



PLAN OF ACTION

Introduction

In the face of the challenges to higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC), it is essential to establish goals and priorities by constructing a strategic agenda for the region. In view of the conditions, needs, and imperatives of the local, national, and global environments, the principles of the Declaration of the Regional Conference on Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (CRES-2008), and the reports made by working groups, it is possible to establish guidelines appropriate to the new realities.

In a globalized world that, in spite of increasingly important technological advances, is socially unjust and unequal, it is necessary to consolidate the role of higher education in the region as a strategic factor for sustainable development and for fostering social inclusion and regional solidarity and for guaranteeing equal opportunities. Within this context, institutions of higher education, in the exercise of their autonomy, should assume a clear social commitment and their responsibility as a public service, supporting the development of science and technology, as well as programs and activities that foster humanistic aspects and that lead to comprehensive training and the promotion of citizenship.

The values and principles of the Declaration of CRES 2008, particularly the concept of education as a social public good, universal right, and duty of the State, oblige higher education, independently of the juridical nature on institutions of higher education, to:

- Affirm the notion of quality linked to pertinence and social inclusion;
- Develop and foster a culture of democracy and citizenship, in collaboration with previous levels of education;
- Affirm humanistic values, the fostering of a culture of peace, respect for and recognition of the value of cultural diversity, and commitment to humane and sustainable development;
- Generate conditions for dialogue between peers from other regions of the planet, with an emphasis of South-South cooperation;
- Contribute to the solution of the most pressing social problems and fulfilment of the Millennium Objectives.

Within this perspective, the following Plan of Action has been developed that contains five major emphases:

- 1) Fostering the expansion of the coverage of higher education, at both the undergraduate and graduate levels, with quality, pertinence, and social inclusion;
- 2) Promoting accreditation, assessment, and quality assurance policies;
- 3) Encouraging educational innovation and research at all levels;
- 4) Building a regional agenda for science, technology, and innovation in order to overcome disparities and for the sustainable development of LAC, in accordance with the general policies of each Member State;
- 5) Nurture regional Latin American and Caribbean integration and the internationalization of higher education in the region through, among other initiatives, the construction of ENLACES – the Area of Convergence of Latin America and the Caribbean for Higher Education.

In order that higher education policies and initiatives be appropriate for the promotion of these ends, we highlight the commitments that should constitute the focus of the efforts of the major actors involved: governments and institutions of higher education, networks, and international organizations. At the end of the document we emphasize proposals of the region for the World Conference on Higher Education in Paris (WCHE-2009).

GUIDELINE 1 – EXPANSION OF COVERAGE WITH QUALITY, PERTINENCE, AND SOCIAL INCLUSION

a) RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS

- Establish and strengthen reliable information systems on higher education in order to carry out appropriate diagnoses, offer inputs for public and institutional policies, and make possible comparisons between systems. In this sense, it is essential that governments act in collaboration with IESALC to foster the consolidation of the Map of Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean (MESALC) and its implementation in all countries of the region, including Puerto Rico and the countries of the Ibero-American Area of Higher Education. It is equally important for countries to participate in the UNESCO Portal on Higher Education Institutions.
- Increase coverage with appropriate standards of quality in order to reach the goal of 40% for the year 2015, taking into consideration that currently, the gross coverage rate in the region is 32%, and the average for developed countries is 55%. To this end, it is necessary for each country to define national goals for increasing coverage for the period at the undergraduate and graduate levels, as well as strategies for fostering geographic de-concentration of offerings, promoting a convergent effort among the governments of the region.
- Increase government budgets for higher education, fostering a policy of recuperation of the public sector, especially in countries that exhibit an imbalance in regard to private offerings, and implementing appropriate instruments of accountability.

- Broaden policies of inclusion for entry into the undergraduate and graduate levels, and carry out new mechanisms of public support for students (grants, education credits, student residences, health and meal services, as well as academic monitoring and vocational and professional guidance) aimed at generating equity, decreasing drop-out, improving student achievement, eliminating training gaps, and fostering digital inclusion.
- Implement inclusion policies of gender, of different ethnic and cultural groups, of persons with disabilities, of those deprived of their freedom or who live in places far from large urban centres, of persons with few resources, migrants, refugees, and other vulnerable populations, implementing appropriate instruments to foster their permanence within the institutions.
- Encourage the creation and consolidation of venues for inter-cultural dialogue under conditions of equality and mutual respect.
- Assess in depth the state of education at levels preceding that of higher education, in order to raise their quality and to update them in pedagogical innovations, as an efficient manner to assure better training of those who seek higher education.

b) RECOMMENDATIONS TO INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- Assume a commitment to adopt qualified and inclusive coverage, and to the implementation of management mechanisms that contain self-assessment procedures and appropriate accountability.
- Include in their strategies indicators of social responsibility.
- Broaden inclusion policies for entrance and carry out institutional support programs for students (grants, education credits, student residences, health and meal services, as well as academic monitoring and vocational and professional guidance) aimed at generating equity, decreasing dropout, improving student achievement, eliminating training gaps, and fostering digital inclusion.
- Implement, as part of institutional plans, affirmative actions for the inclusion and permanence of minorities, persons with disabilities, ethnic groups (indigenous people and those of African descent), persons who lack resources, workers, refugees, and other vulnerable populations.
- Incorporate an academic monitoring system for students in order to combat dropout and to assure appropriate performance and comprehensive training.
- Develop actions for linkage with the entire education system, fostering solid cognitive bases and learning on pre-university levels so that students who enter higher education possess the values, skills, and abilities to be able to acquire, construct, and transfer knowledge for the benefit of society.
- Incorporate a tracking system of graduates within the labour market that makes it possible to assess and strengthen the pertinence and quality of higher education.

- Contribute with plans for the review and improvement of the primary and secondary levels of national education.

GUIDELINE 2 – POLICIES FOR QUALITY ASSESSMENT AND ASSURANCE

a) RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS

- Foster the consolidation of national assessment and accreditation systems and mutual knowledge of the same as a strategy making possible translatability between systems and integrated action on the regional level.
- Review assessment and accreditation models of institutions and programs, as well as those for the allocation of funds for research and projects in order that they may respond to criteria of the recognition of and placement of due value on cultural diversity and interculturality with equity, with special attention to the differences associated with linguistic, socio-cultural, and territorial differences.
- Support the construction and implementation in institutions of higher education of self-assessment systems that develop their own indicators – while being compatible with respective national policies – and which include the link of higher education with innovative projects able to transform society.
- Propose the incorporation, in national accreditation and assessment systems, of indicators of solidarity-based cooperation at the national and international levels.
- Utilize the results of the processes of accreditation and assessment for the development of public policies in higher education.

b) RECOMMENDATIONS TO INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- Seek continuous improvement of the fulfilment of institutional missions, of management models, and of the involvement in local, national, and regional contexts.
- Foster an assessment culture, commitment to assessment and accreditation systems, and establish institutional policies, systems, and structures for quality assurance.
- Carry forward innovative and participatory self-assessment processes, including institutional segments as well as the outside community, as a commitment to transparency and accountability to society.

GUIDELINE 3 – EDUCATIONAL INNOVATION

a) RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS

- Create instruments that foster educational innovation.
- Promote intercultural education, and generate statistics that make it possible to assess the participation of students, teachers, and researchers, and especially of indigenous people and those of African descent in higher education.

- Encourage teachers with career plans and salary levels, fostering permanent training and providing appropriate conditions for professional performance.
- Foster the use of ICTs throughout the education system and promote virtual education with appropriate quality assurance mechanisms.
- Create normative and support instruments that encourage an enterprising spirit and educational innovation.
- Organize working groups comprised of specialists from institutions of higher education and of other government specialists in order to move forward in the process of educational innovation.

b) RECOMMENDATIONS TO INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- Develop new curricula, educational models, and pedagogical strategies informed by the new contexts, comprehensive training, and relations with professionals with the labour market that make possible better choices for students within education systems, with flexible curricula that aid them to move through the structures, that foster new academic career paths, including those with inter-disciplinary, multi-disciplinary, and trans-disciplinary perspectives, and that make possible exchange with other national or international institutions.
- Broaden continued education offerings, with a goal of the generalization of life-long higher education.
- Foster the permanent training of teachers in new teaching/learning models, with skills to work in complex educational environments, with heterogeneous groups, or with people of diverse cultural and social backgrounds.
- Assure interaction and commitment to other levels of teaching, contributing to the quality of primary and secondary education and to the eradication of illiteracy, improving cooperation between different levels of training, formal and informal education mechanisms, short courses, and programs compatible with employment.
- Foster the utilization of ICTs in higher education, and strengthen offerings of distance education, creating focuses of support and innovative models such as joint programs, modular courses, certification by module, among others, in order to innovate in pedagogical practice, increase the coverage of higher education, diversify offerings, and democratize access to knowledge.
- Establish and support lines of research aimed at attempting educational innovations at different moments of the educational process, from curriculum design to carrying out pedagogical experiences in the fields of learning and teaching and of learning to learn.
- Strengthen social studies and the humanities, with the understanding that they are crosscutting keys to the training of students in all university courses.

GUIDELINE 4 – REGIONAL AGENDA OF CT&I

a) RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS

- Increase public investment in science, technology, and innovation, with a minimum goal of 1% of GDP to be reached within the next five years. In the case of countries that have already reached this level, to continue in order to increase the percentage of investment.
- Foster cooperation between advanced knowledge headed by national scientific teams and local production, through diverse mechanisms that add value to such production.
- Encourage the creation of capacities of CT&I in strategic areas of knowledge, foster the construction of endogenous scientific-technological bases and platforms, and promote collaboration and the development of strategic through networking, particularly in South-South and North-South-South cooperation.
- Strengthen and foster with specific resources graduate courses in the region, establishing academic exchange and promoting the creation of regional graduate courses and of shared lines of research between institutions of different countries.
- Support and encourage doctoral training programs in order to increase qualified personnel in all fields of knowledge, with an emphasis on strategic areas for sustainable national development and regional integration.
- Disseminate and project scientific knowledge to society, developing programs to awaken scientific vocations and the culture of innovation among young people.
- Implement a national policy of scientific and technological development, creating legal frameworks and appropriate support instruments in order to construct national systems of science, technology, and innovation that foster and stimulate cooperation between governments, universities, and research centres and the national productive system.
- Foster the implementation of schemes for technology and innovation transfer between local and regional actors in order to add value to processes for the production of goods and services and to increase national and regional competitiveness.
- Strengthen technical and technological education.
- Create instruments that facilitate investments in CT&I on the part of the private sector

b) RECOMMENDATIONS TO INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- Establish institutional policies to foster research and innovation, including stimuli for teachers, researchers, and students, mechanisms for the dissemination of results, seed programs for science, among others.
- Create institutional instruments for the management of the transfer of knowledge and innovation such as incubators, disciplines for the training of entrepreneurs, technology parks, and policies for the protection of intellectual property, among others.
- Create instruments for the development of CT&I at the institutional level in alliance with other sectors, both public and private, and strengthening the pertinence of research.

- Actively participate in the national CT&I system, with the specific functions of higher education.
- Foster studies on our societies and cultures, strengthening endogenous perspectives for approaching our problems, responding to challenges in the areas of human, economic, social, and cultural rights, equity, distribution of wealth, multi-cultural integration, participation, the building of democracy, and national equilibrium, as well as the enrichment of our national heritage.
- Make a clear commitment to regional development, seeking to offer solutions to social problems and making the Millennium Objectives their own.

GUIDELINE 5 – REGIONAL INTEGRATION AND INTERNATIONALIZATION

a) RECOMMENDATIONS TO GOVERNMENTS

- Implement policies and action for the integration of higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean, fostering the construction of the Latin American and Caribbean Higher Education Area (ENLACES).
- Reject the incorporation of education as a commercial service within the framework of WTO agreements, and regulate the investment of foreign capital in national institutions of higher education.
- Give special attention to the cross-border offering of higher education, analyzing the application of specific regulatory measures, regulating the investment of foreign capital in institutions of higher education, and implementing appropriate systems of assessment and accreditation of educational institutions that establish themselves in the region.
- Prevent and avoid the loss of talent through the emigration of persons with academic and professional qualifications, implementing measures and public policies to retain and repatriate qualified individuals and to facilitate their integration into national development projects, as well as creating better options that encourage the permanence and good use of talents. Moreover, official agreements for training abroad should include dimensions such as reciprocity and obligations of in-country service for graduates, including conditions for employment integration in projects of interest.
- Provide for the creation of a network of graduates who have participated in internationalization programs who are working in other countries in order to encourage collaboration with institutions in their countries of origin and those that employ them as professionals.
- For Latin Americans who have been trained and are working abroad in levels of higher education, facilitate their incorporation into networks and training in order to participate in graduate training, according to their qualifications.
- Support the creation of broad coverage mobility programs between the institutions of higher education of the region, facilitating the circulation of teachers, researchers, students, and administrators as a means to foster integration, offering solutions to barriers such as financing, migratory procedures, quotas, among others.

- Up-date the 1974 Regional Agreement for the Co-validation of Studies, Titles, and Diplomas of Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Foster solidarity-based internationalization of higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean, strengthening existing programs for cooperation and integration in the region, and establishing alliances for the development of scientific-technological activity, contemplating through the creation of specific funding programs the definition of regional priorities that favour the complementary efforts of different countries and the increase of the scientific quality of our institutions, contributing to slowing down the brain-drain.
- Strengthen the process of convergence of national and sub-regional assessment and accreditation programs in order to have available regional standards and procedures for assuring the quality of higher education and research in order to promote their social and public function.
- Establish mechanisms for increasing cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, with special emphasis on cooperation of the region with the countries of Africa and small island nations.
- Support university networks, regional institutions of higher education, and the cooperation enhancement actions of IESALC-UNESCO.
- Develop joint initiatives of regional interest with regional and global university networks.
- Foster better use and linkages of higher education to international cooperation for sustainable development.

b) RECOMMENDATIONS TO INSTITUTIONS OF HIGHER EDUCATION

- Promote a strategy of internationalization and international cooperation, and implement proposals for integration.
- Implement programs of solidarity-based cooperation with the institutions of higher education of Latin America and the Caribbean, with special attention to lesser-developed countries.
- Strengthen even more the links that make possible productive interrelations in the areas of teaching, extension, and research, leading to cooperation that fosters the Latin America and Caribbean region to act as a block before the world.
- Generate specific policies to offer attractive options to foreign students in the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean, as a strategy for cultural dissemination and development of an international environment in institutions of higher education.
- Increase and actively participate in networks and nuclei of strategic and prospective thinking on the key problems of higher education within the framework of the integration of Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Encourage and consolidate academic association between graduate programs, strengthening training activities, facilitating the mutual recognition of credits, and stimulating joint degrees and cooperative graduate programs, particularly in strategic areas.

- Promote the training of qualified human resources in the management of regional integration, and solidarity-based international cooperation, seeing the continuity and increase of the quality of the activities that they carry out.
- Foster teaching and research in areas related to the integration of Latin America and the Caribbean, sustainable development, intercultural studies, the knowledge and recognition of the value of our cultural and environmental heritage, and the study of contemporary phenomena.
- Build technical and negotiation skills in order to participate more actively in opportunities that generate international cooperation for sustainable development.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO NETWORKS

- Widely disseminate the Declaration of CRES-2008 and the Plan of Action, in order that its members may accept them as documents of reference and support joint initiatives, with the same objectives, with global university networks.
- Support implementation of the Plan of Action through the activities of its members, seeking synergies with other networks and other involved actors for the productive articulation of efforts.
- Cooperate with IESALC in the implementation, follow-up, and assessment of the Plan of Action.
- Contact African universities and networks in order to develop joint programs and discussion points for the Conference of Paris (WCHE-2009).
- Contribute to the organization and development of ENLACES.

RECOMMENDATIONS TO INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS

- Adopt the principles of the Declaration of CRES-2008.
- Support implementation of the Plan of Action with the framework of their activities.
- Support regional meetings within the framework of ENLACES, and similar initiatives, seeking to strengthen complementarities and synergies between them.

FINAL CONSIDERATIONS

The region should strengthen the activities of IESALC-UNESCO, so it may be transformed into the principal organization of policy coordination in the region in the area of higher education, and as a permanent forum of discussion and debate, promoter of inter-institutional agreements, research focused on the sustainable use of strategic resources, and others. For its part, it is expected of IESALC-UNESCO that it will:

- Disseminate the results of CRES-2008 among governments, institutions of higher education, and other relevant actors, including the Final Declaration and Plan of Action for the region.
- Offer visibility and articulate initiatives of countries, networks, associations, institutions of higher education, international organizations, sub-regional and inter-regional entities within the framework of the Declaration of CRES-2008 and of the emphases proposed in the Plan of Action for Latin America and the Caribbean.
- Establish contacts between other actors, with the university networks and associations of the region, and with global university networks, organizations such as CAN, ALBA, MERCOSUR, CAB, RIACES, CARICOM, SICA, the Ibero-American Forum of Higher Education, SELA, projects such as TUNING and 6x4, universities and regional programs such as UWI, UNILA, Universidad del Sur, FLACSO, CLACSO, CYTED/RICYT, requesting that they list specific activities which they decide to carry forward within the framework of this Plan of Action for cooperative efforts in the region.
- Develop, in conjunction with interested regional actors in higher education, science, technology, and innovation, the agenda of intermediary meetings between CRES and WCHE in which will be discussed and explained the activities proposed by these actors within the framework of the Plan of Action for the region.
- Establish follow-up/monitoring, and implementation mechanisms for the proposals of CRES-2008 expressed in this Plan of Action.
- Request of OEI that the themes of CRES be included in the Ibero-American Summit of Chiefs of State.
- Generate, through the competence of UNESCO in areas of education, an observatory attentive to what occurs within the field of higher education within the framework of the commitments assumed by countries in the WTO, making public its development and consequences.
- Present to WCHE the Declaration of CRES-2008, the Plan of Action, and the proposals of the region for higher education in the world.

PROPOSALS OF THE REGION FOR WCHE (Paris, 2009)

- Reiterate, as fundamental principles, the values expressed in the Declaration of WCHE-1998: education as a public good; quality, pertinence, and social inclusion; and international solidarity.
- Request that governments declare themselves and act in favour of higher education as a right, and not as a marketable service within the framework of the World Trade Organization.
- Support member countries in the implementation of measures to regulate cross-border education offerings and the acquisition of institutions of higher education by foreign companies.
- Encourage that member countries implement agendas of science, technology, and innovation for sustainable development that reduce the gap between developed and developing countries.

- Carry out measures to prevent and avoid the loss of talent caused by the emigration of individuals with professional skills, and implement actions that seek to create conditions of balance between developed and developing countries.
- Support the cooperative linkages between national and regional accreditation and assessment systems.
- Foster the creation of support funds for South-South and North-South-South cooperation, with special attention to countries of Africa and island nations.