

ACTIVITY REPORT



KEY ACTIVITIES | STRATEGIC MILESTONES
IMPACT ACROSS REGIONS





EXECUTIVE SUMMARY



Expanding partnerships, strengthening policy influence and scaling impactful interregional initiatives.

In 2025, Obreal entered a **new phase of institutional consolidation, expanding partnerships, strengthening policy influence and scaling impactful interregional initiatives.**

This activity report highlights achievements, providing a glance at dialogues processes, ongoing projects, new membership, and new communications and advocacy actions.

Across **13 ongoing projects active in 62 countries and involving 149 partner institutions,**

Obreal advanced strategic priorities related to innovation ecosystems, tertiary education reform, and education for sustainable development. Flagship initiatives which Obreal coordinates, such as the EU-funded HAQAA3 and SPHERE, strengthened regional integration, quality assurance, credit transfer systems and higher education reform processes, while new capacity building projects, including IMPACT HE and UniiCoCreate, reinforced universities' roles as drivers of development and innovation.

The year was marked by major milestones in interregional policy dialogue and youth empowerment. The **Third Interregional Dialogue on Education and Development**, held in Bogotá, convened 462 participants from 76 countries and reinforced universities' strategic role in multilateral cooperation, gender equality and sustainable development.

Obreal's self-funded **Youth and Multilingualism AI Incubator** supported young African innovators in developing socially responsible AI solutions, while the **Julio Cotler Program** fostered rigorous research on democratic challenges in Latin America. **Training activities expanded significantly**, reaching hundreds of academics and nearly 1,000 students through initiatives such as COIL in Central America, and the project CLIMAR on climate change and tourism.

Looking ahead, Obreal builds on strengthened partnerships, an expanded membership base, and renewed institutional identity to **deepen interregional dialogue, scale capacity-building initiatives, and empower youth as agents of inclusive and sustainable transformation.** Through policy engagement and advocacy, project implementation and innovation-driven programs, Obreal continues to translate dialogue into concrete institutional solutions, reinforcing **the role of education in advancing equitable development and renewed multilateral cooperation.**

The Board of Directors



ADVANCING IN OUR STRATEGIC PRIORITIES



STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

INNOVATING INNOVATION

A major highlight of 2025 has been the culmination of the first phase of the **Youth and Multilingualism AI Incubator**, an initiative driven by Obreal and the Association of African Universities. This signature program supports ideas of young African higher education students and early researchers, by helping them grow and create AI-powered solutions with real social impact. In 2025, the program supported **8 proposals from 5 different African countries** on topics such as maternal and infant health, social inclusion and revitalization of indigenous languages, among others. The interest generated by the program has led Obreal and the AAU to renew the projects for a second phase and to explore scaling the initiative beyond Africa.

In line with the spirit of the AI Incubator, Obreal has focused on strengthening **the role of universities as drivers of development**, including their contribution to local innovation systems. This has been further realized through EU-funded cooperation projects such as **PRICNAC** (seed funding for innovation projects in Central Africa), **QA DOC** (quality assessment of doctoral schools and programs in Francophone Africa), and **DigiGrad** (Digitalizing and internationalizing graduate studies in Africa). Of particular note, due to its recognition at the ministerial level within the Southern African Development Community, was the 2025-launched **UniiCoCreate** project, which has taken important steps towards establishing university–industry co-creation offices.





STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

TERTIARY EDUCATION, INSTITUTIONAL AND POLICY DEVELOPMENT

Obreal has continued to advocate for **regional and continental integration**, emphasizing the central role of higher education in these processes. The **HAQAA3 initiative** (Harmonization, Accreditation and Quality Assurance in African Higher Education – funded by the EU) remains Obreal's main vehicle for advancing higher education integration. In 2025, it strengthened higher education data reporting and harmonization; advanced capacity building in quality assurance for **African Standards and Guidelines**; and reinforced student participation in quality assurance through a flagship report by the All-African Students Association.

It also published a major mapping report on **African Credit Systems**, and endorsed the selection of 15 countries – via their authorities and HEI – to pilot the Africa Credit Transfer System.

Within this framework, Obreal strengthened its collaboration with the African Union through support to the Pan-African University, which co-hosted a flagship policy-oriented event on the **African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA)** and higher education integration, co-funded by the HAQAA3 initiative. The event generated 17 academic papers (eight of which will be published in an indexed journal), established synergies with EU-funded programs, and led to a follow-up webinar series.





STRATEGIC PRIORITIES

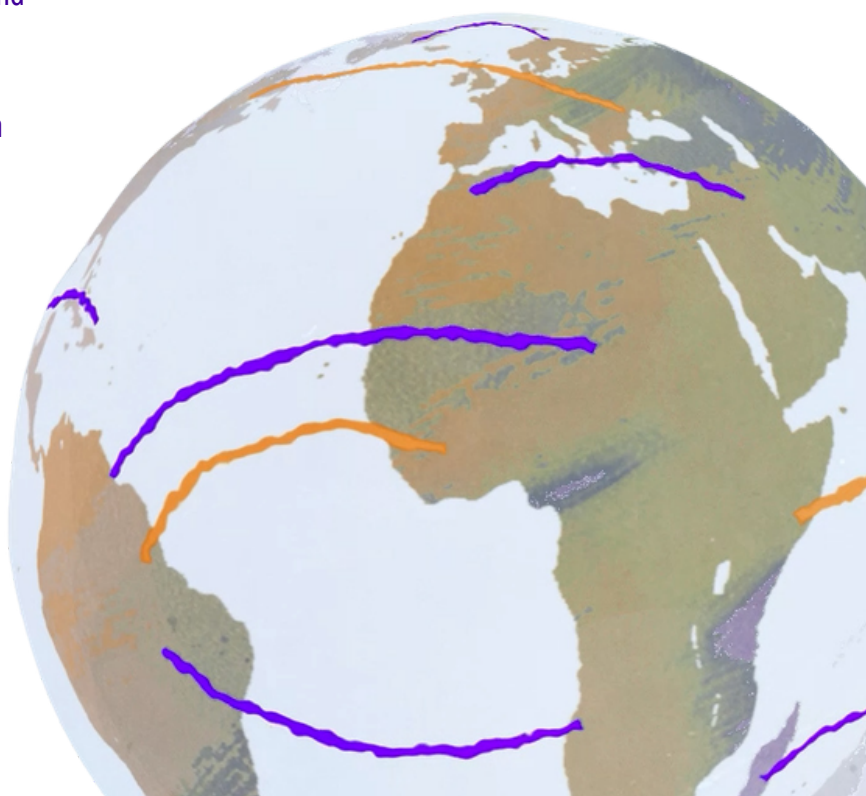
SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT

Obreal is committed to contributing to the achievement of the **United Nations Sustainable Development Goals**, with a focus on objectives related to youth, employability, economic development, inclusion, and citizenship. A key example is Obreal's participation in the EU-funded **ENGAGE SDG** project, which has developed a prototype "Framework for Participatory Approaches" and implemented six pilot projects in the SADC region engaging universities on topics such as youth employment and empowerment, climate adaptation and heat-related health, urban sustainability, and school environments.

Additional initiatives addressing sustainable development include the EU funded **SPHERE** (Support for Higher Education Reform Experts), which produced a major publication on "**Greening Higher Education**" in 2025; **Impact HE**, a new initiative launched in 2025 to support African universities in creating societal impact reports; and **CLIMAR**, a capacity building project in Latin America which developed and pilot a graduate module and professional development course on climate change and tourism.

Further contributions under this strategic pillar include the launch of the **Gastrotour** project, also funded under the Erasmus+ CBHE action of the EU, with partners in Portugal, Spain, Georgia, Czech Republic and South Africa, and the continued implementation of the **EnoTour** project (with university, vocational and industry partners from Tarragona, Porto, Bordeaux, and Veneto), both of which are developing online short courses, micro-credentials, and digital tools to promote sustainability in the food and wine tourism sectors.

Obreal has also strengthened its engagement with the **youth sector**. Early in 2025, Obreal and the Spanish youth organization **Fundesplai** signed a collaboration agreement, which inspired the organization of an online debate and an onsite conference within the framework of the **Youth Well** project, related to youth and well-being.





INITATIVES



INITIATIVES

INTERREGIONAL DIALOGUE ON EDUCATION AND DEVELOPMENT

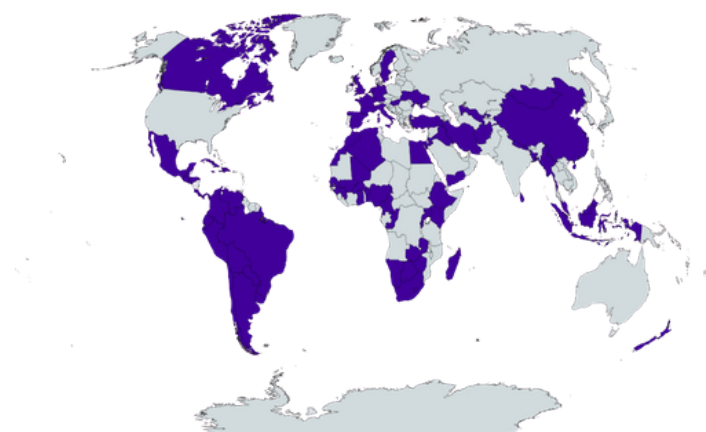
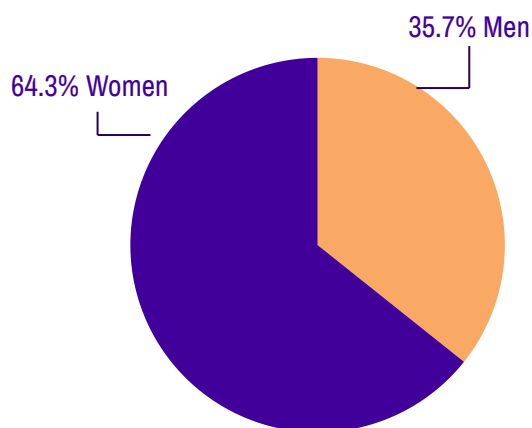
The Third Interregional Dialogue on Education and Development, held in November in Bogotá, aimed to consolidate a sustained interregional cooperation mechanism linking **Latin America and the Caribbean, Africa, North America, and Europe**. Organized by Obreal with the support of the Government of Colombia, the African Union Commission, and the Association of African Universities, the Dialogue sought to rethink international cooperation from a polycentric, inclusive and multilingual perspective, reaffirming universities as strategic actors of development and positioning interregional cooperation as a cornerstone of renewed multilateralism. It also placed gender equality and women's leadership at the center of education, science and innovation agendas as essential drivers of sustainable and equitable development. Held back-to-back with the **OWDS general assembly** (Association for Women in Science in Development), the Dialogue brought together **462 participants from 76 countries**, with strong representation from policymakers, regional and international organizations, cooperation agencies, university associations, and **more than 350 universities and research centers worldwide**. Over 150 of these participants were women scientific leaders.

462

participants

76

countries





Main outputs of the event included the **consolidation of shared priorities around knowledge and learning networks, commitments toward gender equality in science, and the definition of joint areas of interest for interregional collaboration**, such as artificial intelligence, climate change, biotechnology, agriculture and TVET.

The Third Interregional Dialogue entailed two major milestones: First, the Vice-President of Colombia announced the **celebration of a flagship CELAC – African Union summit during 2026**. Secondly, the Colombian Minister of Science, Technology and Innovation and the African Union Commissioner for Education, Science, Technology and Innovation signed a **landmark cooperation agreement between the Government of Colombia and the African Union**.





INITIATIVES

LEVERAGING THE AFRICAN CONTINENTAL FREE TRADE AREA FOR HIGHER EDUCATION INTEGRATION

In April 2025, Obreal supported the first [Conference on Leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area \(AfCFTA\) for Higher Education Integration](#), held in Yaoundé, Cameroon, in partnership with the Association of African Universities (AAU), the Pan-African University (PAU), the African Union and the European Commission, through the HAQAA3 initiative. Co-organised with PAU and AAU and hosted by the Institute of International Relations of Cameroon (IRIC), the conference brought together **policymakers, university leaders, researchers and development partners from Africa and Europe** to explore how AfCFTA can act as a catalyst for higher education integration in support of development.

The discussions highlighted the **strategic interdependence between economic and higher education integration, the need for structured training programs at the interface of trade and higher education, and the importance of multilingual, inclusive and Africa-centered knowledge production**. This laid the groundwork for follow-up activities and stronger Africa–Europe cooperation in this field, and notably a webinar series targeting European Commission and EU external cooperation officials.





INITIATIVES

YOUTH AND MULTILINGUALISM AI INCUBATOR

One of Obreal's flagship, self-funded programs, the [Youth and Multilingualism AI Incubator](#) aims to democratize access to technology by addressing digital and territorial divides, while positioning higher education institutions and young researchers as local innovation hubs, capable of generating AI-based solutions with tangible social impact.

Through an **open competition**, the incubator selected student-led teams in Africa, offering them mentoring, seed funding and support to mobilize additional resources. The objective has been to enable them to develop and scale projects that respond to real societal challenges, emphasizing civic and socially responsible AI. The program also **promotes multilingualism and cultural diversity** as central drivers of inclusion, knowledge exchange and citizen engagement. By combining technological creativity with a multilingual approach, the 2025 pilot round of the Youth and Multilingualism AI Incubator has contributed to **empowering a new generation of innovators in Africa** in shaping inclusive and sustainable development pathways.

The 2024–2025 edition of the Youth and Multilingualism AI Incubator benefited from the support of the Commonwealth Secretariat for the dissemination of the first open call. Selected projects addressed issues ranging from maternal and infant health, sustainable agriculture and food security to homelessness, indigenous languages, entrepreneurship and the empowerment of marginalized communities through AI and multilingual approaches. The selected projects reflect the diversity, creativity and social relevance of the initiative: The profiles and project descriptions of all selected participants are [available online](#) as part of the program's public outputs.





INITIATIVES

JULIO COTLER PROGRAM

Launched in 2024 on the occasion of the **20th anniversary of Obreal**, the **Julio Cotler Program** was created as a tribute to Professor Julio Cotler (1932–2019), a central intellectual figure in Obreal's early years and a strong advocate of the transformative role of higher education in addressing social inequalities. Since its launch, the program has grown significantly, attracting an increasing number of applications and consolidating itself as a **reference platform for emerging critical voices in the region**. It provides a dynamic space to promote analysis, debate and academic production on the key challenges facing democracies in Latin America, while supporting young scholars, researchers and social or political activists from Latin America and the Caribbean at an early stage of their academic trajectories.

The 2025 edition of the program, supported by the Institute of Peruvian Studies (IEP), the Advanced Studies Center of the University of Bologna in Buenos Aires (UniBO BA) and the Argentine Society of Political Analysis (SAAP), focused on **encouraging original, empirically grounded research on contemporary democratic challenges in the region**. Through an open call, candidates submitted research abstracts that were evaluated by an expert committee, which selected between 20 participants to develop full-length academic articles. Shortlisted proposals were presented at the XVII National Congress of Political Science of Argentina in Rosario, and the three most outstanding articles received financial awards and were published online, with open access, contributing to the dissemination of new knowledge and to the renewal of critical democratic debate in Latin America.





INITIATIVES

PROJECTS

In 2025, Obreal continued to grow and nourish its robust project portfolio. **Projects serve multiple purposes for the organization:** they are platforms for concrete cooperation with partners, connecting regions and continents. They are also means to deliver upon policy commitments made in the context of interregional dialogue, and to inspire and substantiate dialogue. They structure training and capacity building and develop content and knowledge products that are at the core of Obreal's mission.

In 2025, Obreal continued to coordinate or support the coordination of EU financed projects under the Erasmus+ program, notably Capacity Building in Higher Education (CBHE) but also Alliances for Innovation and European Youth Together projects. In addition, Obreal continued its position as coordinator of two important EU service contracts, one supporting harmonization of higher education in Africa ([HAQAA3](#)) and the other supporting networks of higher education reform experts in EU neighborhood countries ([SPHERE](#)).

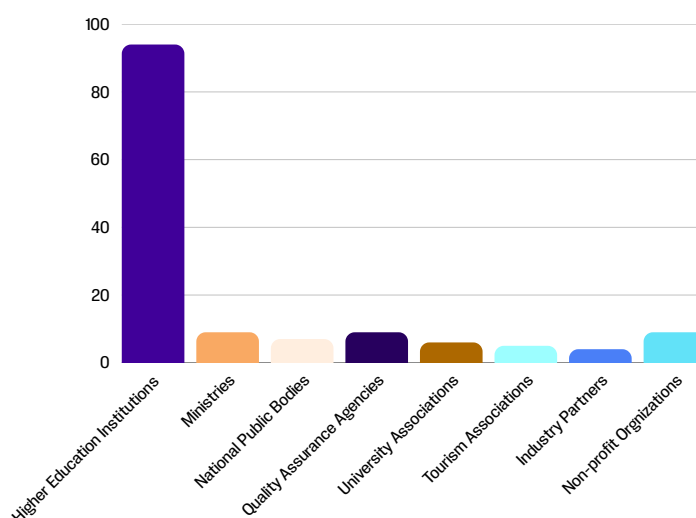
Irrespective of the specific role Obreal has occupied in projects (coordinator, partner, etc), Obreal continues to have an **expressed commitment ensuring the sustainability and extended impact of projects, as well as their synergies**. Obreal also continues to advocate the importance of project leadership capacity in Africa, and in the different souths, to demonstrate the role of tertiary education institutions as development motors. One project ([IMPACT HE](#)) launched in 2025, aims specifically at this objective, which is also a shared goal of members and partners of the S-DHG, the Higher Education for Sustainable Development Group of funders in international development cooperation.

13 Ongoing Projects

62 Countries impacted

149 Partners involved

Partners:





FLAGSHIP PROJECTS

Obreal coordinates the [HAQAA3 initiative](#), with a strong focus on Policy Dialogue for Regional Integration, the African Credit Transfer System (ACTS), the established of the Pan African Quality Assurance Alliance (PAQAA), Data for Higher Education policy, and Quality Assurance Capacity Building. Throughout 2025 year, Obreal steered strategic activities, in close interaction with the European Commission and the African Union Commission, and partners AAU, DAAD and ENQA. Amongst the main activities in 2025 were the preparation of the pilot phase of the African Credit Transfer System (ACTS), and the development and consolidation of PAQAA, including structured stakeholder consultation and validation processes at institutional and regional levels. In addition, Obreal played a central role in the project's governance and led the preparation of key monitoring and reporting deliverables, contributing to the overall coherence and visibility of HAQAA3.



Obreal also continued to lead the implementation of [SPHERE](#) – Centralized Support to the Network of Higher Education Reform Experts, delivering a structured program that supports the modernization of higher education systems in EU neighboring partner countries (Western Balkans, Central Asia, Eastern Partnership and the Southern Mediterranean). Under the overarching theme “Higher Education and the challenges and opportunities of competitiveness and collaboration,” SPHERE organized seven events bringing together HEREs, National Erasmus+ Offices and EU representatives, to address key policy areas such as artificial intelligence, micro-credentials, curriculum reform, university-industry cooperation and sustainability, among others. These activities were complemented by Technical Assistance Missions to partner countries, reinforcing SPHERE’s contribution to higher education reform and regional cooperation.

OTHER PROJECTS

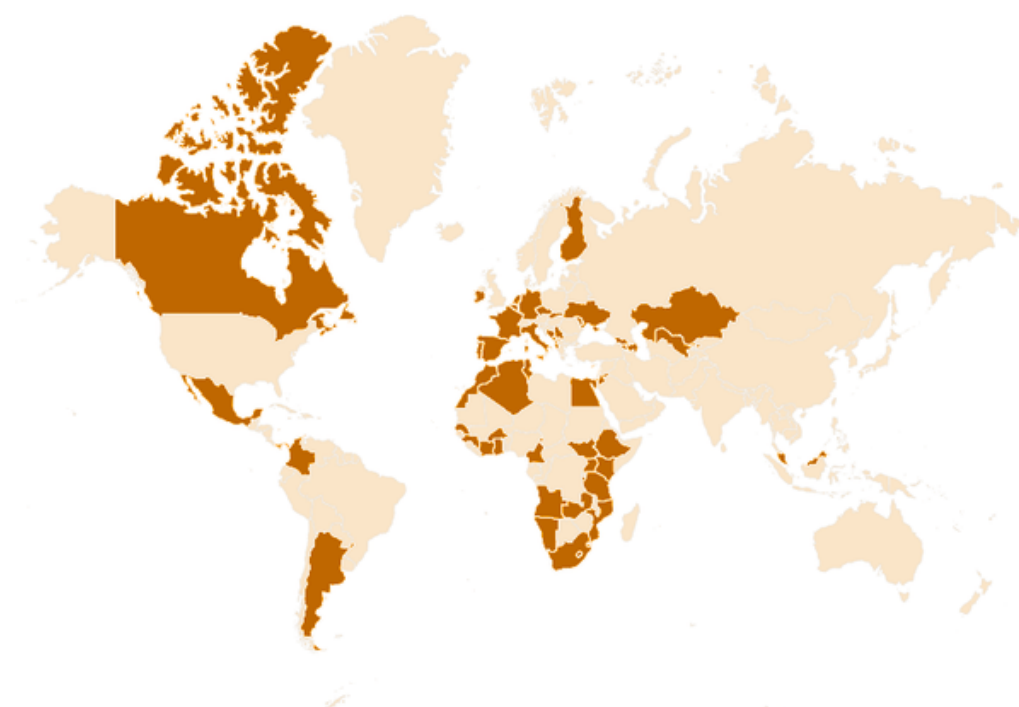
Besides these two flagship projects, Obreal has been involved in other **12 co-funded projects** during 2025. Through these projects Obreal targets different strategic priorities of the association such as youth, sustainability or innovation.



ONGOING PROJECTS



COUNTRIES INVOLVED





INITIATIVES

TRAININGS

In 2024, Obreal launched the [Obreal Training Platform](#) as a tool to strengthen capacities together with its members and strategic partners. In 2025, training activities targeted academic and institutional staff, as well as students, both within project frameworks and through self-funded initiatives.

COIL – COLLABORATIVE ONLINE INTERNATIONAL LEARNING

Together with the Central American University Council - CSUCA, Obreal co-organized the first edition of [a course on the COIL methodology](#), focused on virtual environments for academic collaboration.

322

Professors enrolled

174

Certified Participants

06

Central American
Universities

68

COIL Proposals
designed

CLIMAR – CLIMATE CHANGE, TOURISM, AND CIRCULAR ECONOMY

Within the framework of the Erasmus+ CLIMAR project, Obreal developed an [online training program aimed at addressing the challenges of climate change in the tourism sector](#) through a multidisciplinary approach linked to the circular economy.

988

Students

133

Certified Participants

04

Countries

In addition, in 2025, Obreal and partners piloted a course for both professionals and university and TVET students in wine tourism under the EnoTour project, and is currently developing new training offers under the projects GastroTour, Impact HE, HAQAA3 and Engage SDG, which are scheduled to launch in 2026. Topics range from gastro-tourism business models and sustainability to higher education data management, university-community engagement and project management capacity.



NEW BRAND



NEW BRAND

In 2025, Obreal **renewed its visual identity** and launched a **new website** to better reflect its institutional evolution.

The updated brand projects a more contemporary image, aligned with the association's interregional nature and recognizing the diversity and plurality of the different Souths and Norths.

The **new logo**, brand guidelines, and website reinforce a clearer and more coherent identity, aligned with the present and future of the association.





MEMBERSHIP



MEMBERSHIP

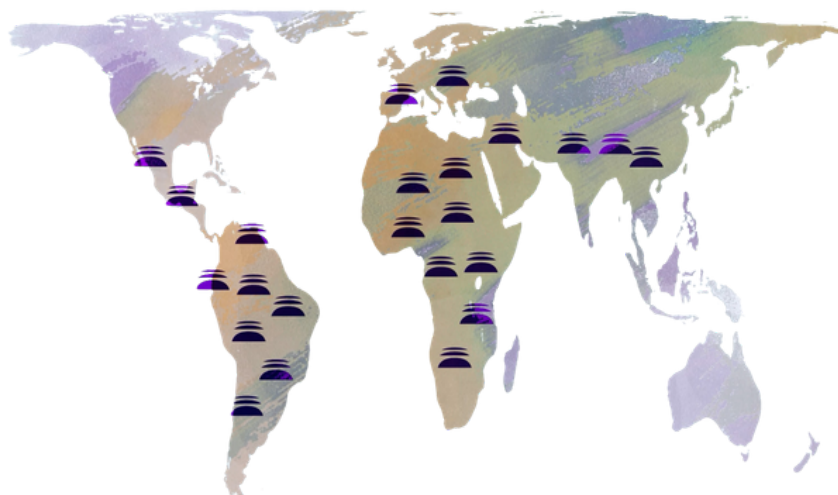
NEW MEMBERS 2025

In 2025, Obreal welcomed **ten new members from Africa, Europe and Latin America**, further strengthening the association's institutional base and reinforcing its interregional character.

Among the new members, the incorporation of the **Pan-African University (PAU)** is of particular **strategic significance**. Established as a flagship initiative of the African Union, the Pan-African University is a continental network of thematic institutes dedicated to postgraduate education and research, with a mandate to contribute to Africa's integration, development, and global positioning through excellence in higher education and knowledge production. Its membership strengthens Obreal's engagement with continental policy processes and reinforces the association's collaboration with African integration and higher education agendas.

The new members also include **UCLL University of Applied Sciences (Belgium)**, the **University of Tourism, Technology and Business Studies of Rwanda**, **Universidad Católica de Guayaquil (Ecuador)**, **Pontificia Universidad Javeriana Seccional Cali (Colombia)**, **Universidad Tecnológica Nacional (Argentina)**, the **University of Cape Coast (Ghana)**, the **Institute of Policy Analysis and Research (IPAR) in Rwanda**, the **Public Policy Professionals Society of Kenya**, and the **Distance, Open and e-Learning Practitioners' Association of East Africa (DOLPA-EA)**.

Together, these institutions and organizations bring valuable and complementary expertise in areas that are central to Obreal's strategic priorities, including regional and continental integration, innovation and entrepreneurship in higher education, public policy development, open and distance learning, and the contribution of universities to sustainable and inclusive development. **Their inclusion enhances the geographical and institutional diversity of Obreal and further consolidates its role as a space for interregional cooperation, translating dialogue into concrete initiatives, collaborative projects, and institutional solutions with tangible impact.**





LOOKING FORWARD



LOOKING FORWARD

Obreal will build on the momentum and partnerships consolidated over 2025 to advance three mutually reinforcing priorities: **consolidating interregional policy dialogue, supporting partners through capacity-building and training initiatives across regions, and empowering youth by strengthening critical thinking and innovation capacities**. Taken together, these priorities express Obreal's commitment to strengthening multilateral cooperation in education and development, translating dialogue into practical institutional solutions, and ensuring that emerging generations are equipped to address the challenges shaping our societies.

Interregional policy dialogue will remain a central pillar of Obreal's work, with a focus on multilateralism, regional integration, and evidence-informed policy debate. Building on the conclusions of the first conference on “Leveraging the African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) for Higher Education Integration”, Obreal plans—together with the WTO Chair Program—to convene a second round of policy and academic debate in April 2026 in Cameroon, sustaining and expanding the conversations initiated in 2025. This work will feed into the broader interregional dialogue process on Education and Development, leading to the fourth IRD in Cairo 2026. In parallel, Obreal will continue advancing the IRD framework outlined in the **“Map of Interregional Knowledge”**, published in November 2025 as well as the key commitments or policy institutional partners. Building on this framework, Obreal and its partners will broaden participation and incorporate additional regional perspectives in the IRD.

The Arab and Mediterranean region will play a central role in the next phase, and Obreal is also engaging with Chinese institutions to ensure China's consistent and strategic participation as a constitutive part of the Cairo dialogue.

Capacity-building projects will continue to translate these interregional priorities into practical institutional solutions. Obreal will maintain and expand a portfolio of capacity-building actions in Latin America, Asia, and Africa, many of them supported through European Union programs such as Erasmus+. These initiatives aim to deliver institutional responses to development and capacity challenges faced by partner regions. **In 2026, Obreal's capacity-building work will focus on strengthening innovation and tertiary education, with a specific emphasis on universities as motors of development and key actors in local innovation ecosystems**. It will also focus on measuring and communicating impacts at a time when development cooperation funding is in flux.

Obreal will also further strengthen its **youth agenda**, grounded in the conviction that developing youth capacities is essential for the future, especially around multilingualism, democracy, education, and innovation.



In this regard, Obreal will launch the **third edition of the Julio Cotler Program**. Having grown significantly since its launch and having attracted an increasing number of applications, the program is expected to reach a new stage of consolidation in 2026. Following the University of Bologna's incorporation into the organizing committee in 2025, Obreal anticipates that additional forums and institutions will join in 2026 to further strengthen and expand the initiative. The Youth and Multilingualism AI Incubator will also continue into 2026. After supporting a first cohort of young African researchers through funding and mentoring, Obreal aims to extend the incubator to additional regions, particularly Latin America, reinforcing interregional cooperation through youth-driven innovation.

In terms of strategic partners and advocacy, Obreal will continue to take part in the **'S-DHG' Forum** (Higher Education for Sustainable Development Group), grouping major funding agencies and higher education policy actors in an effort share practice and trends and engage in common advocacy actions for education in development.

Alongside these priorities, Obreal will continue to sharpen its communications: its **Voices program** and **podcast series** will aim to reach partners and a wider audiences, offering access to ongoing debates on education and development while keeping stakeholders informed about the outcomes and impact of Obreal's work.

Through these priorities and initiatives, **Obreal will continue to connect regions, convene meaningful policy dialogue, and support partners with concrete tools and programs, ensuring that interregional cooperation in higher education and development delivers both strategic alignment and tangible outcomes in 2026 and beyond.**

The Board of Directors



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