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# DOMINICAN REPUBLIC HIGHER EDUCATION PARTNERSHIP

## OBJECTIVE

To develop innovative and sustainable partnerships with Higher Education Institutions in the Dominican Republic in order to strengthen the effectiveness of institutional programs and services aimed at youth from high risk environments. These partnerships promote a pathway to higher education, thereby increasing more opportunities for access to decent work and social welfare.

## COUNTRY CONTEXT

In the Dominican Republic, higher education institutions lack the tools and capacity to support youth from high-risk environments, resulting in low program enrollment rates and completion of higher education. Employment rates among youth between the ages of 15 and 29 in the Dominican Republic are among the lowest in Central America and the Caribbean at 58 percent, which is double that of the country's overall unemployment rate.<sup>1</sup> Nearly 25 percent of the youth fall into the so-called "Ni-Ni" generation, or those who do not work or study, also known as NEET (Neither in Employment, Education or Training)<sup>2</sup>. 60 percent of the Dominican "Ni-Ni" population are women.

Despite some growth in higher education enrollment rates from 48 percent in 2012 to 60 percent in 2017, dropout rates are high and estimated around 50 percent among students who enter university.<sup>3</sup> As a whole, national statistics show that only 15 percent of all students who enrolled in the educational system enter the higher education system. Furthermore, 24 percent of students who do complete secondary education do not continue on to university studies.<sup>4</sup> These high levels of educational abandonment limit career development, marketable skills, and access to job prospects compared to those with higher education degrees, thus contributing to increased risk levels of juvenile crime or illicit employment. In addition, there are pronounced differences in educational attainment between the lowest and highest socioeconomic classes as a result of the disparities in the levels of access to higher education. In 2013, six percent of students in the higher education system were among the lowest 20

<sup>1</sup> International Labour Organization, "COVID – 19 y el Mundo del Trabajo."

<sup>2</sup> World Bank, "Dominican Republic Human Capital Index 2020."

<sup>3</sup> OECD, "Dominican Republic Student Performance PISA 2018."

<sup>4</sup> Educa, "Los Jóvenes Dominicanos: esos desconocidos."

percent of the income distribution, while 45 percent of students in the system were in the highest 20 percent.<sup>5</sup>

## OUR WORK

The Higher Education Partnership develops and tests a model of intervention based on best practices and experiences of U.S. university partners to facilitate access and retention in quality higher education institutions that is inclusive, relevant, and promotive of wellbeing. The activity works with three Dominican Higher Education Institutions: ISA University, the Technology University of Santiago (UTESA), and the Autonomous University of Santo Domingo (UASD), to replicate and test access and retention best practices for youth from high risk environments. In partnership with the Ministry of Higher Education, Science, and Technology, the main lessons learned and results from activity implementation will be incorporated into a toolkit and policy recommendations presented to the Government of the Dominican Republic, with the aim of scaling the model nationwide. The activity contributes to the educational achievement and promotes job readiness of youth in high-risk settings through two main components: 1) Strengthen the capacity of Dominican Republic higher education institutions to increase retention and completion rates, focused on youth in high-risk environments; and 2) Bridge the gap between high schools and higher education institutions.

## RESULTS ACHIEVED

- Three Dominican higher education institutions received capacity development support to strengthen their ability to serve youth from high risk environments.
- 142 university students from high-risk environments participated in targeted retention programs.
- 80 faculty and staff from higher education institutions received professional development training on gender, positive youth development, and inclusive education.
- 485 high school students completed the Bridge Program in preparation for higher education.
- 92 percent of students who completed the Bridge program enrolled in university.
- 76 first-generation students successfully entered higher education.
- 2,442 high school students participated in career guidance workshops.
- 92 high school teachers were trained on innovative academic reinforcement techniques to better prepare students for the transition to university-level academics
- 20 Parent-Teacher Associations (PTAs) were trained on how to be ambassadors of higher education and interventions directly with parents.

**Duration:** September 2019 – September 2024

**Budget:** US \$4.5 million

**Implementing Partner:** Universidad ISA

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<sup>5</sup> The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, “Financial Aid and College Access in the Dominican Republic.”