

Progress in the Implementation of the Third United Nations Decade for the Eradication of Poverty (2018–2027)

Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)

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The eradication of poverty and extreme poverty and the reduction of inequality in all its dimensions continue to be central challenges for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. These are additional to persisting challenges connected to the economic and productive matrix of the region, characterized by high structural heterogeneity, and emerging challenges associated with the effects of climate change, demographic, epidemiological and nutritional transitions, and uncertainties related to the 4th technological revolution. Furthermore, the Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic represents an enormous obstacle to achieving the Sustainable Development Goal of ending poverty in all its forms everywhere in the region.

Despite significant progress in poverty reduction between the beginning of the last decade and the middle of the present one, the COVID-19 pandemic builds upon the **setbacks experienced since 2015**. A continuing upward trend in poverty has been recorded since 2015 in Latin America, with 30.8% of the region's population projected below the poverty line in 2019, and an estimated 11.5% projected to live in situation of extreme poverty.

Poverty dynamics have been uneven among countries. The increase in regional poverty between 2014 and 2018, is due mainly to the increase seen in Brazil and Venezuela. In the rest of the countries, the predominant trend in that same period was towards a reduction, mainly because of an increase in the labor income of the poorest households, but also due to public transfers from social protection systems and to private transfers such as remittances.

In the region, there is also a clear and growing trend towards the **overrepresentation of women living in poverty**, reflected in the femininity index of poor and extremely poor households, which rose in the first decade of the twenty-first century, and has remained relatively stable over the past few years. In 2002, the regional average of the femininity index of poor households in Latin America, which included 18 countries, stood at 105 women for every 100 men, and rose to 113 women for every 100 men in 2018. With respect to extreme poverty, the indicator recorded 108 women for every 100 men in 2002, and rose to 117 women for every 100 men in 2018

The United Nations Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) estimates that **the COVID-19 pandemic will have devastating social and economic effects**, including a contraction of at least -1.8% in regional Gross Domestic Product (GDP) and rising unemployment in the region. Assuming a drastic decrease in labor income for at least a 5% of the employed population, the number of poor persons in the region would rise from 182 million in 2018, to 210 million people in 2020, out of 620 million inhabitants in total; and the quantity of people living in extreme poverty could increase from 63 million to 83 million over the same period.

The poorest and most vulnerable will be hardest hit by the pandemic. Although, the virus alone does not discriminate, social and economic inequality in the most unequal region in the world will most probably entail different impacts on different population groups. The more vulnerable groups will bear the brunt of the economic impact of the pandemic and will have fewer resources to fight it. Furthermore, poverty and poor health are connected in a vicious circle, as the poorest are more likely to have health problems. Accordingly, the chances of becoming seriously ill with the virus are disproportionately concentrated among the poor and vulnerable. Within countries, poverty mainly affects children and adolescents, women, indigenous and Afro-descendant people, residents of rural areas, and those who are unemployed. In the context of the pandemic, special attention should be paid to all of these groups, and especially to women because of their dual roles as workers and caregivers.

As part of its strategic objectives and expected outcomes, **ECLAC has prioritized support for greater social and economic equality** and has contributed to the overall wellbeing of the people of the region in line with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and a rights-based approach. ECLAC in particular aims to mainstream a gender equality perspective into sustainable and inclusive development strategies and to improve the production, dissemination and use of quality and timely statistics for evidence-based decision-making in the economic, social and environmental fields in the region.

In support of the eradication of poverty, **ECLAC is enhancing the capacity of central and subnational governments** in the region to formulate policies, plans and programs that address poverty and equality gaps affecting different socioeconomic and population groups, with special focus on rights for women, children and youth, indigenous people, Afro-descendants, migrants and people with disabilities. The collaboration with the governments of the region has been significant and varied in the fields of social protection, care systems, child labor, technical and professional education, costs of malnutrition, and social cohesion, among others. ECLAC also focuses on **strengthening the technical capacity of social policy institutions** to improve the effectiveness, efficiency, transparency and sustainability of their public action, and to develop synergies with other social policies, institutions and stakeholders. This helps Latin American and Caribbean countries to move towards social policies based on a broader consensus and a long-term sustainable horizon, focusing on reducing inequality, poverty and vulnerability in access to the main social development pillars (education, health, social security, decent work and social assistance); achieving greater attention towards the social determinants of economic dynamics; and crafting a human-rights-based approach to development.

The **Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development** approved by the countries of the region during the Third Meeting of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, which took place in Mexico City on 1-3 October 2019, is a technical and political instrument that will support countries in the implementation of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the region, focusing on eradicating poverty and achieving greater levels of equality and well-being. This Regional Agenda expresses the shared stance of countries regarding the need to promote a new generation of social policies anchored in a rights- and equality-based approach and guided by the principle of universalism that is sensitive

to differences; to strengthen the social institutional framework, including countries' capacity to invest in social matters; to provide sufficient, guaranteed resources for social policies; and to bolster multilateral action.

ECLAC has also contributed to strengthen the implementation of gender equality policies in line with the **Regional Gender Agenda** and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, and to implement the agreements of the fourteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, especially in relation to women's economic autonomy. In 2016, at the thirteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, the member States recognized that gender inequality continued to be one of the region's structural features, and that it was urgent to make faster progress towards fulfilling regional and international commitments on gender equality and women's autonomy. The governments noted that four structural obstacles needed to be overcome to achieve gender equality by 2030: socioeconomic inequality and the persistence of poverty in the framework of exclusionary growth; discriminatory, violent and patriarchal cultural patterns and the predominance of the culture of privilege; the sexual division of labour and the unfair social organization of care; and the concentration of power and hierarchical relations in the public sphere. To that end, they adopted the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 which constitutes an important milestone to overcome women's overrepresentation in poor households.

In the position document presented at the latest Regional Conference on Women in January 2020, entitled "**Women's autonomy in changing economic scenarios**", ECLAC analyzed the current challenges and opportunities posed by an economic scenario that is constantly changing due to economic, technological, demographic and climate changes. In this report, ECLAC also highlighted that slow economic growth and increasing levels of inequality and poverty complicate the picture for social spending and, above all, policies that impact the lives of women.

As it champions integrated solutions to poverty reduction, **ECLAC also strengthens the statistical capacity of countries** in the region to monitor economic, environmental and social trends in order to formulate improved evidence-based policies. For instance, ECLAC provides specific technical assistance to enhance national statistics and to ensure that they are comparable internationally as envisioned in the strategic plan 2015-2025 of the Statistical Conference of the Americas. In 2019, technical assistance was provided in several countries to improve the quality of household surveys, as the main source of data for poverty measurement and analysis. In addition, ECLAC has focused on capacity building in methodologies for data disaggregation, which allow to identify low-income populations and their living conditions with a high level of geographical detail. More recently, the context of the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the possibility of National Statistical Offices to continue the implementation of their regular activities, such as the measurement of employment, household income or the Consumer Price Index. To this regard, ECLAC has provided recommendations to continue data collection through new modalities and has hosted weekly webinars with National Statistical Offices related to this issue.

ECLAC has fostered greater **inter-agency convergence and collaboration** through various projects. ECLAC has worked with countries in the region on incorporating a gender dimension on

poverty measures including non-monetary measures of poverty and time-use poverty¹. Furthermore, the working group on gender statistics of the Statistical Conference of the Americas, has developed activities during the last years on the impact of poverty in women lives and autonomy. Jointly with 10 UN entities, including the five Regional Commissions, ECLAC is implementing the Programme on Statistics and Data of the UN Development Account 10th Tranche. In this context, ECLAC leads the component on “poverty and inequality statistics”, which has produced several methodological guidelines and conducted capacity building seminars and technical assistance. Some of the documents produced include “Non-monetary indicators to monitor SDG targets 1.2 and 1.4”, “Challenges in designing national multidimensional poverty measures” and “Data disaggregation with household surveys: small area estimation methodologies”.

Further in the **statistical domain**, collaboration with other international agencies, such as ILO, UNFPA, UNWOMEN, the Partnership in Statistics for Development in the Twenty-first Century (Paris 21), UNEP, UNESCO, UNICEF and the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC), and international expert groups, such as the Inter-Secretariat Working Group on National Accounts, the Inter-agency Expert Group on Sustainable Development Goal indicators, the United Nations Global Geospatial Information Management (UNGGIM) and UN-GGIM for the Americas, the Group on Earth Observations (GEO) and the Global Working Group on Big Data for Official Statistics, are being reinforced.

In collaboration with the Economic Commission for Asia and the Pacific (UN ESCAP), ECLAC has also undertaken research on **multidimensional inequalities** using new statistical methodologies to gain greater insight into the dynamics that structure the distribution of opportunities and effective rights. With the aim of collecting information globally in relation to the rights, opportunities and risks of children in the digital age, ECLAC has contributed to strengthening the research network of Kids Online Latin America, which was originally developed as a collaborative initiative between the UNICEF-Innocenti Research Office, the London School of Economics and Political Sciences, and the EU Kids Online network in Europe.

ECLAC has also collaborated with various UN agencies at the national level. For instance, it developed in partnership with the regional office of ILO an innovative methodology to analyze and measure the risks and associated factors of child labor at the local level for various countries. It joined efforts with the WFP on improving the design of a national policy on social protection and promotion in Haiti. Furthermore, ECLAC participated in the launching of a joint project on social cohesion carried forward by UNDP in Bolivia and collaborated with FAO, UN WOMEN and the Social Institute of Mercosur (ISM) to strengthen institutions and territorial management for social protection in Paraguay.

ECLAC has created an online COVID-19 observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean which compiles the measures undertaken by governments in the region to address poverty and vulnerability as well as the gender dimensions of the policy response to the COVID-19 pandemic. In order to avoid increasing women’s poverty, aspects such as care and domestic work in a context

¹ See https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/43140/1/S1701175_es.pdf.

of confinement; employment protection and measures for women workers in certain sectors; and benefits, transfers and other social protection measures for women in all their diversity, are analyzed.

Today, ECLAC confirms once again the urgency of moving ahead on the construction of **welfare states, based on rights and on equality**, which provide male and female citizens alike access to comprehensive and universal social protection systems and to essential public goods, such as quality health and education, housing, care systems and transportation. ECLAC's calls for social compacts for equality. A decrease in income inequality is key to resuming the path of poverty reduction and achieving the targets established in the 2030 Agenda's Sustainable Development Goal 1. Even though critical, overcoming poverty in the region not only requires economic growth; it must be accompanied by redistributive policies and active fiscal policies. More specifically, ECLAC emphasizes policies for social and labor inclusion. This also requires a labor market that guarantees quality employment and decent pay, eliminating the barriers for women for labor insertion, and strengthening the development of comprehensive and universal social protection systems in the framework of welfare states centered on rights and equality.