017; Ministry of Education of Argentina n.d.; Ministry of Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; Vice-Ministry of Higher Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, n.d..

1. In **Argentina**, the **National University Scholarship Programme (PNBU)** includes a subprogramme for Argentinian persons from indigenous peoples, regardless of their age, who are taking or about to take courses at national or provincial universities, national university institutes or national teacher or technical training institutes (Ministry of Education of Argentina, 2017; Ministry of Education of Argentina n.d.).
2. The Ministry of Education of the **Plurinational State of Bolivia** requires that the country's private universities award the **Social Solidarity Scholarship**. Each scholarship covers one academic year and can be renewed. The specific requirements for applying for the scholarship vary from university to university. Universities must award scholarships to 10% of newly enrolled students. It is for students who, for financial and social reasons, cannot cover the cost of their university studies and/or indigenous persons from rural areas (Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, n.d.).

3. In **Brazil**, there are two government policies to facilitate access to higher education for students from indigenous peoples. The Quotas Law, a non-financial measure, and the Residence Scholarship Programme, which is a financial measure.
 - (i) **Quotas Law**: the quotas programme for universities and federal technical and secondary education institutions reserves a number of places to promote the admission of indigenous and Afrodescendent persons to public higher education institutions. Places under the racial quota policy are distributed according to data from the Brazilian Institute of Geography and Statistics (IBGE). Consequently, a country with higher numbers of Afrodescendent persons will have more places in their universities. The only document required as proof is a self-declaration. Students must have studied at public secondary schools (Carneiro and Bridi, 2020; Government of Brazil, 2021).
 - (ii) **Residence Scholarship Programme**: this programme provides economic help to quilombola²³ and indigenous students enrolled at federal higher education institutions. Students must verify their origins in several ways: a) a self-declaration from the student; b) a declaration from their community on their ethnical affiliation through a document to be signed by at least three recognized leaders; c) a declaration from the National Indigenous Foundation (FUNAI) confirming that the student resides in an indigenous community or d) a declaration from the Cultural Palmares Foundation confirming that the quilombola student resides in a quilombola community. Students must not take more than two standard semesters of the undergraduate course in which they are enrolled to graduate. The monthly amount is USD 77 for vulnerable students and USD 174 for indigenous students, paid through a card. This programme is a complementary action to favour good academic performance (Ministry of Education of Brazil, 2018c).
4. **Chile** has two government policies to facilitate indigenous students' access to higher education: the Indigenous Residence and Indigenous Scholarships, both financial measures.
 - (i) **Indigenous Residence Scholarship (BRI)**: a monetary contribution enabling indigenous students who had to move to another city to access higher education to pay for accommodation. The scholarship amounts to USD 1,300 divided into ten payments. To access this benefit, students must prove they are of indigenous descent through the National Indigenous Development Corporation (CONADI), be registered in the Social Registry of Households²⁴ as part of the most vulnerable 60% of households (i.e., the student lives in a household that is considered one of the 60% of lowest-income households in the country) and have a secondary school GPA that is above 5.0 (JUNAEB, 2021).
 - (ii) **Indigenous Scholarship (BI)**: a monetary contribution of USD 860 a year, paid in up to ten instalments, which Chilean indigenous students can use as they please. They must prove they are of indigenous descent through CONADI, be registered in the Social Registry of Households as part of the most vulnerable 60% of households (i.e., the student lives in a household that is considered one of the 60% of lowest-income households in Chile) and have a secondary school GPA that is above 5.0 (JUNAEB, 2021).

²³ Quilombola communities are groups with their own cultural identity, formed through a historical process that started with the era of slavery in Brazil. These communities maintain a strong connection with their history, as they perpetuate their customs and ancestral culture. Moreover, they embody resistance to various forms of dominance.

²⁴ An information system intended to support the selection of beneficiaries for a wide range of grants and welfare programmes in Chile.

5. As for **Colombia**, it has four government policies to facilitate indigenous students' access to higher education and all are financial: the credit for communities under constitutional protection, "Talent of my Territory" funding line credit, Black Community Scholarship Fund and Álvaro Ulcué Chocué Indigenous Communities Fund.
- (i) **Credit for communities under constitutional protection (ICETEX)**: for students registered in the official databases identifying the population affected by armed conflict in Colombia (indigenous persons, victims, reintegrated persons and persons with disabilities) and United Network.²⁵ Moreover, students must be enrolled in a professional technical, technological or university course at a higher education institution recognized by the Ministry of Education, have sat the Saber 11 exam²⁶ and obtained at least 200 points, and have a sponsor. The loan funds enrolment and course fees and maintenance costs (office supplies, books, computer, Internet connection, etc.) (ICETEX, 2021).
 - (ii) **"Talent of my Territory" funding line credit**: the requirements are to be Colombian, be a strata 1, 2 or 3 student, score above 200 in the Saber 11 exam, be enrolled in a professional technical, technological or university course at a higher education institution recognized by the Ministry of Education and reside at the special industrial, port, biodiversity and eco-tourism district of Buenaventura. Moreover, students must have a sponsor. The loan funds enrolment and course fees (ICETEX, 2021).
 - (iii) **Black Community Scholarship Fund**: a fund of forgivable loans²⁷ for Afro-Colombian, Raizal²⁸ and Palenquero²⁹ students with scarce financial means and high academic achievements who are enrolled in a technical, technological or university course at a higher education institution registered in the National Information System for Higher Education (SNIES). It funds enrolment, the course fees, maintenance, study supplies and transport for the year in which they undertake their degree thesis (ICETEX, 2021).
 - (iv) **Álvaro Ulcué Chocué Indigenous Communities Fund**: for Colombian students belonging to an indigenous community and registered in the Ministry of the Interior's Directorate of Indigenous, ROM and Minority Affairs, who carry out community work in their community while taking their course and are enrolled in a technical, technological or university course at a higher education institution registered in SNIES. The loan funds enrolment, the course fees and maintenance costs, as well as maintenance for an extra semester so they can undertake their degree thesis (ICETEX, 2021).
6. In **Ecuador**, public institutions offer free university and polytechnic education and there is the **Eloy Alfaro National Scholarship** programme for students belonging to indigenous peoples such as the Afro-Ecuadorian and Montubio peoples. Moreover, they must qualify as "highly vulnerable" or "vulnerable" under the Social Registry. The scholarship provides funding to take a technical, higher technological or university course at an Ecuadorian higher education institution for up to three years of technical or technological education and up to six years of university education. The allocated monthly amount is equivalent to the prevailing unified basic salary (USD 400 in 2021) and covers maintenance costs (food, accommodation, basic services, transport, etc.) and the cost of study supplies. This money is paid on a monthly basis for the

²⁵ A strategy for overcoming poverty.

²⁶ It consists of five tests: critical reading, mathematics, social and citizenship studies, biology and English. The scoring scale ranges from 0 to 500 points (ICFES, 2021).

²⁷ The loan can be forgiven if the student completes the course.

²⁸ A community native to the Colombian insular territory of San Andrés, Providencia and Santa Catalina, descending from Europeans and enslaved persons of African descent.

²⁹ A community of people descending from enslaved persons who, from the fifteenth century, sought refuge in so-called Palenque places, situated on the north coast of Colombia.

duration of the university course. In addition, travel costs are included for scholarship recipients residing in the Galapagos Islands, amounting to an annual sum of USD 195, for the duration of students' studies (Secretariat for Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation of Ecuador, 2017).

7. **Mexico**, as for Colombia, has only financial measures to facilitate access to education for indigenous and Afro-descendant students: the INPI Higher Education, Master's and Degree Support Scholarships for the indigenous students of Mexico and the Youths Building the Future Scholarship.
 - (i) **INPI Higher Education, Master's and Degree Support Scholarships for the indigenous students of Mexico**: for Mexican students of indigenous or Afro-Mexican descent. Scholarships are provided until the age of 29 so students can study at public higher education institutions recognized by the Secretariat of Public Education. The scholarship includes money for food, accommodation, tuition fees and complementary activities. Maintenance amounts to USD 99 a month over a period of ten months and can be renewed (Government of Mexico, 2021a).
 - (ii) **Youths Building the Future Scholarship**: for indigenous or Afrodescendent students in situations of poverty who live in areas with high levels of violence, indigenous areas or areas inhabited by Afrodescendent people. They must be 29 or under, have an income per capita that is under the poverty line income³⁰ and be enrolled at one of the national education system's priority³¹ higher education institutions. Maintenance amounts to USD 120 a month for the ten months of the academic year (Government of Mexico, 2021b).
8. In **Paraguay**, free public higher education is offered by all public universities, as well as the Instituto Superior de Bellas Artes, Instituto Nacional de Educación Superior, teacher training institutes and Instituto Nacional de Salud (Vice-Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2021). In Paraguay, **2021 Higher Education Scholarships** are awarded to Paraguayan students who reside in the country. They have two modalities. Both scholarships are for academic costs, cover one academic year and can be renewed.
 - (i) For undergraduate courses, students must have left secondary school between 2017 and 2020 and be enrolled in a course accredited by the National Agency for the Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (ANEAES), as well as come from low-income families and have a secondary school GPA of at least 3. Moreover, they must submit a simple copy of the indigenous card issued to them by the Paraguayan Indigenous Institute (INDI) (Ministry of Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; Vice-Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2021).
 - (ii) For teacher training studies, the requirements are to come from low-income families, have a secondary school GPA of at least 3 and be enrolled in an initial teacher training course at an official teacher training management institute (Ministry of Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; Vice-Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2021). Moreover, students must submit a simple copy of the indigenous card issued to them by INDI (Ministry of Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; Vice-Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2021).

³⁰ Total value of a food basket and non-food basket per person per month.

³¹ These institutions are situated in areas where the population is mainly indigenous or Afrodescendent, places where marginalization or levels of violence are high. They are intercultural universities, indigenous teacher training schools, intercultural teacher training schools, rural teacher training schools and Universidades para el Bienestar Benito Juárez García.

9. In **Peru**, two government policies promote access to higher education for indigenous students: Indigenous Amazonian Communities (CNA) and Bilingual Intercultural Education (EIB). Both are financial.
- (i) **Indigenous Amazonian Communities (CNA)**: this programme is part of PRONABEC. It provides grants to high-achieving young indigenous persons aged 16 to 22, who attended public secondary schools, so they can pursue higher education (whether technical or university). Students must also come from geographic areas inhabited by indigenous communities. The programme coordinates decentralized admission testing with higher education centres to give students from different areas of Peru the opportunity to study (Ministry of Education of Peru, 2021; Pires, Sampaio and Poma, 2020).
 - (ii) **Bilingual Intercultural Education (EIB)**: this programme is part of PRONABEC. It provides grants to high-achieving young indigenous persons aged 16 to 22, who attended public secondary schools and have scarce financial means,³² so they can pursue higher education (whether technical or university). Students must also have an indigenous language as a mother tongue and come from geographic areas inhabited by indigenous communities. The programme coordinates decentralized admission testing with higher education centres to give students from different areas of Peru the opportunity to study (Ministry of Education of Peru, 2021; Pires, Sampaio and Poma, 2020).
10. Finally, in **Uruguay**, the **National Plan for Racial Equity and for Afrodescendants 2019-2022** (MIDES, 2019) was developed. It implements various policies to increase the completion of secondary education among this population group, thus facilitating access to higher education, as well as greater equity in access to and retention in the programmes of these education institutions. It proposes that public university foster actions favouring the admission of Afrodescendent youth to higher education at all levels. The current scholarships include an Afrodescendent perspective to increase that group's access to these benefits. It also suggests carrying out research to identify practices of racial discrimination in the school system that cause this group to fall behind at school and ultimately drop out.

E. Disability

Next, special public policies on access to education according to disability are described for nine Latin American countries.

Table A23
Latin America (9 countries): special government policies on access to higher education for students with disabilities

Country	Public policies according to disability
Argentina	National University Scholarship Programme (PNBU)
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	Special Educational Needs Social Scholarship
Brazil	For the higher education admission exam, technical help is offered INCLUIR Programme University for All Programme (ProUni)
Chile	Accommodations are made so students can sit the higher education admission exam Scholarship for Students with Disabilities
Colombia	Credit for communities under constitutional protection (ICETEX) Accommodations are offered to enable persons with disabilities to sit the higher education admission exam

³² This must be verified through the Household Focalization System (SISFOH).

Country	Public policies according to disability
Ecuador	Eloy Alfaro National Scholarships
El Salvador	Technical changes are made to the Secondary Skills and Learning Assessment (PAES) and the Academic and Pedagogical Competencies Evaluation (ECAP) (booklets are available in Braille)
Panama	Educational Economic Assistance Programme for students with disabilities
Paraguay	2021 Higher Education Scholarships

Source: Brunner and Miranda, 2016; Carneiro and Bridi, 2020; ProUni, 2021; Da Rocha and Pizzio, 2018; DEMRE, 2020; ICETEX, 2021; ICFES, 2021; Secretariat for Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation of Ecuador, 2017; Ministry of Education of Argentina, n.d.; Ministry of Education of Argentina, 2017; Ministry of Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; Vice-Ministry of Higher Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; Henry Dunant Foundation of Latin America, 2017; Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, n.d.; IFARHU, 2020; Ministry of Social Development of Uruguay (2019).

1. In **Argentina**, the **National University Scholarship Programme (PNBU)** has a subprogramme for Argentinian persons with disabilities. There is no age limit. It benefits students with special educational needs who are studying or who will study at national or provincial universities, national university institutes or national teaching or technical training institutes (Ministry of Education of Argentina, 2017; Ministry of Education of Argentina n.d.).
2. The Ministry of Education of the **Plurinational State of Bolivia** requires that the private universities of the country award the **Special Educational Needs Social Scholarship**. Each scholarship covers one academic year and can be renewed. The specific requirements for applying for the scholarship vary from university to university. Universities must award scholarships to 10% of newly enrolled students. It is for students who, for financial and social reasons, cannot pay for their university studies, indigenous persons from rural areas and/or students with special educational needs (Ministry of Education of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, n.d.).
3. In **Brazil**, there are three government policies to promote the access to higher education of students with disabilities. Two of these measures are non-financial, namely, the offer of accommodations to sit the higher education admission exam and the **INCLUIR Programme**. The other measure, the **University for All Programme (ProUni)**, is a financial policy.
 - (i) For the higher education admission exam, technical help such as furniture adaptations, facilities to access the premises and the refurbishment of special rooms is offered (Brunner and Miranda, 2016).
 - (ii) **INCLUIR Programme**: the purpose of this programme is to promote the inclusion of students with disabilities in higher education, ensuring accessibility conditions in federal higher education institutions. It includes architectural accommodations to ensure accessibility and the acquisition and adaptation of furniture. Moreover, it includes the provision of accessible teaching materials, technological equipment, guide and interpretation services and translation services. It also includes training professionals in the development of inclusive educational practices and the use of assistive technology resources and the Brazilian sign language (Carneiro and Bridi, 2020).
 - (iii) **University for All Programme (ProUni)**: for Brazilian students who have obtained at least 450 points in the National High School Examination (ENEM). Moreover, they must meet one of the following requirements: a) have attended secondary school through a grant awarded by that school (whether private or public); b) be a person with disabilities or c) be a public schoolteacher requiring a scholarship for undergraduate courses (in this case, they do not have to sit the ENEM again). The programme offers full and partial scholarships (50%) for private higher education institutions. Full scholarships are for students with a monthly gross family income equivalent to 1.5 minimum salaries, while the partial ones are for students with an income of the equivalent of up to three minimum salaries (ProUni, 2021; Da Rocha and Pizzio, 2018).

4. In the case of **Chile**, the country has two measures to include persons with disabilities in higher education, one financial (Scholarship for Students with Disabilities) and another non-financial (accommodations for sitting the higher education admission exam).
 - (i) **Scholarship for Students with Disabilities:** for students with disabilities and high academic achievements (a secondary school GPA above 5.0) registered in the National Disability Registry of the Civil Registry and Identification Service and belonging to the lowest-earning 70% of families in the country. This scholarship includes special amounts from the Bicentennial, Juan Gómez Millas and New Millennium scholarships. The benefits obtained by students depend on the accredited higher education institutions at which they are enrolled. In the case of the CRUCH universities, the scholarship funds the annual course fees of reference. In the case of accredited higher education institutions, it funds up to USD 1,510 of the annual course fees. In the case of technical or professional courses offered by accredited professional institutes, the scholarship funds between USD 788 and USD 1,129 of the annual course fees (Subsecretariat of Higher Education, 2021).
 - (ii) For the higher education admission exam, accommodations are offered so that persons with disabilities can sit the exam. Some are: help getting to the room, the refurbishment of special rooms, the option of taking the exam at home, the use of computers, enlarged booklets and test papers and touch screens, the adaptation of tables and chairs, facilities to access the premises, support for examiners, Chilean sign language interpreters, oral communication facilitation and paramedic assistance (DEMRE, 2020).
5. **Colombia** has two government policies to facilitate access to higher education for students with disabilities. One is the credit for communities under constitutional protection (ICETEX), a financial measure, and the other is accommodations enabling students to sit the higher education admission exam, which is classed as a non-financial measure.
 - (i) **Credit for communities under constitutional protection (ICETEX):** for students registered in the official databases identifying the population affected by armed conflict in Colombia (indigenous persons, victims, reintegrated persons and persons with disabilities) and United Network, who are enrolled in a professional technical, technological or university course at a higher education institution recognized by the Ministry of Education, have sat the Saber 11 exam³³ and obtained at least 210 points and have a sponsor. The loan funds enrolment, the course fees and maintenance costs (office supplies, books, computer, Internet connection, etc.). Repayment begins once students have completed their courses (ICETEX, 2021).
 - (ii) For the higher education admission exam, accommodations are offered so that persons with disabilities can sit the exam. Students (except those with motor disabilities) can choose between a standard question booklet or an adjusted one, as well as whether or not they will sit the English test. Students with hearing disabilities answer via computer (ICFES, 2021).
6. In **Ecuador**, public institutions offer free university and polytechnic education and there is the **Eloy Alfaro National Scholarships** programme for students with disabilities. The scholarship provides funding so students can take a technical, higher technological or university course at an Ecuadorian higher education institution and funds up to three years of technical or technological education and up to six years of university education. The monthly amount allocated is equivalent to the prevailing unified basic salary (USD 400 in 2021) to cover maintenance costs (food, accommodation, basic services and transport, among other things) and the cost of study

³³ It consists of five tests: critical reading, mathematics, social and citizenship studies, biology and English. The scoring scale ranges from 0 to 500 points (ICFES, 2021).

supplies. This money is provided on a monthly basis for the duration of the university course. Moreover, travel costs are included for scholarship recipients residing in the Galapagos Islands, amounting to an annual sum of USD 195, for the duration of students' studies (Secretariat for Higher Education, Science, Technology and Innovation of Ecuador, 2017).

7. In **El Salvador**, Braille booklets are available for the Secondary Skills and Learning Assessment (PAES) and Academic and Pedagogical Competencies Evaluation (ECAP) (Henry Dunant Foundation of Latin America, 2017).
8. In **Panama**, the **Educational Economic Assistance Programme for Students with Disabilities** offers non-refundable financial aid to students who need financial support to pay for their studies (for basic, secondary and higher education) and who have disabilities (IFARHU, 2020).
9. In **Paraguay**, free public higher education is offered by all public universities, as well as the Instituto Superior de Bellas Artes, Instituto Nacional de Educación Superior, teacher training institutes and Instituto Nacional de Salud (Vice-Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2021). In Paraguay, **2021 Higher Education Scholarships** are awarded to Paraguayan students who reside in the country. They have two modalities. Both scholarships are for academic costs, cover one academic year and can be renewed.
 - (i) For undergraduate courses, students must have left secondary school between 2017 and 2020 and be enrolled in a course accredited by the National Agency for the Evaluation and Accreditation of Higher Education (ANEAES), as well as come from low-income families and have a secondary school GPA of at least 3. They must present an up-to-date medical diagnosis made by a competent specialist that attests to a disability or an updated record issued by the National Body for the Human Rights of Persons with Disabilities (SENADIS) (Ministry of Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; Vice-Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2021).
 - (ii) For teacher training studies, students must come from low-income families, have a secondary school GPA of at least 3 and be enrolled in an initial teacher training course at an official teacher training management institute. They must also present an up-to-date medical diagnosis made by a competent specialist that attests to a disability or an updated record issued by SENADIS (Ministry of Education and Science of Paraguay, 2021; Vice-Ministry of Higher Education and Science, 2021).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, the data show an extraordinary increase in access to higher education programmes. However, many population groups have been left behind and have seen their right to access to higher education violated. It is essential to monitor progress in terms of inclusion at this level of education, as well as to strengthen and deepen policies and strategies to ensure equal opportunities for access, retention and completion. This document presents an analysis of the evolution of higher education in the region and identifies various national inclusion policies according to the axes described in the document *The social inequality matrix in Latin America*, prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2016).