

ifa ECP Monitor Country Report

# Mexico

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## 1. External cultural policy objectives in geopolitical context

Mexico is the fifth-largest country by area in the Americas and among the leading 15 world economies (see Table 1). In 2019, Mexico had a total population of just under 122 million and the capital, Mexico City, is one of the largest urban centers in the region. Over the past decades the country has transformed into an economic and political emerging power, a positive trend that is likely to persevere (O'Neill, 2021). Mexico is a member of important multilateral organizations like the OECD, G20, MIKTA,<sup>1</sup> APEC,<sup>2</sup> and the Pacific Alliance (Vasile, 2019). With a rich cultural tradition, abundant natural resources and a global diplomatic footprint, it is rightly considered a candidate for a 'middle' power.

On the other hand, Mexico faces many challenges. Although it is the leader among developing countries, the internal socio-economic gap is still wide; wealth and prosperity are still distant dreams for many Mexicans. Mexico has been the source of the largest migration flow between countries in the world. In 2010, more than 11 million immigrants from Mexico lived in the U.S. (Statista, 2015). The country shares an ambiguous love-hate relationship with its northern neighbor. In that sense, Mexico has been said to be a "bi-regional country", seeking alliances with the U.S. and Canada (e.g. NAFTA), while at the same time sharing cultural and historical ties with South America (Pellicer, 2006). Mexico's position within the global community can only be understood in terms of this duality (Ferretti, 2007). However, such position has also led to diplomatic inertia. Mexican leadership is seemingly reluctant to expand the country's 'middle' role internationally (Pellicer, 2006), and especially since 2018 under a new foreign policy of minimal intervention in international affairs (KAS, 2020). The external cultural policy is not yet well defined and seems to be lacking navigation, too (C. Villanueva, 2007). The conspicuous omission of Mexico from the latest Soft Power 30 index illustrates the diplomatic standstill (Portland, 2019). The last time it was included in this ranking was in 2015 (29<sup>th</sup>).

The perception of Mexico is somewhat tainted by poverty, corruption and drug trafficking-related violence, which is often reiterated in international media. In fact, one of the major challenges for Mexican diplomacy is to set the record straight and recover the country's reputation. Luckily, there are plenty of resources to achieve that. Mexico has a unique cultural and historical legacy and fascinating nature which attracts tourists from around the world. It is home to a rich indigenous culture (*Mestizaje*)<sup>3</sup> with almost 70 languages,<sup>4</sup> multiple religions, and ethnicities. The appeal of the Mexican culture is almost universal: very few people are not familiar with Mexican cuisine (tacos, burritos), the arts (the Mayans, Frida Kahlo), tourist destinations (Cancún, Acapulco, Tulum), traditions and folklore (Cinco de Mayo, Day of the Dead), or even Mexican telenovelas shown worldwide (C. Villanueva, 2007).

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<sup>1</sup> MIKTA - Mexico, Indonesia, Republic of Korea, Turkey, Australia.

<sup>2</sup> APEC - Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation.

<sup>3</sup> *Mestizaje* refers to ethnic mixing and hybridity.

<sup>4</sup> 68 native languages and 350 dialects, derived from 11 distinct language families (Bonet, Négrier, & Zamorano, 2019).

**Table 1: Mexico's geopolitical and geo-economic position**

	<b>2019</b>	<b>% change since 2015</b>		
Population (million) / ranking	121.85 / 10 <sup>th</sup>	4.69		
GDP (\$ million) / ranking	1,258,287 / 15 <sup>th</sup>	10.01		
GDP per capita (\$)	20,739	12.38		
Cultural economy (%GDP)	-	-		
Education economy (%GDP)	4.52 <sup>(2017)</sup>	-0.71		
R&D economy (%GDP)	0.28	-0.14		
Media economy (%GDP)	-	-		
Sources: OECD, World Bank				
	<b>2019</b>	<b>change over 2015</b>		
Geopolitical position	Hard power rank	46 <sup>th</sup>	n/a	-
	World trade rank	14 <sup>th</sup>	14 <sup>th</sup>	-
	Soft power rank	n/a	29 <sup>th</sup>	↓
	Diplomacy rank	15 <sup>th</sup>	14 <sup>th</sup> <sup>(2016)</sup>	↓

**Table 2: Government spending on ECP fields as a % of total outlays**

	<b>2019</b>	<b>% change since 2015</b>
Culture	-	-
Education	17.57 <sup>(2017)</sup>	-1.44
R & D	-	-
Media	-	-

## 2. External cultural policy: an overview

**Table 3: Key ECP Statistics for Country**

	2019
Number of countries with ECP activities	at least 80
Total number of institutions abroad	156 diplomatic representations
Total number of FTE staff engaged in ECP activities	106 attachés
Government financial support (\$)	~ 13.3 million (267 million pesos) <sup>(2013-2018)</sup>
Total expenditure of all ECP operators (\$)	-
Comparative ECP ranking	medium

Mexico was one of the pioneers of ECP in Latin America, but assumed a more active role in the 1960s, when culture was integrated as one of the foreign policy areas (Ortega Guerrero, 2009). The country became more prominent in international cultural cooperation during the government of Luis Echeverría (1970-1976), and focusing on Latin America, the Caribbean, and the U.S. (Rodríguez Barba, 2008). Soon enough, the first Mexico cultural centers were inaugurated in Madrid (1977) and Paris (1979). During the 1980s and 1990s, external cultural policy aligned closer with the economy priorities (the NAFTA agreement). One example of successful cultural promotion is the Guadalajara International Book Fair (FIL) (since 1987), today the most important publishing gathering in the Spanish-speaking world. The major international exhibitions of Mexican artists coincided with the creation of the first agency within the foreign affairs ministry: the Mexican Institute for International Cooperation (IMEXCI, 1998-2001) and the Mexican Institute (*Instituto Mexico*, 2001-2007). Since then, the ECP apparatus includes many government bodies and programs coordinated by the Department of Cultural Affairs under the principal ECP body, the Foreign Affairs Secretariat – SRE (see Figure 1).

The principles of external cultural policy are determined by the National Plan of Development (PND) which is drafted every six years and decides the direction of the government. Under the Peña Nieto (2012-2018) administration, the National Development Plan reveals the wish to “widen and strengthen Mexico’s presence worldwide” (Gobierno de México, 2013). This is in stark contrast with the cautious approach of current President Andrés Manuel López Obrador (better known under his initials AMLO), who announced that “the best foreign policy is a good domestic policy” (Lozano, 2019).

The diplomatic work is primarily carried out through a network of cultural attachés operating in Mexican embassies. It is mandatory<sup>5</sup> for all Mexican diplomats to “promote the knowledge of the national culture abroad, and to expand the presence of Mexico in the world” (C. Villanueva, 2007, p. 118). In 2019, the network encompassed 80 Embassies, 67 Consulates (50 in the U.S.), 7 Missions, and 3 Representative Offices (Berlanga Vasile, 2019). Apart from ambassadors, 106 attachés<sup>6</sup> worked there (SRE, 2020). During the same year, around 2,000 cul-

<sup>5</sup> The Law of the Mexican Foreign Ministry (Ley del Servicio Exterior Mexicano, SEM).

<sup>6</sup> As of January 2008, there were 75 cultural attachés. The regional distribution privileged North America with 22 diplomats, followed by Europe (20), and South America (10) (Ortega Guerrero, 2009, p. 197).

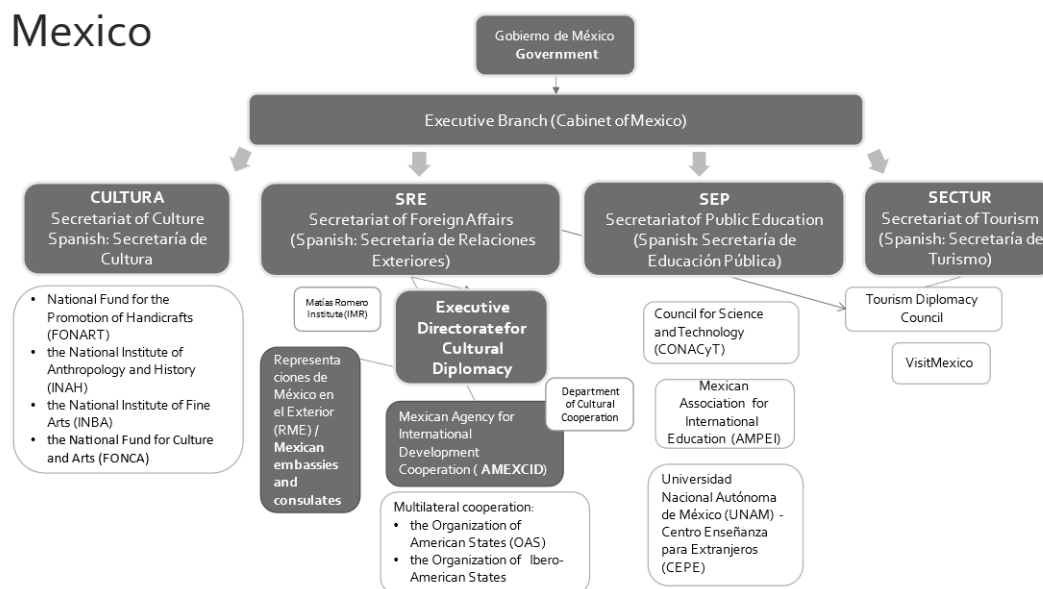
tural programs were implemented with an audience of 12 million. North America stands out with 610 activities, followed by Europe (476), Latin America and the Caribbean (302), Asia Pacific (109), and Africa and the Middle East (83) (ibid.). Mexican diplomats are very active in multilateral organizations, especially UNESCO (cultural heritage protection) and the Organization of Ibero-American States (OEI) (Bonet et al., 2019).

One issue has been the perceived low importance of cultural programming as opposed to economic affairs. Many Mexican embassies are actually lacking cultural attachés and the financial means to conduct cultural activities. The budget for cultural activities has been decreasing over the years: in 2018, 15 million pesos (approx. \$725,000) were provided through the Mexican Agency of International Cooperation for Development (Berlanga Vasile, 2019).

Within the Secretariat for Foreign Affairs, the Department of Social Communication has the responsibility to produce and curate the information about Mexico and manage interactions between diplomatic representations and the foreign media. However, as Berlanga Vasile (2019, p. 68) notices, the department does not provide specific guidelines and is not well coordinated with the rest of the ECP units within the ministry. As a result, there is considerable overlap and duplication of efforts.

The second actor is the Secretariat of Culture (*Secretaría de Cultura - SC*), created in 2015, and its operative arm, the General Directorate of International Affairs (DGAI). SC's predecessor was the National Council for Culture and Arts (est. 1988) (*Consejo Nacional para la Cultura y las Artes* or CONACULTA) (Secretaría de Cultura, 2015). The DGAI has two sub-offices: International Cultural Cooperation Directorate, with a task to support cultural cooperation projects in fields of tangible and intangible cultural heritage, cultural diversity and creative industries; and the International Cultural Diffusion Directorate, responsible for "disseminating and promoting the artistic expressions of Mexico in the main forums and events around the world" (R. C. Villanueva, 2019). Cultural cooperation and promotional activities are also highlighted in the Sectoral Programme for Culture derived from the National Development Plan 2020-2024. Apart from disseminating national cultural wealth and improving Mexico's image abroad, the goal is to provide emigrated citizens with opportunities to connect to their heritage (Secretaría de Cultura, 2020). As it can be seen from the objectives, there is considerable overlap with the activities of AMEXCID's DGCEC office.

C. Villanueva (2007, pp. 116, 125) has argued that the Secretary of Foreign Relations (SRE) and the Secretariat of Culture "stand for" official external cultural policy, but that other actors also informally "act on behalf" of Mexican culture (universities, television companies, telenovelas and film industry, or even the President of Mexico). The Mexican government has encouraged their involvement. The foreign affairs ministry, for example, includes a Department of Liaison with civil society organizations (CSO), tasked with facilitating CSOs' participation in diplomatic activities (Berlanga Vasile, 2019). Also, "Public Diplomacy Laboratory", made up of public officials, academics, writers, and professionals from the public and private sectors, should facilitate the construction of a new narrative for Mexican public diplomacy (SRE, 2020, p. 132).

**Figure 1: Institutional map of country's ECP**

### 3. Fields of ECP

#### 3.1. Culture and the arts

**Table 4: Key statistics on culture and the art**

	2019	2015
Number of countries present	-	-
Number of representations abroad	156 diplomatic representations	~ 20 Institutos México
Number of FTE staff	106 <sup>7</sup>	
Number of artists in exchange programs (National Fund for Culture and the Arts -FONCA)	57 grants <sup>(2018-2019)</sup>	169
Number of cultural events General Directorate for Culture and Education Cooperation (DGCEC)	1205 <sup>(2018)</sup>	1814
Budget (\$)	Secretariat of Culture / Support for international mobility of artists: 454,800	

<sup>7</sup> Diplomatic staff at Mexican missions abroad: 80 ambassadors, 67 consuls and 106 attachés and/or cultural attachés SRE (2020).

	2019	2015
Government financial support (\$)	470,639 <sup>(2018)</sup> (9,405,279 pesos)	~ 2,430,000 (48,542,893 pesos)
General Directorate for Culture and Education Cooperation (DGCEC)	725,000 <sup>(2019)</sup>	

Cultural tradition has always been an essential component of diplomatic activities<sup>8</sup> (Rodríguez Barba, 2008). The first priority in international affairs is to project an image of Mexico as “a dynamic country that, because of its values and cultural richness, evokes the respect of other societies” (SRE, 2013). For example, more actively since the 1990s, Mexico organized a series of large exhibitions abroad (e.g., “México: Splendour of Thirty Centuries”, 1990-92), showcasing the nation’s archaeological wealth. The idea behind it is to strengthen the image of the country as an ancient civilization, and as C. Villanueva (2007, p. 59) argues, “a reliable business partner” (for example in the NAFTA bloc). The 2003 touring exhibition “Aztecs” curated by the Royal Academy of Arts London, was another opportunity to highlight the “splendour and complexity” of Mexico and contributed significantly to improving the national image (Huffs Schmid, 2014). In 2001 alone, 121 such exhibitions of Mexican arts were held abroad (Rodríguez Barba, 2008, p. 3).

External cultural policy does not follow the European model with central cultural institutes (e.g. Goethe-Institut, Institut français). Rather, the diplomatic work is carried out through “cultural embassies” and academic exchange programs. There have been attempts to unify the ECP efforts under one common agency, the Instituto de México. Mexican cultural centers in countries such as the U.S., France, the UK and Brazil were tasked with the promotion of language and culture abroad.<sup>10</sup> However, with the resignation of the Foreign Minister Castañeda at the beginning of 2003, his initiatives were reversed (Rodríguez Barba, 2008).

Under the succeeding Calderón administration (2006-2012), the main ECP objectives aligned with the economic interests and were mostly focused on cultural industries. Another institutional change was the establishment of the Mexican Agency for International Cooperation for Development (AMEXCID) under the aegis of the foreign affairs ministry in 2011. Within AMEXCID, the General Directorate for Culture and Education Cooperation (DGCEC) assumed the responsibility of culture and tourism cooperation and promotion activities of Mexican diplomatic representations (Berlanga Vasile, 2019). Also, around this time first appeared the term “Cultural Diplomacy” in SRE’s annual reports (Siqueiros, 2015, p. 27). Interestingly, the Peña Nieto (2012-2018) government plan includes both public and cultural diplomacy or “*culpub diplomacy*” (R. C. Villanueva, 2019). The plan should improve the perception of Mexico abroad, or “project a true and fair view, in accordance with the historical legacy and traditions of Mexico: a democratic, rich, plural and vibrant nation” (Siqueiros, 2015; SRE, 2014, p. 31). Unfortunately, the cultural budget did not match the ambition: the resources for cultural diplomacy in the government of Peña Nieto amounted to only 267 million pesos, or around \$13.3 million (R. C. Villanueva, 2019).

<sup>8</sup> The Cultural Promotion Program (Programa de Promoción Cultural - PPC).

<sup>9</sup> The names of other major exhibitions are also revealing: “Teotihuacan: A Cosmopolitan City of Ancient Mexico”, “Great Masters of Modern Mexican Art”, “Imaginarios Mexicanos” etc (Rodríguez Barba, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Around 2007, Mexico had 38 Centers and Cultural Institutes abroad, 22 in the US, 4 in central America (Belize, Costa Rica, Salvador and Paraguay), 5 in South America (Bolivia, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador and Paraguay), 4 in Europe (Austria, Denmark, Spain and France) and 3 in Asia (Korea, Japan and Iran) (C. Villanueva, 2007).

The low financial support undercuts the potential of Mexican ECP. Mexico is a culturally rich country: it has the world's seventh largest collection of UNESCO protected goods (R. C. Villanueva, 2019) and the largest cultural infrastructure among the Latin American countries (Berlanga Vasile, 2019). Important national cultural institutions, like the National Institute of Anthropology and History (INAH, est. 1939), the National Institute of Fine Arts and Literature (INBAL, est. 1947), the National Fund for Culture and Arts (FONCA, est. 1989), the National Fund for the Promotion of Crafts (FONART, est. 1974), contribute to promotion of Mexico's cultural heritage. These institutions possess a rich infrastructure of museums, archaeological sites, research centers and libraries, arts schools and galleries, and are very active internationally (C. Villanueva, 2007, p. 127).

Regionally, Mexico is very active in all available Ibero-American Programs for cultural cooperation.<sup>11</sup> The programs seek to strengthen the common Ibero-American cultural space and foster intraregional cooperation. IBERMEDIA (since 1997), for example, aims to promote the Iber-American audio-visual industry, and enable knowledge transfer and co-production of films (UNESCO, 2016). Mexico's annual contribution to the program is \$ 250,000 (UNESCO, 2020).

### 3.2. Language and education

**Table 5: Key figures on language promotion**

	2019	2015
Number of countries where courses are offered	n/a	n/a
Number of students enrolled <small>CEPE - UNAM</small>		
In-class	6,768 (2,306 foreign and 4,462 Mexican students) <sup>(2018)</sup>	6,805 (2,588 foreign and 4,217 Mexican students)
Number of candidates for Spanish language qualifications <sup>(CEPE-UNAM) CELA, EXCELEAA, SIELE</sup>	2,244 <sup>(2018)</sup>	119 <sup>(2016)</sup>
Number of language & culture teachers <sup>(CEPE-UNAM)</sup>	118 <sup>(2018)</sup>	
Budget (\$ million)	n/a	n/a
Government financial support (\$ million)	n/a	n/a

<sup>11</sup> Ibermedia, Iberarchivos, Iberescena, IBERmuseos, Ibe.TV, Ibercultura Viva, Iberbibliotecas, Iber-Rutas, -Iberorquestas juveniles, Ibercocinas, Tradición e Innovación, Iberartesanías: Ibero-American Program for the Promotion of Crafts, IBERmúsicas, IBERmemoria Sonora y Audiovisual, RADI: Ibero-American Network of Diplomatic Archives.



Mexico is the fifth most linguistically diverse country in the world (Berlanga Vasile, 2019). In total, 68 indigenous languages (Nahuatl, Maya, Otomí, etc) are spoken, with over 350 linguistic variants (Arellano, 2021). As the largest hispanophone country, Mexico is an important actor in the promotion of the Spanish language. In particular, there is a good opportunity to establish the relevance of Mexican Spanish<sup>12</sup> in the Northern continent. It is estimated that by 2060, the U.S. will be the second largest Spanish-speaking country in the world, after Mexico - nearly one in three Americans will be Hispanic (Instituto Cervantes, 2019).

In Mexico, the language promotion is carried out mainly through the activities of the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México (UNAM), and its teaching center for foreigners, *Centro Enseñanza para Extranjeros* (CEPE) which apart from 3 local branches has many locations abroad like for example Chicago, London, Paris and South Africa (Velázquez-Vilchis & Ponce, 2021). The center was established in 1921 with the mission of “universalizing knowledge about the Spanish language and Mexican culture” (CEPE, n.d.). In its long tradition spanning a century, CEPE served not only as the Spanish teaching center, offering teacher training and language certification, but also promoted Mexican arts, history, and literature. CEPE’s language offer is often accompanied by cultural programming (820 events with 22,654 visitors in 2018) and guided tours that boost the growth of language tourism in Mexico (CEPE, 2018; L. M. S. Sánchez, 2019). In 2018, across its three locations CEPE had 6,768 (2,306 foreign and 4,462 Mexican) registered students<sup>13</sup> from over 70 nationalities (top three being U.S., Japan, China) (CEPE, 2018). CEPE participated as the creator of SIELE (*Servicio Internacional de Evaluación de la Lengua Española*) common Spanish language certification together with the Instituto Cervantes and the Universities of Salamanca and Buenos Aires. In addition, Mexican institutions created their own Spanish language proficiency exam (CELA – *Certificado de Español como Lengua Adicional*).

Apart from the leading teaching institution, UNAM - CEPE, other public universities offer courses for foreigners through their language departments, like the Universidad Autónoma de Querétaro and University of Guanajuato (the latter with an average 50 students per semester) (Velázquez-Vilchis & Ponce, 2021, p. 93). Universidad Veracruzana, Xalapa campus, has been active for 60 years in the teaching of Spanish as a foreign language, through its School for Foreign Students (EEE). In western Mexico, the University of Guadalajara has the Spanish for Foreigners Program (PEPE). Like CEPE, many of these centres integrate language teaching for foreigners with courses in Mexican history, literature and culture, workshops, excursions and cultural immersion activities (Velázquez-Vilchis & Ponce, 2021).

Lastly, academic centers for Mexican studies exist in different countries: the Rosario Castellanos Chair of Mexican Studies at the Hebrew University of Jerusalem, the Institut d’Études Mexicaines of the University of Perpignan in France, the Chair of Contemporary Mexican Studies at the at the Université de Montréal in Canada; the Ortega y Gasset University Research Institute in Madrid, the Centre for US-Mexican Studies at the University of Texas at Dallas, the Centre for US-Mexican Studies at the California in San Diego, the Centre for Mexican and Central American Studies (CEMCA) of the French Ministry of Foreign Affairs, and other (Rodríguez Barba, 2008).

<sup>12</sup> Mexican population is the largest Hispanic group in the U.S. (63%), followed by Puerto Ricans, Cubans, Dominicans, etc. (Potowski & Muñoz-Basols, 2018, p. 55).

<sup>13</sup> The geographic distribution of students: Americas 22%, Europe 21%, Africa 4%, Asia 50%, Oceania 3% (CEPE, 2020).

### 3.3. Tertiary education and science

**Table 6: Key figures on tertiary education**

	2019	2015
Number of countries	~ 70	~ 70
Number of universities / colleges abroad	UNAM: 13 locations in 9 countries	-
Number of domestic universities/ colleges	3,542	-
Number of students		
Number of foreign students <sup>14</sup>	7,223 <sup>(2018)</sup>	9,994
Number of students at trans-national higher education (TNE)	-	-
Number of government scholarships awarded (AMEXCID)	3,883 <sup>(2017)</sup>	3,675
Number of staff / teachers	-	-
Budget (\$) / AMEXCID Scholarships	21,570,547.41 <sup>(2017)</sup>	23,584,430.38

The responsibility of international education cooperation lies with the Secretariat for Public Education (SEP) and its Subdirectorate for international Affairs. The core mission is to promote Mexican institutions and increase cooperation and exchange activities with other countries in the scientific, educational, cultural and technical domains. In these activities it is aided by the National Council for Science and Technology (CONACYT). The Council's Directorate for International Cooperation designs cooperation policies in the fields of science, technology and innovation. The main purpose of international cooperation policies is to encourage knowledge transfer towards Mexican society and strengthen Mexico's position in education, regionally and worldwide (Bonet et al., 2019, p. 216). Under the mandate of technical and scientific cooperation, AMEXCID is also in charge of educational cooperation and academic exchanges (Siqueiros, 2015, p. 29).

In terms of international education attractiveness, Mexico is positioned as mid-tier. Higher education has a long tradition: the first university was established in 1551 (Cantwell, Luca, & Lee, 2009). The Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México – UNAM (National Autonomous University of Mexico) stands out as the most important institution. With 360,883 student population in 2019/20 on three campuses, it is one of the most important and largest in Latin America (UNAM, 2020). Also, UNAM is present abroad in Canada, China, Spain, Costa Rica, France, UK, and has multiple locations in the U.S., in Chicago, Los Angeles, Se-

<sup>14</sup> Data based on Global Flow of Tertiary-Level Students | UNESCO UIS. (2020). Retrieved 2 September 2020, from <http://uis.unesco.org/en/uis-student-flow>.

attle, Tucson, San Antonio. Seventeen Mexican universities are included on the World University Rankings, of which three fall within the ranking of 601-800 (TPBO, 2020), but no single university falls within the top 100 internationally (Estevez Nenninger et al., 2018). The 2018 QS Higher Education System Strength Rankings (HESS) place Mexico 31<sup>st</sup> out of 75 countries, just below Israel (QS Top Universities, 2018). International students (7,223 in 2018) choose Mexican institutions for a number of reasons. The tuition fees are relatively low and the cost of living is significantly cheaper than in U.S. or Canada, for example. Moreover, with Spanish being the second most spoken language in the world, the universities can capitalize on new growth opportunities.

However a developed international education market is still far from reality. Mexico is better known as a net sending country, meaning that more Mexican students leave to study abroad than students who arrive into the country (Cantwell et al., 2009). To be more precise, 34,196 in 2018, or almost five times the number of incoming students (UNESCO). The most popular study destinations are Spain, the U.S., France, Germany, and Canada (Gacel-Avila, 2018). The Mexican government has encouraged outbound academic mobility (M. D. Sánchez, 2014). Since 1971, the National Council of Science and Technology (CONACYT) administers funding for Mexican students to study abroad, giving preference to STEM fields and high-ranked Western universities (Estevez Nenninger et al., 2018). For postgraduate studies abroad, CONACYT provides funding of up to 300,000 pesos (around \$15,000). In 2019, 4,821 Mexican students took up this opportunity (CONACYT, 2019).

Mexico, like many Latin-American countries, still has very low student mobility rates, both outbound and inbound. The Cantwell study (2009) also found “geographically based orientations” towards study in Mexico: degree-seeking students came predominantly from Latin America, while European and North-American students preferred short-term study (Cantwell et al., 2009, p. 348). Mexico’s negative perception abroad (corruption, poverty, unsafe conditions) and complex bureaucracy are further negatively impacting internationalization (Cruz Ruiz, 2016, p. 223). Moreover, institutional efforts in international engagement are not nuanced in ways that address the actual needs. According to one study (Peak & Ilieva, 2016), Mexican government ranked as one of the least supportive in terms of enabling the international environment in tertiary education (Gacel-Avila, 2018).

An increased awareness of this issue over the past decades has given impetus to change the situation and attract more students. Since 1992, the Mexican Association for International Education (AMPEI) (*Asociación Mexicana para la Educación Internacional*) works actively with Mexican embassies and universities to promote international education and support academic exchanges. Within the NAFTA framework, for example, CONAHEC – the Consortium for North American Higher Education Collaboration, fosters academic collaboration between Canadian, U.S. and Mexican universities (more than 170 members). On the receiving end, the foreign affairs ministry (SRE), through the Mexican development agency AMEXCID, offers international merit-based scholarships. In 2017, 3,883 students were supported in this way (AMEXCID, 2017).

Regional and multilateral cooperation is an integral part of educational foreign policy. For instance, Mexico has been a member of the Organisation of Ibero-American States for Education, Science and Culture (OEI) since 1949. The OEI, headquartered in Madrid, is considered the largest multilateral cooperation body between Spanish and Portuguese-speaking nations.

Mexico has bilateral agreements on educational and cultural cooperation with 22 CELAC<sup>15</sup> member countries and 21 EU countries (Bonet et al., 2019, p. 217). Another cooperation mechanism is the Ibero-American Conferences of Ministers of Education.

Likewise, science diplomacy used to enhance regional cooperation and connectivity. There are two notable instruments: the Ibero-American Program for Science and Technology for Development (CYTED) and the Inter-American Institute for Global Change Research (IAI) which greatly contribute to regional Latin American integration. CYTED aims to strengthen cooperation networks between Spain, Portugal and Latin-American countries to advance scientific and social development. Mexico has traditionally had a large number of participating researchers, over 1,000 per year (Soler, 2014). Joining efforts with the southern continent extends onto many other areas, including aerospace. For instance, the Mexican Foreign Ministry has announced plans to create the Latin American and Caribbean Space Agency (ALCE) together with Argentina and CELAC countries (Soler, 2021). The main challenges ahead in science cooperation will be a lack of continuity and low budgets, as well as widening ideological chasms in the region. Next to Brazil, Mexican researchers are the most active (40% collaboration index) and have increased their collaboration with European (French, German, Spanish) and U.S. counterparts (Gacel-Avila, 2018; Gacel-Ávila & Rodríguez-Rodríguez, 2017).

### 3.4. Foreign Media

**Table 7: Key figures on foreign broadcasting**

	2019	2015
<b>Radio: <i>Radio México Internacional</i></b>		-
Number of countries broadcasted to	available worldwide via Internet	-
Number of languages	Spanish, English and French, and several indigenous languages	-
Audience / weekly (million)	n/a	-
Digital & social media audience (million)	n/a	-

*Radio México Internacional* (RMI) is a government-run international radio station located in Mexico City. From 1969 to 2004 it aired on shortwave and was discontinued in 2005 due to financial constraints. In 2011 it was relaunched as an Internet radio service ([www.imer.mx/rmi](http://www.imer.mx/rmi)) broadcasting 24 hours a day in Spanish, English, French, and indigenous languages (Checa Godoy, 2013). Since 1983, the service has been overseen by the public broadcaster, *Instituto Mexicano de la Radio* (Mexican Radio Institute – IMER). The main purpose of external radio programs is to spread information about Mexico and present the most outstanding aspects of the country to the world. Airing under the slogan “La Voz que

<sup>15</sup> CELAC- Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (*Comunidad de Estados Latinoamericanos y Caribeños*).

nos une” (“the voice that unites us”), the station also aims to integrate the different regions and connect with Mexicans living abroad (IMER, n.d.).

Mexican popular culture has been instrumental in attracting mass international audiences. Along with Brazil, the country is a very successful exporter of the entertainment industry, notably soap operas or *telenovelas* (Schneider, 2014), increasing international success of the Mexican film<sup>16</sup> and television industry. Two large production companies dominate the soap operas market: TV Azteca<sup>17</sup> and Televisa.<sup>18</sup> Televisa, a private television company, started producing TV series in 1958 and entered the wider world market (especially in Eastern Europe) in the mid-eighties (Medina & Barrón, 2010). Televisa can look back on a tradition of 50 years in which it produced more than 800 telenovelas, many of which have earned international success, and have been aired in over 100 countries. The significance of telenovelas therefore goes beyond light TV entertainment. The programs have been an important culture vehicle and often the first point of contact with Mexican traditions and culture for global audiences. At the same time, the worldwide distribution of telenovelas greatly contributes to the promotion of Mexican Spanish dialect (Guajardo Villar, 2012).

## 4. Challenges and future outlook

For “soft power *à la Mexicana*”, culture has been imperative (C. Villanueva, 2007). In the international arena, Mexico was not characterized as an economic or political power, but as a cultural power (Berlanga Vasile, 2019; Olmedo Estrada, 2011). In tandem with the national economic growth also evolved ECP strategies. Instead of solely promoting its *mestizaje* character and diversity, the recent governments have encouraged the projection of the image of ‘one’ or ‘united’ Mexico (*México unido*). Such a national brand should counter the negative image of a violent Mexico and stimulate economic development. Even though the focus has slightly shifted towards the promotion of tourism and other economically-viable sectors (Schneider, 2014), the “Mexico Brand” still relies heavily on the cultural component.

Taking into consideration its global popularity, the diffusion of Mexican culture among foreign audiences falls short of its potential. As a diverse, multi-ethnic country, full of colors and flavors, Mexico possesses all the qualities of an international cultural power. And yet, its external cultural policy is not as effective as it should be, and largely because of the lack of funds, continuity, and coherency. Additionally, a distinction is made between public diplomacy and cultural diplomacy, often with competing priorities. The overall ECP strategy often depends on the political agenda of each foreign minister and president, rather than a long-term, coherent state strategy (Rodríguez Barba, 2008): from Castañeda’s ambitious international project to today’s institutionalized, lukewarm approach. There are signs that change is taking place. For example, the reform of Mexican Foreign Service Act in 2018 brought significant improvements in the form of professionalization of Mexican diplomatic staff, the most important arm of Mexican ECP (Berlanga Vasile, 2019). Whether diplomatic missions alone will be adequate

<sup>16</sup> It should not go without mention that Mexico was among the top 15 film producing countries in the world (12<sup>th</sup> in 2015) (Instituto Cervantes, 2019).

<sup>17</sup> TV Azteca Mundo (formerly Azteca Internacional) is a TV station available in 13 countries in North, Central and South America.

<sup>18</sup> Grupo Televisa, S.A. is the largest media company in the Spanish-speaking world and very visible in the international entertainment business. Televisa Internacional, the global distributor of content for Grupo Televisa, is the world’s leading distributor of Spanish language content (Guajardo Villar, 2012).

to the task remains an open question. A more realistic yet ambitious solution would be a creation of a specialized cultural institution (Guajardo Villar, 2012), like was attempted with Instituto México.

Despite the progress made over the past two decades, Mexico still requires further development of its higher education sector, especially in professionalization, openness to international education and academic mobility (Gacel-Avila, 2018). If Mexico, as an emerging nation among the 15 top economies of the world, cannot attract young talent and increase scientific collaborations with other countries, its regional and international presence will most certainly suffer.

Finally, one of the biggest challenges for the current and all subsequent governments will be to recognize the importance of cultural diplomacy and define a new image of Mexico in the world, or at least one that counters the many negative, and often untrue or slanted, stereotypes.

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