

HIGHER EDUCATION AND THE LABOUR MARKET

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INTRODUCTION

There is a close relationship between investment in education, coverage and effectiveness, learning acquired and immersion in the labour market. The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) have currently achieved almost total coverage in primary education, eliminating the difference between boys and girls with respect to economic level (Arias et al., 2023; Huepe, 2024; Näslund-Hadley & Alonzo, 2024), however, as educational levels advance, the gaps increase, which means that access to secondary and tertiary education is even more complex in the region, however, investing in education is essential to guarantee greater labor inclusion, this term refers to labor insertion in good quality jobs. (Huepe, 2024)

In the last two decades, higher education has spread in the Region, which implies high enrollment, worldwide it has gone from 19% to 43% from 2020 to 2023, however, the increase in enrollment does not mean that there is an increase in the number of graduates and above all, there is no guarantee that graduates will access better jobs. This implies that obtaining an academic degree no longer guarantees a professional career, so that there are more and more graduates who do not get a stable job where their abilities are taken advantage of, therefore, it is necessary to pay attention to the current panorama. (UNESCO, 2025)

In addition to this, the outlook became bleaker with the arrival of the pandemic that was able to recover in 2021 and 2022 in a heterogeneous way

and certain countries by 2023 had not yet reached the levels they had before the pandemic and, in general, labor production experienced a drop in 2022 with a contraction in the industrial sectors. trade and construction, in addition, wages stagnated, inflation in food, energy and volatility also caused greater inflationary pressures; although it is true, they also showed a recovery in participation rate, unemployment rate, employment rate and number of employed people. (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)/International & Labour Organization (ILO), 2023)

The objective of this article is to investigate, through a documentary review, the panorama of higher education in relation to the labor market to make a comparison with the Mexican context. This allows for reflection on the fourth Sustainable Development Goal: By 2030, ensure equal access for all men and women to quality technical, vocational and higher education, including university education.

DEVELOPMENT

Beginning the development of this topic requires a look at the economic growth (GDP) of LAC countries, in a context marked by high political uncertainty and fragmentation, which entails opportunities to strengthen their competitiveness and reduce their vulnerabilities. Globally, the Gross Domestic Product (GDP) in the region is estimated at 2.1% by 2025 and 2% by 2026. As can be seen, this implies a slowdown in the region. (OECD, 2025)

Among the elements that are related to the economic growth of a country are associated with various variables such as security, unfortunately, the region is going through high levels of lethal violence that are linked to organized crime, despite this, there is a sustained recovery, since countries continue their progress towards reducing inflation, although it must be said that it is not enough to meet the goals, largely because of the labor costs that drive the rise in food and services. (World Bank Group, 2025).

Table 1

Growth Outlook for Latin America and the Caribbean - April 2025

Country	2024e*	2025p**	2026p**	2027p**
Argentina	-1,8	5,5	4,5	4
Bahamas	1,9	1,1	1,2	1,3
Barbados	3,8	2,8	2	1,7
Belize	8,2	2,8	2,4	2,3
Bolivia	1,4	1,2	1,1	1,1
Brazil	3,4	1,8	2	2
Chile	2,6	2,1	2,2	2,1
Colombia	1,7	2,4	2,7	2,9
Costa Rica	4,3	3,5	3,7	3,8
Dominica	4,6	4,3	3,4	2,8
Ecuador	-2,5	1,9	2	2,1
El Salvador	2,6	2,2	2,4	2,9
Granada	3,7	3,8	3,4	2,7
Guatemala	3,7	3,5	3,8	3,8
Guyana	43,4	10	23	24,3
Haiti	-4,2	-2,2	2	2,5
Honduras	3,6	2,8	3,4	3,7
Jamaica	-0,7	1,7	1,7	1,6
Mexico	1,5	0	1,1	1,8
Nicaragua	3,6	3,4	3,3	3,3
Panama	2,9	3,5	3,8	4,3
Paraguay	4,2	3,5	3,6	3,6
Peru	3,3	2,9	2,5	2,5
Dominican Republic	5	4	4,2	4,4
Saint Vincent and the Grenadines	4,5	4,9	2,9	2,7
Saint Lucia	3,7	2,8	2,3	1,9
Suriname	2,8	3,1	3,3	3,5
Trinidad and Tobago	1,7	2,8	1,3	3,2
Uruguay	3,1	2,3	2,2	2,2

Note: e= estimate; p**= perspective.*

Prepared with information from the World Bank Group (2025), p. 8.

It should also be mentioned that poverty reduction continues to advance, although more slowly, the achievements reported in the period 2018-2023 (65% improvement in poverty) have been closely related to the combina-

tion of public transfers, stronger labor markets, and higher inflation-adjusted incomes. The long-term solutions are the promotion of the increase of high-productivity jobs, aimed at the emergence of artificial intelligence (AI) and the evolution of the green economy. (World Bank Group, 2025)

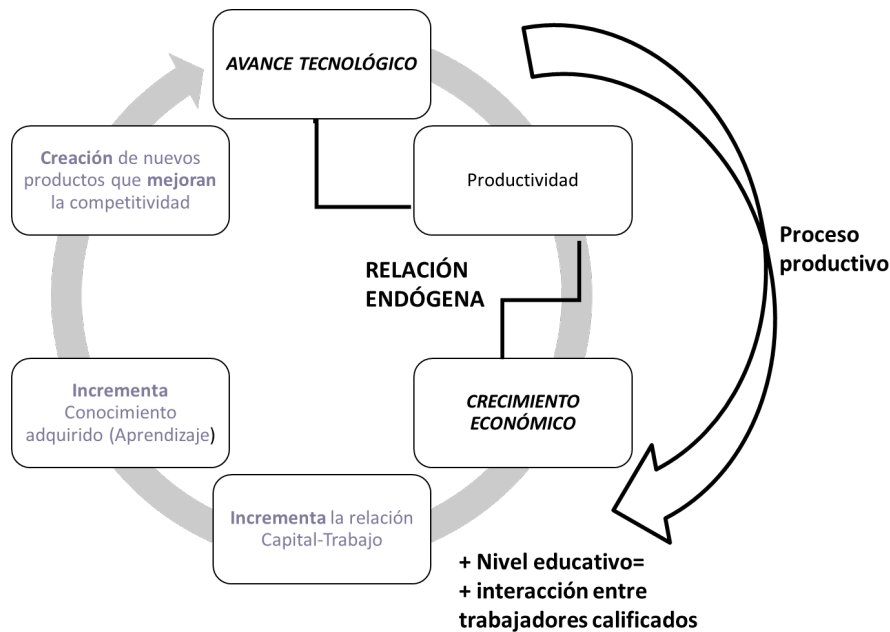
In Mexico, in the first quarter of 2025, the annual growth traffic light was orange, with growth of 0.2% reported compared to the fourth quarter of last year and 0.6% annually compared to 1Q2024 (first quarter of 2024); however, this is insufficient to meet the sustained annual growth target of 4.5%. In addition to this, the tariff trade and export policy that the United States promoted represent a threat to the economy, as they contribute to less contracting of secondary activities. The recommendations to resume the country's positive and sustained growth imply greater involvement in co-investment projects (public and private) that focus on building long-term productive capacities; In relation to the trade and services sector, the presence of a robust domestic market is necessary that implies a formal labor market, stable inflation, and the necessary conditions to attract investment and the creation of quality jobs. (Mexico, How Are We Doing?, 2025)

ROLE OF UNIVERSITIES IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

However, it must be considered that the economic growth of a country is mostly linked to the technological progress of the countries, rather than to the accumulation of physical capital; a significant proportion of the growth rate is related to different residual effects that are linked to education, culture, technology, organization, international trade, investment in scientific research and public policies; not only in the use of capital and labor. (Ocegueda Hernández et al., 2022)

Figure 1

Schematic of the endogenous model of the relationship between technological progress and economic growth (for the original in Spanish)



Note: Authors' elaboration with information from Aghion & Howitt (1992); Arrow (1971); Ocegueda Hernández et al., (2022).

The relationship between production processes and residual processes can be seen in the previous diagram, the relationship between technological advance, productivity and economic growth that represent the productive process is shown on the right side of the diagram, however, the capital-labor relationship is added to the circular diagram (from there, the residual processes are indicated) and the acquired knowledge, since the situation of learning and the development of knowledge generate experience in workers that is reflected in an increase in productivity, such experience can be achieved with an increase in the educational level of workers that allows an increase in interaction with skilled workers, so that the relationship between capital and labor is fostered, thus promoting the knowledge acquired (learning) and thus giving way to the creation of new products and improving competitiveness, so that it is a matter of overcoming obsolescence in old technologies that derive from the accumulation of

knowledge, so it is necessary to make investments in education and scientific and technological development. (Aghion & Howitt, 1992; Arrow, 1971; Ocegueda Hernández et al., 2022)

In this way, the above scheme allows us to consider the close relationship between the role of universities in responding to the demand for skills required in the market to boost the growth of a country.

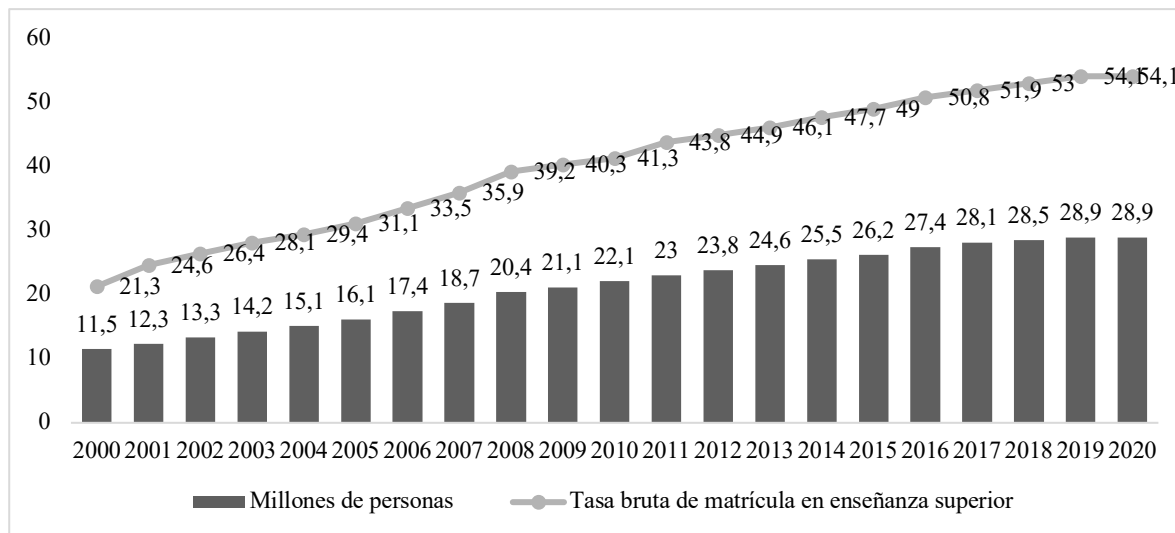
SUPPLY AND DEMAND FOR HIGHER EDUCATION

Higher Education research trains teachers at all levels and this implies their responsibility to lead research and technological development. In view of the growing demand for HE in the region, the 2018-2028 action plan and the CRES 2018 Declaration referred to the need to raise the educational quality of the region by promoting a culture of quality and education in the evaluation systems of HEI Higher Education Institutions, promoting, mainly, the contextualization and updating of curricula; in addition to this, countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Mexico and Uruguay have increased the number of public HEIs, but the growth of private supply continues to increase. (Ricaurte et al., 2025)

Investment in education in the LAC region shows a wide diversity, the countries with the highest investment in GDP are Bolivia, Belize, Curaçao, Costa Rica, Barbados, Honduras, Jamaica and Brazil, currently, Higher Education (HE) is also considered a public good of a social nature, a duty of the State and a Human Right (CRES, 2008) since, in itself, it means an improvement in the quality of individual life, since the wage gap between those who have completed higher education and those who have secondary education is 200% in countries such as Brazil, Chile, Colombia and Mexico, but also, at the national level, it represents highly qualified human resources that are inserted in the private and public initiative, The following figure shows the increase in enrollment from 2000 to 2020. (Aveleyra, 2023)

Figure 2

Gross enrolment ratio and total enrolment in higher education (Latin America and the Caribbean 2000-2020)



Note: UNESCO 2022a, cited in Aveleyra (2023), p. 32.

As can be seen in the figure above, the growth of enrollment in higher education has not decreased in LAC in the last 20 years despite the pandemic situation, between 2010 and 2017 an average annual growth of higher education in the public sector of 3.1% and in the private sector of 4.8% is identified. In this way, the latter sector is key in the expansion of higher education, so that fees went from 43% in 2000 to 50% by 2013, so the growth in enrollment is also due to the offer that the private sector has offered, in the case of Paraguay although the private offer grew by 60%. Public universities continue to be more effective in their degrees. But this fact is not decisive, since the access of the general population to higher education is not directly related to the existence of public educational offerings. It should also be noted that in the region there is an increase in non-university higher education, which represents a better offer for low-income sectors, since it means a possibility of social advancement and rapid insertion into the world of work.

However, despite encouraging growth, it should be noted that access gaps continue to widen, with middle- and high-income countries increasing enrolment the most, while low-income countries are declining their participation rates. There are gaps in attention that should be remembered, at least in a general way: 1) in the areas of study known as STEM (science, technology, engineering and mathematics) little female participation is

identified, while their participation in health, education, social sciences and humanities predominates, and they have greater participation in non-university education and also have less insertion in the labor market. 2) The indigenous condition limits access to education in general, in the country there are significant gaps in access from pre-primary and primary education, and access is more complex in higher education, especially if you are a woman. 3) Socioeconomic income is another conflict, it is identified that students from poor sectors have lower performance in higher education and higher dropout rates. (4) The Afro-descendant population has a gross enrolment rate of 45.5 per cent, which is 26 per cent lower than that of the non-indigenous and non-Afro-descendant population. 5) The population with disabilities has the highest levels of exclusion and in general, has not shown a substantial improvement, although the population has been more visible. 6) Migratory phenomena are related to desertion and abandonment. (Aveleyra, 2023; OIE, 2017; UNESCO OREAL (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization) et al., 2022)

The public resource allocated to HEIs in LAC has increased in recent decades, however, compared to the OECD it is still below the average. On average, countries in the region invested 0.9% of GDP in 2021, which is 0.2% more than in 2000. The expenditure per student is 6,000 dollars, while for primary and secondary it ranges between 9,000 and 10,000 dollars, although there are countries that do not have better results in academic quality despite increasing GDP, this leads to the question of whether learning outcomes are more related to teaching quality than to the number of students who enter the classroom. On the other hand, national programs (such as conditional transfers) contribute to reducing the access gap due to socioeconomic conditions (Rawlings & Rubio, 2003; Roser & Ortiz-Ospina, 2016)

Enrollment in LAC will continue to grow over the next 25 years, this is explained by two conditions: the demographic transition of the region and the need for lifelong education, as already mentioned. This widens gaps and deepens inequalities. (Acosta-Silva, 2025)

THE PANORAMA OF MEXICO

In the next table, a comparison was established in relation to the enrollment absorbed according to the control regime, in relation to, schools, teachers, total enrollment, total professional enrollment and total graduate enrollment, in this sense, it is estimated that in comparison with the 2020-2021 cycles and the 2023-2024 cycle, a difference is not established around the number of institutions, however, there is an important change around schools in relation to control, since at the national, public and private levels there are increases of 4.1% for the last cycle at the national level, 3.9% at the public level and 4.2% at the private level. Regarding the number of teachers, an increase of 2.3% is identified at the national level, but a decrease of 0.9% at the public level and an increase of 6.06%, private. (Integrated Higher Education Information System (SIIES), n.d.c., n.d.b)

Table 2

Comparison of Institutions, schools, teachers and higher education enrollment by control regime, cycle 2020-2021 with 2023-2024 (preliminary figures)

	School year	National Total	Public totals	Total individuals
Institutions	2020-2021	4,336	1,078	3,258
	2023-2024	4,336	1,078	3,258
Schools	2020-2021	6,757	2,516	4,241
	2023-2024	7,044	2,620	4,424
Teachers	2020-2021	442,733	248,680	194,053
	2023-2024	452,925	246,332	206,593
Total (Enrollment)	2020-2021	4,983,206	3,230,917	1,752,289
	2023-2024	5,350,057	3,321,866	2,028,191
Professional (Tuition)	2020-2021	4,579,894	3,084,893	1,495,001
	2023-2024	4,890,145	3,162,052	1,728,093
Postgraduate (Tuition)	2020-2021	403,312	146,024	257,288
	2023-2024	459,912	159,814	300,098

Note: Prepared by the authors with information from SIIES (n.fa) and SIIES (n.fb).

As for total enrollment, a general increase of 6.8% is identified at the national level; that is, in relation to public control, an increase of 2.7%, and in the private sphere, of 13.6%. Enrollment at the professional level showed the following increase: 6.3% at the national level, in public control by 2.4% and in private control by 13.4%. Finally, postgraduate enrollment had the following national increase of 12.3%, 8.6% in public control and 14.2% in private control (Integrated Information System of Higher Education (SIIES), n.d.c, n.d.b). In this way, it is identified that from the period 2020-2021 to 2023-2024, it is private control that has increased enrollment and the number of teachers the most.

Table 3

Enrollment growth in Mexican HEIs for the period 2019-2023¹⁴

Year	Total Enrollment	Male enrolment	Female enrolment	Enrollment disability*	with	Enrollment, Language Speakers*	Indigenous
2023	5,393,387	2,484,385	2,909,002	78,5822		65,166	
	100% ¹	46%	53.9%	1.4%		1.2%	
2022	5,192,618	2,403,056	2,789,562	71,2455		65,3986	
	100% ⁴	46.2%	53.7%	1.3%		1.2%	
2021	5,069,111	2,354,782	2,714,329	64,8818		62,1629	
	100% ⁷	46.4%	53.5%	1.2%		1.2%	
2020	4,981,977	2,365,817	2,616,160	53,36311		61,34212	
	100% ¹⁰	47.4%	52.5%	1%		1.2%	
2019	4,930,326	2,389,207	2,541,119	53,15914		53,61815	
	100% ¹³	48.4	51.5	1		1	

Note: Prepared by the author with information from SIIES (n.d.c.).

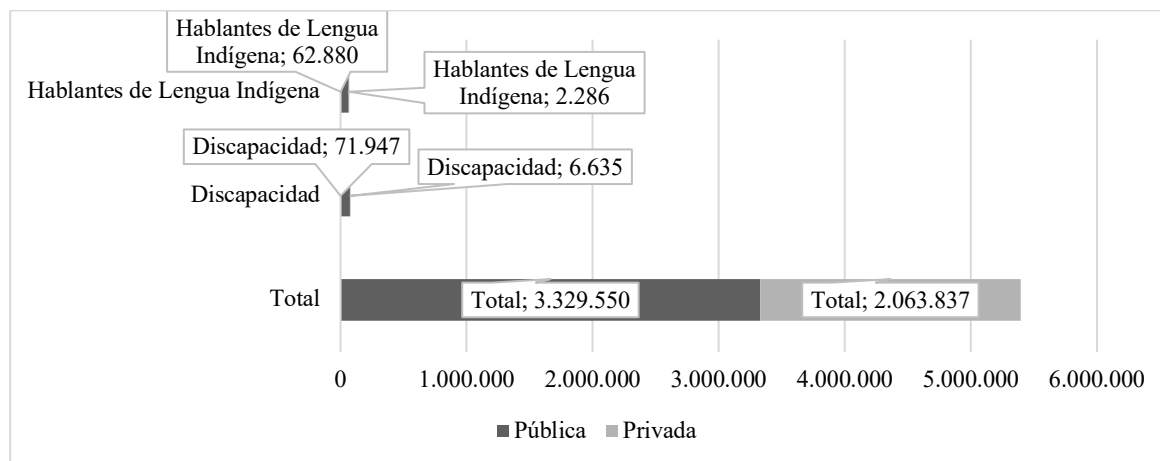
The above table shows the growth of Higher Education enrollment in Mexico from 2019 to 2023, as can be seen, there is a difference of 8.5% in the period, which has grown on average 2.2 percentage points annually, with a predominance of female enrollment that has varied by only 0.1% over the last few years and, to a lesser extent, but also in an increase in enrollment for students with disabilities (increase of 32.3%) and speakers of an indigenous language (increase of 17.7%), especially for the former, although it should be said that this is equivalent in the public and private sectors of education. (Integrated Higher Education Information System (SIIES), n.d.)

¹⁴ 1Students enrolled = public 3,329,550 (61.73%), private 2,063,837 (38.27%). 2Students with disabilities enrolled = public: 71,947 (91,565); Private: 6,635 (8,445). 3Students who speak an indigenous language = Public: 62,880 (96.49%); Private: 2,286 (3.51%). 4Alumans enrolled = Public: 3,284,294 (63.25%); Private: 1,908,324 (36.75%). 5Students with disabilities enrolled = Public: 65,537 (91.99%); Private: 5,708 (8.01%). 6Students speaking the indigenous language = Public: 63,216 (96.66%); Private: 2,182 (3.34%). 7Students enrolled = Public: 3,252,141 (64.16%); Private: 1,816,970 (35.84%). 8 Students with disabilities enrolled = Public: 59,783 (92.14%); Private: 5,098 (7.86%). 9 Students speaking the indigenous language = Public: 60,134 (96.74%); Private: 2,028 (3.26%). 10 Students enrolled = Public: 3,231,251 (64.86%); Private: 1,750,726 (35.14%). 11 Students with disabilities enrolled = Public: 47,917 (89.79%); Private: 5,446 (10.21%). 12 Students speaking the indigenous language = Public: 59,093 (96.33%); Private: 2,249 (3.67%). 13 Students enrolled = Public: 3,147,469 (63.84%); Private: 1,782,857 (36.16%). 14 Students with disabilities enrolled = Public: 45,735 (86.03%); Private: 7,424 (13.97%). 15 Students speaking the indigenous language = Public: 51,041 (95.19%); Private: 2,577 (4.81%).

*Percentage values in relation to the total enrollment.

Figure 3

Comparison of enrollment of students with disabilities and indigenous language speakers in relation to total enrollment in 2023



Note: Prepared by the author with information from SIIES (n.d.).

The Figure graphically represents the proportion of students who were enrolled in the period 2023-2024, in proportion to students with disabilities or speakers of an indigenous language, in the results it is identified that public control has 38.01% more students than private control, however, the difference between public control and private control for students with disabilities is 90.7%; In a similar proportion, 96.3% of the enrollment of students who speak an indigenous language is in the public sector.

Table 4

Income and Expenditure of HEIs in Mexico Cycle 2023-2024 ANUIES

	Total Enrollment	New total revenue	Places offered	New Applications	Graduates	Graduates
Individual	2,062,046	640,266	880,873	810,808	327,225	438,173
Doctorate	37,579	12,993	19,162	16,815	7,526	13,023
Specialty	29,238	14,894	20,324	20,465	9,933	17,031
Bachelor's degree in normal education	14,272	3,903	6,251	5,239	2,890	3,080
University and technology degree	1,736,509	516,117	702,292	650,366	233,473	307,509
Master's Degree	239,081	90,130	128,578	114,637	72,011	95,223
Senior Technician	5,367	2,229	3,466	3,286	1,392	2,307
Public	3,331,032	796,891	999,956	1,718,168	466,162	543,899
Doctorate	27,986	6,483	8,591	9,075	5,117	5,641

Specialty	51,742	18,524	21,175	20,959	11,688	13,435
Bachelor's degree in normal education	117,035	31,973	38,332	79,983	24,329	26,091
University and technology degree	2,889,565	625,847	784,564	1,456,408	367,786	426,843
Master's Degree	81,286	32,692	45,771	45,937	23,143	28,654
Senior Technician	163,418	81,372	101,523	105,806	34,099	43,235
TOTAL	5,393,078	1,437,157	1,880,829	2,528,976	793,387	982,072

Note: own elaboration with information from ANUIES, yearbooks 2023-2024.

For the 2023-2024 school year, it is identified that 25.62% (648,147) of the applications for new admission were not attended by either the public or private sectors (National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (ANUIES), n.d.), that is, the number of students who did not continue their studies due to socioeconomic difficulties, not having accredited the admission exam or lack of space in public spaces.

In the public sector, a demand of 41.8% more than the number of places offered was reported and in the private sector 7.95% of the places offered were not occupied. The percentage difference in doctoral students between public and private schools is 25.5% in favor of the private sector. In relation to the number of students, a difference of 43.49% was identified in favor of the public sector. In the bachelor's degree in normal education, there is a difference of 87.8% in favor of the same sector. The percentage difference of university and technological bachelor's degree students is 39.9% in favor of the public sector, in relation to master's degree students, the difference is 66.0% in favor of the private sector, while with regard to higher technical students, the difference is 96.7% in favor of the public sector (National Association of Universities and Institutions of Higher Education (ANUIES), n.d.). This implies that in master's and doctoral degrees, the private sector shows a considerably higher enrollment than the private educational sector.

Finally, a gross higher education coverage for the 2023-2024 cycle of 43.8 is identified, which represents an increase of 9.3 compared to the 2015-2016 school year, in addition, an absorption index of 90.7 in the 2023-2024 cycle, which is a difference of 13 points compared to the 2017-2018 school year. The dropout rate is 7.2, two tenths higher than the 2015-2016 period, the

highest rate was reported in 2020-2021 with 8.8. (Integrated Higher Education Information System (SIIES), n.d.a)

JOB PLACEMENT OF GRADUATES

In terms of access, having a greater probability of participating in the labor market by accessing quality jobs, and it grows as people reach the upper secondary level and the increase is greater until they reach tertiary education, this is more evident in countries such as Costa Rica, unlike Guatemala where labor participation is lower if tertiary education is completed. (Huepe, 2024)

The informality of markets is one of the predominant characteristics of the LAC region, they have a presence of between 20% and 80% and can be related to workers and companies and leads to non-compliance with legislation and labor regularizations. An informal worker is an employee without an employment contract or whose employment is not formally registered with the authorities. This situation of informality is directly related to unemployment, which in the region exceeds the average, ranging from 15% in Chile, almost 80% in Bolivia, in Mexico unemployment varies between 3% and 14% in Brazil, in addition to the fact that a significant proportion of informal workers work in formal companies. (Ayres et al., 2025)

There are also considerations within informality such as that companies are smaller, so as not to be detected and grow less, that is, informality increases with the company, however, they leave a greater quota to the regional companies that face this limitation, also, they hire less qualified workers, pay lower salaries and are regularly managed by people with a low level of education. In addition to this, they are less profitable and tend to creative destruction. This informality is common among women and workers with less education, or who are very old or very young. However, they experience a wage gap that is related to the selection of workers of certain types, but exempts them from taxes and allows them to access social benefits. (Ayres et al., 2025)

Now, in terms of investment in education, it is expected that there will be an equivalence reflection in the rates of return, but this does not happen in this way in the region and can be explained, on the one hand, by a marked educational inequality, causing a minority sector to concentrate

the best salaries; on the other hand, the outcome between the competencies developed by education systems and the needs of productive sectors and companies (Aedo Inostroza & Walker, 2012; Gontero & Novella, 2021; Huepe, 2024; Psacharopoulos & Patrinos, 2018)

In relation to the outcome between the competencies developed by the educational systems, it is considered that education should guarantee that students acquire the necessary skills for life and work, competencies refer to knowledge that is acquired formally and that is related to the doing of activities or tasks in an appropriate way. which can also be expanded through learning, so that they can be identified by certifications. On the other hand, skills refer to the application and use of that knowledge to solve problems, communicate and relate; that is, the concept is more related to physical, mental, and emotional elements to maintain appropriate behaviors and relationships (Gontero & Novella, 2021)

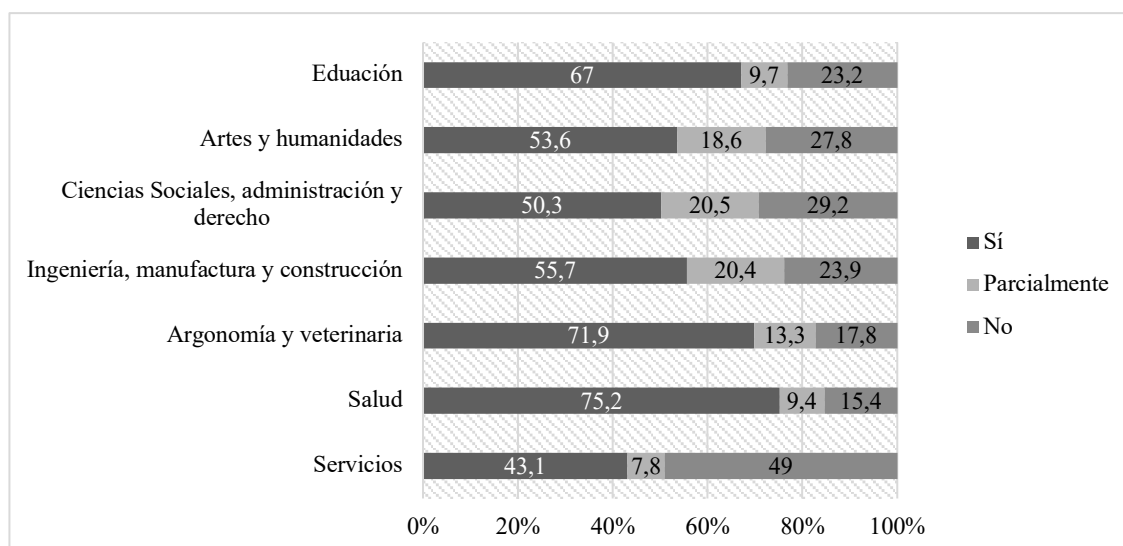
Work performance, therefore, not only depends on educational levels, but also on specific skills, these are measured through the International Assessment of Adult Competencies (PIAAC), this test evaluates: reading competence. numerical competence and problem solving in computerized environments. (DGADAE, n.d.). However, the specific skills required for the job will depend on each occupation, however, it is essential to have a taxonomy of skills to guide training and training plans, that is, developing the taxonomy is a complex task due to the frequent changes in the context and dynamics of each country, but also, coordination between the labor and economic spheres is required. One way to identify occupational and competency standards is through the National Qualification Frameworks, whose function is to link training with the labor sector in which a classification of occupations is made with their respective competencies and skills; in LAC, mechanisms have been developed to coordinate these systems, there is no talk of a comprehensive and adequate national qualifications framework in relation to vocational training offers and competence levels with labour needs (Gontero & Novella, 2021).

In Mexico, the National Qualification Frameworks are related to SEP CONOCER (International Labour Organization (ILO) and the Inter-American Centre for the Development of Vocational Training (CINTERFOR, n.d.).

The current panorama of labor insertion in the region indicates that 39% of students who finish their degree get a first job in something related to the area of study, this low rate is due, to a certain extent, to the lack of success of job boards in universities and the early employment of students. But there is also the conviction that recent graduates are not sufficiently prepared for jobs. There is, therefore, a lack of communication between employers and IE, the result is that a university demand is generated that is above the creation of jobs, causing companies to hire recent graduates for positions that do not need a qualification, producing waiting lines for people with lower educational levels. In Mexico, young people looking for their first job are the population group with the highest unemployment rate nationwide, 6.4%, in the first quarter of 2022 they registered an informality rate of 67.4% and this sector is most likely to remain in that sector (IMCO, 2022).

However, another study estimates that the percentage of employed graduates improved after the pandemic years: 39.8%. 23.2% work in the public sector. The best-paid careers are engineering, manufacturing, natural sciences, exactness, computer science, and construction. In addition, 42% consider that technological knowledge and skills were essential to get their first job. However, it is identified that 27.2% of the graduates are independent professionals; This trend is on the rise: it increased 10.2% since 2020. Also, it is identified that 27.9% continued to strengthen their skills with diplomas or postgraduate degrees, but only for 36.1% this represented job growth and only 55.6% consider that where they work they have opportunities for growth, and gender gaps persist. In addition, 10.3% of graduates have no work experience because they have never worked. Among the reasons why they have not found employment are: lack of experience, low or no salary or low benefits, and lack of vacancies in the area of study (Universidad del Valle de México (UVM), 2023)

Figure 4
First work related to what was studied



Note: (Universidad del Valle de México (UVM), 2023, p. 5)

EDUCATIONAL MISMATCH AND OVERQUALIFICATION

Social and labor policies in the region face multiple challenges, since the pandemic accelerated productive changes and the necessary improvements in technology at the global level, and LAC presents important gaps that can be facilitated if wage increases and better conditions for workers are contemplated, ensuring that the gaps by sex, age, and formality do not continue to widen. (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)/International & Labour Organization (ILO), 2023)

Although it is true that the knowledge that is produced in a country cannot be analyzed independently of the relations of production within the framework of capitalism, what is known today as cognitive or knowledge capital. However, new technologies versus production processes that include labor represent serious concerns. For example, it is known that a robot can considerably reduce jobs, replacing between three and five jobs. A large number of workers who cannot access the necessary levels of training and education are preferred over those who are better qualified. Therefore, the need to assimilate new knowledge and develop new skills for successful insertion into the workplace is evident. However, two poles of the situation can be observed: on the one hand, there is an undeniable process of intellectualization of manual labor, but intellectual labor is disqualified to the

point of sub-proletarianization. In view of the global panorama of the use of robots and the intuitiveization of work, we can see on the one hand the loss of the worker's qualification that is the result of the rapid modernization of the industrial park and the emergence of new professions that require a new type of qualification in the labor force, thus a polarization of the labor force is glimpsed. highly skilled workers who predominantly employ intellectual labor, semi-skilled workers, and unskilled workers. (Odriozola Guitart & Hernández, 2015).

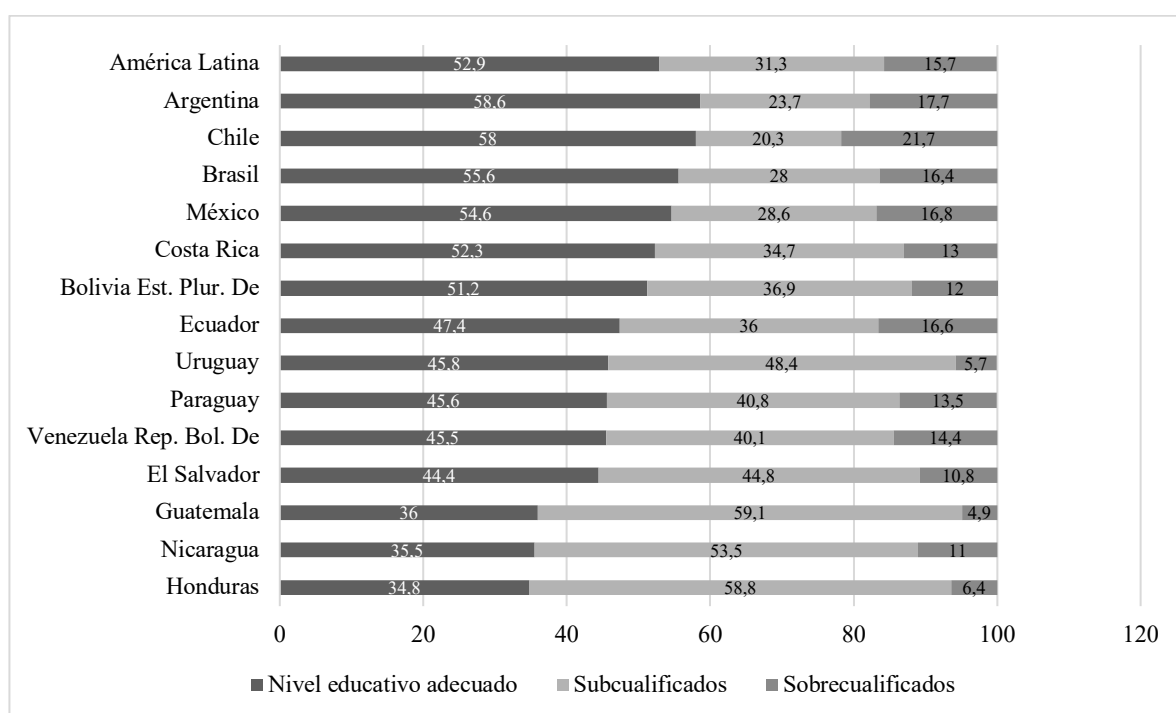
What is really true is that technological transformation is increasingly modifying occupations and tasks with automation and the insertion of computers, so it is necessary for the workforce to be trained in specific skills. However, for individuals to access better employment opportunities in the so-called fourth industrial revolution, it is necessary to have the right talent, LAC has the largest skills gap in the world, according to a talent survey conducted by ManpowerGroup (cited in Arias-Ortiz et al., 2021), it is identified that 40% of organizations in the region have problems filling their vacancies and 70% do not have the right candidates; which represents a barrier to access a better quality of life and a barrier to the productive development of companies.

However, the difficulty is not only in the acquisition of skills, but also in the development of skills, since it is necessary to promote soft and technical skills to meet the demands of working life, which involve the development of skills and training throughout the working period. (Arias-Ortiz et al., 2021)

Regarding skills mismatches, a skills gap is determined when a worker does not have the skills that employers require and an occupational shortage when the number of workers with specific technical skills is higher than the supply, but when companies do not fill the vacancy because there are few applicants, There is talk of a shortage of occupational skills gap, which translates into inefficiency in the labor market and the mechanisms that mediate. However, there can also be high mismatches that are an excess of people overqualified in the wrong subjects. (Gontero & Novella, 2021).

Figure 5

Latin America (14 countries): proportion of workers with an adequate level of education, underqualified or overqualified, about 2019 (in percentages)



Note: International Labour Organization (ILO), ILOSTAT, cited in Gontero & Novella (2021), p. 22.

In the figure above, a classification of workers' skills is shown by the ILO, the classification is with adequate education for their occupation, over-qualified (higher educational level than needed for their occupation) or underqualified (lower educational level necessary for their occupation).

CONCLUSIONS

The analysis of higher education in Latin America and the Caribbean, with emphasis on the Mexican context, allows us to affirm that there is a direct, but not necessarily proportional, relationship between access to higher education and quality labor insertion. Although the expansion of enrollment in recent decades represents a significant advance in terms of coverage, this growth has not been accompanied by equivalent improvements in the employability or working conditions of graduates.

One of the main findings is the persistence of deep structural inequalities in access, permanence and results of higher education. Factors such as so-

cioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity, disability, and migratory status continue to limit educational and employment opportunities, reproducing historical social gaps. In this sense, the increase in coverage has not been able to translate into a true democratization of opportunities.

Likewise, a critical mismatch is identified between the competencies developed in higher education institutions and the demands of the labor market. This gap is reflected in the overqualification of graduates, the low proportion of jobs related to their area of study, and the high incidence of labor informality, especially among young people. This shows a weak articulation between education systems and productive sectors.

In the case of Mexico, although there is a sustained growth in enrollment – particularly in the private sector – and a greater inclusion of historically excluded groups, important challenges persist in terms of effective coverage, educational quality, and labor absorption. In addition, high unmet demand in the public sector and economic constraints continue to be significant barriers to access to higher education.

On the other hand, the regional economic context, characterized by moderate growth, high informality and transformations derived from digitalization and automation, poses new challenges for the formation of human capital. In this scenario, universities acquire a strategic role not only as trainers of professionals, but also as key agents in the generation of knowledge, innovation and technological development.

Finally, it is concluded that it is essential to rethink educational and labor policies from a comprehensive approach that articulates academic training with the needs of the labor market. This involves strengthening the link between universities and employers, promoting the development of technical and socio-emotional skills, boosting relevant qualification systems and fostering lifelong learning. Only through these actions will it be possible to move towards higher education that effectively contributes to economic development, social inclusion and the improvement of the quality of life in the region.

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