Expert Group Meeting
New research on trust and social cohesion – World Social Report 2025.
Session III. Trust and inequality
“Social unrest, trust and inequality: Findings from the Panorama of Social Cohesion in Latin America”

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1. Social unrest and social cohesion
2. (Mis)trust in institutions and expectations in LA (2015-2023): findings from the Panorama of social cohesion in LA
3. Recommendations from the interdependence between democratic governance and wellbeing
A different and uncertain regional and global context: pandemic and unprecedented economic crisis with modest recovery; new questionings about globalization and liberal democracy with rising populist leaderships.

A polarized and changing regional political context with no hegemonic/univocal models; social unrest (2019: Chile, Haiti, Colombia; 2021: Colombia; 2022: Ecuador)

Global reference points: 2030 Agenda for sustainable development as a global commitment with setbacks in its fulfilment

New reference points from ECLAC: a rich reflection on inequality as a structural obstacle for sustainable development and pacific coexistence (social inequality matrix; dual social and labour inclusion; RAISD)

A need to revisit social unrest and social cohesion from a new measurement and policy framework based in these new reference points.
1. Social unrest and social cohesion
2019 protests in Chile: The trigger was the rise in public transport costs

2019-2022 protests in Ecuador: The trigger was the elimination of fuel subsidies

2019 protests in Haiti: The trigger was a rise in fuel costs

2021 protests in Colombia: The trigger was the proposal of a regressive fiscal reform
What is social unrest?: Definition of the 2020 Social Panorama of Latin America

- Social unrest is linked to a **negative perception of different dimensions of social life**. It can arise from disapproval of various elements of the socioeconomic structure, the political and institutional framework or social relations.

- **It takes the form of dissatisfaction with the distribution of well-being**, the exercise of **public power** and/or **political representation**, as well as the **distrust** towards institutions and individuals, and feelings of insecurity.
Analytical dimensions of social unrest

OBJECTIVE CONDITIONS

- Socioeconomic structure
- Political and institutional dimension
- Social relations

SOCIAL UNREST

- Fair/unfair distribution of resources and assets
- Legitimate/illegitimate distribution and exercise of political power
- Positive/negative social ties and interactions between people

- Level of dissatisfaction with the distribution of well-being and questioning of privilege and inequality
- Level of dissatisfaction with the exercise of public power, political representation and institutional functioning
- Negative appraisal of social relationships and experiences of discrimination
Social Cohesion: an elusive concept, with multiple approaches

- Since the end of the 19th century, it responds to a concern about **what unites and identifies individuals as part of modern societies** (E. Durkheim).
- CS is usually approached as a **process or as a result** (end or goal).
- It may or may not also be seen as a **continuum** according to one definition, or a **diversity of possible/coexisting models** of social cohesion.
- Given such a diversity of approaches and definitions, it is useful to classify each approach based on **3 recurring criteria**:

  - **Social cohesion as shared values and sense of belonging**
  - **Social cohesion as trust associated with commitment and ability to live/work together**
  - **Social cohesion as the promotion of well-being and the reduction of gaps**
Towards a reformulation of the concept of social cohesion in ECLAC

Social cohesion incorporates both structural and subjective dimensions, and can be understood as the dialectic between instituted mechanisms of social inclusion and exclusion, and the responses, perceptions and attitudes of citizens towards the way these mechanisms operate.

New reference points:
- 2030 Agenda
- Equality as the strategic horizon of development (ECLAC)
- Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development (RAISD)

Prescriptive approach, focused in equality and democracy:
Social cohesion as the capacity of a society and its democratic institutions to promote equality-based social relations and to generate on the basis a sense of belonging and an orientation towards the common good in a way that is perceived as legitimate by its members.
Analytical outline of democratic and equality-oriented social cohesion

**Enabling elements:**
- Guarantees of well-being
- Culture of equality
- Mechanisms for recognition, participation and conflict resolution
- Rule of law and quality democracy

**Policies that impact social cohesion**

**Some constituent manifestations of social cohesion:**
- Equality-based social relations
- Sense of belonging
- Orientation towards the common good

**Old and new disruptive factors:** inequality, pandemic, social unrest, climate change, etc.

GLOBAL AND NATIONAL CONTEXT

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean
2. Social cohesion panorama: some findings and regional trends
Some regional features and challenges for social cohesion

1. A generalized **aversion** and **dissatisfaction** with high levels of **inequality**

2. A sense of **material and physical vulnerability** (violence, crime, gender-based violence), as well as **labour precariousness**.

3. Some **institutional progress** in terms of recognition and equality (treaties, legal norms, etc.)

4. A **high and growing distrust**, both towards other people and to institutions (state powers, electoral authorities, armed forces, churches, political parties, etc) and a generalized perception of **corruption** among public officials.

5. Despite a **severe dissatisfaction with the functioning of democracy in each country**, democracy is still an **ideal** and the preferred system of government.

6. A **shared expectation** that the **State must take action to reduce inequalities**.
Measurement framework

1. **Three pillars** in congruence with previous ECLAC measurements

2. **Measurement of the constitutive expressions** of social cohesion and its **enabling elements**

3. Subjective and objective indicators

4. **Dashboard (type “dashboard”)**: allows comparison without ranking and shows directions of change in the different indicators

5. **Traffic light format** to facilitate understanding and analysis of data
## Framework for social cohesion framework

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<tr>
<th>Pillars</th>
<th>Elements and expressions</th>
<th>Dimensions</th>
<th>Sub dimensions</th>
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<tr>
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<td>Enabling elements</td>
<td>Guaranties of wellbeing</td>
<td>Labour inclusion</td>
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<td>Social inclusion</td>
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<td>Institutional frameworks</td>
<td>Enabling elements</td>
<td>Mechanisms for recognition</td>
<td>Mechanisms of participation and conflict resolution</td>
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<td>Belonging</td>
<td>Constitutive Expressions</td>
<td>Equality-based social relations</td>
<td>Bonds</td>
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<td>Sense of belonging (connectedness)</td>
<td>Interpersonal trust</td>
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<td>Orientation towards the common good</td>
<td>Recognition and respect of diversity</td>
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<td>Identification With country</td>
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<td>Perception of social justice and fairness</td>
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<td>Respect for social rules</td>
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<td>Civic Participation</td>
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Dashboard: Belonging Pillar, circa 2018
A low perception of a fair income distribution

• In 2023, only 21% considered that income distribution was fair/very fair, despite gradual reductions in income inequality indexes.

• Perceptions matter

Fuente: Own elaboration, based on CEPALSTAT and special tabulations of the surveys carried out by the Latinobarómetro Corporation.
Disparities in interpersonal trust (community vs general)

- In 2023 there were signs of close social links, represented by a 56% people who trusted the people in their communities, which has kept relatively high.
- However, this does not reflected more trust in people in general, which fell in 2010-2017, and has since stabilized around 17%.

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on special tabulations of the surveys carried out by the Latinobarómetro Corporation and the AmericasBarometer of the Latin American Public Opinion Project (LAPOP).
A cross-cutting and growing institutional distrust

Latin America (17 countries): Institutional trust by institution, 2015-2023
(Percentages)

- The region exhibits rates of institutional trust below 40% for a wide variety of institutions included in the analysis, which continued to fall from 2015 to 2018, and a slight recovery since.

- In 2023, trust levels were low for all institutions, specially regarding political parties (16%), followed by Congress (25%), the national government (29%), the judiciary (29%), electoral institutions (35%), and the national police (40%).

Source: Own elaboration, based on special tabulations of the surveys carried out by the Latinobarómetro Corporation.
Most people prefer the democratic system, despite criticisms about its functioning and a high perception of corruption.

The positive evaluation of the functioning of democracy has kept falling (28% in 2020) but the assessment of democracy as the best form of government is still above the majority (58%).

In addition, people are usually critical of the state's probity. **In 2018, only 11% considered that corruption was not generalized among public officials.**

Latin America (18 countries): evolution of the assessment of democracy as best form of government and its actual functioning, 2010 - 2023 (in percentages)

Source: Own elaboration, based on special tabulations of the surveys carried out by the Latinobarómetro Corporation.
A wide consensus among citizens about the state’s redistributive role

In 2023, still a shared conviction in the region that the State should implement policies to reduce income inequality (69%).
A wide consensus among citizens about the unfairness of inequality and the exercise of power

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on special tabulations of the surveys carried out by the Latinobarometro Corporation.
Inequality, trust and democracy in LA: perceptions on inequality and fairness matter a great deal

• Income inequality and trust are negatively related (Latinobarometro, LAPOP, WVS)
• While inequality is still considerable in most realms, perceptions on its high levels and ‘unfairness’ are linked to rising mistrust.
• Perceived inequality plays a significant role in changes in trust (Valle and Scarsatini, 2020).
• Trust is shaped by many factors, one of which is the distribution of income and wealth in a society, particularly when it is not perceived as legitimate (CEPAL, 2020; Valle and Scarsatini, 2020).
• The quality of public policies also matters for there is an expectation that governments act to reduce inequalities.
• Improvement in some trust indicators since 2017?
3. Policy recommendations based on the interdependence between democratic governance and wellbeing
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Enabling elements of social cohesion</th>
<th>Policy areas</th>
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<tr>
<td>Guarantees of well-being</td>
<td>Universal social protection systems and human capacity-building</td>
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<td>Culture of equality</td>
<td>Social and labour inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>Mechanisms for recognition, participation and conflict resolution</td>
<td>Affirmative action policies and anti-discrimination measures</td>
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<tr>
<td>Rule of law and quality democracy</td>
<td>Governance, openness in decision-making processes and dialogue mechanisms</td>
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- **Policy areas are originated in the enabling elements of social cohesion**; with a special focus on the promotion of well-being, equality, recognition and participation, and a quality democracy.

- **Different policy sectors emerge from each area**. For example, from social and labour inclusion emerge access and quality policies in educational services, health, water and sanitation provision, among others.

- **This is not an exhaustive list**, but a first approach to **priority and interdependent areas**.
Conclusion: Governance and well-being

- In the face of an uncertain and volatile context, social cohesion must be a horizon to guide policies.
- The transition towards an equality-focused social cohesion is also an instrument to face change, uncertainties and to generate resilience with legitimacy.
- A regional overview offers a complex scenario with some positive highlights (institutional progress, democracy as the best system of government, the expectation that the State should reduce inequality, etc.).
- To strengthen social cohesion it is important to implement integral policies: in each national context, to reinforce governance from the basis of better institutions and the gradual construction of real welfare states.
- It is hard to think on how to provide legitimacy and funding for this policy agenda in a sustainable way across time, without a social pact that has both pillars in its center.
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THANK YOU!