

JOINT STATEMENT

Higher education, research and innovation must be core pillars of a future-oriented EU-CELAC agenda

Collaboration is vital

Since the previous European Union-Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (EU-CELAC) summit in 2015, the world has undergone considerable change. In particular, the urgency of a global economic and social transition towards sustainability and carbon-zero is universally recognised. It requires global agreement and action, to which region-to-region agendas can provide a strategically important contribution.

The political and sanitary crises of recent years showcased the importance of transnational and transregional exchange and collaboration in a world of global interdependences, and the risk and damage for our societies and economies resulting from even relatively short disruptions. Whether long-term transition processes, or a response to sudden crises, this requires solutions built on knowledge and skills, to which the university sector has a critical contribution.

On behalf of the university sectors of Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, we express our expectation that at the forthcoming EU-CELAC summit, governments will give due consideration to the contribution that higher education, research and innovation bring to the EU-CELAC agenda.

Enhanced collaboration among both regions' university sectors contributes to the global visibility of an EU-CELAC agenda based on human rights and the rule of law. Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and Europe share a commitment to inclusion and equity, democratic values, social inclusion, and cultural and linguistic diversity. This must be the basis for ongoing and future social, environmental, economic, and technological innovation and development, also in light of the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals and Agenda 2030.

Therefore, we express our expectation that a strengthened EU-CELAC partnership will give full consideration to the role of research, innovation and higher education, in line with previous statements.¹

Tackling the twin green and digital transition, in full respect of values

The twin green and digital transition is a key area for enhanced EU-LAC collaboration on value-based technical, economic, and societal changes. We support the goal to strive for shared approaches on issues related to the green and digital transition (data privacy, AI regulation, environmental protection and carbon reduction etc.) to ensure openness, transparency, and inter-operability in the public interest.

¹ I.e. EU-CELAC 2021-2023 [Strategic Roadmap for the implementation of the Brussels Declaration and EU-CELAC Action Plan on Science, Technology and Innovation](#); and the Declaration of the [Informal Meeting of Ministers and Higher Education Authorities](#) (May 2023).

Universities have a key role to play, through foundational research, knowledge creation, innovation and capacity building, and provision of cutting-edge education and training for citizens and professionals at all stages of life and career. With their proven ability to work in transnational and interregional settings, across disciplines and sectors, universities are important actors in the advancement of sustainable social, technological, and economic development.

New challenges for research and education

To provide the knowledge and skills required for employment and citizenship, university sectors need support for their own ongoing transformation processes. In this context, university values, such as autonomy, academic freedom, equity and inclusion must be given due consideration.

For example, formats and modes of educational provision are changing in order to provide more flexible education, e.g. through micro credentials. This impacts recognition and quality assurance approaches, as well as universities' general operations. In addition, academic careers need urgent reforms, and entrepreneurship and innovation must be systematically embedded in research and education. Moreover, Open Science, in all its dimensions, must become the foundation of scientific collaboration, using limited resources and forces as effectively as possible and allowing more efficient knowledge exchange.

These issues are of growing importance for higher education and research systems in both regions, and will impact their ability to perform excellent research, provide cutting-edge education and contribute to innovation and societal and economic development.

Enhancing collaboration

EU-CELAC higher education and research relationships are longstanding, manifold, and dynamic. An enhancement of the EU-CELAC policy framework in the area of higher education, research and innovation, matched with funding opportunities, would not only benefit the university sector, but also the wider EU-LAC agenda, as it contributes to people-to-people exchanges, fosters distributed excellence and knowledge, and capacity building. This may include a wide range of initiatives, driven by the sector, including staff and student exchanges, joint research and teaching, and collaboration with society and industry.

The following measures should be considered:

- A more structured EU-LAC higher education and research policy dialogue, with the systematic involvement of stakeholder organisations. This should take into consideration lessons learned from existing regional and bi-regional exchanges (European Research Area, Bologna Process, ASEM Education Process) and ongoing projects and pilots in the sector. Measures to enhance CELAC intra-regional exchange and collaboration and related capacity and institution building – as an important enabler of bi-regional dialogue and partnership – should also be examined.
- The further development of the EU-CELAC higher education area, and the EU-CELAC research area, and links and synergies between the two. Key areas for collaboration in this regard would be the assessment of research and academic careers, in consideration of ongoing work under the Coalition for Advancing Research Assessment (CoARA), and enhancement of academic mobility (for example, a transnational doctoral exchange programme).

- Regular EU-CELAC conferences on higher education, research and innovation policy and practice. This would establish the policy–practice connect, take stock of progress made, showcase successful policies, projects, and practices, and promote synergies and collaboration. Broad sectoral involvement should include policy makers and regional and national associations.
- Support transnational and transregional working groups on key topics and priorities, such as the development of legislation on digitalisation, focusing on issues such as data privacy, and artificial intelligence to provide recommendations for further action and collaboration. This would enhance policy coherence and shared approaches.
- Enhancement of funding. Current demand under the Erasmus+, Horizon Europe and national funding programmes far exceeds the offer. More scholarships, structured exchange, and collaborative research opportunities could substantial benefits not only for the individual beneficiaries, but also for their institutions and organisations, as well as their societies and economies.



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