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Chile's Science and Research Ecosystem

MARKET INTELLIGENCE REPORT

Summary

- Chile's vision for its science and research sector is to generate development and well-being in a sustainable and integrated way. The sector is governed by two principal bodies: the National Council of Science, Technology, Knowledge and Innovation for Development, and the Ministry of Science, Technology, Knowledge and Innovation. There are a number of other government agencies also involved in research and development.

- Chile's research and science strength areas include engineering, astronomy, Antarctica, environmental and earth sciences, and clean energies. Many institutions are also focused on STEM, economics and governance, medicine and health sciences, and indigenous studies and development.

- Chile's research ecosystem is composed of universities, government funded research centres, and private sector bodies. There are around 50 accredited universities, with a student base of around 800,000 people. The top two Chilean universities have 2026 global QS rankings of 116 and 173 respectively, and of 1 and 6 respectively for the Latin America and Caribbean region.

- In 2023, Chile's total R&D spent was USD 1.25 billion. Of this, 42% was sourced from the private sector, 35% from central government, 16% from tertiary education institutions, 6% from international sources and 2% from private not-for-profit institutions.

- New Zealand and Chile have a number of institutional arrangements that support science and research exchange. The most recent is an Agreement for Cooperation Program between Universities New Zealand and the National Agency for Research and Development of Chile (ANID) from November 2025, which is focused on human capital cooperation but also provides the basis for wider engagement. Our countries also share underlying societal values and similarities in geographical, economic and demographic characteristics that position us well to partner with Chile in research and science of mutual interest.

*NB: Unless otherwise specified, website links in the report below are in English.

Report

Chile's strategic vision and governance for science and research

Chile's National Strategy for Science, Technology, Knowledge and Innovation for Development 2022 (link in Spanish) sets out a vision for its science and research sector that is to generate development and well-being in a sustainable and integrated way, based on a knowledge society. Its purpose is that science, technology, knowledge, and innovation (collectively referred to as science) constitute a fundamental pillar of society to promote the creation of a widely defined sense of value, contributing to the preservation of the biosphere, its ecosystems, and its diversity, and to the development of an inclusive and ethical society.

Chile's science ecosystem is governed by two principal bodies. The National Council of Science, Technology, Knowledge and Innovation for Development (the Council – link in Spanish) is an autonomous entity responsible for advising the President, whose principal task is the elaboration and review of Chile's National Strategy for Science, anticipating the country's greatest challenges and providing orientations to strengthen the science system so that it contributes to Chile's sustainable development. The Council is apolitical and multi-sectorial, providing a central vision for government efforts relevant to science.

The Ministry of Science, Technology, Knowledge and Innovation (Ministry of Science – link in Spanish) is responsible for the design of legislation, policy and programmes. Through these, it aims to strengthen, democratise, and decentralise science, technology, knowledge and innovation, to contribute to sustainable development across economic, environmental, educational, social and cultural spheres for both people and communities.

As the governing body for public policy, the Ministry defines strategies and thematic priorities in critical areas such as climate change, public health, artificial intelligence, and biodiversity, and oversees key strategic programmes. It also serves as the central coordinator of the national science ecosystem, bringing together universities, research centres, public agencies, regional governments, and the private sector to align efforts and resources.

Priorities and strengths

Chile has several areas of science strength borne of either its unique geography or economy. Standout examples include:

- Engineering: which supports Chile's mega mining industry, as well the supporting transport, infrastructure, and port industries.
- Astronomy: Chile has the world's clearest skies and hosts more than half of the world's most advanced astronomical infrastructure with extensive international collaborations. The sector has contributed to key discoveries in cosmology, stellar evolution, exoplanets, and galactic archaeology. Chilean policy also requires all observatories to grant Chilean scientists 10% of observation time.
- Antarctica: Chile's long-standing presence on the continent, logistical advantages, and commitment to environmental stewardship shape a robust Antarctic research agenda. Chile's gateway city serves the highest number of National Antarctic Programmes.
- Environmental and Earth sciences: Chile's geographical diversity, low population density, and extensive coastline provide for strong research programmes in marine ecosystems, freshwater ecosystems, agriculture and forestry, geology, and others.
- Clean energies: Two of Chile's focus areas of science for economic development are green hydrogen and lithium, each being subject to individual national strategies and substantial investment. Chile produced 25% of global lithium in 2023, and has ambitions to develop a USD 24 billion export market for green hydrogen and its derivatives by 2050. Chile has boosted investment in renewable energies, with the Atacama desert in the north and Magallanes region in the south emerging as hubs for solar and wind energy, respectively.

Research entities

Chile's research ecosystem is composed of universities, government funded research centres, and private sector bodies. The system has historically been centralized in Santiago but has in recent years sought to decentralise to regional universities and institutions. There are around 50 accredited universities, with an approximate 50/50 split between public and private institutions, and again between universities with their main campus in the capital Santiago vs Chile's regions. Chilean universities have a student base of around 800,000 people.

The private Pontifical Catholic University of Chile and the public University of Chile are the two most esteemed universities, with 2026 QS rankings of 116 and 173 respectively, and ranking as 1 and 6 respectively for the Latin America and Caribbean region. Their student base is 38,000 and 47,000 respectively. These same two universities also share the highest number of institutionalised cooperation with New Zealand.

Many other Chilean universities – both private and public – are considered to have very high research output and globally-recognised specialisations, including in the priority areas mentioned earlier and in broader knowledge areas such as STEM, economics and governance, medicine and health sciences, and indigenous studies and development. Often, Chile's high-performing universities will offer English-medium programmes of study, and/or have a high proportion of English proficiency amongst staff. Some examples of the focus areas across Chile's universities include:

- University of Santiago de Chile: mining, environmental sciences, astronomy/astrophysics
- The Catholic University of the North (link in Spanish): indigenous studies, earth sciences, geology
- Universidad de la Frontera: indigenous studies and education, environmental sciences, agriculture, creative arts and Technology, health sciences
- Austral University (link in Spanish): agriculture
- University of Magallanes (link in Spanish): Antarctica, green hydrogen, and agriculture
- University of Concepción (link in Spanish): health sciences, marine science
- Pontifical Catholic University of Valparaíso: architecture, urban planning, smart cities, agriculture
- Diego Portales University: health sciences, astrophysics, astronomy
- University of the Andes: health sciences, medicine

Many Chilean universities participate in university groupings or networks, which can provide an effective channel for engaging with multiple institutions at once. Some examples include (all links in Spanish):

- Council of Rectors of Chilean Universities (CRUCH)
- G9 Network of non-State Public Universities
- Corporation of Private Universities (CUP)
- Grouping of Regional Universities (AUR)
- Universities of the State of Chile (CUECh)

Chile's science ecosystem also contains a number of other publicly funded research entities, both within and outside of the universities. These include (all links in Spanish):

- National Interest Research Centres contribute to general knowledge for the development and well-being of the country in the area of state interests and public policies.
- Priority Area Centres generate knowledge, science, or technology that responds to a nationally relevant public challenge where gaps exist that impact on the development of national capabilities or public policies.
- Applied Research Centres generate science and technology of the highest level, connected with opportunities and/or challenges in the productive sectors. One of their distinct objectives in knowledge transfer to the productive sectors, with a focus on the private sector.

- Millenium Institute Centres increase the quality of collaborative frontier knowledge of a scientific or technological character.
- Millenium Nucleuses: These are groups of 3-10 researchers from universities or research centres that have the mission of addressing complex questions on the frontier of knowledge in their respective disciplines.
- Both the Millenium Institutes and the Millenium Nucleuses are required to not only focus on frontier research but also on the formation of young scientists, the creation of formal collaboration networks, and knowledge transfer and dissemination.
- Technological Centres) enable technological infrastructure and advanced human capital that answer to business and productive sector demands for innovation capabilities for improved, high-value and marketable products, processes, or services.
- Scientific and Technological Equipment Service Centres aim to install permanent R&D capabilities related to the access and shared use of high-need equipment.
- Regional Centres work on increasing regional R&D capabilities, contributing knowledge, science, and technology targeted to the needs, priorities and opportunities in each region.
- International Centres are centres of excellence that support research and technology transfer in spheres where Chile presents important gaps. These are established through agreements between countries.

Funding

Chile's R&D spend against GDP has hovered between 0.3 and 0.4% over several years, significantly below the OECD average of approximately 2.7%. Chile's goal is to increase R&D spend to 1% of GDP.

In 2023, Chile's total R&D spent was USD 1.25 billion (download study here in Spanish).

Sector	Financing %	Financing USD	Executed %	Executed USD
Private sector	42%	530m	44%	555m
Tertiary Education Institutions	16%	195m	43%	530m
Central government	35%	430m	8%	95m
Private not-for-profit institutions	2%	25m	5%	65m
International sources	6%	70m	-	-

The large majority of public funding for research comes from contestable funding rounds. The Chilean National Agency for Research and Development (ANID) oversees 70% of publicly managed funds (USD 480 million in 2024) – link in Spanish). The remainder is managed by institutions such as Chile's Economic Development Agency (CORFO), the Ministry of Agriculture, the Ministry of Education, and the Ministry of Science.

National Agency for Research and Development (ANID): Core funding agency

ANID's budget is split between 83 annual funding calls across postgraduate scholarships, individual research projects, applied research projects, associative research projects, and calls aimed at building Chile's regional science capability. While not all calls are open to international applicants, some are (such as Chile's domestic PhD scholarships), while others are targeted towards increasing international collaboration.

One of ANID's yearly calls is for 'Strengthening International Links' (link in Spanish), known colloquially as FOVI in Chile, and normally open over April-May. This call provides a platform for initial international engagement: it offers approximately USD 30,000 per project for international exchanges across conferences, teaching, and joint research projects. The call's structure encourages initiatives led by Chile's regional research institutions, and the evaluation process offers a bonus point for projects that address specific regional priorities. These often match important areas for New Zealand such as renewable energy, agriculture, sustainable food production, climate change, disaster resilience, and Antarctica.

Other public agencies

The Chilean Economic Development Agency (CORFO) focuses its R&D funding on business innovation, driving projects with a focus on technology and sustainable productive development. Their key programs include:

- Crea y Valida: From prototype to technical validation
- Innova Alta Tecnología: High-tech, R&D-intensive projects
- Start-up Chile: A public start-up accelerator for all stages of development, which welcomes start-ups from Chile and around the world.

The Ministry of Agriculture has two associated agencies with research and innovation activities. The Agricultural Research Institute (INIA – link in Spanish) undertakes research and development, innovation, community engagement and technology transfer, in order to pursue value-add and innovative solutions for Chile's agricultural sector to

contribute to sustainability and food sovereignty. The Foundation of Agricultural Innovation (FIA – link in Spanish) seeks to promote innovation processes through the development of capabilities, articulation, strategic information and the generation of innovation that contributes to the sustainable development of the country's agricultural sector and agrifood chain. Both agencies are focused on research and innovation lines in sustainable agriculture systems, management of water resources, and climate change.

The Ministry of Education's funding is focused on institutional strengthening of universities.

The Ministry of Science provides strategic funding for large-scale initiatives such as national supercomputing infrastructure, scientific facilities, and international collaboration networks. It also oversees long-term funding aimed at strengthening the institutional capacities for research, development, and innovation in accredited Chilean universities, alongside calls for using open innovation to solve public sector challenges, and science communication and education.

New Zealand – Chile links in science and research

New Zealand and Chile's shared underlying societal values alongside our similarities in geographical, economic and demographic characteristics position us well to partner with Chile in research and science of mutual interest. New Zealand enjoys a positive reputation, and there is strong interest in collaborating with our education, research and innovation systems not only in common sectors and challenges, but also in ecosystem structure, private-public partnerships for applied research, and R&D commercialisation. There are several institutional arrangements in effect between New Zealand and Chile, that provide a platform to support science and research engagement. These include, but are not limited to:

- The Agreement for Cooperation Program between the National Agency for Research and Development of Chile (ANID) and Universities New Zealand, November 2025 creates a framework to foster the development of activities related to science, technology and innovation, and encourage the formation of human capital.
- The Education Cooperation Arrangement between the Ministry of Education of New Zealand and the Ministry of Education of the Republic of Chile, June 2022 facilitates the exchange of information on education systems and initiatives.
- The Education Cooperation Arrangement between Education New Zealand and the Chilean Council of Rectors (CRUCH), June 2022 establishes a base for cooperation including on international exchanges, information sharing, and collaboration dialogues.

How the Embassy can help

The Embassy (MFAT or Education New Zealand) maintains a number of contacts across a range of tertiary institutions and research centres in Chile. Areas we can provide assistance, depending on capacity, include:

- providing insight into the Chilean R&D system and requirements,
- providing information as known on specific Chilean institutions and identifying synergies in research areas,
- facilitating introductions where possible, and
- general advocacy in Chile for New Zealand expertise.

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