



General Assembly

Distr.: General
7 August 2023
English
Original: Spanish

Seventy-eighth session

Request for the inclusion of a supplementary item in the agenda of the seventy-eighth session

Observer status for the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture in the General Assembly

Letter dated 1 August 2023 from the representatives of Argentina, Colombia, El Salvador, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Spain and Uruguay to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General

We have the pleasure to write to you in reference to rule 14 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly and request the inclusion, in the agenda of the seventy-eighth session of the General Assembly, of a supplementary item entitled “Observer status for the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture in the General Assembly”.

In accordance with rule 20 of the rules of procedure of the General Assembly, enclosed herewith are an explanatory memorandum (annex I) and a draft resolution (annex II).

We should be grateful if the present letter and its annexes could be circulated as a document of the General Assembly.

(Signed) Fabián **Oddone**
Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of the Argentine Republic to the United Nations

(Signed) Leonor **Zalabata Torres**
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of Colombia
to the United Nations

(Signed) Egriselda **González López**
Ambassador and Permanent Representative of El Salvador
to the United Nations

(Signed) Ana **Jiménez de la Hoz**
Ambassador and Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of Spain to the United Nations



(Signed) José Eduardo **Pereira Sosa**
Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of Paraguay to the United Nations

(Signed) Luis **Ugarelli**
Ambassador and Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of Peru
to the United Nations

(Signed) Jorge **Ferreira Silva Aranda**
Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of Portugal to the United Nations

(Signed) María Noel **Beretta Tassano**
Chargé d’Affaires a.i. of Uruguay to the United Nations

Annex I

Explanatory memorandum

1. Background

The Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI) is a governmental international organization for cooperation between Ibero-American countries in the fields of education, science, technology and culture in the context of comprehensive development, democracy and regional integration.

OEI was founded in 1949 under the name “Ibero-American Education Office”, following the first Ibero-American Congress on Education, held in Madrid. In 1954, at the second Ibero-American Congress on Education, held in Quito, the decision was made to transform OEI into an intergovernmental organization.

OEI is the largest agency for multilateral cooperation among Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking Ibero-American countries, and has more than 3,000 people working for Ibero-America, physically spread across 20 countries of the region.

Since its establishment, OEI has sought to strengthen its action by promoting partnerships, generating synergies and opening its activities to other national and international actors, especially from the United Nations system, in line with Sustainable Development Goals (SDG) 17, “Strengthen the means of implementation and revitalize the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development”, which indicates that an effective sustainable development agenda requires such partnerships between the public sector, the private sector and civil society at the global, regional, national and local levels.

OEI plays a major role as the regional representative of Latin America and the Caribbean in both the SDG 4-Education 2030 Regional Steering Committee and the SDG 4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee of the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO).

2. Composition

The full member States of OEI are all the Ibero-American countries that make up the community of nations comprising Andorra, Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Equatorial Guinea, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal, Spain, Uruguay and Venezuela.

The headquarters of its General Secretariat is in Madrid, Spain, and it has regional offices in Argentina, Bolivia, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Portugal and Uruguay.

The observer countries of OEI are Angola, Cabo Verde, Guinea-Bissau, Luxembourg, Mozambique, Sao Tome and Principe and Timor-Leste.

OEI is also an associate observer of the Community of Portuguese-speaking Countries (CPLP), the Central American Integration System (SICA) and the EU-LAC Foundation.

3. Objectives of OEI

OEI has established the following general aims for the implementation of its founding principles and the fulfilment of its obligations under its statutes:

(a) To help bolster knowledge, mutual understanding, integration, solidarity and peace among Ibero-American peoples through education, science, technology and culture.

(b) To foster the development of education and culture as a valid and viable option for peacebuilding by preparing human beings for the responsible exercise of freedom, solidarity and defence of human rights, and for supporting changes that would help to create a fairer society for Ibero-America.

(c) To collaborate on an ongoing basis in the transmission and exchange of economic, political and cultural integration experiences produced in European and Latin American countries – which constitute the two areas of influence of the organization – as well as in any other issue that can facilitate the development of the countries.

(d) To collaborate with the member States in pursuing the objective of ensuring that education systems fulfil three missions: a humanistic mission – developing ethical, comprehensive and harmonious training for new generations; a democratization mission – ensuring equal educational opportunities and social equity; and a productive mission – preparing for working life and facilitating entry into the labour market.

(e) To collaborate in the dissemination of a culture which, without ignoring the idiosyncrasies and peculiarities of the various countries, incorporates the codes of modern life to allow for the assimilation of global advances in science and technology, while reinvigorating cultural identity and harnessing the responses arising from its build-up.

(f) To facilitate the relationships between science, technology and society in Latin American countries, examining the implications of scientific and technical development from a social perspective and enhancing the appreciation and understanding of its effects by all citizens.

(g) To promote the linkage between educational, scientific, technological and cultural plans and socioeconomic plans and processes aimed at achieving human development and equitable distribution of cultural, technological and scientific products.

(h) To promote and implement programmes of horizontal cooperation among the member States and between the member States and States and institutions of other regions.

(i) To contribute to the dissemination of the Spanish and Portuguese languages and to the refinement of the methods and techniques for the teaching of these languages, and for their conservation and preservation among cultural minorities living in other countries.

(j) To promote bilingual education in order to preserve the multicultural identity of the peoples of Ibero-America, expressed in the multilingualism of their culture.

4. Institutional structure

OEI is governed through the following three bodies:

- The General Assembly, which is the supreme authority of the organization, is composed of official representatives or delegations at the highest level of the member States. It is also the legislative body that sets out the general policies of OEI, studies, evaluates and approves the organization's plan of activities and

overall programme and budget, sets annual dues and elects its Secretary General for the relevant period.

- The Governing Council is the body delegated by the General Assembly to oversee the governance and administration of OEI. It is composed of the ministers of education of the member States or their representatives and is chaired by the minister of education of the country in which the next meeting of the General Assembly is to be held. Its principal mission is to consider and approve the report of activities, the biennial programme and budget and the financial statement of the organization.
- The General Secretariat is the permanent body delegated by the General Assembly to assume responsibility for the executive management of OEI and represents the Assembly in relations with Governments, international organizations and other institutions. The General Secretariat is responsible for the technical and administrative management of the organization and the implementation of programmes and projects. The internal structure of the General Secretariat is based on a flexible organizational system adapted to the policies, strategies and plan of activities.

5. Programme activities

The work of OEI is determined based on five main areas of work of the organization and its strategic areas of action: education, science, culture, languages and human rights, all vital for the realization of full and inclusive development in the Ibero-American region, and which demand working in collaboration with national governments on an ongoing basis.

The activities undertaken in the field of education include projects covering all levels of education, from early childhood to higher education, including technical and vocational training and adult literacy programmes. The organization pays particular attention to improving the quality of education and promoting innovation, research and assessment at all levels, the development of the teaching profession and the promotion of inclusive education. It also helps to strengthen education management and administration processes, while promoting governance and leadership in the academic institutions of the Ibero-American region.

In the field of science, OEI supports national governments of Ibero-America to structure public policies for scientific and technological development. It also implements programmes for science dissemination education and promotes the generation and transfer of knowledge, as well as the relationship between science, technology and society.

OEI sets forth actions and policies for the promotion of Ibero-American culture, while highlighting the enormous cultural richness and diversity of our region and supporting its cultural and creative industries, and strengthening arts education and the development of the Ibero-American cultural charter, especially in all matters related to digital culture and intellectual property rights.

With regard to languages, OEI promotes bilingual and intercultural experiences in schools on the borders with Spanish- and Portuguese-speaking countries. It also encourages international cooperation, promotion and dissemination in the Portuguese and Spanish languages, and supports the hundreds of original languages of the region.

In the field of human rights, OEI develops regional initiatives to support local and regional processes for the building of open, inclusive and rights-guaranteeing societies, with the ultimate goal of strengthening Ibero-American citizenship.

The Governing Council of OEI, comprising the ministers of education of the 23 member States of the organization or their representatives, determines the biennial programme activities in all the above-mentioned areas through the approval of the organization's programme budgets.

6. OEI partnerships in the international arena

OEI shares and promotes the values and principles of multilateralism and international cooperation, and has therefore developed common frameworks for action and agreements with the following actors:

- Agreements in the context of the United Nations:

OEI and UNESCO have signed several cooperation agreements since 1990, including the recent agreement signed in Paris on 8 January 2021 between both organizations, in which they call notably for the joint promotion of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and which sets forth specific initiatives such as inclusion and equity, quality education and the promotion of early childhood initiatives, as well as the development of lifelong opportunities, higher education, scientific cooperation and innovation.

OEI has historically maintained close cooperation relationships and has signed agreements and memorandums of understanding with the following UNESCO bodies:

- International Bureau of Education
- Asia-Pacific Centre of Education for International Understanding
- UNESCO Institute for Lifelong Learning
- UNESCO Institute for Statistics
- International Institute for Education Planning
- Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

In addition, OEI plays an important role as the regional representative of Latin America and the Caribbean on the SDG4-Education 2030 Regional Steering Committee and the SDG 4-Education 2030 High-Level Steering Committee.

Collaboration with the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) has been ongoing since the signing of the first memorandum of understanding between UNICEF and OEI in 2013; a new framework agreement for collaboration between the two organizations was signed in April 2019. To support States in guaranteeing the right to education for all, closing gaps and enabling the implementation of the 2030 Agenda, UNICEF and OEI have been focusing their efforts and joint actions on building the political and technical capacities of government agencies and civil society, training teachers and other agents responsible for the care, education and protection of children and adolescents; and designing and implementing policies and actions of alternative and flexible education models that help to reduce early desertion and dropout rates at all levels of education.

In 2020, OEI and UNICEF worked on joint publications for teaching materials and virtual events.

In recent years, the relationship with the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has been governed by a large number of agreements, specifically those referring to the economic study relating to the 2021 Education Goals programme in each of the countries and their different targets, the publication entitled "*La contribución de la cultura al desarrollo económico en Iberoamérica*", and various technical assistance projects for the development of satellite accounts in various countries. Many issues are common to both institutions,

such as the economics of education, the socio-occupational inclusion of young people in Ibero-America and recommendations concerning public policies for gender equality and women's rights. A framework agreement between ECLAC and OEI signed in 2009 for an indefinite duration and in respect of which various annual protocols have been established, is in effect.

OEI currently has a cooperation agreement with the Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees which has been in force since 2017, and has concluded an agreement with the International Labour Organization and its Inter-American Centre for Knowledge Development in Vocational Training to foster the exchange of knowledge in vocational training policies and their contribution to economic and social development.

- Agreements with other international organizations and actors

European Union: OIE has been working with the European Union for more than 15 years on joint actions involving the European Union and Latin America. OIE is also the sole international organization made up of Latin American and European countries which is accredited by the European Union to carry out delegated cooperation projects. In that connection, OIE is currently supporting the Government of Paraguay through technical assistance to the Education Sector Policy Support Programme in Paraguay, funded by the European Union; the Programme for the Strengthening of Science and Technology Systems in Latin America; and technical assistance projects concerning policies of the European Union and partnership projects in various Latin American countries.

Inter-American Development Bank (IDB): OIE and IDB signed a memorandum of understanding in 2001, which is currently in effect. The country offices of OIE have also collaborated in the implementation of numerous IDB-funded projects in the region, including the Let's All Learn to Read programme in Panama, and the regional hybrid education project "Education for the twenty-first century: thriving, competing and innovating in the digital age" in Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Mexico.

Development Bank of Latin America and the Caribbean (CAF): OEI and CAF signed a framework agreement in 2010 for an indefinite duration. CAF and OEI also signed a technical cooperation agreement in February 2021 to support the project for the promotion and articulation of innovation ecosystems in Latin America, the aim of which is to design and deliver multi-stakeholder learning experiences for the strategic consolidation of innovation ecosystems in at least six countries of the region. Both parties will provide support through specialized training and backing to help develop learning experiences and generate an inventory of innovation projects associated with small and medium-sized enterprises (SMEs).

World Bank: Together with the World Bank, OEI has been developing the Regional Programme for the Development of the Teaching Profession in Latin America and the Caribbean.

Other Ibero-American organizations: The working relationship between OEI and the Ibero-American General Secretariat has been ongoing since the establishment of the latter in 2005. The relationship is governed by various agreements, including memorandums of understanding and membership agreements of the Ibero-American Alliance for Academic Mobility. OEI also maintains close collaboration with other Ibero-American organizations, such as the International Youth Organization for Ibero-America, the Conference of Ministers of Justice of Ibero-American Countries and the Ibero-American Social Security Organization (some of them, including the first two, also have observer status in the General Assembly).

OEI also has the status of associate observer organization in the Community of Portuguese-Speaking Countries. Its candidature was presented as a basis for the strengthening of relations between the two organizations in the context of the United Nations SDGs.

- Work with governmental actors

OEI works directly with the ministries of education and culture of all the countries that make up the Ibero-American community, both in the development of biennial priorities and in the implementation of regional actions and other specific priorities that are of particular interest to any national government and whose implementation is supported by OEI.

OEI also works with other ministries and governmental bodies, public agencies, etc. on matters related to its mandate, and maintains a special relationship with the actors involved in international cooperation, primarily the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation, with which it carries out numerous actions as set out in the memorandums and operational programmes of both institutions.

- Academia and non-governmental organizations

OEI has extensive experience working with universities in the Ibero-American community, especially in promoting coordination in higher education and student mobility, an issue that remains a priority in the programme of work of OEI approved at the last conference by the Ibero-American countries. In addition, OEI promotes coordination with non-governmental organizations and foundations at both the national and the international levels, and is actively involved in the participation of these organizations and civil society in the actions it promotes.

Through its Ibero-American Science, Technology and Society Observatory, OEI promotes the Ibero-American Network of Indicators of Higher Education, in which UNESCO also participates through its International Institute for Higher Education in Latin America and the Caribbean, along with the relevant sections of ministries of the member countries.

- Private sector

OEI works in particular with the private sector through the Ibero-American Institute for Education and Productivity, which regularly produces publications, seminars and the journal *Pódium*. In addition, OEI receives financial support from a number of enterprises, such as Fundación SM, Fundación Telefónica - ProFuturo, Fundación Santillana and Fundación ONCE América Latina.

7. Visibility of OEI cooperation actions

Increased visibility, enhanced reputation, deeper transparency and greater accountability are just some of the outcomes on which OEI places special emphasis. Communicating means making oneself understood, building bridges and generating alliances to extend the reach of messages. The impact of communication in OEI has been growing in recent years, generating, among other things, a major repercussion on digital communication media, a significant increase in cooperation projects documented with photographs or videos, and a spike in live broadcasts of events or webinars, making OEI the multilateral cooperation agency with the strongest digital presence in the region.

8. Reasons for requesting observer status in the General Assembly

OEI is aligned with the 2030 Agenda and with a renewed and inclusive multilateralism to confront the current challenges facing Ibero-America by achieving the education targets of SDG 4.

Specifically, during the XXVI Ibero-American Conference of Ministers of Education, held in 2018 in Antigua Guatemala, the Ibero-American countries members of OEI signed a declaration which brought their national education policies in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Since then, OEI has been working with the 2030 Agenda as an international framework with a view to supporting, coordinating and harmonizing the actions of its member States in order to achieve the SDGs in Latin America.

The main contributions of OEI to the development and achievement of the Goals set forth in the 2030 Agenda are:

SDG 1: “End poverty”: OEI contributes to this Goal through the policies and programmes it promotes in the different areas of education in Latin America, mainly through literacy and early childhood programmes and job training.

SDG 4: “Quality education”: All the actions of OEI are aimed at ensuring inclusive, equitable, quality education and lifelong learning opportunities for all at the regional, subregional and national levels. All the targets of SDG4 are covered with these actions and contribute to the achievement of the Goal in the Ibero-American region.

SDG 5: “Gender equality”: The actions of OEI are linked with achieving educational equality and overcoming all forms of discrimination in education, in particular by combating violence and discrimination against girls and women in vulnerable contexts, taking into account the fact that schools play a coordinating and key role in promoting gender equality.

SDG 8: “Decent work and economic growth”: OEI contributes specifically to target 8.6, which is to significantly reduce the proportion of young people who are unemployed and are not studying or receiving training. To that end, OEI undertakes various actions concerning training for the job market, national systems of professional qualifications, and the analysis and study of future employment needs in the region through the Ibero-American Institute for Education and Productivity.

SDG 10: “Reduced inequalities”: OEI contributes specifically to target 10.2, which is to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, gender, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status, using educational policies as the main tool for social cohesion and non-discrimination.

SDG 16: “Peace, justice and strong institutions”: Specifically, target 16.8: broaden and strengthen the participation of developing countries in global governance institutions. OEI helps to strengthen the education systems of the countries of the Ibero-American region and to ensure that its member States are represented and work cohesively with Latin American countries through the governing councils, conferences and assemblies of OEI, but also by increasing their joint representation at the regional level in international forums such as those of the United Nations system.

SDG 17: “Partnerships to achieve the Goals”: OEI joins the collective effort to achieve this Goal by supporting policy coordination with other agencies and institutions with which it shares geographic or thematic areas. OEI works for the integration of agendas through various initiatives, such as the development of and participation in forums for political and technical discussion, and the promotion of dialogue and the development of strategic alliances and collaboration agreements with other organizations and institutions (World Bank, UNESCO, Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development, Pacific Alliance, etc.).

The work that OEI has been carrying out with United Nations bodies such as UNESCO reflects the value of OEI for the United Nations system. For example, OEI was appointed regional representative for Latin America and the Caribbean on the UNESCO SDG 4-Education 2030 Steering Committee, which provides an ideal platform for dialogue and alignment with the other global actors. OEI has been participating actively in the Committee through the articulation of platforms and the analysis and exchange of regional good practices, as reflected in the survey of regional progress in the achievement of SDG 4 prepared in March 2018 on the occasion of the fourth meeting of the Steering Committee.

OEI has been appointed as a member of the Advisory Board of the *Global Education Monitoring Report* (GEM report), which allows it to participate in the working sessions of that important body. It also works closely with the UNESCO Regional Office for Latin America and the Caribbean on several joint initiatives, such as the preparation of the Seventh International Conference on Adult Education and issues on climate action through education.

OEI is actively involved in the Global Action Programme on Education for Sustainable Development, coordinated by the Division for Inclusion, Peace and Sustainable Development of UNESCO, with which significant progress has also been made to improve coordination and alignment with the 2030 Agenda.

Accordingly, the granting of observer status to OEI in the General Assembly will help to consolidate and further advance the joint work of OEI and the United Nations system, especially in the following areas:

- (a) Transferring to the United Nations system a regional vision of the work being done and the progress and challenges specific to Latin America concerning the educational, scientific and cultural components of the 2030 Agenda, helping to address the common challenges of the region in a comprehensive manner;
- (b) OEI can offer extensive knowledge and expertise from more than 70 years of specific work in Latin America that helps to make the particularities of the region in both areas understood in order to achieve progress;
- (c) Bringing the voices of OEI member States and those of their stakeholders from the educational, scientific and cultural community to United Nations forums in a joint and reinforcing manner, incorporating and sharing conclusions and advances already developed within OEI at both the regional and the subregional levels, the pooling of which will help to improve coordination in order to make progress in the advancement of the 2030 Agenda in the Ibero-American region;
- (d) Pooling of these experiences and good practices in the Ibero-American region, not only in order to make progress in the region, but also to help other regions to learn about them, study them and integrate them into their plans to achieve the SDGs.

9. Satisfaction of the legal criteria

The legal nature of OEI is that of an intergovernmental body, as stated in its statutes, thus satisfying the legal criteria set out in General Assembly decision 49/426 of 9 December 1994, in which the Assembly, on the recommendation of the Sixth Committee, decided that the granting of observer status in the General Assembly should be confined to States and to those intergovernmental organizations whose activities cover matters of interest to the Assembly.

Annex II**Draft resolution****Observer status for the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture in the General Assembly**

The General Assembly,

Desiring to promote cooperation between the United Nations and the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture,

1. *Decides* to invite the Organization of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture to participate in the sessions and the work of the General Assembly in the capacity of observer;
 2. *Requests* the Secretary-General to take the necessary action to implement the present resolution.
-