

# Education

## ISSUES NOTE

### BRICS 2025



#### 1. Background Information

Education is an essential policy area for development in any country, and it has also become a crucial dimension of BRICS cooperation. Under the auspices of the Meetings of Education Ministers, over the years members have been able to overcome institutional and cultural differences to establish an enabling environment for broad-based, mutually beneficial dialogues and initiatives. With the incorporation of new members, work in this topic can further contribute to global education development, representing a unique BRICS approach to upholding the education targets enshrined in the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals.

In 2011, the BRICS Leaders' Sanya Declaration brought, under "new proposals to explore", the idea of "developing common strategies" in the areas covered by the mandate of UNESCO. In 2013, on the sidelines of the 37<sup>th</sup> UNESCO General Conference, the first BRICS Education Ministerial was held, providing the initial platform for further discussions. So far, throughout 11 cycles of ministerial and technical preparatory meetings, the following areas have received particular attention:

- The importance of upholding Sustainable Development Goal 4.
- The strengthening of the BRICS Network University (BRICS-NU).
- The willingness to enhance student exchange opportunities between BRICS countries, particularly in higher education, to foster people-to-people interaction and mutual learning.
- The promotion of digital education and of mechanisms to accelerate digital transformation in education.
- An encouragement to joint efforts through a Technical and Vocational Education and Training (TVET) Alliance, so that young people and adults acquire the necessary skills and competencies.
- The attempt to facilitate recognition of academic qualifications among member countries.
- The possibility of creating a comprehensive evaluation/ranking system of BRICS universities, which would better reflect the characteristics of member countries' educational systems vis-à-vis established rankings.

In institutional terms, BRICS-NU has established its own governance system. Significant progress has been made in creating joint postgraduate programmes and in enhancing mobility. In the remaining topics, efforts to further institutionalize initiatives are still under discussion, and cooperation has thus far largely relied on technical and senior officials' meetings, intertwined with seminars. Annual ministerial meetings have provided opportunities to refine strategies and confirm next steps.

The Brazilian chairship aims to build on these historical developments, avoiding the reopening of previously resolved discussions while respecting the pace of gradual integration for new members into ongoing activities, as well as their perspectives.

Undeniably, university links between the BRICS members have significant untapped potential. The strength of each BRICS country's university and research systems is evident. However, academic partnerships with traditional destinations outside BRICS still dominate, leaving room for a rebalancing effort that could benefit all members. On the one hand, this requires active involvement from BRICS governments. On the other, academic cooperation thrives when autonomy and decentralized decision-making process are preserved.

When it comes to TVET, each BRICS country has made notable advancements, recognizing its importance as a decisive factor for economic and social development. Similarly, joint projects have been launched. However, compared to BRICS-NU, the TVET Cooperation Alliance is a more recent initiative and still requires greater political attention and incentives to gain momentum. For this reason, and without neglecting other ongoing initiatives, the Brazilian chairship intends to place particular emphasis on technical and vocational education and training, scheduling its associated meeting close to the ministerial conference.

Moreover, international assessments developed under an agreed framework within BRICS—though challenging to implement—could strengthen both basic and higher education. These assessments would encourage diverse perspectives on educational quality while supporting mutual recognition of qualifications.

## **2. Priorities**

### **2.1 TVET: increasing the percentage of secondary students enrolled in professional and technological education**

Created in 2022, the TVET Cooperation Alliance aims to establish a multilateral platform for exchanging policy experiences and best practices while encouraging direct cooperation between TVET networks and institutions. Particular attention will be given to including new BRICS members in calls for joint activities. Leaders of TVET institutions will be invited to Brasília in early June to strengthen direct links, interact with Education Ministers and Senior Officials, and undertake a technical visit to one of the Institutes of the Brazilian Federal Network of Professional and Technological Education.

Key questions for discussion will include: Do BRICS countries have national targets for secondary student enrollment in professional education? What strategies are countries employing to meet these targets? What lessons can be shared among members?

### **2.2 BRICS NU: consolidating the expansion of topics and institutions involved**

The Memorandum of Understanding for the Establishment of the BRICS Network University emphasizes enhanced collaboration in higher education, particularly in research and innovation, with the creation of joint postgraduate programmes and with increased mobility. Based on an extensive work of identification of fields in which cooperation had more potential to grow, it also set the six initial areas for cooperation, each one of them with an active thematic group: Computer Sciences and Information Security; BRICS Studies; Energy; Ecology and Climate Change; Water Resources and Pollution Control and Economics. It counts on an Action Plan and on national coordinating structures in founding member countries.

In 2024, the Protocol of Accession of Egypt, Iran, United Arab Emirates and Ethiopia to the BRICS-NU was signed. BRICS-NU's thematic areas were also expanded to include mathematics, natural sciences, social sciences and humanities, sustainable agriculture/food security, and health

sciences. A decision was also taken to establish an academic journal that shall serve as a specialised international platform for the exchange of scientific and academic information between research centres and educational institutions of the BRICS member countries (Kazan Declaration, 2024).

In 2025, priority will be given to consolidating this expansion, both in terms of topics and institutional participation.

### **2.3 Ethical and inclusive adoption of Artificial Intelligence in basic education: sharing standards**

Digital Education has a relevant track record within BRICS. In 2016, the New Delhi Declaration advanced shared understandings on the use of information and communication technologies to improve the quality of the teaching-learning process, develop teachers and strengthen educational management and planning. At that time, BRICS Education Ministers also agreed to identify a nodal institution in each country to create an institutional network for sharing policies on this issue. They further highlighted the importance of promoting mutual knowledge of existing digital libraries within BRICS.

When meeting in Cape Town in 2018, ministers launched the idea of a comparative study on e-learning within BRICS contexts. This initiative gained further relevance during the COVID-19 pandemic, which accelerated the need for digital transformation in education. Building on this momentum, commitments and areas of work were updated in 2021, when a decision was taken to organize regular meetings of experts via videoconference. These meetings would provide a platform for discussing and formulating policies and strategies to harness digital and technological solutions appropriate to education.

In recent years, the acceleration of digital transformation has been reinforced as a key topic in BRICS educational dialogues. In Kazan, in 2024, BRICS Education Ministers welcomed China's proposal for a Memorandum of Understanding on cooperation in digital education within the BRICS framework. The objectives of this initiative include promoting educational equity, improving the quality of education, enhancing the training of teachers and administrators, and boosting digital transformation in education.

As a first step toward these goals, Brazil intends to organize a seminar that will invite representatives from the other BRICS work streams where similar topics are being discussed. This seminar aims to integrate these discussions and focus on the sharing of existing standards in each member country regarding the ethical and inclusive adoption of Artificial Intelligence in basic education.

### **2.4 Assessments as a pillar for cross-border recognition**

The Skukuza Declaration (2023) highlighted the importance of facilitating the mutual recognition of academic qualifications among BRICS member states to ensure the mobility of qualified professionals, academics, and students. A workshop in this area was organized in December 2023 to discuss the current legislative and political landscape and to identify ways to foster collaboration between competent authorities. In several cases, including in Brazilian and Chinese legislation, quality assurance through regular assessments has been identified as a key prerequisite for advancing mutual recognition.

As a follow-up to the workshop, the Russian Federation proposed in 2024 the establishment of a platform for such collaboration in priority areas. Procedures for recognizing qualifications would be developed by a BRICS Working Group established through a Memorandum of Understanding

(MoU) on cooperation in quality assurance, evaluation, and recognition of qualifications among the governments of the BRICS member states. The proposed MoU seeks to broaden the dialogue between member countries on the recognition of academic qualifications, building on the common understandings already reached.

In tandem, both in Skukuza (2023) and Kazan (2024), and building on a previously established dialogue, BRICS Education Ministers addressed the limitations of existing global rankings, noting their lack of consideration for the diversity of higher education systems. A commitment was made to explore a comprehensive quality assessment system for universities in the BRICS countries, one that better reflects their unique characteristics.

As a first step, during the Russian chairship, two online workshops on global ranking and assessment systems were held. These workshops revealed that many of the world's most prominent quality assessment mechanisms often rely on anonymous assessors, fail to disclose the criteria under evaluation, and operate on assumptions that are not always transparent. Conflicts of interest are regrettably common, methodologies are sometimes obscured, and feedback mechanisms have significant room for improvement. These findings underscore the need for BRICS to pursue a gradual change in the international landscape for educational assessments.

The future implementation of international assessments based on an agreed framework within BRICS would strengthen both basic and higher education by promoting a multifaceted and diverse perspective on educational quality. Such a framework would also facilitate the mutual recognition of qualifications and potentially ease academic and professional mobility among member states.

To advance this work, Brazil proposes streamlining these two areas of accrued focus. First, two online discussions will continue exploring how BRICS countries use national assessments to inform education policymaking and the possibilities for data harmonization. Second, based on the progress achieved in these discussions, the potential for mutual recognition of qualifications will be revisited.

### **3. Planned Deliverables**

3.1. Seminar on TVET for sharing best practices and lessons learned and for increasing TVET academic mobility among BRICS countries.

3.2. Revised BRICS-NU attribution table with participating universities by topic, leading university, planned actions and targeted timetables.

3.3. Seminar for sharing standards on ethical and inclusive adoption of Artificial Intelligence in education.

3.4. Seminars on national assessments in education policymaking, data harmonization, and quality assurance for mutual recognition.



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