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**‘EU-LAC Knowledge Forum’
Montevideo
24th and 25th of April 2023
- Report -**

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Executive Summary

The Summit of Heads of State and Government CELAC-EU, scheduled for 17-18 July 2023, will provide an opportunity to generate a high-level strategic dialogue on the challenges and opportunities of bi-regional cooperation around (higher) education and science, technology and innovation in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and the countries of the European Union (EU). In the framework of its mission to facilitate the exchange between governmental authorities and civil societies of the two regions, the EU-LAC Foundation organised on 24 and 25 April 2023 a Knowledge Forum with the aim of generating inputs to enrich the agenda of discussions of high-level authorities in the field of cooperation in science, technology and innovation, the EU-CELAC Common Area of Higher Education, as well as capacity building and access, equity and quality of knowledge.

The EU-LAC Knowledge Forum was held at the Spanish Cooperation Training Centre in Montevideo – Uruguay in a hybrid form and had the technical and financial support of the Uruguayan Agency for International Cooperation (AUCI) and the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), as well as the institutional support of the Ministry of Education and Culture of Uruguay and the UNESCO Regional Bureau for Science in Latin America and the Caribbean.



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The Forum brought together around 55 face-to-face participants and 50 virtual participants - mostly representatives of the student, academic and scientific communities, experts from international organisations specialised in the field, and government representatives from LAC and EU countries.

This report reflects, in synthesized form, the dialogues held during the Forum, as well as the information shared by several experts through an ex ante online survey.

The Forum participants agreed that the context of the bi-regional partnership has changed considerably since the last EU-CELAC Summit and deemed it necessary to adapt the mechanisms of scientific and academic cooperation in more equitable conditions between regions and countries. It was suggested that EU and LAC states should recognise the right to science as a constitutional right of all citizens. From this right, policies, international cooperation programmes and investments in the HE sector and R&D should be derived. Good practices and initiatives at bi-regional, regional, sub-regional and national levels were shared, many of which deserve to be reinforced or even reactivated. Participants stressed the need to strengthen the ‘researcher mobility’, ‘global challenges’ and ‘innovation’ pillars of the EU-CELAC Joint Research and Innovation Initiative (JIRI) through an action plan and funding, taking as an example the work undertaken in the ‘research infrastructures’ pillar. It was also proposed to establish a technical secretariat to follow up on the commitments made in the JIRI-SOM and a better coordination between the four pillars. Participants called upon policy makers in both regions to establish an institutional framework for the EU-CELAC Common Higher Education Area, based on principles such as exchange of information, mutual trust, allocation of financial resources, building and convergence on existing ones, graduality and quality, and to develop objectives and gradual operational steps to facilitate convergence in areas such as accreditation and recognition of degrees, quality assurance, mobility schemes, etc.).

Given the limited resources to promote scientific cooperation, it was suggested to establish multi-sectoral dialogues, enhance public-private partnerships with the involvement of various actors (e.g., business chambers, development banks, foundations, think tanks...) and promote science diplomacy on key issues of the Agenda 2030. The interest was articulated in developing, jointly between LAC and the EU, policies to promote open science, based on the 'FAIR' principles, to strengthen and generate a greater impact of the efforts generated in both regions. Given the multitude of instances, forums and spaces for academic cooperation and R&D, concrete ideas were formulated on processes and coordination mechanisms to generate greater synergies and avoid duplication of efforts. Finally, the participants proposed fostering joint reflections on the transformation of higher education, promoting policies aimed at equity in HEIs, the fostering of capacities throughout life-long learning processes, the retainment of human talent, and the promotion multilingualism in science.

1. Interventions by authorities

Nicolás Albertoni, Deputy Foreign Minister of the Republic of Uruguay, said that the Forum would help to strengthen relations between the countries of the bi-regional association in stare of the EU-CELAC Summit of Heads of State and Government. Economic recovery, employment generation, reduction of inequality, insecurity and organised crime are some of the current challenges facing the LAC region. Having the EU as a partner was not only important but necessary, bearing in mind that LAC was one of the regions with the greatest inequality in the world, and it





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was therefore necessary to jointly analyse impact policies. He reiterated that Uruguay had always been an active member of the bi-regional relationship and offered to be a hub for future work.

The Executive Director of the EU-LAC Foundation, **Adrián Bonilla**, explained that this event was part of a series of activities aimed at generating relevant information for the bi-regional relationship and the agenda of the EU-CELAC Summit of Heads of State and Government. The last meeting at the highest political level took place in 2015. Since then, we have witnessed events and dynamics that have marked the global agenda such as the pandemic, which accelerated the processes of digitalisation that have had a profound impact on education. The idea of promoting spaces for exchange between academic and scientific actors from both regions was institutionalised from the time of the establishment of the EU-LAC Foundation, in line with the decisions taken at the summits of this century. This year's summit marks a new moment in LAC-EU relations in different conditions. Areas of cooperation should be identified in which there is consensus and shared objectives, and where knowledge is a cross-cutting issue.

Alberto Majo, National Director of Innovation, Science and Technology of Uruguay, mentioned that the world has experienced various changes that affect the daily life of citizens, the economy and politics. Therefore, this bi-regional event comes at an important moment in which cooperation between research actors, the private sector and decision-makers should be reviewed. He deemed necessary to agree on a new governance that is adapted to the new times and held that education, science and technology could help to provide answers to global challenges.

The Director of Global Approach and International Cooperation in R&I of the European Commission, **María Cristina Russo**, stressed that, in 2014, the development of an EU-CELAC Knowledge Space was proposed to facilitate bi-regional cooperation in the fields of science, research, innovation and technology. This space has been developed under three pillars: mobility of researchers, cooperation in research infrastructures, and research focused on global challenges. In 2020, a meeting of high authorities (JIRI SOM) was organised for the last time, where an action plan with concrete initiatives was approved. The current year is very important as it seeks to strengthen EU-CELAC cooperation. The Directorate-General RTD is working with the European External Action Service (EEAS) to ensure that research is considered as a key element in the summit agenda. In the second half of 2023, it is also planned to organise again a senior officials meeting (JIRI SOM), probably in Spain, where a new action plan will be adopted and approved at ministerial level, paving the way for bi-regional cooperation in science for the coming years.

The EU Ambassador to Uruguay, **Paolo Berizzi**, pointed out that there are high expectations for the upcoming EU-CELAC summit. In this context, the EU is co-financing three EU-LAC Foundation Fora with civil society, academics and experts to generate inputs for the adoption of common lines of initiatives, programmes and public policies that help to articulate links between the two regions in the areas of knowledge, gender equality and green and digital transitions. He emphasised that the Digital Alliance between LAC and the EU had just been launched to facilitate the development of secure and sustainable digital infrastructures. He also mentioned the Copernicus Reference Centre in Chile to promote the public and private use of Earth satellite data provided by this European programme. Similarly, the EU is strengthening the bi-regional partnership through the new Global Gateway investment framework, aimed at strengthening sustainable collaborations in different areas. He also highlighted the role of the Uruguayan Agency for International Cooperation (AUCI) in promoting innovation and research activities in the framework of European and triangular cooperation in the country and the LAC region.



According to **Santiago Jiménez Martín**, Spanish Ambassador to Uruguay, Spain, which will assume the presidency of the EU Council in the second half of 2023 and, together with other countries, is working tirelessly to bring the summit to fruition. The revitalisation of the bi-regional partnership will be a milestone, not only in the commercial and political sphere, but also in the social sphere. He recalled that the aim of the Knowledge Forum would be to draw up concrete proposals to demonstrate that the bi-regional partnership not only exists but is moving forward and has the capacity to change people's lives. The fact that events such as this Forum could be held at the AECID Training Centre in Montevideo is also possible thanks to the new Spanish law that aims to allocate 0.7% of gross domestic product to development cooperation.

2. Cooperation in Science, Technology and Innovation

The inputs generated in this thematic area revolved around challenges, good practices and recommendations for strengthening bi-regional cooperation in:

- research infrastructures
- enabling environments for innovation;
- technology transfer;
- open science/open access policies; and
- the EU's Global Gateway investment programme.

The keynote speaker **Ramon Torrent** (President of OBREAL Global) recommended taking into consideration the '[EULAC Focus Common Vision and Action Plan](#)' in which concrete ideas had been formulated that have not lost validity and relevance since its formulation at the end of 2019. He also advocated leveraging EU policies and programmes to strengthen the relationship with LAC. The relationship of member states with the EU is asymmetrical because no member state can include the EU, but the EU can include member states and associate them with its policies, in the field of scientific cooperation. He also drew attention to the different levels of relations between all EU member states and all LAC states; some EU member states and some LAC states, Ibero-American relations, Italo-Latin American relations, relations between English-speaking states, states whose official language is French, Dutch, etc.

Referring to research infrastructures, the speaker **Fernando Amestoy** (Coordinator of the CELAC Research Infrastructures Working Group) clarified that these are not an end in themselves, but rather promote development, science and research. He presented the progress made in the working group coordinated by him, which, in turn, constitutes one of the pillars of the JIRI, in which, despite the heterogeneous realities in the region, participants found a way of working according to the principle of 'leaving no one behind'. He recommended developing scientific potential in accordance with economic potential, in a given context, to generate value and social impact. He also suggested developing scientific partnerships following the logic of 'eco-regions' rather than (geo)political logics. He stressed the importance of open science and quality data accessible to all to strengthen research capacities and address identified global problems.

Lidia Borrell-Damián, speaker at the Forum, highlighted that in the LAC region plenty of experience with non-commercial models of scientific publishing ('diamond model') exist that promote publications at no cost for authors and free access to research results for readers. In Europe, the scientific system continues to be dominated by large commercial scientific publishing agencies and publishers. Neither science nor societies benefit from this model. Scientific progress has therefore been slow and costly. Although open science policies have been promoted in the past years, they are difficult to implement, for their implementation depends on structural changes in other areas,

such as, for example, the scientific merit assessment model. In this regard, an [Action Plan for the Diamond Open Access model](#) was published last year to further develop and expand a sustainable, bottom-up, community-driven scholarly communication ecosystem, including journals and platforms, while respecting the cultural, multilingual, and disciplinary diversity that is the strength of the sector.

2.1 Overview of the situation, lessons learned and good practices

Forum participants and those who took part in the online ex-ante survey agreed that, in general, over the last few years there has been an increase not only in interest in collaborating on science, technology and innovation, but also in the number of cooperation initiatives and knowledge exchange between the two regions. This rapprochement has developed beyond the political situation. It is common values and interests – for example, similar challenges in digital or technological development; sustainable development; health; migration; governance and democratisation – that facilitate scientific cooperation and where researchers and academics can learn from each other's experiences, respectively.¹

Participants addressed the 'Joint EU-LAC Research and Innovation Initiative' (JIRI) as a governance mechanism for cooperation in science, technology and innovation as well as the approval of the [Strategic Roadmap 2021-2023](#). The work in its different pillars progressed at very different speeds and intensities, so that this mechanism, in the opinion of many participants, has not yet fulfilled its potential. With regard to open science as the backbone of this roadmap, the recent publication on ['Open access policies in Latin America, the Caribbean and the European Union'](#) was highlighted, which analyses the common challenges and ways of convergence to move forward with policy dialogue based on recommendations for policy action for intra-LAC and EU-LAC collaboration.

Participants convened in that scientific cooperation differs from development cooperation. In general terms, the former tends to be more symmetrical than the latter. As a lesson learned, it was noted that multilateral scientific cooperation funding schemes have proven to be more successful than bilateral ones. It was also pointed out that it is important to foster integration between bottom-up research projects (from scientific communities) and top-down programmes (promoted by public entities) because of their multiplier effect and to foster the collaboration of actors who, in a pure bottom-up strategy, might not have the opportunity to collaborate.

Among the initiatives, programmes and good practices, participants highlighted the following:

- [Horizon Europe](#) Programme (2021-2027) (extension of the Horizon 2020 Programme).
- European funding for researchers of excellence: [ERC](#), [MSCA](#)
- [ResInfra](#) Project, with pilots developed: INSTRUCT-ERIC, Lifewatch ERIC, RICAP and E-RIHS
- [ALCUE NET](#) Network (2012-2017)
- [EU-LAC Interest Group](#) Platform (heir of ERANet-LAC 2013-2017)
- [ENRICH IN LAC](#) Network
- Network of National Contact Points in LAC ([LAC NCP Network](#))
- Ibero-American Programme on Science and Technology for Development ([CYTED](#))

¹ See, for example, the publication ['Why Latin America Matters'](#), or the university network ['Routes towards Sustainability'](#).

- Programme for the Strengthening of Science and Technology Systems ([FORCYT](#))
- [Ibero-American Innovation Strategy](#)
- [BELLA](#) Programme with its submarine and terrestrial components
- [EUROCLIMA+](#) Programme
- [UNESCO's Recommendation on Open Science](#) and UNESCO's monitoring of open science in LAC and EU countries.
- IDB [Science and Technology Programme](#).

In addition, the role of small-scale bi-national or bi-regional projects as catalysts for innovation and for the creation of research ecosystems with complementary actors (e.g., [German-Argentine University Centre](#)) was considered fundamental.

One lesson learned has been to understand that the strengthening of research infrastructures must be oriented towards the general development of countries. In LAC, scientific cooperation should be understood as a preferential means to overcome the middle-income trap. Development policies should include guidelines that enhance the LAC region's digital ecosystem and its global connection. In this regard, the importance of the [Digital Alliance](#) was highlighted in four fundamental pillars:

- Expansion of infrastructure (e.g. Bella II).
- Policy dialogue (ECLAC with European development cooperation agencies – e.g., Spain, Germany, France; dialogue with bodies such as Mercosur, Andean Community, SICA, CARICOM etc.)
- Capacity building and training (e.g., Copernicus - Earth observation).
- Development of start-ups (e.g., Tecnalia).

2.2 Current challenges

Several participants highlighted the serious limitations to research funding, which they understood to be related to the political and economic context (e.g., political instability in certain countries; economic crisis resulting from the pandemic; war in Ukraine; high turnover of senior civil servants), but also to insufficient political will, commitment or leadership. The lack of funds for initiatives aimed at long-term impacts was also noted, and it was recalled that - being middle-income countries - some LAC countries are no longer eligible for EU funding and alternative co-financing mechanisms have not yet been designed.

The heterogeneity and gaps in capacities within countries and within the EU and LAC regions were acknowledged, as well as the asymmetries between LAC and the EU. Of particular concern was the lack of integration of the Caribbean in existing initiatives and mechanisms. Concern was also articulated about a mismatch related to high-level infrastructures in both LAC and EU countries, because the access of the critical mass to benefit from them does not seem to be evolving at their pace.

Concern was shared about a 'hyperinflation' of bodies, for a and entities that generates duplication and gaps, as well as a lack of coordination between these bodies and levels of scientific cooperation.



Finally, indeterminacy about the preferred scientific evaluation system (publications/projects/fund acquisition/teaching/outreach/teamwork/other merits of researchers) was mentioned as an obstacle to progress on fundamental issues such as, for example, open science/open access.

2.3 Common interests and recommendations

Participants recommended to improve the dissemination and awareness raising strategies on existing initiatives and opportunities in R&D at the bi-regional level, which in many sectors are still unknown. Communication should take into account the different languages spoken in the countries that make up the EU-CELAC knowledge area and avoid being limited to English. In this respect, contacts and networks with alumni/ former scholarship holders could also be activated as multipliers and 'ambassadors' of the cooperation programmes.

It was suggested to prioritise areas of action of mutual interest - taking into account common challenges - and, on this basis, to encourage States to define their strategies and align their policies at national, sub-regional and regional level with the bi-regional agenda, in order to achieve greater synergies and foster innovation. Evaluation criteria taking into account bi-regional fields of interest could be incorporated into various calls for proposals.

It was considered essential that bi-regional cooperation in science, technology and innovation be articulated through a flexible and specific approach focused on the needs and realities in each country. Given the asymmetries between regions, it was recommended that cooperation projects include components such as governance mechanisms, institutional strengthening and capacity building. Similarly, it was suggested that cooperation be strengthened within a framework of equality and peer-to-peer relations between centres and researchers from both regions, promoting their integration in networks on an equal footing, and also taking into consideration the different conceptions that may be held about what the major challenges are.

Similarly, it was suggested to establish mentoring and collaboration programmes between leading science, technology and innovation institutions in both regions to support capacity building in countries where specific needs exist. In particular, it was considered necessary to foster the building of bridges with the Caribbean, highlighting not only the needs, but also the specific potential of the countries that make up this region. Likewise, it was proposed to collaborate on priority issues based on the conceptualisation of 'eco-regions' (e.g., the Amazon) and thus promote a paradigm shift in terms of cooperation.

With regard to the 'Joint EU-LAC Research and Innovation Initiative' (JIRI), it was suggested that the three pillars of researcher mobility, global challenges, and innovation be strengthened with an action plan and provided with funding, taking the working group on the research infrastructure pillar as an example. Likewise, it was proposed to establish a technical secretariat to follow up on the commitments made at the JIRI-SOM meetings and to strengthen coordination between the four pillars, for instance through regular webinars and dialogues.

To increase fundraising from third parties and identify new sources of funding for science, technology and innovation, it was advocated to broaden multi-stakeholder dialogues, enhancing public-private partnerships, involving more actors (e.g., business chambers, foundations, think tanks...) and promote scientific diplomacy in key issues of the 2030 Agenda. The productive sector could be mobilized by demonstrating the added value of such cooperations (e.g., training multilingual professionals with international experience and intercultural skills). It was also



suggested to innovate in North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation, to build an agenda for scientific exchange and mobility in the new transitional development framework. Similarly, it was recommended that processes within institutions be optimised, and that cooperation initiatives or projects include a requirement for counterpart contributions from the beneficiaries.

The importance of creating environments and ecosystems that encourage technology transfer and the creation of start-ups and spin-offs that directly benefit the economy, SMEs, job creation, talent retention, and strategic autonomy by reducing external dependencies, especially in the energy and technology sectors, was articulated.

Open science policies, based on the 'FAIR' principles, should be further developed jointly between LAC and the EU to achieve greater convergence of efforts and of impact, bearing in mind that taxpayer-funded science should be open to all citizens. Organisations such as UNESCO and the EU play a key role in intergovernmental coordination and in shaping the policy agenda by developing lines of action that can then be adopted and implemented by member countries.

The participants recommended increasing the impact of the bi-regional agenda in doctoral programmes and schools, and the promotion of joint research agendas, strengthening the appropriate institutional framework to promote new generations of scientists with bi-regional training and projection and thus overcome gaps and asymmetries in scientific capacities that might even contribute to the creation of startups or spin offs.

Given the 'hyperinflation' of instances, forums and spaces, and in order to avoid duplication of efforts and maximise the efficiency of the resources invested, it was considered necessary to:

- appoint bi-regional liaison officers in each area of relevance to the science, technology and research ecosystems;
- establish coordination mechanisms between the different existing bodies;
- maintain a regular policy dialogue (e.g. annual hybrid meetings);
- develop a digital platform (self-built and coordinated) that provides all available information on bi-regional scientific cooperation programmes and networks and facilitates access, connection and understanding of the multiplicity of ongoing activities.

The need to respond to the inflection generated by the massive introduction of artificial intelligence interfaces in emerging general purpose technology platforms was emphasised. In this respect, the development of common regulatory and ethical frameworks was considered necessary to address emerging challenges in areas such as artificial intelligence and personal data protection. It was also recommended to establish verticalised and cross-cutting exchange mechanisms between initiatives or platforms to generate synergies and avoid redundancies in scientific cooperation resources.

In addition to strengthening all the above-mentioned initiatives, it was suggested to enhance:

- Doctoral and post-doctoral training initiatives in artificial intelligence and other relevant areas (e.g., [Centres for Doctoral Training - CTD](#)).
- The Network for Artificial Intelligence, Knowledge and Sustainable Development ([Naixus](#)) and other international/bi-regional collaborative efforts in AI.

3. Towards a Common Area of Higher Education

The inputs provided in this thematic area referred to challenges, good practices, and recommendations to give new impulses to bi-regional cooperation in:

- mobility of students, academics and administrative staff;
- the recognition of degrees and curricula
- accreditation of higher education institutions and programmes;
- the development of joint programmes; and
- the internationalisation of university systems.

In his presentation, Rafael Rosell Aiquel (President of the EU-LAC Permanent Academic Forum) summarised the process generated by the [FAP ALC-UE](#) since its first Academic Summit in 2013 in Santiago de Chile, which constituted a bi-regional space for reflection and integration between academics, researchers and university managers, and which was followed up with preparatory meetings and Academic Summits, in parallel to the bi-regional high-level political meetings. When the political momentum was lost, efforts to establish the EU-CELAC Common Higher Education Area also slowed down. He reiterated the importance of providing this Common Area with an institutional framework, energising joint networking, and promoting the free movement of students, professors and university staff. With the Bologna process, there is a point of reference to give greater coherence to higher education systems, which has also fostered relations of trust and peace in the European area. The demand for a common bi-regional space persists among the university communities, and what needs to be worked on, with a view to the EU-CELAC Summit of Heads of State and Government, is the political will.

The Director General for Higher Education and Science of the Organisation of Ibero-American States (OEI), **Ana Capilla Casco**, mentioned in her keynote that OEI's *raison d'être* is to promote bi-regional cooperation projects and that OEI membership is not exclusive. She presented some of the important programmes underway, particularly '[Universidad Iberoamérica 2030](#)', which was built on the basis of analyses generated at a Meeting of Ministers and High Authorities of Higher Education in Havana (2020), addressing the challenges of mobility, quality, internationalisation, the comparability of HE systems, and the strengthening of science and technology systems oriented to the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda. Together with the Ibero-American Network for the Accreditation of Quality in Higher Education (RIACES), the [Ibero-American Virtual Kalos Seal](#) was created to accredit the degrees of Ibero-American higher education institutions (HEIs) that are not taught online. She also referred to the programme for the Strengthening of Science and Technology Systems ([FORCYT](#)). Furthermore, she highlighted the efforts of the EU-LAC Foundation to make visible these types of initiatives generated by different actors in the '[Matrix of objectives and strategic lines for the construction of the Common Higher Education Area](#)'.

The speaker, **Félix García Lausín** (General Secretariat - SEGIB), mentioned that the [Ibero-American Knowledge Area](#) was the result of a process of academic and political concentration, in which various bi-regional associations were collaborating. With a view to the EU-CELAC Summit of Heads of State and Government, he advocated prioritising the institutionalisation of the EU-CELAC Common Area of Higher Education. Moreover, there was also a lack of regular meetings between ministers in the area, academic institutions, among others. Recalling the [joint press release](#) of the Eighth JIRI SOM wherein the need to seek better coordination between the different initiatives underway was stressed, he explained that there is a will to make available to the Bi-regional Higher Education Area those instruments that were generated within the Ibero-American Knowledge Area. He also stressed the importance of ensuring quality in higher education. As a good practice, he mentioned the cooperation agreement signed between the European Association for Quality Assurance in Higher Education (ENQA) and the Ibero-American network that fulfils the same function.

3.1 Overview of the situation, lessons learned and good practices

Some of the participants in the Forum and in the ex ante online survey noted that the creation of a bi-regional Common Area of Higher Education would presuppose the establishment of a common and integrated higher education space at the LAC level, taking as an example the Bologna process in Europe. The latter allowed progress to be made in recent years with the consolidation of the European Higher Education Area, which involves creating a system of academic degrees that can be easily recognised and compared, promoting the mobility of students, professors and researchers, and guaranteeing quality learning and teaching. Forty-eight countries joined this process by voluntarily signing an intergovernmental commitment to reform their education systems. Forum participants agreed that not only would it be difficult to replicate this experience in LAC, but that, from the very beginning of the Bologna Process, resistance to the adoption of similar homogenisation and standardisation processes in the region was noted, due, among other things, to the nature of the institutional (public and private) landscape of universities, the considerable differences between HEIs within each country, and the interest of the university sector in maintaining a high degree of autonomy from government policies and regulations.

Even so, chapter 9 'Higher Education' of the EU-CELAC Action Plan 2015 allowed for the intensification of cooperation in different lines of action contemplated in this chapter, which, in turn, resulted in a greater degree of mutual knowledge and trust between the actors involved. Several HEIs in both regions have expanded their internationalisation strategies; cooperation was established for the recognition and accreditation of degrees; joint study programmes were created; opportunities were opened up for academic communities to interact in exchanges and cooperation programmes, thus facilitating the circulation and training of students, faculty and staff. This has been facilitated predominantly through bilateral agreements between HEIs in both regions.

In addition to the fundamental role of HEIs, the function of university associations, academic networks, and national, sub-regional, regional and bi-regional organisations in carrying out initiatives, training, seminars, projects with the private sector and university extension activities, in order to concretise and implement some lines of action related to the EU-LAC Common Area of Higher Education, was highlighted. In this regard - without claiming to be exhaustive - initiatives of the Conferences or Councils of Rectors of different countries in both regions, ANUIES, ASCUN, AUF, AUGM, AUIP, CLACSO, CSUCA, ENLACES, EUA, FAUBAI, Coimbra Group, FAP ALC-EU, LERU, OBREAL Global, OEI, SEGIB, Universities Caribbean, UDUAL, among others, were mentioned.

Another group of actors that constitute the bi-regional Common Higher Education Area are the people - students, teachers, university staff. In this sense, mobility programmes are an essential tool to create and strengthen links between individuals, institutions, countries and regions. Mobility actions are an investment in human talent, enabling the training of professionals with a global vision and the acquisition of competences that can then be applied in the different political, economic and social spheres of our societies. It was stressed that the EU region enjoys much greater attractiveness for LAC students than any other region in the world - an asset that deserves much greater attention by decision-makers. A considerable number of LAC students are not funded by an EU programme (e.g., Erasmus+), but apply for scholarships from national bodies, foundations or HEIs, or rely on their own or family means.

Among the programmes and good practices highlighted by participants were:

- The [governance structure of the Bologna process](#)
- New [Regional Convention for the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean](#).
- Example at the level of Central America and the Dominican Republic: [Fifth Plan for the Regional Integration of Higher Education](#) (incl. internationalisation, quality assurance, among others).
- ALFA I (1994-1999), ALFA II (2000-2006), ALFA III (2007-2013) Programmes
- ALFA-Puentes Project (2011-2014) and capacity building workshops promoted by [OBREAL Global](#)
- [Erasmus+](#) Programme (action: educational mobility of people)
- [Erasmus Mundus Joint Masters](#) Programme
- [EURAXESS](#) EU Service
- Grants for students and researchers from the [Fundación Carolina](#)
- Mobility grants from the German Academic Exchange Service ([DAAD](#))
- [Global University Associations Forum \(GUAF\)](#): dialogues on strengthening HE (e.g. good practices in recognition of qualifications, mobility, institutional autonomy and academic freedom, implementation of the SDGs)
- Bi-regional / international forums promoted from the Caribbean: 'One Caribbean Solutions' and 'Caribbean Youth Forums'.
- German [ANABIN](#) database containing information on the assessment of foreign higher education and professional qualifications
- EU-LAC Foundation's [Matrix](#) of Objectives and Strategic Guidelines for the Construction of the EU-LAC Common Area of Higher Education

3.2 Current challenges

Despite the intentions embodied in the action plans and declarations of past summits regarding the EU-LAC Common Area of Higher Education, participants conceived the transfer of these intentions into concrete actions at the political and institutional level as one of the major challenges. In this respect, marked differences were noted, comparing, for example, the relatively scarce political efforts to implement the Common Area of Higher Education vis-à-vis the agreements to promote trade relations between the two regions.

At the intra-LAC level, there was limited interest in adhering to the new Regional Convention for the Recognition of Studies, Diplomas and Degrees in higher education, which implies a continuing lack of harmonisation and validation of programmes and degrees. HEIs in the region therefore have a diversity of criteria and indicators to measure the progress and quality of their internationalisation strategies, teaching, or academic performance. The fact that curricula in different countries and HEIs start and end at different times of the year makes it difficult to organise academic exchanges and cooperation. Compared to the EU, many HEIs in LAC lack adequate resources to invest in infrastructure, research and quality teaching, which in turn has a negative impact on the attractiveness of HE systems for students and academics from abroad and hinders the creation of programmes and partnerships with European institutions.

With regard to mobility, a lack of compilation and visibility of national statistics and data to show all forms of mobility in the current HE systems was pointed out. Only on the basis of this articulated evidence among the countries of the LAC region could a strategy be formulated that links the issue of mobility with the regional integration process. For the time being, there are studies generated

by different institutions in some countries, indicating that only a very low number of students have access to mobility actions, and that those who engage in exchanges often finance the travel by their own resources or those of the students' families. In addition, there are aspects such as physical distance and migration regulations. For example, students, academics and university staff from the Caribbean report a lack of (affordable) connections to other destinations in LAC and the EU, as well as obstacles to obtaining visas and work permits. With the acceleration of digitalisation and virtualisation in higher education systems in the wake of the Covid-19 pandemic, it is therefore necessary to create the conditions to make mobility experiences - be they physical, hybrid or virtual - accessible to a much larger number of people.

3.3 Common interests and recommendations

From the perspective of the participants, EU and CELAC Heads of State have a key role to play in establishing an institutional framework and thus creating the minimum conditions required to foster the bi-regional Higher Education Area. The institutional framework should be based on principles such as political will, information sharing, mutual trust, allocation of financial resources, building and convergence on what already exists, gradualism and quality, and be developed in a systemic way at three levels:

- (1) strategic level - to place the construction of the Common Area of Higher Education in the EU-CELAC bi-regional partnership, established at the 1st LAC-EU Summit in Rio de Janeiro in 1999, in order to jointly face common challenges and build a sustainable future for the societies of the two regions;
- (2) political level - to deepen the political dialogue and cooperation programmes in the field of higher education in priority areas, integrating the agreements and progress achieved in different spaces and levels (e.g., UNESCO, European Higher Education Area, Ibero-American Knowledge Area, integration processes at sub-regional level, among others), and supporting the existing inter-university agreements as well as the actors, associations and networks that have actively worked towards the objective of shaping and substantiating the Common Area of Higher Education;
- (3) operational level – to take into account the experience accumulated from historical and current cooperation programmes, reach governmental consensus on concrete, gradual or progressive steps in the central dimensions of the Common Area (accreditation and recognition of degrees, incl. degree supplements; quality assurance system; mobility schemes, etc.), define the responsibilities of the competent authorities (ministries or agencies of higher education; accreditation agencies, etc.), and allocate the financial resources to ensure the implementation of the agreed actions.

The systemic and gradual approach of this process should envisage institutional capacity building in prioritised areas (e.g., digitisation, internationalisation); fostering the active participation of stakeholders (students, teachers, researchers, representatives of organisations and civil society) in the design, implementation and evaluation of programmes; and the strengthening of 'small' efforts at sub-regional level, ambitious in their impact, which in turn could serve as incubators for larger-scale initiatives, such as, for example, the integration of higher education systems in Central America and the Dominican Republic; the promotion of a common HE space in the Caribbean region; or the launching of an online platform for learning and work in the LAC region, following the example of [EuroPass](#).

Given the lack of information on the idea to establish the Biregional Area of Higher Education among societies, academic communities and public officials, it was recommended to intensify the dissemination and/or create platforms that systematise information on the progress made at the bi-regional level in aspects such as the recognition of degrees; accreditation systems; mobility scholarships; bi-regional cooperation projects. It was also suggested to generate and articulate data and statistics at regional and bi-regional level on mobility flows, sources of funding for mobilities, volume of resources invested in mobility, interests and experiences of academic communities with different mobility schemes.

It was proposed to create incentives to give greater visibility and dynamism to academic cooperation, for example, through calls for proposals to award bi-regional projects or programmes of excellence. These awards could have a shared board of trustees between entities from both regions, which could even be assumed on a rotating basis, and whose evaluation processes would contemplate shared values and principles, such as social inclusion, gender equality, focus on youth, sustainability, among others.

Participants also advocated for the strengthening of networks and associations that provide spaces to articulate the voices of academic communities from both regions, with an emphasis on student involvement and territorial/geographical representativeness, gender equality, cultural, linguistic diversity, etc. in these instances.

The need to expand funding and recover the initiatives and programmes mentioned above was articulated in order to give continuity to successful experiences that had generated relevant impacts. It was suggested to include in the Horizon Europe and Erasmus+ calls for proposals a particular chapter for LAC-EU cooperation and to allow international organisations to present and lead proposals. The need was expressed to expand the Erasmus+ programme to increase the number of beneficiaries and improve the quality of exchanges, as well as to generate more flexible bi-regional mobility schemes, for example, considering hybrid and virtual modalities. Not least, participants proposed to establish a programme of cooperation in science and higher education, such as the [SHARE](#) programme with ASEAN, as well as programmes that focus on creating links between HEIs and the communities in which they are located.

4. Closing Gaps in Access, Equity, Quality and Skills

With regard to this thematic area, challenges and good practices were analysed and recommendations were made to promote bi-regional cooperation in:

- equitable access to (higher) education;
- the promotion of social cohesion and employability;
- the reduction of geographical gaps in education and science;
- the transformation of teaching and learning to address contemporary and future challenges.

Keynote speaker **Stacy Richards-Kennedy** (Regional Director for the Caribbean, CAF Development Bank) indicated that Caribbean countries share many objectives and challenges with Latin America and Europe. At the same time, small island states face particular vulnerabilities due to their direct exposure to natural disasters and the effects of climate change, combined with very limited resources. Without education there can be no sustainable development and without research and innovation there can be no progress in societies. The best results in the fields of education and research would be those that generate solutions based on diversity, inclusion and sustainability.

Bi-regional cooperation should focus on (1) strengthening higher education systems to close access gaps, focusing on social, gender and cultural equity, and fostering the development of people's skills; (2) access to and investment in technological and digital tools and services in education and research that are key in a region like the Caribbean which faces challenges such as distance and geographical issues; and (3) enhancing the correlations between public and private investments in research activities and economic development and growth.

In his presentation, **Andreas Schleicher** (Director of Education and Skills and Special Advisor to the Secretary-General of the OECD) pointed out the importance of moving towards models that focus on early childhood education, as the early years of childhood are key to good skills development. According to current research, 15-year-olds appear to be less creative than 10-year-olds. Therefore, education systems should adjust their curricula to foster the development of skills required to meet the challenges of our times. Given that low-skilled people are less likely to have access to in-service training programmes, governments should make greater efforts to ensure the accessibility of secondary and post-secondary education. OECD data show that people who have not completed school are very unlikely to continue their education later in life. Meanwhile, most people with a Master's or doctoral degree tend to continue their learning throughout their professional career. In this sense, lifelong learning tends to reinforce rather than moderate initial qualification differences. The best jobs are those where people learn 'on the job', which is why greater integration between the employment and education sectors is recommended. He also drew attention to the fact that a considerable number of adults in some countries have not acquired the digital skills and competences required to 'navigate' in today's world. In addition to increasing the supply of training courses, it would be advisable to enhance digital skills through micro-credentials acquired in HEIs.

The Director and Founder of GCED Peruvian Lab, **Kelly Quispe Flores**, mentioned in her keynote that education is a passport to better opportunities for personal and societal development. To add some elements to the Forum's dialogue, she addressed the relationship between education and corruption, including the role of some private educational institutions whose main purpose is not to open access to knowledge, but to generate personal benefits and profit. She also addressed the relationship between education and migration, reporting on the scarcity of mechanisms for insertion and validation of schooling, technical or academic training for young people in migration situations. Host countries should design programmes to ensure that these people do not drop out of school. Finally, she advocated for programmes to close the digital skills gap between young people in both regions.

4.1 Overview of the situation, lessons learned and good practices

In the face of current pressing challenges such as climate change and the Covid-19 pandemic, the capacity of HEIs in both regions to align their management strategies to the SDGs, corporate social and environmental responsibility programmes and university outreach was highlighted. Similarly, the speed at which many HEIs adapted curricula and teaching modalities to new digital technologies, ideally accompanied by the strengthening of faculty competences and offerings to serve students, was acknowledged. It was noted that international agreements with targets and indicators such as the 2030 Agenda have helped HE authorities to take responsibility, define strategies and indicators and report on their progress in closing the existing gaps. It was estimated that the '[European Green Deal](#)' and the [EU-LAC Digital Alliance](#) would generate new impulses for the transformation of the education sectors in both regions.

The efforts made in HEIs in both regions to institutionalise gender mainstreaming actions, including the revision of the management system, norms and teaching of HEIs (e.g., protocols for prevention and attention to gender-based violence), were positively evaluated. Beyond the fact that access to education constitutes a human right, there are also multiple analyses showing that women's equal participation in university management positions, in research projects and as part of the teaching staff leads to better results and impacts.

Progress was also identified in the analysis and measurement of equity in HE systems in both regions, which shed light on key factors to be taken into account in the design of policies aimed at reducing the gaps in the university environment.²

The movement to make science more accessible, democratic and transparent and to advocate for its openness to society formed also an important part of the Forum's dialogues. Driven by advances in digital technologies, the move towards open science has made information, data and results of science more accessible to all stakeholders. In addition, 'citizen science' practices have opened up the possibility for citizens to participate in defining research agendas and processes. This is linked to the need, articulated at the Forum, for a more holistic concept of what is meant by 'science', which should refer to processes of knowledge creation in all its forms (e.g., in scientific laboratories, in ecosystems inhabited by indigenous peoples, etc.) and its transfer to society.

The participants positively assessed that education - along with other dimensions such as employment, health, and justice - was considered in the concept of 'social cohesion', promoted by the EUROsociAL programme, aimed at reducing inequalities in 19 countries in Latin America. The programme had an impact on the formulation of public policies and the permeability of the concept of 'social cohesion' was noticeable in the public agenda of some LAC countries.

Among the initiatives, programmes and good practices to be highlighted, the following were mentioned:

- Alfa Tuning Latin America Project (2004-2008, 2011-2013)
- [Erasmus+](#) (Action on capacity building in the field of higher education)
- [IDB Education Programme](#)
- [EUROsociAL+](#) (2016-2022 and its predecessors 2005-2010, 2011-2016)
- Programmes on principles of good governance, anti-corruption and accountability of political organisations, foundations, e.g., Transparency International, Heinrich Böll Foundation, Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung, from which good practices for the education sector can be drawn.

4.2 Current challenges

Three levels of inequalities and asymmetries in education, science and technology were identified: gaps between LAC and the EU, gaps at the regional level, and gaps at the internal level within each country, involving differences between rural and urban areas and specific populations (e.g., youth, women, indigenous peoples, afro-descendants, migrants, people with disabilities...). In this respect, the issue of classifications relating to the level of development of countries - e.g., developing countries, middle-income countries, etc. - was highlighted. Participants expressed their

² See, for example, the publication [Measuring the impact of equity promotion policies Lessons from Colombia: National and institutional levels.](#)

concern regarding the fact that these classifications focus on GDP per capita, which makes inequalities within countries invisible and reduces the possibility of accessing international cooperation resources. Asymmetries imply, for example, very unequal equipment with infrastructure and technology, very unequal access to teacher training courses, etc.

It was noted that access to HE for certain young populations in LAC continues to be hampered due to factors such as lack of resources and targeted public policies. Due to the Covid-19 pandemic, many students from lower and middle social strata interrupted their learning cycle. Meanwhile, the group of young people who prefer to take short courses and access jobs which require little qualification has increased, limiting thereby their prospects for professional, economic and social mobility.

Progress in the institutionalisation and mainstreaming of gender equality in the educational sphere has not necessarily led to a change in culture and social practices. It was also noted that there is a lack of mechanisms to monitor and evaluate the measures taken to institutionalise gender equality at all levels of university spaces.

It was noted that university curricula still lack elements that promote a holistic approach to the issues linked to the 2030 Agenda and competences in order to apply the knowledge acquired to develop transdisciplinary solutions to contemporary challenges (climate change, health, food sovereignty, inequalities, etc.).

Another issue that raised many concerns was the impact that new technologies, and particularly AI, may have on (higher) education, science, the world of work and, more generally, on people's lives.

Furthermore, it was also noted how human rights setbacks in some countries also had repercussions on schools and universities (e.g., insecurity and violence, freedom of expression, dissemination of fake news).

4.3 Common interests and recommendations

Taking into account the repercussions of the pandemic and the war in Ukraine on the societies and economies of LAC and the EU, and in the face of an apparent geopolitical reordering at global level, Forum participants noted that the context of the bi-regional partnership has changed considerably since the last EU-CELAC Summit at the highest political level. It was advocated to take a fresh look at the interests and needs of both regions (and sub-regions) and to engage in a more honest dialogue leading to more equitable cooperation mechanisms between regions and countries.

Forum participants advocated that EU and CELAC Heads of State should recognise the right to science as a constitutional right of all citizens. From this right, policies, international cooperation and investments in the HE sector and R&D should be derived. It was suggested that public officials, academia, citizens, the private sector and specialised international organisations should be involved in the formulation and implementation of bi-regional cooperation programmes and public policies. It was stressed that these policies and programmes should be formulated following the logic of relevance, responding to the realities and needs of each country, region, locality, and 'leave no one behind'.

Greater bi-regional cooperation was advocated in order to transform HEIs and to jointly imagine desirable and viable scenarios for HE and the world of work in the face of global challenges. This would involve, for example, curriculum reforms, teacher training, formation of transdisciplinary think tanks and exercises leading to case-based solutions, with the 2030 Agenda as an umbrella.

Student and academic communities could benefit from their respective states' adherence to and implementation of international legal conventions issued by international bodies such as the UN that create conditions and provide a framework for their rights, welfare, education, work and scientific activities.

Forum participants recommended deepening cooperation, e.g., through multi-stakeholder dialogues, training, exchanges of good practices and lessons learned, or specific programmes, in the following areas:

- Programmes linking primary and secondary education with technical training institutions and universities, in terms of the acquirement of key skills, and to facilitate a better transition between the different systems;
- Policies to encourage access to education for different groups of the population, as well as permanence in the education/university system;
- Exchange programmes between undergraduate students;
- Tools to assess plans and measures to promote gender equality in all spheres of HE;
- Implementation of principles of good governance, transparency and anti-corruption in HEIs,
- Programmes that create conditions for the promotion and retention of human talent, for the return from a mobility action, and for collaboration between national and foreign scientists.

It was also considered important to cooperate at the bi-regional level on training in new technologies including artificial intelligence for academic and scientific communities, entrepreneurs and citizens in general, including their regulatory, ethical, pedagogical, cultural and linguistic aspects, in order to jointly analyse their impact, take advantage of their potential, and raise awareness of their risks.

The need to increase the scope for awareness-raising and scientific dissemination was emphasised, including models of social appropriation of knowledge, not only as a strategy for exchange but also for positioning the social value of science, thus recovering the public legitimacy that scientific work has lost as a result of the pandemic, with special emphasis on work with children and adolescents. In this regard, it was suggested to improve the communication capacity of academics to transmit, in a relevant language, scientific results and their implications to other spheres: policy makers, private sector, NGOs.

The need to eliminate existing language barriers in order to achieve the widest possible access to science in different languages was highlighted, as well as the need to enhance scientific work and communication between actors beyond English. In this sense, it was suggested to expand the possibilities of cooperation for the strengthening of the second and third languages on both sides of the Atlantic.