



Afrodescendent women in Latin America and the Caribbean

Debts of equality



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This study was conducted by the Division for Gender Affairs of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC). María Aparecida Bento, Altagracia Balcácer, Giselle dos Anjos Santos and Vivian Souza, consultants with that division, were in charge of its preparation under the supervision of María Nieves Rico, Chief of the Division. The work was coordinated by Alejandra Valdés, Researcher, of the same Division.

Thanks are due to Lais Abramo, Chief of the Social Development Division, and Marta Rangel, a consultant with the Social Development Division, for their comments; to Vivian Milosavljevic, of the Social Development Division, and Laura García, of the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE)-Population Division of ECLAC, for their statistical work; and to Elizabeth Crespo Kleber and Ana Irma Rivera Lassén for their contributions.

The substantive inputs provided by Iliana Vaca-Trigo, Social Affairs Officer; María Cristina Benavente and Margarita Vega, consultants; Corinna Templin, Research Assistant; and Amparo Bravo and Ana Catalina Valencia are greatly appreciated.

The Division wishes to acknowledge the contributions of Jhon Antón Sánchez, Cristina Bloj, Vicenta Camuso, Claudia Mosquera, Rocío Muñoz Flores, Matilde Pacheco and Javier Sota, of the Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), Lily Jara, of the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO), and Fabiana del Popolo, Laura García, Antonin Menegaux and Rodrigo Ruiz, of ECLAC, all of whom participated in the Meeting of Experts on Afrodescendent Women, the Challenges of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Regional Agenda for Gender Equality, held in Santiago, Chile, on 9 and 10 December 2015.

The Division is grateful for the inputs shared by representatives of the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women.

Gratitude is also due to AECID for its assistance with the compilation of information and the drafting of this document, which were undertaken as part of the ECLAC-AECID Cooperation Programme's support for the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean.

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United Nations publication
LC/TS.2018/33
Distribution: L
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Printed at United Nations, Santiago
S.18-00725

This publication should be cited as: "Afrodescendent women in Latin America and the Caribbean: debts of equality", *Project Documents*, (LC/TS.2018/33), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2018

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Contents

Abstract.....	7
Introduction.....	9
I. Black and Afrodescendent women: the long road to recognition as rights holders.....	15
A. Intersectionality.....	16
B. Identity and autonomy.....	18
C. Inroads and challenges in achieving the statistical visibility of black and Afrodescendent women.....	20
II. Economic autonomy for Afrodescendent women.....	23
A. Without an intersectional approach, there is no way out of poverty for Afrodescendent women.....	25
B. Afrodescendent women and access to education.....	28
1. Affirmative action policies in education.....	32
C. Afrodescendent women's access to employment.....	32
1. Afrodescendent women in the labour market.....	34
2. Affirmative action policies in the labour market.....	38
3. Paid domestic work: the sum total of gender and ethno-racial inequalities.....	40
D. Inequalities in pension system coverage: the challenge for Afrodescendent women of securing a decent standard of living during old age.....	43
E. Unpaid work.....	44
F. Women of African descent and their right to territory.....	47
III. Physical autonomy for Afrodescendent women.....	51
A. Effects of patriarchy and racism on the social representations of Afrodescendent women.....	52
B. Inequalities in access to health care and services.....	53
1. Sexual and reproductive health.....	56
C. Violence against Afrodescendent women: an expression of patriarchy and racism.....	62
IV. Decision-making autonomy for Afrodescendent women.....	67
A. Community action, identity-based organization and impact on public policies.....	68
B. Presence in political power.....	71
C. Between institutional racism and the institutionalization of racial and gender equality policies.....	76

V. Final remarks	79	
Bibliography	85	
Figures		
Figure 1	Latin America (10 countries): attendance of persons between 18 and 24 years of age at an institution of higher education, by ethnicity/race and sex, latest available year	30
Figure 2	Brazil: level of schooling, by race and sex, 2014.....	31
Figure 3	Latin America (11 countries): unemployment rates for persons 15 years of age and over, by ethnicity/race and sex, latest available year	33
Figure 4	Latin America (10 countries): employed population between 15 and 29 years of age, by ethnicity/race and sex, latest available year	34
Figure 5	Latin America (8 countries): employed population of 15 years of age or more holding administrative positions, by ethnicity/race and sex, latest year available	35
Figure 6	Latin America (4 countries): women of 15 years of age or more who are employed as manual workers, by ethnicity/race, latest year available.....	36
Figure 7	Latin America (8 countries): women of 15 years of age or more who are employed in professional and technical positions, by ethnicity/race, latest year available	37
Figure 8	Latin America (8 countries): persons of 15 years of age or more who are employed in management positions, by ethnicity/race and sex, latest year available	38
Figure 9	Latin America (8 countries): domestic wage workers of 15 years of age or more, by ethnicity/race, latest year available	41
Figure 10	Latin America (4 countries): pension system coverage of employed persons of 15 years of age or more, by ethnicity/race and sex, 2015.....	44
Figure 11	Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador: amount of time devoted to unpaid work by the population of 15 years of age and over, by ethnicity/race and sex, 2012	45
Figure 12	Latin America (11 countries): proportion of the population of young persons between the ages of 15 and 29 who are neither in school not employed, by ethnicity/race and sex, latest year available	46
Figure 13	Latin America (11 countries): persons aged 60 years or over with at least one disability, by ethnicity/race and sex, latest year available	55
Figure 14	Latin America (4 countries): women who had at least four antenatal check-ups, by ethnicity/race, latest year available	58
Figure 15	Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador: maternal mortality ratio by ethnicity/race, around 2011	59
Figure 16	Latin America (10 countries): adolescents aged 15–19 years who are mothers, by ethnicity/race, latest year available	61
Figure 17	Uruguay: girls aged 12–19 years who have liveborn children, by ethnicity/race, 2011	62
Figure 18	Ecuador: women who have experienced some type of gender-based violence, by ethno-racial self-identification, 2011	63
Figure 19	Uruguay: prevalence of gender-based violence occurring in the past 12 months, by sphere, by ethnicity/race, 2013	64
Figure 20	Brazil: killings of women, by race or colour, 2003–2013	65
Figure 21	Latin America (7 countries): afrodescendants in the national population and in national parliaments (single or lower chambers), 2013	72
Figure 22	Latin America (7 countries): Afrodescendent women among legislators in national parliaments (single or lower chambers), 2013	73

Boxes

Box 1	Brazil: do poverty reduction programmes have an impact on racial inequality?	26
Box 2	Brazil and Colombia: inroads in the introduction of regulations governing paid domestic work	42
Box 3	Traditional Afrodescendent medicine: its role in Afrodescendent women's health and challenges for its recognition and inclusion in public policies	56
Box 4	Brazil: access to health care, sexual and reproductive health and racial inequalities	60
Box 5	Uruguay: the Ufama al Sur cooperative in Montevideo	69

Abstract

The intersection of multiple systems of oppression exert a decisive influence on the social and economic position of Afrodescendent women in Latin American and Caribbean societies, and those systems of oppression are given structural expression in the form of ethno-racial and gender-based discrimination.

The aim of this study is to provide an overview of the various types of inequalities experienced by women of African descent in the region and to contribute to the discussion concerning the types of policies that can help to do away with all the various forms of discrimination to which they are subject. To that end, it takes an intersectional, gender-based approach to the analysis of the social, economic, educational, health-related and other equality gaps that differentiate their situation from that of Afrodescendent men and non-Afrodescendent men and women.

The progress being made in shaping an international framework for the realization of the rights of persons of African descent is manifested in the demands being made for recognition, justice and development which are echoed in the Programme of Activities for the Implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015–2024). In Latin America, this effort is embodied in the agreements underlying the Regional Gender Agenda and the proposals voiced by organizations of women of African descent and of the diaspora in the region, which give expression to an agenda whose fulfilment will necessarily entail shining a light on the role of groups of women who have been excluded from taking part in reaching the decisions that affect their lives. The governments of the region are therefore called upon to develop public policies for the promotion of gender equality based on an intersectional perspective that values and recognizes the region's ethno-racial diversity as a basic condition for sustainable development with equality.

The need to compile statistics that do away with the invisibility of persons of African descent is a challenge for the region which attests to the failure to accord full recognition to this segment of the population. This situation is compounded by the scarcity of data that are disaggregated by sex, since the lack of such social statistics impedes a detailed examination of the associated inequalities. Despite these stumbling blocks, the analysis undertaken in this study reflects the persistent inequalities experienced by Afrodescendent women in different areas.

This study focuses on three main dimensions of women's autonomy: economic autonomy, physical autonomy and autonomy in decision-making. It examines a number of public policy initiatives that governments have designed and implemented in an effort to close the inequality gaps that persist in the region, while also recognizing that much more remains to be done in order to repay the debts of equality owed to Afrodescendent women.

Introduction

The final decade of the twentieth century marked the beginning of a systematic analysis in Latin America and the Caribbean of the situation of Afrodescendent women and the inequalities that they face. That analysis focused on delving into the interconnections among gender, race/ethnicity and social class and came in response to the growing demands of the Afrodescendent women's movement, which was drawing attention to the failure of experts on gender discrimination to consider the realities that they faced and to incorporate them into their analyses.

In fact, bringing out the heterogeneity of the political concept of “women” has become one of the greatest concerns of gender scholars since the 1990s, when the concept of intersectionality emerged as a tool for shedding light not only on the different manifestations of discrimination —such as sexism, heterosexism, racism and class prejudice— but also on the ways in which these manifestations cut across and overlap one another to create complex intersections of two, three or more expressions of discrimination, thus giving rise to interrelated forms of intolerance.

The governments of Latin America and the Caribbean have been tuned into this debate and have ratified a series of international agreements —in parallel with international agreements on the rights of indigenous persons— that recognize the rights of persons of African descent. An important role in this regard was played by the International Conference on Population and Development (Cairo, 1994), which set itself the strategic objective of fostering “attitudes in favour of responsible behaviour in population and development, especially in such areas [as] ... instilling gender and racial sensitivity” (United Nations, 1995b, p. 79).

Nonetheless, over 20 years on, persons of African descent in Latin America continue to be the target of discrimination in terms of access to opportunities and the ability to exercise their rights. This is reflected in the gaps separating the indicators for this sector of the population from the rest of the populace, all of which goes to show that the fulfilment of the agenda drawn up in Cairo will require a more enduring commitment (ECLAC, 2010b).

The Beijing Platform for Action crafted at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing in 1995, “respects and values the full diversity of women's situations and conditions” and recognizes that women face multiple barriers owing to such factors as their ethnicity which hamper their progress and their quest for full equality (United Nations, 1995a).

The Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban, South Africa, in 2001, served as a powerful framework for the formal recognition by States of the harmful effects, both for individuals and for society, of racism and

discrimination on the basis of skin colour and ethnic origin. The governments gathered together at Durban pledged to combat de jure and de facto discrimination and to incorporate a gender perspective into their anti-discrimination policies that would reflect the complex interlocking structures of oppression that result in a lack of power, limited capacity-building and restricted autonomy in the lives of women of African descent.

In the report of the Third World Conference against Racism, the attending States affirmed that they were “convinced that racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance reveal themselves in a differentiated manner for women and girls, and can be among the factors leading to a deterioration in their living conditions, poverty, violence, multiple forms of discrimination, and the limitation or denial of their human rights”. They also acknowledged “the need to integrate a gender perspective into relevant policies, strategies and programmes of action against racism, racial discrimination, xenophobia and related intolerance in order to address multiple forms of discrimination” (United Nations, 2001, p. 18-19).

One of the more recent examples of the varied range of international commitments and action in this area is the proclamation of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015–2024), which “marks out a path for States and civil society to fulfil their commitments and obligations in resolving the structural problems that persist the world over, including in Latin America, and perpetuate exclusion and discrimination against Afrodescendent populations” (ECLAC, 2017b, p. 217). The proclamation for the Decade (United Nations, 2014), in line with the watchword of “recognition, justice and development”, sets out a series of measures to be adopted by States, such as the passage of broad-based legislation to fight discrimination, the promotion of greater awareness, recognition and respect for the culture, history and heritage of persons of African descent and the implementation of measures for improving Afrodescendants’ access to education, health, employment and other rights.

At the regional level, the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development was adopted at the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean in Montevideo in 2013. The Consensus puts forth a set of high-priority measures referring explicitly to Afrodescendent populations that are aimed at reaffirming the countries’ commitment to combat racism and racial discrimination (ECLAC, 2017b). That document includes a number of agreements concerning women of African descent, such as the one that underscores the need to “address gender, racial, ethnic and intergenerational inequalities, bearing in mind the way these dimensions overlap in situations of discrimination affecting women, especially young Afrodescendent women” (ECLAC, 2013, p. 32).

Another important instrument that has recently been added to the region’s institutional structure is the Plan of Action for the Decade for People of African Descent in the Americas (2016-2025) adopted by the General Assembly of the Organization of American States (OAS, 2016). The general objectives of this plan at the national level are to: “Gradually adopt public policies and administrative, legislative, judicial, and budgetary measures for persons of African descent to access and enjoy their rights. Develop programs and activities, particularly educational programs at the primary and secondary school levels to foster an understanding of the significance of slavery and the slave trade, and their consequences on the life of persons of African descent, as well as to acknowledge the significant contributions of persons of African descent to the economies, cultures and societies of the region” (OAS, 2016).

In addition, the Regional Gender Agenda, which is the product of 40 years of work undertaken by the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, also fully incorporates the issues of importance to women of African descent, including ethno-racial and gender-based intersectionality (ECLAC, 2016b). The 36 agreements reached at the various sessions of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean highlight these issues in the regional debate and in the Regional Agenda.

The Lima Consensus (2000) focuses on orienting State policy towards rectifying inequalities and safeguarding the human rights of women and girls while devoting special attention to specific groups of women, including black women, and on taking action to close the gap between de facto and de jure equality and taking into account the pluricultural, multi-ethnic and multilingual identity of the countries of the region (ECLAC, 2000). In the Mexico City Consensus, the participating States agreed to fully incorporate the gender and ethno-racial perspective into the design and follow-up of all public programmes and policies and reaffirmed their commitment to the “development of an information system based on statistics disaggregated by sex, with a view to effectively mainstreaming a gender perspective, taking racial [and] ethnic ... diversity into account, in all government programmes and policies”, thereby incorporating an intersectional perspective into those instruments (ECLAC, 2004).

In the Quito Consensus (2007), the signatory governments pledged to develop and implement public policies that will provide for broader, sustainable access for women to land ownership and natural and productive resources and to couple them with special safeguards for women of African descent and other groups of women, such as indigenous and campesino women. They also agreed to uphold women’s sexual and reproductive rights and their right to universal access to comprehensive health care while placing priority on certain groups, including women of African descent, and to promote respect for undocumented women’s integral human rights and to take steps to guarantee full access to identity and citizenship documents for all women, especially for those who have been excluded from this right. They also pledged to implement affirmative action policies as measures of social reparation (ECLAC, 2007).

The Brasilia Consensus (2010) encompasses a range of agreements concerning Afrodescendent women in Latin America and the Caribbean which it prefaces with a formal acknowledgement of the persistence of racism and the consequent accumulation of disadvantages with which they and their indigenous counterparts are faced. These agreements include commitments to develop proactive policies regarding the labour market and productive employment; to promote and ensure the mainstreaming of gender and ethno-racial perspectives in all policies, especially economic and cultural policies; and to adopt preventive and punitive measures, together with measures for protecting and caring for women, that will further efforts to eradicate all forms of violence against women in public and private spheres, with special attention to certain groups of women, including women of African descent (ECLAC, 2011a).

The attention drawn by social movements to the need to take an effective approach to the diverse nature of the heterogeneous group classified as “women” progressively gained ground within the institutional structure. This process culminated in the explicit adoption of the concept of intersectionality in the Santo Domingo Consensus (ECLAC, 2014b). This was the instrument in which the governments formally acknowledged that the full guarantees for women’s human rights are founded on a recognition of the countries’ cultural diversity.

The Santo Domingo Consensus (2014b) outlines a number of specific challenges that must be overcome in order to deal with the inequalities experienced by women of African descent. The measures required to achieve this goal include providing full access to technologies and promoting the entry of women into vocational training in the sciences; defining and developing public policies to combat discrimination and promote affirmative action on the basis of an intersectional approach that encompasses the fight against sexism, racism and ethnocentrism; encouraging the mass media to project a positive image of women and to banish the stereotypes and the violent content that perpetuate discrimination and violence against women; and providing access to quality health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, during and after disasters and in cases of emergency and for displaced persons and refugees in order to prevent mortality and morbidity, particularly among women, girls, adolescent girls, young women, indigenous and Afrodescendent women, rural women and women with disabilities in these circumstances (ECLAC, 2013a).

Finally, the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030, which was adopted at the thirteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean (2016), gives voice to the need to support the leadership of Afrodescendent women in social and political organizations and to promote parity-based participation in democracy, institution-building and the advocacy capacities of civil society organizations and of women's and feminist movements as a means of democratizing policy and society (ECLAC, 2017a).

The effort to fulfil the Regional Gender Agenda has included follow-up to the commitment to the advancement of women of African descent in the region. In 2015, a meeting of experts was held at ECLAC headquarters in Santiago on issues of concern to Afrodescendent women and the challenges posed by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Regional Gender Agenda. That gathering marked the starting point for the development of this study.

Thus, over the course of four decades, the formulation of global and regional gender agendas has strengthened an intersectional approach to the various identity-based, social, economic, age-related, ethno-racial and other categories, positions or situations in which women find themselves and which reflect the overlapping and cross-cutting nature of the various aspects of inequality and discrimination that deepen women's subordination.

Within the framework of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, member States have recognized that ethno-racial inequalities are also one of the structural pillars of the matrix of social inequality in the region and have agreed to take action to close the gaps in that matrix in order to break down the barriers that block the access of various groups of persons, including Afrodescendants and especially Afrodescendent women, to social services and well-being. In the resolution adopted by the second session of the Regional Conference (Montevideo, 2017), the participating governments affirmed that the region exhibits "structural inequalities that intersect and concatenate throughout the life cycle" in ways that affect persons of African descent with particular intensity; reiterated their commitment to eradicating inequality in all its forms and dimensions by instituting inclusive social policies that are difference-aware and are based on a gender, ethnicity, race, intersectoral, intercultural and human-rights perspective; and called for State action to address the situation of particular inequality, discrimination and social and economic exclusion of the Afrodescendent population.

The analysis of gender inequalities in the Latin American and Caribbean region must therefore necessarily identify ethno-racial differences as a component of the matrix of social inequality existing in the region (ECLAC, 2016d). Bringing out the historical presence of women of African descent also entails a recognition of their actual experiences as women living in a given historical, social and cultural context in slave-owning and racist societies.

These women also live in one of the regions with the greatest degree of inequality in the entire world (Bárcena and Byanyima, 2016), and this fact makes it necessary to take the intersections between social class and ethno-racial identity into consideration in order to arrive at a more accurate view of their reality and to propose effective measures for achieving gender equality.

In sum, understanding the situation of Afrodescendent women in Latin America and the Caribbean from a broad vantage point that takes in a human rights and gender perspective is only possible on the basis of an intersectional analysis that encompasses proposals for achieving sustainable development. This study is intended to provide a contribution to just such an analysis and consequently incorporates an intersectional perspective that is aligned with the proposals advanced by black feminist theorists from Latin America, the Caribbean and the United States (Crenshaw, 2002; Viveros, 2016; Lugones, 2008; Hill, 2000). To this end, it reviews and analyses the available information on three different dimensions of the autonomy (economic, physical and decision-making autonomy) of Afrodescendent women in the countries of the region, in addition to exploring the achievements and challenges relating to the advancement of the rights of Afrodescendent women. Most of the available data permit comparisons of the Afrodescendent

population with the non-Afrodescendent population but do not include the population that self-identifies as being indigenous or capture other ethno-racial identities. In the few cases in which data on the indigenous population are available, this is mentioned explicitly.

Because more economic statistics are disaggregated by sex and ethnicity/race than other types of statistics are, the main focus of this study will be on the economic aspects of autonomy as they relate to women of African descent.

The first chapter in this study looks at the conceptual framework of intersectionality and offers a discussion of the historical role of Afrodescendent women in Latin America and the Caribbean. That review covers the slave trade and the colonial era and then traces how that legacy has continued to find expression through the ensuing centuries in ways that account for the disadvantageous situation in which this group of women still finds itself today.

The second chapter explores the economic autonomy of women of African descent. To that end, the data from the most recent census round in the region are analysed from an intersectional standpoint that shows up the differences between Afrodescendent and non-Afrodescendent men and women.

The third and fourth chapters discuss the physical and decision-making aspects of the autonomy of Afrodescendent women. Social statistics on women's autonomy that are disaggregated by ethnicity/race are in very short supply, and an exploratory approach is therefore taken in this regard.

The concluding chapter reviews some of the main findings of this study and offers suggestions regarding public policy measures that could make a positive contribution to efforts to repay the debt of equality that the region owes to its Afrodescendent women (ECLAC, 2016b).

I. Black and Afrodescendent women: the long road to recognition as rights holders

The history of Afrodescendent women in Latin America and the Caribbean bears the scars of European colonization —scars that can still be seen today, long after the colonial administrations came to an end and gave way to the nations that now make up the region. In the sixteenth century, a hierarchical system that became an integral part of the ideology and functional structure was built under colonialism. That system was based on the idea of race, which was then codified on the basis of skin colour and the phenotypes of their subjects and used to give “legitimacy” to the domination that came with the Conquest (Quijano, 2005). This mental scheme, which offered a new way of legitimizing the long-standing ideas and practices associated with the relations of domination between the supposedly superior conquerors and the supposedly inferior members of the vanquished population, played a pivotal role in the conquest of further territories and the subjugation of entire peoples in order to enrich the European Powers (Quijano, 2005).

According to the Peruvian sociologist Anibal Quijano (2005), the idea of race has proven to be the most effective and long-lasting tool of universal social domination and has become the most basic underlying criterion for the distribution of the world’s population among the various ranks, places and roles making up the power structure of the new society that grew out of European expansionism and domination of the American and Caribbean territories.

The introduction into these territories of enslaved peoples brought over from Africa has had very specific implications for women. Fewer women than men were transported to the New World, and they were sexually exploited by their fellow enslaved peoples and by the conquerors, who turned them into sexual objects and a vehicle for the reproduction of manpower. As the centuries passed, the gender-, race- and class-based forms of oppression that served as the foundation for these power relations became more sophisticated and more deeply embedded (Stolcke, 1991). In Latin America and the Caribbean, this led to the imposition of a Eurocentric and androcentric world view that persists even today. It is a world view in which white men occupy a privileged position in the economic, political and social structure that places them above women, in general, and black and Afrodescendent

women, in particular.¹ In this view, the specific historical and cultural traits of white males constitute the superior, universal standard for human beings (Monteiro, 1997).

This construct entails a profoundly exclusionary form of universalism which classifies and ranks all peoples, continents and historical experiences on the basis of this model. Other ways of being, other ways of organizing society, other forms of knowledge or of knowing are seen not only as different but also as somehow lacking, as archaic, primitive, traditional or pre-modern, and this, in the progress-based social belief system or collective imaginary, underscores their inferiority (Monteiro, 1997). This view shores up the dominant group's ideology and can be used to as an ideological tool for endowing inter-group politics with legitimacy and for justifying what they choose to reject or accept, along with exploitative systems such as slavery (Bento, 1992).

A. Intersectionality

The multiple forms of discrimination that reinforce and are interlinked with gender-based discrimination leave deep marks on the lives of Afrodescendent women in Latin America and the Caribbean. That is why an analysis of the material and symbolic conditions to which this social group is subject must start from an intersectional perspective that includes the many varied categories that make up their identity, along with the consequences of the intersection of gender with other identities that have historically been construed as inferior, such as the identity of being “black” or “of African descent”.

In feminist interpretations of history, the debates that took place in the nineteenth century within the context of the effort to abolish slavery and the women's suffrage movement are generally seen as the foundation for the discourse on intersectionality.

Sojourner Truth, a free black woman who attended a convention on women's rights in Ohio in December 1851 and gave a speech that came to be entitled “Ain't I a Woman?”, held up the bourgeois concept of femininity for examination (Viveros, 2016) and highlighted the interrelationship between racial and gender-based discrimination. Challenging the men in the audience who defended the idea of feminine fragility as a means of blocking women's attempts to gain entry into public affairs, Truth argued that the fact that, because of her position in society, she worked hard and bore a heavy load did not make her any less of a woman or less of a mother than the white women who were seen as weak and in need of constant help and protection (Yuval-Davis, 2013). She therefore showed that society's understanding of what it was to be a “woman” was founded upon a narrow form of universalism whereby the “other” women (the non-white ones) were not regarded as making up part of that collectivity.

The de-colonial theorist María Lugones (2008) affirms that, historically, in the West, only white women members of the bourgeoisie have been seen as women: the females who have been excluded by and from this description have not only been seen as subordinates but are also viewed and treated as animals who have been recognized as females in terms of their sex but are not ascribed the traits of femininity. This has been made possible, she asserts, by the existence of a logic of separational categorization that distorts the social phenomena and human beings located at the intersection of those categories. When the dominant group is selected to serve as the norm, the various categories become homogeneous; thus, “woman” is a synonym for “white, heterosexual woman of the bourgeoisie” and “black” is a synonym for “heterosexual black male”. This categorical separation makes it possible for the subordination of black women to be ignored or, at the very most, to be seen as an additional layer of what happens to women (that is, white women) and to blacks (that is, black

¹ The political identity of black and Afrodescendent women can be expressed or described in various ways. The terms “black women” and “Afrodescendent women” or “women of African descent” are by no means the only possibilities, but since they appear to be the ones that most fully encompass the various processes by which the identities of these women have been shaped in the region, those are the terms that will be used in this study. For a deeper exploration of this issue, see section B for a discussion of identity and autonomy.

men) (Lugones, 2008). The concept or awareness of intersectionality thus shows up what is lost when categories such as gender and race are viewed as being separate from one another.

This term was coined by the African American scholar Kimberlé Crenshaw in 1989 in the course of the debate surrounding the case of *DeGraffenreid versus General Motors Assembly Division* as a way of drawing attention to the legal invisibility of the multiple dimensions of oppression experienced by black women working for General Motors in the United States (Viveros, 2016; Zota, 2015). Although Crenshaw did not set out to create a general theory of oppression, but rather was seeking to define a practical concept for use in analysing concrete inequalities, the term ended up being converted into an analytical and conceptual tool that is widely used in feminist and women's studies.

By virtue of the broad acceptance of this term,² the category of “women” within feminist discourse came to be seen as being much more complex, as did the interpretation of the inequalities they face. As a result, the idea began to gain ground that, while it is true that, in some way or another, all women are subject to gender-based discrimination, it is no less true that other factors relating to women's social identities, such as class, caste, colour, ethnic origin, religion, national origin and sexual orientation, are “differences that make a difference” in the way that different groups of women experience discrimination (Crenshaw, 2002, p. 173). As noted by Crenshaw (2002), these differential elements can create problems and vulnerabilities for some groups of women but not others or can have a disproportionate impact on certain groups of women.

One of the main contributions made by the conceptualization of intersectionality is that it transcends the arithmetical perspective whereby certain groups of women are regarded as being discriminated against twice or three times over. When the situation is viewed from an intersectional vantage point, it is understood that the properties of social agents cannot simply be classified as advantages or disadvantages as part of an arithmetical logic of domination. Thus, the most “disadvantageous” position in a classist, racist and sexist society is not necessarily that of poor black women if their situation is compared with that of young men of the same social group, who are more exposed than those women are to the arbitrary use of certain forms of power, such as police searches (Viveros, 2016).

Another consideration is that the development of an intersectional approach to the study of social phenomena entails the application of different levels of analysis. At a micro-sociological level, the object of study is the way that different forms of oppression and their effects tie into the structures of social inequality exhibited in individuals' lives. At the macro-sociological level, the focus is on how systems of power intersect in the production, organization and maintenance of inequalities (Hill, 2000; Viveros, 2016). Both of these levels of analysis are fundamental for understanding and devising ways of influencing the living conditions of certain social groups and for acting upon the power structures and systems that generate them. This study will primarily focus on the macro-sociological level of analysis.

Thinking about intersectionality thus necessarily involves thinking about the complex, essential, varying and variable effects of the intersection of multiple factors of differentiation —economic, social, political, cultural, psychological, subjective and experiential factors— in specific historical settings which generate modalities of exclusion, hierarchization and inequality (Brah, 2013). As observed by Nira Yuval-Davis (2013), intersectional analysis should not be confined to an analysis of inequalities or forms of discrimination but should also take in a theoretical framework that encompasses all members of society, since it is well-suited to an analysis of social stratification as such.

² Avtar Brah (2013) notes that, during the meeting of non-government organizations (NGOs) held during the Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (Durban, South Africa, 2001), Radhika Coomaraswamy, Special Rapporteur on violence against women, its causes and consequences, stated that the term had become extremely popular and was being used in various forums by the United Nations and NGOs. In the following year, it was incorporated into a resolution on women's human rights that was adopted by the United Nations Commission on Human Rights at its fifty-eighth session. In the first paragraph of that resolution, the Commission acknowledged “the importance of examining the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination, including their root causes, from a gender perspective” (United Nations, 2002, p. 3).

In this sense, the intersection of the multiple systems of oppression penalizes women of African descent, discriminates against them and subordinates them to racist, classist and patriarchal powers. This racial, economic and gender-based exploitation is structural, rooted in history and highly institutionalized throughout Latin America and the Caribbean. It is therefore manifested in structural systems of inequality that have been built up over the course of time and that are created and recreated through routine, day-to-day practices (Bento, 1992).

The exploitation of groups that are regarded as being “inferior” by the hegemonic power, as in the case of women of African descent, is manifested in the substandard nature of their objective living conditions in terms of such factors as health care, education, employment and housing. The intersection of combined systems of oppression (Crenshaw, 2002) also shows that their exploitation is not confined to the sphere of production or gainful employment, but is equally present in their sexual exploitation and the material and symbolic violence directed at women’s bodies and particularly those of women of African descent (Carneiro, 2003), all of which interferes with their physical, economic and decision-making autonomy.

B. Identity and autonomy

Identity, viewed as an historical and relational process, has a powerful symbolic meaning capable of mobilizing the groups it defines, combining interests and senses of belonging and acting upon an entire range of recognizable modes of identification —religion, culture, traditions, foods, language, music, styles of dress— that, taken together, engender affective, personalized loyalties. These loyalties are the foundation for the struggle for social and political rights and influence. In the case of the ethnic identification of groups that are not in their territories of origin, these loyalties give rise to a political phenomenon that takes the form of a “culture of the diaspora” (Carneiro da Cunha, 1985).

Ethno-racial identity is not, therefore, solely a form of belongingness; it also entails a process of relating to the historical and social changes that have produced it. It is neither fixed nor essential but rather is a constructed reality that is formed and altered by the way in which the surrounding cultural systems and the subjects that they represent construe them (Hall, 1992).

Linked as it is to the culture of the diaspora, the ethno-racial identity of women of African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean entails more than just belonging to an identifiable group. It is a relational process that solidifies the awareness, on the one hand, of being part of social processes marked by power structures that continue to make gender and ethno-racial distinctions that reinforce the differences between one group and another and, on the other hand, the members of that group’s resistance throughout history in the name of the freedom and dignity of black and Afrodescendent peoples.

Although Afrodescendent women are a heterogeneous group, the violence and the rights violations that have historically and structurally marked their lives in the Latin American and Caribbean nations are, both symbolically and in a very concrete sense, the starting point for demonstrating the differentiated nature of their status in terms of gender, ethnicity/race and class. The inequality and structural exclusion that are the hallmarks of their membership in that group and the resistance that they have put up throughout their history are what draw the battle lines in their struggle for their rights and their quest for economic, physical and decision-making autonomy.

It must be borne in mind that the situation of Afrodescendent women in Latin America differs from that of Afrodescendent women in the Caribbean; to begin with, the Afrodescendent population in the Caribbean subregion is in the majority, which is not the case in the countries of Latin America with the exception of Brazil.³ There are also important differences in cultural, social and historical

³ Data from the 2010 national census round indicate that Cuba has the second-largest Afrodescendent population in percentage terms in Latin America and the Spanish-speaking Caribbean (35.9%) after Brazil (50.9%). These countries are followed by Puerto Rico (14.8%), Colombia (10.5%), Panama (8.8%), Costa Rica (7.8%) and Ecuador (7.2%). The Afrodescendent population in the other countries of the region represents less than 5% of the total population (ECLAC, 2017b).

terms, and the approach taken in analysing the situations of the Afrodescendent population, and especially of Afrodescendent women, must therefore also be differentiated, although the scarcity of information makes this task a difficult one.

It is interesting to note how the conceptualization of the category of “Afrodescendants” emerged at the Regional Conference of the Americas against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia, and Related Intolerance, held in Santiago in 2000.⁴ That meeting, held in preparation for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance (2001), played a key role in bringing together the Afrodescendent movement in the region (Campoalegre, 2017). According to Rosa Campoalegre (2017), the category of “Afrodescendants” deconstructs the colonial term of “negro” by giving a name to political subjects who resist their subjugation, who are full subjects at law rather than being reduced to no more than victims and who are members of a diaspora community of African descent that transcends national borders.

Although in recent decades it has become widely known that the concept of “race” has no scientific basis whatsoever, the mental categories that sustain that myth continue to have profound implications for society (Munanga, 2004). The recognition of “race” as a social and political construct means that it can be regarded as a category that can transit time and space. It therefore becomes possible to recast it as a beacon of identity and, as such, convert it into a platform for combating racism (Rivera, 2010).

The political identity of the women referred to in this study is often expressed in a number of different ways, whether by mobilizing the category of race as a means of reclaiming the identity of black women or whether by embracing categories such as “Afro-Argentine women”, “Afro-Uruguayan women”, “Afro-Caribbean women” and so forth or simply “Afrodescendants”. The specificities of each situation may also pave the way for the formation of identity on a cultural basis, as in the case of the Raizal and Palenquera women of Colombia, or on an ethnic basis, as may be the case of the Garifiuna women in Central America (Belize, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua). Reference will therefore be made to both terms—black women and Afrodescendants (or women of African descent)—as a means of encompassing the various processes of identity formation engaged in by these women in the region.⁵

The link between the struggle against racism and Afrodescendent women’s quest for autonomy suggests that, for them, autonomy represents a way of surviving in a racialized and class-ridden world in which real opportunities for growth and development are few and far between or, in some cases, virtually non-existent. Given the greater challenges facing certain groups of women and especially women of African descent in terms of redistribution, recognition and representation, it becomes clear that achieving autonomy is a very different matter for some women than for others.

As a political concept, autonomy for women refers to the capacity to freely take informed decisions about their lives so that they can exist and act in a manner that is in keeping with their own aspirations and desires in the historical context that makes that possible (ECLAC, 2011b). This is, then, ultimately a fundamental element in the process of safeguarding people’s right to exercise their human rights on a footing of full equality.

⁴ The term “people of African descent” was later ratified in the Durban Conference and came to serve as the foundation for the formulation of public policies and for the creation of new forums for political action and other means of safeguarding and upholding the rights of Afrodescendent peoples (Campoalegre, 2017).

⁵ Preference will be given in this study to the terms “Afrodescendent women” and “women of African descent” because it is felt that these terms are the ones that best reflect the wide array of categories used by these women to identify themselves within the regional context. In the specific case of Brazil, however, preference will be given to the term “black women” because this is the term primarily used by social movements in the country and because it is also the term used in official statistics. In some instances, these terms will be used as synonyms for one another as a means of recognizing the multiple forms that the political identity of these women may take.

The economic, physical and decision-making pillars of women's autonomy should be understood as the interrelated components of a single multidimensional whole, since economic autonomy is strengthened as women gain greater physical autonomy and autonomy in decision-making and vice versa. For example, as women break down the factors that limit their freedom of choice in matters relating to their sexual and reproductive lives, as is also true of their subordination in the workplace, they come closer to achieving a life free of violence and one in which they can participate fully in political affairs (ECLAC, 2012; Lupica, 2015).

In this sense, Afrodescendent women's achievement of economic, physical and decision-making autonomy will be a leap forward for women in the region as a whole, since it will signify the collapse of one of the main pillars of the matrix of inequality existing in Latin America and the Caribbean.

C. Inroads and challenges in achieving the statistical visibility of black and Afrodescendent women

The governments of Latin America and the Caribbean have a great deal of ground to cover before they will be compiling a sufficient quantity of reliable statistics on persons of African descent in the region, and their failure to do so thus far hampers progress in the development of public policies that will further the effort to achieve equality and particularly gender equality. The little headway that has been made in the compilation of statistics on black and Afrodescendent women to date is the result of the efforts of organizations of Afrodescendants, governments, and specialized agencies and other bodies of the United Nations system, among others, that have denounced the discrimination and cultural negation entailed by the statistical invisibility of these groups.

As noted in the *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2016*, published by ECLAC (2017b, p. 223): "Ascertaining the numbers of Afrodescendent people in Latin America remains one of the most basic and urgent challenges: obtaining an accurate figure is hindered by problems of ethno-racial identification in the data sources, which range from a failure to include relevant questions to the quality of the data collected." A very conservative estimate based on the data from the most recent census round for 16 Latin American countries puts the number of persons of African descent in the region at approximately 130 million as at 2015⁶ (ECLAC, 2017b).

The need to include a question in the countries' censuses regarding self-identification with a given race or ethnic group had been recognized in the debates driven by black women's movements since the late 1970s, but it was not until the preparatory processes and conferences held in the run-up to the Third World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in South Africa in 2001 that governments began to actually pay attention and then to take action on that score in the 2010 census round. This marked the beginnings of the steps taken to break the "noisy silence" (González, 1987) which had shrouded the racial violence and hierarchies existing in Latin American and Caribbean societies.

The statistical invisibility and the scarcity of reliable information on the Afrodescendent population have been the result of choices made by national governments at different points in their history in an attempt to hide and deny the flagrant ethno-racial inequalities and contradictions existing within their borders and to uphold the myth of the existence of racially harmonious democracies in the region.⁷ The practice of overlooking or ignoring the presence of persons of African descent in many

⁶ These 16 countries are: Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

⁷ The myth of a racially harmonious democracy is linked to the discourse and collective imaginary that prevailed in the aftermath of the colonial era concerning the existence of harmonious relations among the black, white and indigenous populations in some of the countries Latin America and the Caribbean that had been colonized by Spain or Portugal. In addition to their purported peaceful coexistence, the supposedly equal rights enjoyed by the different racial groups was another piece of supporting evidence for the existence of this type of democracy, since there was no institutionalized segregation in those societies such as there was in the United States and South Africa. Yet while segregation was not instituted by law, racial stratification in those societies is of a structural nature (Gonzalez, 1987).

countries of the region was strengthened as the nation-States in the region took shape (ECLAC, 2017b). This is made clear, for example, by the suppression, early on, of the identification of black or mestizo segments of the population in national censuses. The case of Chile provides a quite clear illustration of this, since, when the “freedom of the womb” was declared in 1811 and the end of slavery was declared some years later (1823), the categories of “negros”, “zambos” and “quadroons” were removed from the census forms in order to conceal the humiliating legacy of slavery in a society that sought to adopt a republican persona (Soto Lira, 1988). The ensuing construction of the Latin American States was marked by the exclusion of ethnic and racial identities and the formation or depiction of culturally unitary nations that prized the “whiteness” of their citizens and made it a condition for the full exercise of citizenship (Ottenheimer and Zubrzycki, 2011).

It is no coincidence, then, that few references to the presence of persons of African descent exist in countries such as Mexico, Chile or the Plurinational State of Bolivia, despite the evidence of their presence not only in the colonial era but today as well. In the Andean subregion, for example, the Afrodescendent peoples, despite their significant presence, have no place in the constructs and imagery of what is “Andean” (Walsh, 2007). Nonetheless, their presence has been extremely influential in the social, cultural, economic and historical development of these countries.

It has been only recently, and very slowly, that ethno-racial variables have been incorporated into the national statistics compiled by the countries of the region from their population censuses, household surveys and administrative records.⁸ The progress made in this respect has varied a great deal from country to country, although it is true that the 2010 census round was a turning point in the collection of data on the Afrodescendent population, which has been based, for the most part, on self-identification criteria.⁹

Nevertheless, because of the prevailing racial discrimination in the region, persons of African descent may not declare themselves to be Afrodescendants, resulting in the underreporting of this segment of the population. People may avoid identifying themselves with terms that highlight their African descent, especially if the categories that are used are interpreted as being stigmatized. In addition, if intermediate categories are not offered, they may choose to self-identify as not being of African descent. On the other hand, in settings where ethno-racial identities are being revitalized, people who do not belong to a given ethnic or racial group may self-identify with it either by reason of affinity or because they hope to benefit from targeted policies or for other reasons (Antón and Del Popolo, 2009).

In the 2010 census round, 12 countries included questions that allowed respondents to self-identify as Afrodescendants: Argentina (2010), Bolivarian Republic of (2011), Brazil (2010), Costa Rica (2011), Cuba (2012), Ecuador (2010), Honduras (2013), Panama (2010), Paraguay (2012),¹⁰ Plurinational State of Bolivia (2012), Puerto Rico (2010) and Uruguay (2011). The countries that have not yet conducted the censuses for that round but that intend to include the option of self-identification

⁸ Very few countries in the region include ethnic self-identification questions in their household surveys and, with the exception of Brazil, a number of limitations persist in terms of the representativeness of the samples for these groups; the problem is further compounded when attempts are made, in addition, to disaggregate the information by sex, age group and geographic location. In the case of administrative records based on continuous surveys, the problem is even more glaring, since only Brazil has systematically collected data in its records on health and education, in particular, although Colombia and Ecuador are also making great strides in these areas. For a more in-depth discussion of this subject, see ECLAC (2017b).

⁹ The categories from which persons of African descent can choose if they wish to self-identify vary from country to country because they relate to the historical processes of integration/segregation that have unfolded in each nation. For example, in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the census categories are “black”, “Afrodescendant” and “brown” (*morena*); in Panama, they are “Afro-colonial”, “Afro-Antillean”, “Afro-Panamanian” and “other Afrodescendent”; in Uruguay, they are “Afro” and “black”; in Brazil, they are “black” and “brown” (*parda*); in Ecuador, “black”, “Afro-Ecuadorian”, “mulatto”, “Montubio” (a coastal campesino) and “mestizo”; and in Puerto Rico, the only option is “black”. The categories listed on the census forms in the other countries that provide for self-identification in the population and housing censuses exhibit a similar level of variability.

¹⁰ The census results for Paraguay are not yet available.

as an Afrodescendant are Colombia, El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua and Peru. Thus, the countries that have yet to include an option for self-identification as a person of African descent in their population and housing censuses are Chile, the Dominican Republic and Haiti (ECLAC, 2017b).

Despite the urgings of organizations of Afrodescendants in Chile, the 2017 census forms did not include a category for the Afrodescendent population, so persons of African descent had no choice but to mark “other” when responding to the question regarding indigenous peoples and then fill in the box with the term “Afrodescendent”, which may have obstructed the self-identification of this segment of the population.

In Costa Rica, it was at the initiative of the Caribbean Project Association and the Centre for Afro-Costa Rican Women that, with the support of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, a question allowing for ethnic self-identification was included in the 2000 census form (Costa Rica, Office of the President of the Republic, 2015), which attests to the influence that organized civil society can have on the State. Puerto Rico, for its part, did not compile data on race until the 2000 census round, having allowed 50 years to pass before doing so. In that nation, only 14.8% of the population self-identified as having some degree of African descent despite the fact that it is a very racially mixed populace.

Thus, the demands of civil society organizations and the progress made in the most recent census round notwithstanding, much remains to be done in terms of the compilation of social statistics on the population of African descent. In the case of women of African descent, major shortcomings exist in terms of the vital statistics (including data on fertility rates, maternal and child mortality and causes of death) which are essential in order to track women’s health status. Very few countries gather data on ethno-racial variables in these areas and, even when some information on these subjects is available, population estimates are usually not broken down by race, ethnicity, sex or age, so the corresponding rates cannot be calculated.

In reviewing the progress made in the documentation and systematization of statistics on the Afrodescendent population in Latin America, mention should be made of two recent publications issued within the framework of the International Decade for People of African Descent 2015-2024: the *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2016*, which includes a chapter entitled “Peoples of African descent: broadening the scope of inequality to make progress in guaranteeing their rights” (ECLAC, 2017b), and a Spanish-language document entitled *Situación de las personas afrodescendientes en América Latina y desafíos de políticas para la garantía de sus derechos* (Afrodescendants in Latin America and policy challenges to be met in safeguarding their rights) (ECLAC, 2017). These two publications provide information that can be usefully applied in analysing the living conditions of persons of African descent in the region and are therefore important tools for the formulation of public policies for reversing the exclusion and inequality to which this segment of the population has been subjected.

It is extremely important to have systematically compiled, reliable statistics on the population of African descent and especially on Afrodescendent women, not only in order to gain a clearer picture of social realities in Latin America, but also, and most significantly, in order to provide inputs that will allow policymakers to design and implement better rights-based policies for combating racism and racial discrimination as a means of furthering development with equality.

II. Economic autonomy for Afrodescendent women

As far back as the 1980s, Lélia Gonzalez, a prominent black Brazilian feminist, was drawing attention to the importance of discussing the situation of women in Latin America and the Caribbean and the impact of racial discrimination on the lives of women whom she referred to as “Amefricans” and “Amerindians” (Gonzalez, 1987). She argued that talking about the oppression of Latin American women is to talk in terms of generalities that conceal, that emphasize and that de-contextualize the harsh realities experienced by millions of women who pay a very high price for not being white (Gonzalez, 1987, p. 135). More than three decades on, the criticisms voiced by Lélia Gonzalez in her pioneering work remain valid. The particular experiences of Afrodescendent and indigenous women, marked by the intersection of gender-based, class-based and ethno-racial oppression, are still hidden from view today, both in the official statistics of a majority of the Latin American and Caribbean countries and in many of the studies on women conducted by research institutions in the region.

This chapter draws on census data provided by the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE)-Population Division of ECLAC. Although the censuses of the various Latin American countries were conducted in different years,¹¹ these tabulations are the most relevant and abundant source of information on the countries that is currently available. The racial self-identification categories and the methods used to collect and furnish this information by the countries of the region vary a great deal, which hampers efforts to develop comparative studies of the status of women of African descent in the region.

For ECLAC, economic autonomy is understood to be “a cornerstone of women’s autonomy ... [which], by definition, requires women to receive enough income to overcome poverty and have enough free time for training, entry into the labour market, personal and professional development, active participation in social and political life and caring for loved ones without it becoming a barrier to realizing their own aspirations” (ECLAC, 2016a, p. 37). This perspective focuses on women’s living conditions in the economy and in the workplace,¹² which are marked by the sexual division of labour, the wage gap, the uneven distribution of total workloads, and discrimination and sexual harassment on the job.

¹¹ Argentina (2010), Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (2011), Brazil (2010), Colombia (2005), Costa Rica (2011), Cuba (2012), Ecuador (2010), Honduras (2013), Nicaragua (2005), Panama (2010), Plurinational State of Bolivia (2012) and Uruguay (2011).

¹² The workplace, in this sense, is understood to refer to the location of all activities performed by people of any sex or age for the purpose of producing goods or providing services for use by third parties or for final own consumption.

The debate surrounding the issue of the economic autonomy of women of African descent highlights the role played by gender inequalities and ethno-racial inequalities that are buttressed by the sexual and racial division of labour.¹³ This is not only attributable to the predominant assignment of women to unpaid forms of labour chiefly centred around social reproduction and caregiving, but is also the outgrowth of a historical social construct in Latin America and the Caribbean that has steered racialized subjects,¹⁴ and especially the women among them, towards lowly positions in both the reproductive and productive spheres.

The effects of the sexual division of labour, in addition to the fact that it saddles women with a heavier workload in terms of domestic and caregiving tasks, also include a prevalence of substandard and informal forms of employment, wage discrimination, inequalities in terms of access to employment and job stability and in terms of the use and control of resources, exclusion from the social safety net, disparities in terms of pension system and social security coverage and the fact that they are more likely to be living in poverty during old age than men are (ECLAC, 2016a).

In its turn, the racial division of labour has historically condemned Afrodescendent women to subordinate roles in the labour force that press them into much lower-ranking positions than their white or mestizo counterparts. At the time that the debate about women's participation in the workforce began to come to the fore in the second half of the twentieth century, women of African descent had already been part of the labour force in the Latin American and Caribbean countries for centuries, although in extremely poorly paid, lowly positions.

Epsy Campbell Barr, a member of the Costa Rican legislature during the 2002–2006 and 2014–2018 terms and of the Alliance of Afro-Descendent Peoples of Latin America and the Caribbean, describes this situation when she observes that women of African descent have, throughout history, had to take on both productive and reproductive tasks, although the former have been performed under historically discriminatory conditions. Their contributions to the economies of Latin America and the Caribbean have yet to be subjected to a rigorous examination, but the fact remains that, during the more than 300 years during which they were enslaved in the Americas, they did exactly the same kind of work in the fields and in other production activities as black men did, but they also had the economic responsibility of reproducing more slave labour. Their involvement in the reproductive economy has been a constant throughout their history. Gender-based analyses that place emphasis on the division of roles in the productive and reproductive spheres are therefore of somewhat more limited relevance in the case of Afrodescendent women (Campbell, 2003).

¹³ The Peruvian theorist Aníbal Quijano asserts that, in the course of the formation of colonial society in the Americas, the link between the construction of the idea of “race” and the simultaneous existence of various types of exploitative labour relations (slavery, servitude, wages and so forth) gave rise to a systemic racial division of labour in which each type of labour was associated with a particular race. Thus, the *racial* classification of the population and the association quite early on of the new racial identities of the colonized peoples with unpaid work and non-wage labour led Europeans and other Caucasians to believe that paid work was the privileged preserve of *white people* (Quijano, 2005, p. 110). Moreover, Quijano (2005) argues that the lower wages paid to the “inferior races” for performing the same work as is performed by their white counterparts for higher wages in today’s capitalist centres cannot be explained without reference to the racist social classification of the world’s population.

¹⁴ Quijano also contends that the colonization of the Americas by Spain and Portugal is what produced the racialization of the region’s societies and the ensuing classification of the members of the population on the basis of hierarchically ranked racial identities. According to Quijano, skin colour was chosen as the main feature for differentiating between the “races” of the dominant/superior Europeans and the dominated/inferior non-Europeans because it was the most visible trait (Quijano, 2007, p. 120). The former were dubbed “the white race” and the latter (that is, the indigenous population and, later on, persons of African descent) as the “race” of “coloured people”. In the process of establishing a Eurocentric world order in which “white” people were taken to be the norm, the significance of racial markers for so-called “whites” faded but grew stronger in the case of people “of colour”. Thus, when reference is made to racialized persons, the allusion is to a long and complex process whereby social/racial identities were constructed—a process that began with the colonization of the Americas and that has been perpetuated ever since. As part of that constructed set of identities, indigenous peoples and African persons or persons of African descent were and are assigned an inferior position in the social hierarchy on the basis of their skin colour, their phenotypes and their particular world view.

A. Without an intersectional approach, there is no way out of poverty for Afrodescendent women

As observed in the preceding section, Latin America is one of the regions with the greatest degree of inequality in the world (Bárcena and Byanyima, 2016). This level of inequality is the outgrowth of the intersecting systems of gender-based, class-based and racial oppression which are a structural part of the region. An intersectional analysis of labour income distribution in the region sheds light on the manner in which these cross-cutting forms of exploitation and subordination have perpetuated structural inequalities throughout the region's history that work to the detriment of racialized population groups and, in particular, the women belonging to these groups.

An examination of that distribution shows, for example, that, among people with eight years of schooling or more, men who are neither indigenous nor of African descent predominate, followed by Afrodescendent men, women who are neither indigenous nor of African descent, Afrodescendent women, indigenous men and, finally, indigenous women¹⁵ (ECLAC, 2017c). The interweaving web of ethno-racial and gender dimensions thus shapes a pattern of inequality in which indigenous women, indigenous men and Afrodescendent women occupy the lowest rungs of the income ladder (Lupica, 2015).

The total average per capita income of women of African descent has been calculated at 1.9 times the poverty line, which is only slightly higher than the income level calculated by ECLAC as being the threshold for vulnerability to poverty (1.8 times the poverty line). Given the recessionary situation being observed in the region at the present time, this figure signals a short-run probability of slipping into poverty (ECLAC, 2017c).¹⁶ A large percentage of Afrodescendants in the region who are employed are nonetheless living in poverty or extreme poverty because their incomes are too low to cover their basic needs.

The fact that millions of households have now slipped back into poverty constitutes the central challenge to progress in Latin America and the Caribbean today. Although poverty in the region was reduced by 1.2 percentage points and extreme poverty was cut by 0.3 percentage points per year between 2008 and 2012 and poverty and extreme poverty rates were lowered by 0.4 and 0.1 percentage points per year between 2012 and 2014, the region witnessed a setback in terms of poverty reduction in 2015–2016 (ECLAC, 2018). According to the latest information available, in 2016 the number of poor persons in Latin America reached 186 million, or 30.7% of the population, while 61 million people (10% of the population) were living in extreme poverty (ECLAC, 2018).

Thus, in 2015 and 2016, for the first time in decades, the region recorded an increase in the number of people living in poverty, while another 30 million people were in danger of lapsing back into poverty (UNDP, 2016), with Afrodescendent women making up a disproportionate share of that population segment.

¹⁵ Mean labour income is calculated using figures that quantify the indigenous and Afrodescendent populations on the basis of the counts provided by the household surveys of each country. The indigenous population is identified in household surveys in Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Mexico, Panama, Peru, Paraguay, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay, while the Afrodescendent population is identified in the surveys of Brazil, Ecuador, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

¹⁶ ECLAC has defined degrees of vulnerability on the basis of income expressed in terms of the poverty line (ECLAC, 2010a), with the population being grouped into four main categories: (a) indigents or persons who are highly vulnerable to situations of indigence, which includes people who are living in extreme poverty or so close to the extreme poverty line that they tend to slip into and out of that situation (up to 0.6 of the poverty line); (b) poor persons and persons who are highly vulnerable to situations of poverty, i.e. people whose incomes place them below or near the poverty line and who therefore tend to move into and out of poverty in the presence of normal business cycles (between 0.6 and 1.2 times the poverty line); (c) persons who are vulnerable to poverty (persons with incomes equivalent to between 1.2 and 1.8 times the poverty line); and (d) persons who are not vulnerable to poverty (those whose incomes are equivalent to more than 1.8 times the poverty line).

The study entitled *The social inequality matrix in Latin America* (ECLAC, 2016d) confirms the higher poverty rates existing among the Afrodescendent population in the region based on household survey data from Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay. These findings attest to the very close ties existing between poverty and gender-based and ethno-racial inequalities.

The percentage of the Afrodescendent population in the first (lowest-income) quintile in these countries is larger than the percentage of the non-Afrodescendent population that is in that quintile. In the fifth (highest-income) quintile, the distribution is just the opposite: the percentage of the non-Afrodescendent population in that quintile vastly exceeds the percentage of the Afrodescendent population (ECLAC, 2017b).

In Ecuador, for example, 42% of the Afrodescendent population is below the poverty line, versus 27% of the non-indigenous, non-Afrodescendent population—a gap equivalent to 15 percentage points. A significant gap is also seen in Brazil (12 percentage points), Peru (6 percentage points) and Uruguay (7 percentage points) (ECLAC, 2016d). The width of the gap between the Afrodescendent and non-Afrodescendent segments of the population at the two extremes of the income distribution reflects the level of economic inequality existing between these two groups (ECLAC, 2017b).

Afro-Colombian households also have a higher poverty rate (51%) than other households do (DNP, 2010). The available data are not disaggregated by sex, but it is clear that the Afrodescendent population is in a vulnerable position. In "Políticas públicas para el avance de la población afrocolombiana: revisión and análisis" (Public policies for the advancement of the Afro-Colombian population: a review and analysis), De Roux (2010) also draws attention to how disadvantageous the situation of Afro-Colombians is relative to the non-Afrodescendent, non-indigenous population in terms of pay levels for work of equal value.

That study underscores the glaring inequalities in average labour income levels existing in terms of gender and ethnicity in Cartagena and Cali—two of the cities with the largest concentrations of persons of African descent in the country. In Cartagena, for example, Afro-Colombian men in high-ranking occupations (directors and officials) earn just one fifth as much as non-Afro-Colombian men in those occupations, while Afrodescendent women in the "professionals and technicians I" category earn one fourth as much as their non-Afro-Colombian counterparts. In Cali, Afro-Colombian men in the "directors or officials" and "professionals and technicians I" categories earn half as much as their non-Afro-Colombian peers (De Roux, 2010). As noted in that study, discrimination is the only possible explanation for these wage gaps (De Roux, 2010).

In Brazil, the main indicators of average monthly labour income for the population aged 16 years or more, as published in the study entitled "Retrato das Desigualdades de Gênero e Raça: 20 anos" (A picture of gender-based and racial inequalities: 20 years on), show that white men earned an average of 2,509 reais in 2015, whereas the average monthly income of black women was only 1,027 reais—that is, just 40% of the average monthly income of those positioned at the peak of the income pyramid (Fontoura and others, 2017).

Box 1

Brazil: do poverty reduction programmes have an impact on racial inequality?

Since 2003, anti-poverty social policies in Brazil, coupled with affirmative action measures in the sphere of education, have had a preponderant effect on black women, since they constitute a majority of the poorest segments of the country's population. Of all the households signed up with social programmes in Brazil, 88% are headed by women and, of those households, 68% are headed by black women (UN-Women, 2016).

Of the 14 million families covered by the *Bolsa Família* Programme^a in 2014, for example, 73% were black, and 68% of those households were headed by black women. And out of the 724,000 families that had received housing units under the *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* Programme^b as of 2014, 70% were black. A full 80% of the heads of household of the families served by the *Luz Para Todos* Programme^c are black men or women. In addition, 68% of the places reserved under the National Programme for Access to Technical Education and Employment (PRONATEC)^d for students covered by the *Bolsa Família* Programme have been filled by black male or female enrollees (Arruda, 2014). In fact, between 2011 and 2014, black women accounted for 53% of all persons enrolled in PRONATEC (UN-Women, 2016).

Box 1 (concluded)

Social policies targeting extreme poverty have certainly benefited the Afro-Brazilian population in recent years, but the inequalities existing in Brazil continue to bear the mark of deep-seated racial discrimination.

Thus, given the nature of the legal and public policy frameworks found in the region, institutionalized action based on an intersectional approach that is sensitive to the differentiated constructs existing within the different social groups will be needed in order to tackle persistent inequalities and the modes of exclusion of Afrodescendent women in the country (Yuval-Davis, 2013) and to ensure the participation of groups that have historically been excluded and discriminated against, particularly Afrodescendent women.

Source: M. Pinheiro, L. De Souza and M. Rodrigues (coords.), *Políticas sociais para o desenvolvimento: superar a pobreza e promover a inclusão*, Brasília, Ministry of Social Development and Hunger Alleviation/United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization/United Nations Development Programme (UNESCO/UNDP), 2010; United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), *Mais igualdade para as mulheres Brasileiras: caminhos de transformação econômica e social*, Brasília, 2016; N. Yuval-Davis, “Más allá de la dicotomía del reconocimiento y la redistribución: interseccionalidad and estratificación”, *La interseccionalidad en debate. Actas del Congreso Internacional "Indicadores interseccionales y medias de inclusión social en instituciones de educación superior"*, M. Zapata, S. Garcia and J. Chan (eds.), Berlin, Institute for Latin American Studies, 2013; R. Arruda, “Populace engram é maior beneficiária dos programas sociais”, *Estrada*, São Paulo, 15 October 2014 [online] <http://politica.estadao.com.br/blogs/roldao-arruda/populacao-negra-e-maior-beneficiaria-dos-programas-sociais/>.

^a The *Bolsa Família* social programme was launched in 2003 to combat poverty and inequality in Brazil. The programme has three main lines of action: income supplementation, access to rights (beneficiary families must fulfil certain commitments regarding access to education, health care and social assistance) and tie-ins with other government social programmes designed to help families overcome vulnerability and poverty.

^b *Minha Casa, Minha Vida* is a social programme run by the federal government that helps low-income families acquire a home of their own.

^c The *Luz para Todos* Programme was introduced in Brazil in 2003 to take up the challenge of putting an end to exclusion in the form of a lack of access to electricity in the country. Its goal is to extend access to electrical power to over 10 million people living in rural areas. Households that lack access to electricity are primarily located in the low-rent areas having the lowest rankings on the Human Development Index (HDI).

^d PRONATEC was established in Brazil in 2011 to expand and democratize access to vocational and technological courses of study.

Even though the average income of black women has risen more than that of any other group over the last 20 years (jumping by 80% between 1995 and 2015), the data for the entire time series show that the same hierarchy has persisted, with the income scale moving, in descending order, from white men to white women to black men and finally to black women (IPEA, 2017a). The gap between blacks and whites and, especially, between black women and white men is so wide that huge inequalities clearly continue to exist, despite the progress that has been made. What is more, the percentage of black persons found among the poorest 10% of the population in Brazil actually climbed from 73.2% in 2004 to 76% in 2014 (IBGE, 2014). Since the official data reflect a reduction on the order of 21 percentage points in the share of the population living in poverty between 2004 and 2014, it would appear that proportionally more non-Afrodescendants than Afrodescendants were able to escape poverty during this period.

This situation can be accounted for partly by the fact that the non-Afrodescendent poor population is generally closer to the poverty line than their Afrodescendent counterparts and partly by the fact that the impact of institutional racism¹⁷ is such that the black population is subject to discrimination with regard to access to anti-poverty programmes and the services provided by those programmes (Theodoro, 2016).

¹⁷ The term “institutional racism” refers to racist social practices which, acting through State structures, take on a cross-cutting nature and work in a systemic manner to maintain and perpetuate privileges and hegemonies (Moraes, 2013). For a more in-depth exploration of this subject, see section C. For a more extensive discussion of institutional racism and the institutionalization of policies of racial and gender equality, see chapter IV.

The Plan of Action for the Decade for People of African Descent in the Americas (2016-2025), which was adopted by the General Assembly of OAS, makes explicit mention of the need for States to “encourage inclusion of the rights of persons of African descent on the agenda for social development and anti-poverty policies and programmes” (OAS, 2016). The Political Platform of Afrodescendent Women Leaders for the International Decade for People of African Descent calls for States to include strategies and actions in their anti-poverty programmes for reducing the impact of poverty on Afrodescendent women and for promoting equality and non-discrimination (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2015).

The adoption of a cross-cutting, intersectional approach is the first and fundamental step towards shedding light on the structural pillars of the matrix of social inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean and on disentangling them from one another (ECLAC, 2016d). This is why it is of such importance to emphasize, time and time again, that policies and strategies for reducing inequality must be based on a recognition of the existence and scope of cross-cutting gender-based and ethno-racial inequalities and must provide for proactive means of overcoming them.

B. Afrodescendent women and access to education

On numerous occasions ECLAC has identified employment and education as the two factors that have the greatest impact in promoting social inclusion and reducing inequality. An analysis of the schooling received by Afrodescendent women is thus of pivotal importance in analysing their participation in the labour market, but it also goes beyond that. Education, in addition to providing a means of gaining entry into the workforce, is a means of fully developing each person’s individual skills and abilities and thus, from a collective viewpoint, can help to further the development of an entire community.

The organizations of women of African descent consulted by OAS during its preparation of the study entitled *La agenda del activismo de las mujeres afrodescendientes en América Latina: prioridades y apuestas a futuro* (The agenda for Afrodescendent women activists in Latin America: priorities and initiatives for the future) underlined the potential of education and training to provide this social group with greater access to their rights (ADS/OAS, 2017). The Political Platform of Afrodescendent Women Leaders for the International Decade for People of African Descent framed by the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women embodies this idea and calls upon States to break down the barriers that exist and take concrete action to broaden Afrodescendent women’s access to education at all levels (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2015).

In recent decades, the countries of the region have made a determined effort to broaden the educational system’s coverage and have all but closed the ethno-racial and gender gaps, in terms of national totals, that had existed in access to primary education for girls and boys between 6 and 11 years of age. For older age groups, however, the situation differs, and ethno-racial and gender gaps have been widening, although, in this case, the changes have generally been favourable to women (ECLAC, 2017b).

As noted in the *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2016* (ECLAC, 2017b), in 7 out of the 11 countries for which the relevant data are available, the school attendance rate for Afrodescendants between 12 and 17 years of age is lower than the rate for non-Afrodescendent and non-indigenous children and adolescents in that age group.¹⁸ The largest differentials in relative terms, although not as great in absolute terms, are found in Uruguay, Ecuador and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. This trend is less marked but is also present in Colombia, Costa Rica, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Brazil. The attendance rate for Afrodescendants is higher than it is for non-Afrodescendants, on the other hand, in Panama and Argentina, and this reverse gap is even greater in Nicaragua and Honduras.

¹⁸ These are gross school attendance rates, which do not show whether the young people concerned are at the educational level that corresponds to their age.

Differences between the sexes in this respect are quite small in all cases, although “in the seven countries in which the indicators are less favourable for Afrodescendants, the overlap with the gender variable puts Afrodescendent boys in the worst situation and non-Afrodescendent girls in the best” (ECLAC, 2017b, p. 238).

The dropout rates for Afrodescendants are a topic of considerable importance in the region. It has been established that completion of secondary school, as a minimum, has a direct impact on the likelihood of remaining above the poverty line during adulthood (ECLAC, 2016c and 2017b). Since this can also be of key importance in determining individuals’ participation in political and civic affairs, effort should be devoted, as called for by Afrodescendent women’s organizations, to have this level of education established as an absolute lower limit for all young people. In two major studies published in 2015, such organizations have called upon States to take action and to strengthen public policies aimed at lowering the school dropout rates of Afrodescendent children and adolescents (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2015, and Geledés Black Women's Institute, 2015).

Figures for Peru indicate that, in 2014, the school dropout rate for Afrodescendent children and adolescents was 8.4%, with 8.3% of these persons stating that pregnancy or the fact that they were already mothers or fathers was the reason why they were leaving school (Benavides and others, 2015).

The higher teenage pregnancy rate found among lower-income women (a group that includes a disproportionate number of women of African descent) heightens the exclusion of poor adolescents and particularly poor Afrodescendent adolescents, thereby fuelling the intergenerational reproduction of poverty in the region (Céspedes and Robles, 2016). The economic and physical aspects of the lack of autonomy of young persons of African descent in the region therefore combines with early pregnancies to interfere with their enjoyment of their rights in ways that will leave a mark on their future development throughout their lives.

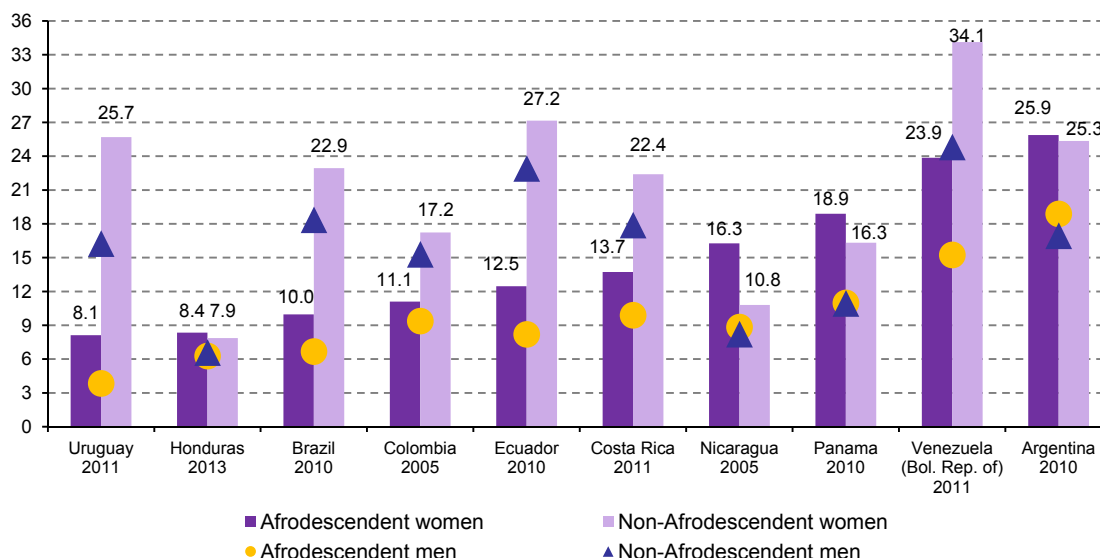
The attainment of a university education is also of strategic concern to many organizations of Afrodescendants because this level of education not only provides access to better jobs but also opens up the possibility of ascending to positions of power and prestige from which their occupants can (re)write the history of their peoples, heighten their visibility and help to bring out their leadership potential in the various spheres of society.

The data on attendance rates at institutions of higher learning for persons between 18 and 24 years of age in 10 Latin American countries confirm the fact that more women than men are studying at these institutions in all the countries concerned (see figure 1).

As shown in figure 1, in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Uruguay, non-Afrodescendent women are in the majority at this level of education, followed by non-Afrodescendent men, while Afrodescendent women, followed by Afrodescendent men, have the lowest attendance rates in institutions of higher learning in these countries. In Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Argentina, on the other hand, this ranking is just the reverse, as Afrodescendent women have the highest attendance rate at university-level institutions (see figure 1).

The largest differentials between non-Afrodescendent women and Afrodescendent women are found in Uruguay (17.6 percentage points), Ecuador (14.7 percentage points), Brazil (12.9 percentage points) and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (10.2 percentage points), but they are also significant in the cases of Costa Rica (8.7 percentage points) and Colombia (6.1 percentage points). The figures for Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and Argentina show that the differentials between rates in the cases where women of African descent are in the majority are much smaller than they are in the cases where they are in the minority (ECLAC, 2017b).

Figure 1
Latin America (10 countries): attendance of persons between 18 and 24 years of age at an institution of higher education, by ethnicity/race and sex, latest available year
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of census microdata.

Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown.

In the first six countries named above (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Uruguay), these data reflect a pattern of ethno-racial inequality in the field of education that emerges in the school attendance rates for children and adolescents between 12 and 17 years of age and then deepens as students grow older. It should also be noted that young Afrodescendent men begin to have the lowest school attendance rates starting at the average age corresponding to the beginning of secondary education in the region—a fact that can be accounted for by their early entry into the workforce and consequent abandonment of their schooling (ECLAC, 2017b).

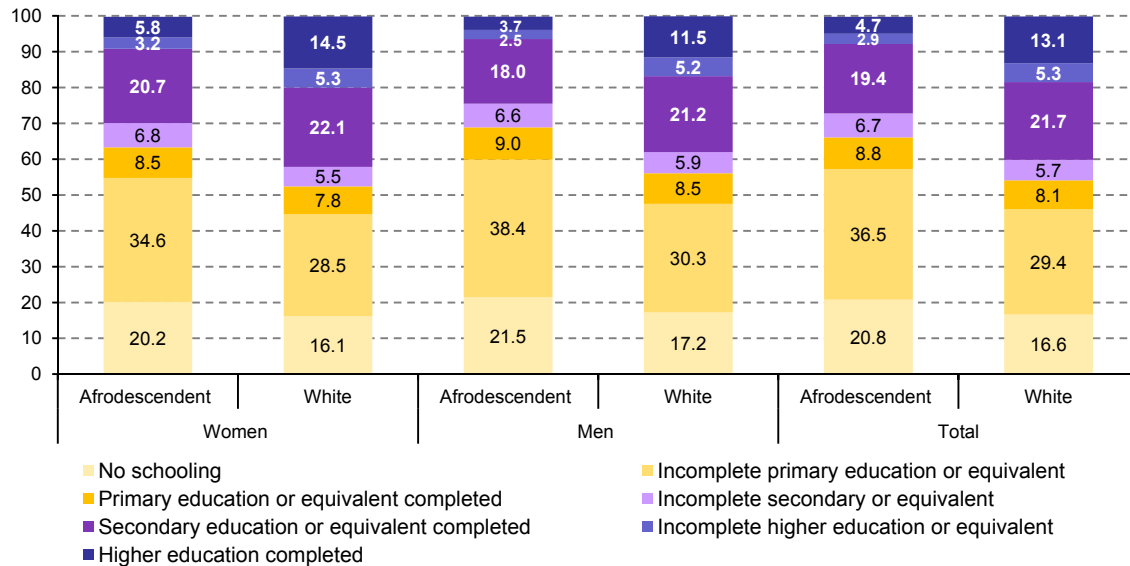
These data do not, however, show up the differences in the percentages of students who complete their educations. In the case of Peru, the results from the 2006 national continuous survey published in “Diagnóstico sobre la problemática de género and la situación de las mujeres afrodescendientes en el Perú: análisis and propuestas de políticas públicas. Documento preliminar en revision” (Baseline analysis of gender and the status of Afrodescendent women in Peru: analysis and public policy proposals) show that only 2.6% of Afro-Peruvian women complete a university education, while the rate for Afro-Peruvian men is slightly higher (3.1%) (Carrillo and Carrillo, 2011).

In that country, 10% of Afro-Peruvian women have not completed any level of schooling, while the corresponding figure for Afrodescendent men is 4.2%; 30% of Afrodescendent women in the country have completed between 10 and 12 years of schooling and 12% have completed more than 12 years (Carrillo and Carrillo, 2011).

In Colombia, census data for 2005 indicate that, up until the level of basic secondary education, attendance rates are higher for Afrodescendent males than for their female counterparts. This ratio tips the other way at the secondary level and becomes more pronounced at the tertiary level, with women of African descent accounting for 57.9% of all Afrodescendants at the university and postgraduate levels (Milton, 2006). This pattern matches up with the overall trend depicted by the data presented in the *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2016* and those shown in figure 1.

In Brazil, in line with the region-wide trend, the school attendance rates of Afrodescendent women and non-Afrodescendent women are higher than the rates for the males in the corresponding racial groups. The percentage of white women who had completed their higher education (14.5%) as of 2014 was 2.5 times higher than the percentage of Afrodescendent women (5.8%), however (see figure 2).

Figure 2
Brazil: level of schooling, by race and sex, 2014
(Percentages)



Source: Brazilian Geographical and Statistical Institute (IBGE), National Household Survey 2014.

Note: The totals for Afrodescendants, or “blacks”, were calculated on the basis of the sum of the totals for the census categories “*Preto*” (black) and “*Pardo*” (brown); the totals for whites were calculated on the basis of the sum of the totals for the census categories “*Branco*” (white) and “*Amarelo*” (yellow). The responses in which the level of instruction could not be ascertained have not been included.

Figure 2 shows that, in Brazil, both Afrodescendent women and white women are concentrated in the “Incomplete primary education or equivalent”, “Secondary education or equivalent completed” and “No schooling” categories, although the differentials between the two groups are nonetheless quite marked: 20.2% of black women have no schooling at all, compared to 16.1% of white women. If the figures for the categories “No schooling” and “Incomplete primary education or equivalent” are added together, then it can be seen that over half (54.7%) of all black women in the country have very little education, whereas the proportion of white women in that broader category is nearly 10 percentage points lower (44.6%).

In the case of the Garifuna women of Guatemala, opportunities for completing their studies are restricted by the limited availability of bilingual instruction. This has a direct impact on their chances of entering the formal labour market and on participating in the social and political affairs of the country (CERIGUA, 2011). This serves as an illustration of a much more widespread situation in the various countries, where there is generally a lack of culturally appropriate educational policies for highlighting and valuing the specific traits of Afrodescendent peoples and cultures.

White men in Puerto Rico who have a university diploma will, on average, earn 89% more than white men who have only a secondary school diploma. In the case of Afrodescendent men, the differential is 71%; for white women, the earnings differential for these two groups is 67% and, for Afrodescendent women, it is on the order of 60% (Rivera-Batiz and Ladd, 2005).

In recent years, initiatives aimed at overcoming ethno-racial inequalities in access to education in Latin America have indirectly contributed to the economic autonomy of Afrodescendent women, even though their educational achievements continue to be undervalued in the labour market. Because the persistent gender-based wage gap is compounded by deep-seated racism in the societies of the region, public and private investments in education for Afrodescendent women are not fully reflected in their labour earnings.

This aspect of inequality is evidenced in the lives of women of African descent throughout the region. Organizations of Afrodescendent women consulted by OAS have placed particular emphasis on the problem posed by the underutilization of Afrodescendent women in the labour market, where they are unable to secure the forms of employment for which they have been trained (ADS/OAS, 2017).

1. Affirmative action policies in education

Affirmative action policies in education have come into greater use over the past 10 years in some Latin American countries, but their implementation at the regional level varies significantly.

Colombia has an education loan fund for Afrodescendent (black, Raizal and Palenquero) students and a special scholarship programme for persons of African descent residing in the city of Bogotá (Rangel, 2016). In addition, a legislative bill (bill No. 114 of 2015) is currently under discussion that would introduce minimum quotas in higher education for indigenous persons, Roma, Afro-Colombians and students who are members of the Raizal and Palenquero peoples.

In Uruguay, the passage of Act No. 19.122 in 2013 reserved at least 8% of the places in all training programmes offered by the National Institute of Employment and Vocational Training (INEFOP) for persons of African descent and made the inclusion of awards for Afrodescendants in the establishment and assignment of scholarships and other forms of student assistance a requirement.

Yet the greatest strides in terms of the introduction of affirmative action policies in higher education have been made in Brazil, where measures have been developed to guarantee access to public and private universities for persons of African descent.

In 2012 the Brazilian legislature passed a quota law that requires public universities to reserve 50% of their places for students from public schools, in addition to the places that are reserved for black or indigenous students based on the percentage of the population made up by those groups in each state. Data compiled by the National Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality (SEPPIR) indicate that 150,000 places were created in public universities for black students between 2012 and 2015 under racial quota requirements. These data are not disaggregated by sex, however, so they cannot be used to measure the impact of this policy on women of African descent in Brazil.

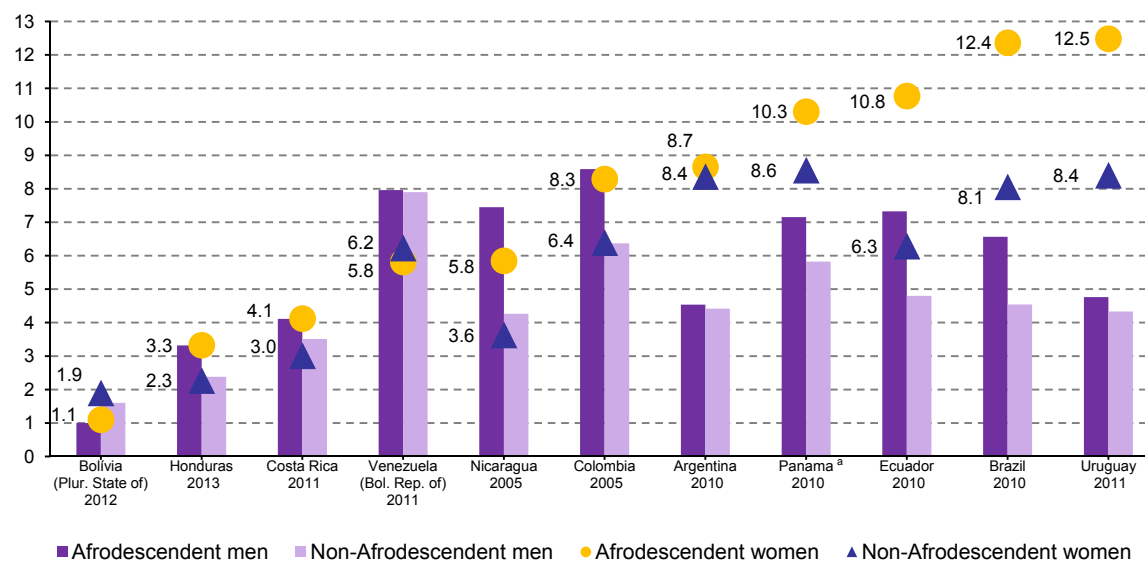
Since 2005 the University for All Programme (PROUNI) has been offering full and partial scholarships to low-income Afrodescendent and indigenous students wishing to attend private institutions. In the years between its founding and the first half of 2014, PROUNI awarded nearly 1.5 million scholarships; 50.8% of the recipients were Afrodescendants and 53% were women (PROUNI, 2015a and 2015b). Here again, however, there is no publicly available data on the cross-tabulation of these two variables.

Cuts in the public education budget in Brazil over the past two years could result in the discontinuation of these successful policies, however, as well as hindering efforts to monitor Afrodescendent women's access to these programmes and participation in them.

C. Afrodescendent women's access to employment

The issue of women and work, which is equated with employment, was the issue that paved the way for early academic studies on women in the various countries of the region. In the late 1960s and early 1970s, research papers that eventually became classics in the literature on women and paid work became must-reads in the region's universities (Bruschini, 2006). In the particular case of Brazil, studies on gender-based and racial inequalities in labour relations have been milestones in the literature on black women, as noted by Carneiro and Santos (1985), Barrios (1991) and Bento (1991, 1999).

Figure 3
Latin America (11 countries): unemployment rates for persons 15 years of age and over,
by ethnicity/race and sex, latest available year
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of census microdata.

Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown.

^a In Panama, responses from persons who did not state their age were excluded.

Labour markets in Latin America exhibit “large ethnic, racial and gender divides in terms of employment access and quality, rights and social protection, among other factors, representing a critical obstacle to efforts to overcome poverty and inequality in the region” (ECLAC, 2016d). Since the labour market is the master key for opening the way to equality and to income redistribution (ECLAC, 2014), the disparities depicted in figure 3 attest to the disadvantageous position of Afrodescendent persons, who have the highest unemployment rates in the region, and especially of women of African descent.

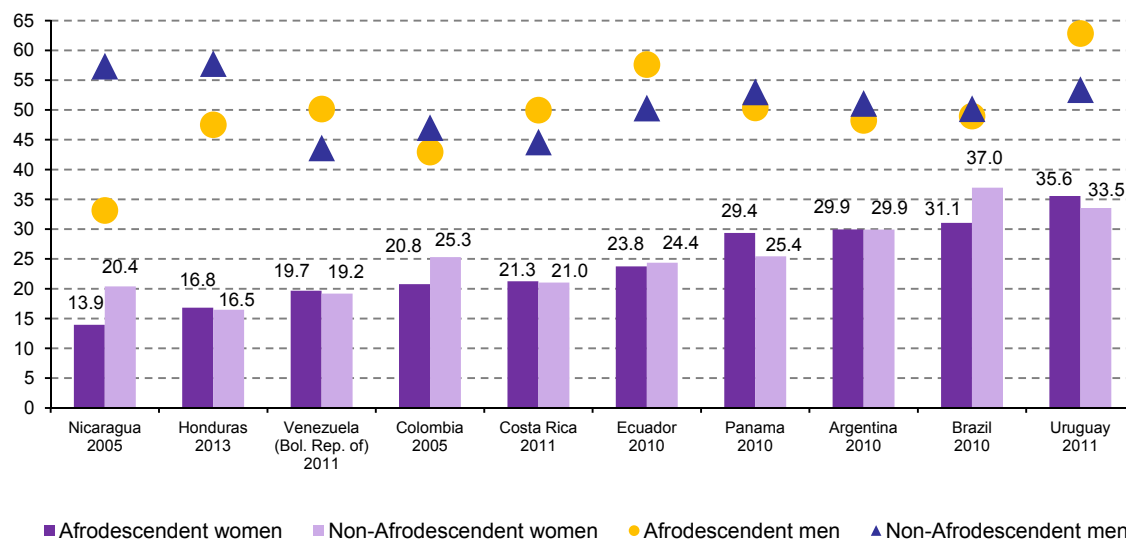
In five of the countries for which data are available (Argentina, Brazil, Ecuador, Panama and Uruguay), women of African descent are the segment of the population with the highest jobless rate and, in three of them (Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay), their unemployment rates are two or even more times higher than the rate for non-Afrodescendent men. In those same countries, the differentials relative to men of African descent are also the largest. What is more, in Ecuador, Brazil and Uruguay, the unemployment rates for Afrodescendent women are between 4.5 and 4.1 percentage points higher than they are for non-Afrodescendent women.

In the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Costa Rica and Honduras, women and men of African descent have the same unemployment rates, which are, in the latter two cases, higher than the corresponding rates for non-Afrodescendent women and men.

A number of studies on the labour market in the region have shown that women have lower employment rates than men and that the differentials are greater when cross-tabulated with age and ethno-racial indicators.

Figure 4, which gives employment data for the population between the ages of 15 and 29 years, shows that, as a simple average for 10 countries of the region and without disaggregating the figures by ethnicity/race, young women’s employment rates are only half as high as the rates for men in that same age group.

Figure 4
Latin America (10 countries): employed population between 15 and 29 years of age,
by ethnicity/race and sex, latest available year
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of census microdata.
 Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown or respondents did not provide information on their employment status.

As is to be expected, gender-based asymmetries are seen to be even greater when they intersect with ethnicity/race. This can be illustrated with the case of Nicaragua, where a comparison of the employment rate for young non-Afrodescendent men (57.4%) with the rate for young non-Afrodescendent women (20.4%) shows up a 37-percentage-point differential, while the differential is even greater (43.5 percentage points) in the case of young women of African descent.¹⁹

While the situation differs considerably across the countries of the region, the low labour-market employment rates for young women of African descent, which reflect the intersection of a number of different forms of discrimination, show how much more limited their opportunities for employment are during what is generally considered to be the most productive and creative stage in a person's life.

1. Afrodescendent women in the labour market

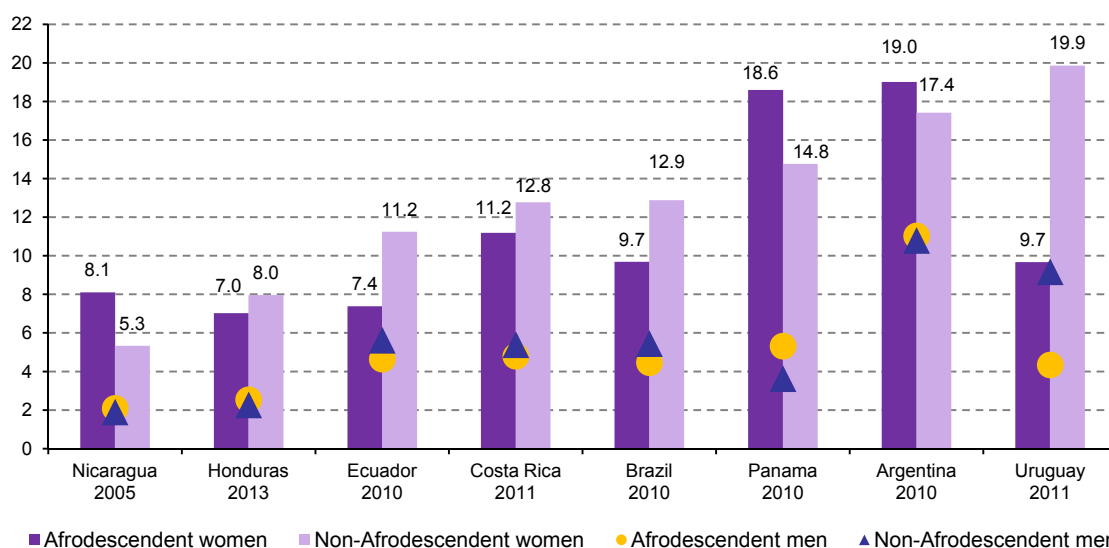
Although Afrodescendent women have increased their presence at the higher levels of educational institutions over the past decade, their achievements in this respect have not been fully rewarded in the labour market, as noted earlier (ECLAC, 2017, 2017b and 2016d). The historical patterns of discrimination dating back to the colonial era of the slave trade in Latin America continue to be perpetuated in the labour market up to the present day, despite the fact that the laws of all the nations of the region enshrine the formal principle of the equality of all people, regardless of their sex, skin colour, ethnic origin or other traits or features.

It is worth recalling the arguments advanced by the Peruvian theorist Anibal Quijano regarding the long-lasting effects that colonialism and its centralized hierarchy based around "race" have had on the social organization of labour. Quijano asserts that the categories of "black", "white",

¹⁹ The *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2016* (ECLAC, 2017b) discusses this subject extensively in chapter V.

“indian” and so forth—the identities newly invented on the basis of the idea of race— have been associated with certain roles and positions in the new global structure that controls labour and that has its roots in the colonial ethos. Thus, the idea of race and the division of labour have become structurally tied together and reinforce one another (Quijano, 2005). This construct is still evident in the region up to the present day and in the global division of labour, with racialized population groups continuing, for the most part, to occupy less prestigious and poorly paid positions in the labour market. What is more, the intersection of the racial division of labour inherited from colonial times with the sexual division of labour has led to the naturalization of the presence of Afrodescendent women in the most lowly positions in the labour market.

Figure 5
Latin America (8 countries): employed population of 15 years of age or more holding administrative positions,^a by ethnicity/race and sex, latest year available
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), “Situación de las personas afrodescendientes en América Latina y desafíos de políticas para la garantía de sus derechos”, *Project Documents* (LC/TS.2017/121), Santiago, 2017, and on the basis of census microdata processed with REDATAM 7.

Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown.

^a The category of “administrative positions” comprises office jobs in the areas of administration, legal affairs, planning and informatics.

The academic literature on the socioeconomic situation of persons of African descent in the period following the abolition of slavery in Latin America is quite categorical in stating that freedom from slavery did not break down the entry barriers impeding equal access to decent forms of employment, property ownership and education or any real possibility of becoming a member of society by means that were free of oppression and discrimination (De Roux, 1992). As affirmed by the Afro-Brazilian thinker Lélia Gonzalez, although, as long as they were slaves, persons of African descent were thought of as good workers who contributed to the production system, once they were freed they came to be regarded as poor workers incapable for engaging in labour as free men and women (Gonzalez, 1982). This attitude that continues to have an impact on these people’s positions in the labour market and on their lives in general.

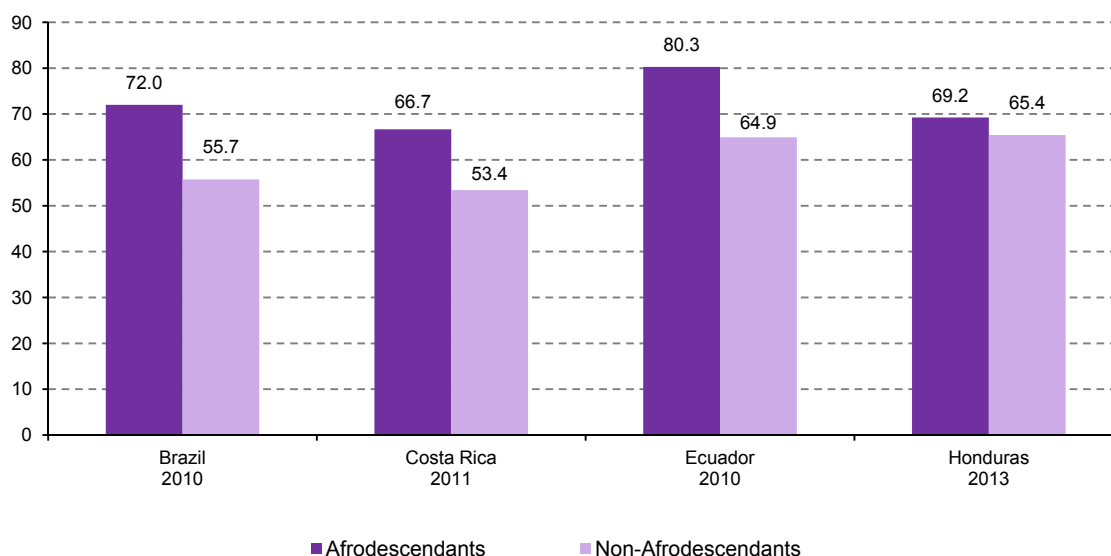
The report of the Office of the Ombudsman of Ecuador on the situation of the Afrodescendent population in that country attests to the fact that certain jobs are regarded as being naturally and exclusively associated with the Afrodescendent population, with Afrodescendent men being seen as

suitable to jobs that require physical strength (soldiers and security personnel) and Afrodescendent women being seen as suited to domestic work. In that report, the Office notes that the societal belief that persons of African descent are only “capable” of performing physical labour whose purpose is to “serve and take care of” the white population perpetuates the consequences of slavery and has the effect of excluding Afrodescendants from other forms of employment (Office of the Ombudsman of Ecuador, 2012).

As shown in figure 5, women of African descent are in the majority in the category of administrative positions in four of the eight countries for which data are available —Argentina, Panama, Uruguay and Nicaragua— while non-Afrodescendent women are in the majority in this category in Costa Rica, Brazil, Ecuador and Honduras. Employment in these positions does not, for the most part, require a university or technical degree, and the corresponding pay levels are therefore lower.

In the countries where non-Afrodescendent women hold more of these jobs, Afrodescendent women are primarily engaged in manual labour, as is shown in figure 6. The services and commercial sectors have a high turnover rate and are quite possibly the place of employment of a majority of the women and, in particular, Afrodescendent women who perform manual labour. These women labour under substandard employment conditions and are subject to a high degree of job insecurity.

Figure 6
Latin America (4 countries): women of 15 years of age or more who are employed as manual workers,^a by ethnicity/race, latest year available
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), “Situación de las personas afrodescendientes en América Latina y desafíos de políticas para la garantía de sus derechos”, *Project Documents* (LC/TS.2017/121), Santiago, 2017, and on the basis of census microdata processed with REDATAM 7.

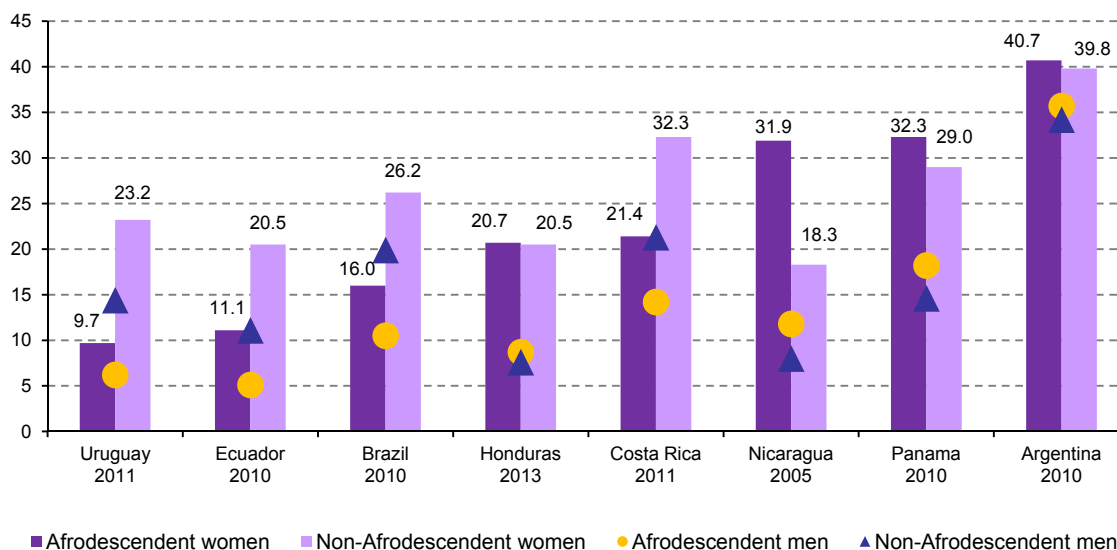
Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown.

^a The category of “manual worker” comprises service workers, sales clerks, and producers and workers employed in agriculture, fisheries, stock-raising, transport, industrial and artisanal textile production, garment assembly, carpentry, construction (bricklaying), plumbing, electrical installation and repair, graphics, chemicals, mining, foundries, food and beverage production, ceramics, leather production, tobacco production, stevedoring, packing, warehousing and personal and related services.

The increased presence of women in professional and technical positions that require a university or technical degree reflects the higher educational attainments of women in the region in recent decades; women have now outstripped their male counterparts in terms of years of schooling in almost every country of the region (see figure 7).

The differentials in such indicators separating Afrodescendent women and non-Afrodescendent women are substantial, however. In four countries (Brazil, Costa Rica, Ecuador and Uruguay), the proportion of non-Afrodescendent women holding professional or technical jobs exceeds the proportion of Afrodescendent women in those occupations by around 11 percentage points, on average. In other words, women who are neither of African or indigenous descent are more likely to be employed in these types of positions, which require substantial qualifications in terms of education and training and which presumably command higher salaries. This appears to corroborate what Lélia Gonzalez was saying in the early 1980s when she observed that the intrinsic racism of Latin American societies is such that their members persist in regarding women of African descent as being incapable and inferior and in refusing to accept the idea that they are capable of taking up more prestigious professions (Gonzalez, 1982).

Figure 7
Latin America (8 countries): women of 15 years of age or more who are employed in professional and technical positions,^a by ethnicity/race, latest year available
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), “Situación de las personas afrodescendientes en América Latina y desafíos de políticas para la garantía de sus derechos”, *Project Documents* (LC/TS.2017/121), Santiago, 2017, and on the basis of census microdata processed with REDATAM 7.

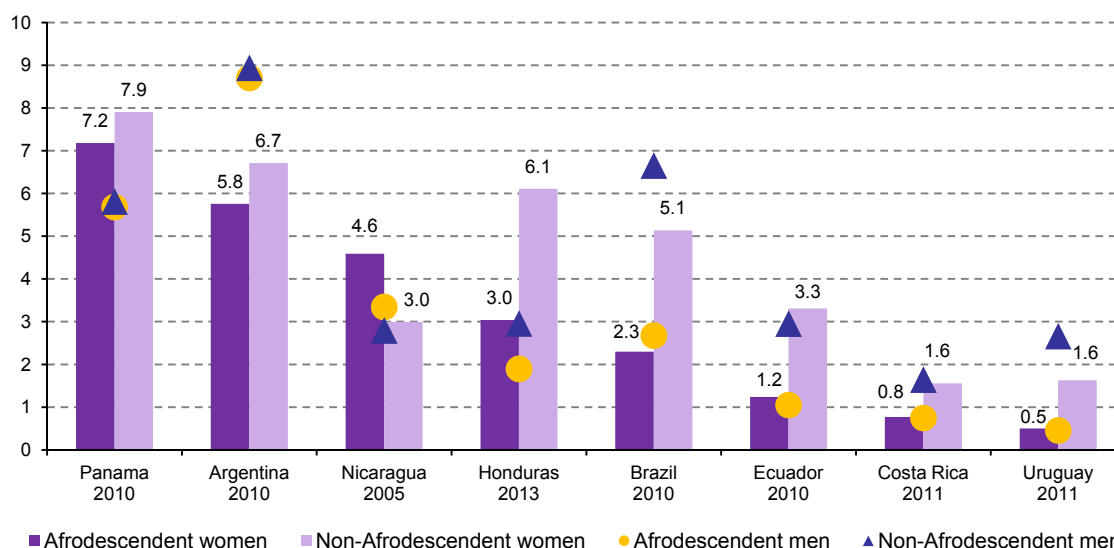
Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown.

^a The category “professionals and technicians” comprises workers with university or technical degrees and/or persons employed in education, the sciences and knowledge sectors.

Finally, the gender-based and ethnicity/racial distribution of management positions in the region, which are held by a relatively small proportion of the working population in each of the groups concerned, is quite uneven (see figure 8).

In at least one case (Nicaragua), more women of African descent than any other group hold management positions in public and private institutions and positions as managers and administrators. The next-largest group in this category in that country is Afrodescendent men. Furthermore, in contrast to the situation in the rest of the region, non-Afrodescendent men are in the minority in this category. Panama is also unique among the countries of the region that have data for this indicator, since the gender gap in management positions is the inverse of what it is elsewhere, as women (whether of African descent or not) are in the majority.

Figure 8
Latin America (8 countries): persons of 15 years of age or more who are employed in management positions,^a by ethnicity/race and sex, latest year available
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), “Situación de las personas afrodescendientes en América Latina y desafíos de políticas para la garantía de sus derechos”, *Project Documents* (LC/TS.2017/121), Santiago, 2017, and on the basis of census microdata processed with REDATAM 7.

Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown.

^a The category “management positions” comprises leadership positions in public and private institutions, managers and administrators.

In all the countries except Nicaragua, persons of African descent hold the fewest management-level jobs, however. In four of the countries (Panama, Honduras, Ecuador and Costa Rica), Afrodescendent men are the smallest group in this category, while in Argentina and Brazil, Afrodescendent women are in the minority.

Finally, Brazil is the country with the widest gender and racial gap in the distribution of management positions, with a differential on the order of 4.4 percentage points separating the best-represented group (non-Afrodescendent men) and the group that is represented the least (Afrodescendent women).

2. Affirmative action policies in the labour market

Over the past decade, a number of countries in the region have developed affirmative action policies focusing on the labour market in an effort to increase the number of persons of African descent who have decent forms of employment. This effort has focused on the government service, and various countries are exploring the possibility of passing legislation that would set aside a given number of positions for Afrodescendent and indigenous candidates.

The first initiative of this type was launched in Brazil in 2002, when the Ministry of Foreign Affairs established a scholarship programme for young persons of African descent wishing to study diplomacy in order to enter the diplomatic corps. The objective behind this effort was to have a corps that reflected the country’s ethno-racial diversity more accurately. Another major step taken in 2014 was the approval of 20% minimum quotas for persons of African descent in the competitive application procedure for civil service positions in Brazil’s federal government. This initiative is helping to increase the proportion of Afrodescendants holding more highly qualified positions in government service.

Ecuador has adopted an initiative along the lines of the one launched by Brazil. As a result, 90 members of indigenous peoples and nations, the Montubio peoples, Afro-Ecuadorians and mestizos have joined the Foreign Ministry's diplomatic corps, which now counts members of these population groups among its staff for the first time ever (Rangel, 2016).

In late 2013, Uruguay passed Act No. 19.122, which acknowledges the fact that the Afrodescendent population in the country has been a victim of racism, discrimination and stigmatization ever since the time of the slave trade and, on the basis of that acknowledgement, provides for measures to promote the participation of members of that population group in education and employment as a means of helping to redress the effects of long-standing discrimination. Among other measures, that law introduces a requirement whereby 8% of the vacancies in the government service are to be reserved for candidates of African descent who meet the constitutional and legal requirements for those positions and are successful in the open competitive application process.

In 2015, however, the National Afrodescendent Coordination Bureau, a network of independent social and activist organizations of persons of African descent in Uruguay, brought to light a number of shortcomings in the enforcement of that law which included variations in the application of the regulations from one agency to the next, the use of the quota as a ceiling rather than as a floor and the failure to reserve the required number of places in the competitive admission process (*El País*, 2015).

Colombia does not have any national law that sets aside places in the government service for persons of African descent; the subject was debated—and then set aside—in the legislature when it considered a bill that sought to introduce regulations to support a sufficient degree of genuine participation on the part of the black and Afro-Colombian population at decision-making levels in the various government branches and institutions (Colombia, Congress of the Republic, 2012).

Efforts of this type have not been confined to the public sector. In Brazil, a pioneering initiative was launched in the private sector by a clothing company (Camisaria Colombo) to organize collective bargaining procedures and union action with a view to agreeing on minimum hiring quotas for black Brazilians. A similar clause was subsequently agreed upon at the collective bargaining table in the commercial sector of São Paulo state. These initiatives illustrate the fact that unions and collective bargaining processes can play a pivotal role in combating ethno-racial discrimination and inequalities in the labour market (Abramo and Rangel, 2005).

Although none of these initiatives includes any measures that specifically target women of African descent, they nonetheless represent progress in terms of the State's recognition of its role in upholding the rights of women and men of African descent to be a part of the government service and to have access to decent forms of employment. The Political Platform of Afrodescendent Women Leaders for the International Decade for People of African Descent framed by the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women also calls for the adoption of measures that will guarantee access to decent employment on an equitable basis for women of African descent by breaking down the ethno-racial barriers that hinder these women's efforts to enter the labour market (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2015).

Efforts to provide women of African descent with access to quality forms of employment should be founded upon the understanding that doing justice for black women and other oppressed groups necessarily entails altering the division of labour; it is not a question simply of improving the working conditions and pay levels of people who have been exploited as a source of cheap labour but also, and essentially, of doing away with the special privileges that allow a particular social group, by virtue of class position and its members' phenotypes, to obtain the specialized training that allow them to develop their capacities while other groups cannot (Lozano Lerma, 2009).

3. Paid domestic work: the sum total of gender and ethno-racial inequalities

Domestic wage work is one of the most common occupations for women in Latin America and the Caribbean, with nearly 14% of all employed women in urban areas performing this type of work (ECLAC, 2017b). According to estimates of the International Labour Organization (ILO), this occupational category includes 18 million people in the region, 93% of whom are women, and indigenous, Afrodescendent and migrant women all make up a disproportionate share of this occupational segment (ILO, 2016).

Results from the 2010 census round in eight countries of the region indicate that approximately 7 million people are employed in the domestic sector in those countries and that somewhat more than 4.5 million (63%) of those people are Afrodescendants²⁰ (ECLAC, 2017b).

These statistics reflect the legacy of the colonial era and slavery and, in particular, the sexual and racial distribution of domestic service jobs. The slavery and servitude to which Africans, Afrodescendants and indigenous peoples were subjected in Latin America and the Caribbean have left their mark on the history of the region in ways which are still seen today in the paid domestic services sector (Ávila, 2009).

The societal representations of women of African descent that pigeonhole them in caregiving roles (cooks, laundresses, nannies and so forth) are still widespread today and hinder their access to occupations requiring more advanced skills (Muñoz, 2014). The African American author who uses the pen name bell hooks²¹ writes that sexism and racism combine to perpetuate an iconography of black people that imprints the collective cultural consciousness with the idea that they have been placed on earth primarily to serve others (hooks, 1995).

The relative lack of regulation of the paid domestic service sector in the region, despite the ratification of ILO Convention No. 189, and the substandard conditions to which paid domestic workers are subject as a result of that lack are manifestations of a racist world view. Because black persons and, more specifically, black women are seen as inferior and subordinate, they are denied access to the labour rights enjoyed by other workers based on a logic that naturalizes their status as “servants” in today’s societies.

The available data for eight countries in the region indicate that, in five of those countries, more Afrodescendent women than non-Afrodescendent women are employed in the domestic service sector. And even in those countries where Afrodescendent women are not in the majority in that sector, domestic service positions still represent a large percentage of the occupations in which women of African descent are employed (see figure 9).

One out of every five women of African descent in Ecuador works as a domestic servant, while over 10% of Afrodescendent women do so in Costa Rica, Brazil, Nicaragua and Honduras.

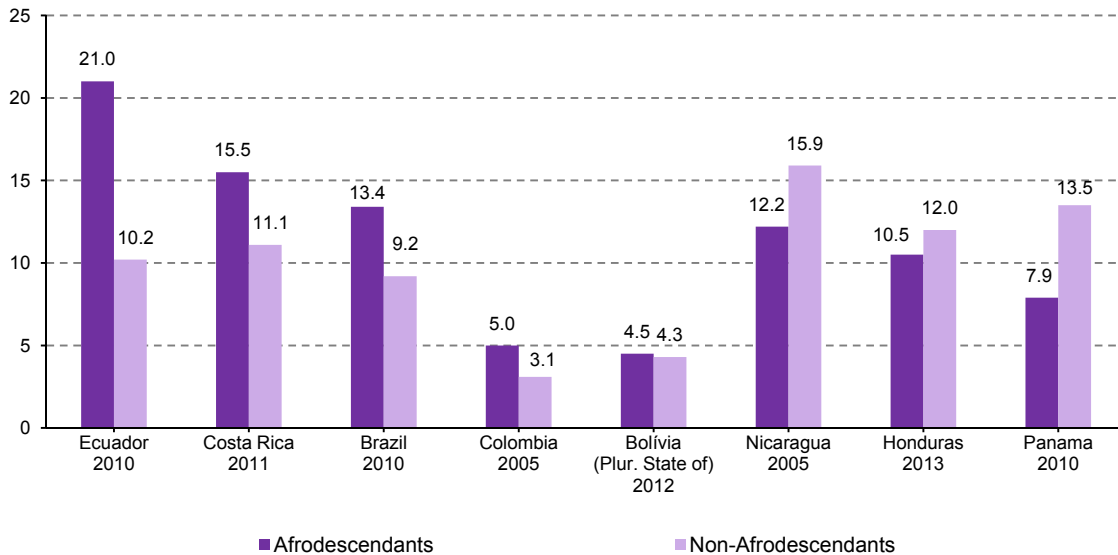
Cross-tabulations of data on ethnicity/race and on area of residence provide statistical inputs for the debate on domestic employment in the region. The fact that the percentages of Afrodescendent domestic wage workers in urban areas of Brazil and in rural areas of Costa Rica, for example, are close to the nationwide total for Ecuador (18%)²² shows just how relevant this level of disaggregation is for policymakers (ECLAC, 2017b).

²⁰ Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Nicaragua, Panama and the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

²¹ The pen name used by the author Gloria Jean Watkins.

²² See figure V.16 in ECLAC (2017b) [online] https://repositorio.cepal.org/bitstream/handle/11362/41599/4/S1700566_en.pdf.

Figure 9
Latin America (8 countries): domestic wage workers of 15 years of age or more,
by ethnicity/race, latest year available
(Percentages)



Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2016* (LC/PUB.2017/12-P), Santiago, 2017.

Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown.

The employment conditions of the majority of women domestic workers are clearly substandard. On average, they earn just slightly more than 50% of what employed women as a group earn (ECLAC, 2017b). In addition, in most of the countries of the region, domestic workers do not have employment contracts, earn less than the standard minimum wage and do not have labour rights such as entitlement to paid maternity leave or paid vacations. All of this constitutes a flagrant violation of their right to decent work and places them at a clear disadvantage relative to women having other occupations.

The introduction of policies for promoting training for Afrodescendent women and helping them to find quality jobs is of fundamental importance in economies where many women of African descent who are seeking work, whether for the first time or not, find employment as domestic servants because the only experience they have that is applicable in the labour market is the experience they have gained by performing unpaid domestic work and caring for others in their own homes (ECLAC, 2014a).

Children are involved in this situation as well. ILO data compiled in 2013 indicates that, in Brazil, 93% of all children and adolescents performing domestic work are Afrodescendent girls (Gonçalves, 2014), in direct violation of their right to be children and to have time for leisure and recreation and to develop educational, emotional, physical and many other capacities and skills (Céspedes and Robles, 2016). The forceful intersection of racism and gender-based oppression sets up a barrier in the lives of many girls who, seeking to escape poverty, to have better life opportunities or simply to carry on historical traditions and family life, enter the labour market under highly disadvantageous conditions that do not safeguard their right to an education or their right to be children.

Box 2

Brazil and Colombia: inroads in the introduction of regulations governing paid domestic work

The fact that, traditionally, a majority of paid domestic servants in Brazil have been black women is a daily reminder of the legacy of the colonial era and the slave trade.

The Consolidation of Labour Laws Act was instituted in 1943 for the specific purpose of protecting workers' labour rights in Brazil and, although the rights of other wage workers have been extended to domestic servants, this law did not regulate their workday or a number of other aspects of their working conditions, putting domestic workers at a disadvantage. It was not until 2013 that some of these aspects of paid domestic service jobs began to be covered by labour regulations.

Domestic workers' unions and, in particular, the National Federation of Domestic Workers (FENATRAD), played a pivotal role in the presentation of the Proposed Constitutional Amendment (PEC) No. 66, known as the *PEC das domésticas*, and in securing its passage. This legislation established a series of rights, including the following: a standard workday of 8 hours per day, 44 hours per week; overtime pay; extra pay for night work; wage protection; protection against arbitrary dismissal or dismissal without just cause; childcare assistance; and occupational accident insurance.

Priority measures identified by women domestic workers in this country include the formation of alliances among domestic workers' unions, the wider union movement, the movement of black women, the feminist movement and labour inspection agencies with a view to establishing a coalition to strengthen women domestic workers' unions and to contribute to the political and economic training and empowerment of women domestic workers by informing them about new educational and career opportunities.

In Colombia, it was only very recently that domestic service workers won the right to have employment contracts and, consequently, to be eligible for the country's social security system via Act No. 1595 of 2012, by which the country ratified the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), and Decree No. 721 of 2013, which governs domestic service workers' eligibility for membership in the Family Allowance System. Nonetheless, owing to the faulty enforcement of these standards, many workers continue to work without a contract and are unable to avail themselves of their rights.

It was not until 2016 that the legislature passed Act No. 1525, which requires persons who hire domestic service workers by the hour or by the day to clean their homes and perform other similar tasks to pay a transportation allowance and unemployment insurance premiums, to provide paid vacations and to contribute to a social insurance fund and to an old-age, health and occupational risk insurance scheme. The struggle mounted by domestic workers' organizations enabled them to demonstrate that their work contributes to the development and progress of the nations' families by allowing their employers to strike a balance within their households which permits them to devote more time to their income-generating occupations.

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of D. Rose, "Trabalho doméstico no Brasil: os avanços trazidos pela Lei Complementar 150/15", São Paulo [online] <http://dayanerose.jusbrasil.com.br/artigos/206890453/trabalho-domestico-no-brasil-os-avancos-trazidos-pela-lei-complementar-150-15>; Colombia, Congress of the Republic, "Ley No. 1595, 21 de diciembre de 2012", Bogotá [online] <http://wsp.presidencia.gov.co/Normativa/Leyes/Documents/LEY%201595%20DEL%2021%20DE%20DICIEMBRE%20DE%202012.pdf>; Colombia, Presidency of the Republic, "Decreto 721 de 2013", *Diario Oficial*, No. 48.762, Bogotá, 15 April 2013 [online] <http://www.alcaldiabogota.gov.co/sisjur/normas/Norma1.jsp?i=52630>.

Much the same kind of situation is found in Haiti, where the majority of the population is composed of persons of African descent. The United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) estimates that around 173,000 children in that country, most of whom are girls between the ages of 5 and 17, were performing domestic work as of 2002. These child workers, 80% of whom are girls, are referred to as *restavèk* ("live-ins" in Haitian Creole) because they are sent by their families, most of whom live in rural areas, to another —supposedly better-off— family that is to provide them with proper meals and lodging in exchange for the performance of domestic and caregiving tasks. Actually, however, most of these *restavèk* children end up living with families that are also in economic difficulties, and they consequently have problems securing such basic rights as the rights to food and proper clothing. Afrodescendent child domestic workers in Haiti, most of whom have very long workdays, thus are often prevented from going to school and are at risk of abuse and ill-treatment, which may include physical and sexual violence (Merlet, 2009).

D. Inequalities in pension system coverage: the challenge for Afrodescendent women of securing a decent standard of living during old age

The social inequalities existing in the region in the form of the long-standing exclusion of Afrodescendants and discrimination against them touch all aspects of these people's lives, including their access to the basic rights enshrined in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948), including the right to social security coverage and a pension during old age.

As observed by Amarante, Colacce and Manzi (2016), the imbalances that may arise in social security systems are partly a reflection of imbalances in the labour market, as the reverberations of differences in access to employment in the formal sector and the resulting differences in income levels are felt years later in the form of inequalities in access to pensions and in the size of those pensions.

Given the differing characteristics of the labour market in each country, those markets' varying degrees of formalization, and differences in the various pensions systems and in their degree of legitimacy, coverage rates also vary sharply from one country to the next. Be that as it may, in all of the countries for which data are available, the pension system enrolment rate for the employed Afrodescendent population is lower than it is for non-Afrodescendants. The gap between the rates for these two groups ranges from 6 percentage points in Ecuador to nearly 15 points in Brazil. Region-wide, men of all ethnicities/races tend to have higher pension coverage rates than women, although women have a slightly higher rate than men in Brazil.

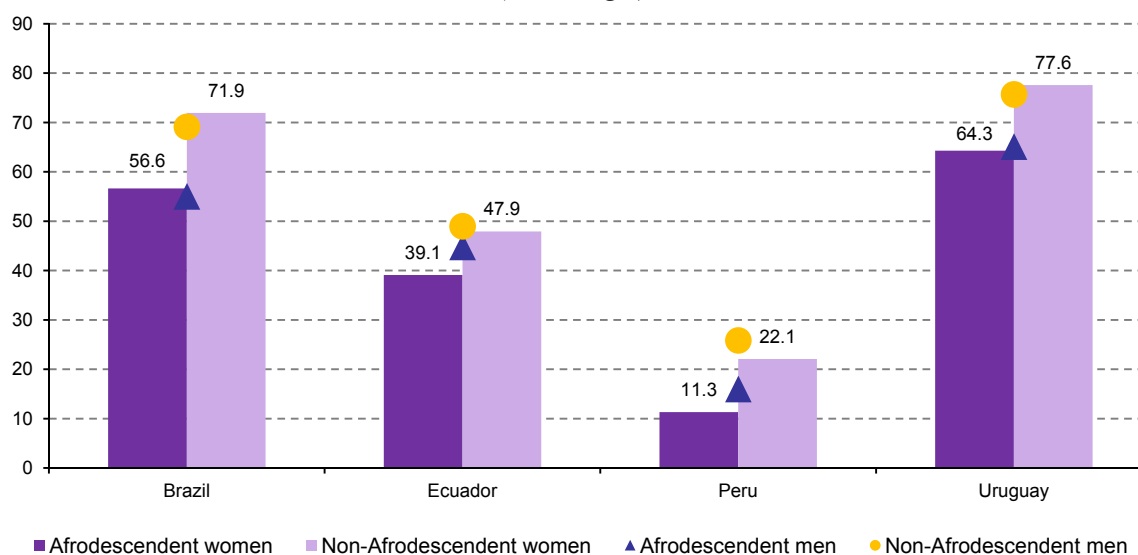
Even though, generally speaking, Afrodescendent women enter the workforce at an earlier age and withdraw from it at a later age than other women (ECLAC, 2016a), their pension system coverage rate is lower than the rate for non-Afrodescendent women in all the countries for which the relevant data are available. Their concentration in substandard, informal forms of employment is one of the main reasons for this situation.

In Peru, nearly twice as many non-Afrodescendent women as Afrodescendent women belong to a pension system. The gap between these two groups of women amounts to almost 9 percentage points in Ecuador, 13.3 percentage points in Uruguay and 15.3 points in Brazil (see figure 10).

Other factors, such as residence in an urban or rural area and migration status, also have a direct impact on the likelihood that an employed person belongs to a pension system and thus will or will not benefit from a sufficient degree of social protection when they reach old age. Fewer women of African descent who live in rural areas or who are undocumented migrants have access to a pension when they retire.

Old age is a crucial stage of life in terms of women's economic autonomy, and social security coverage plays a pivotal role in ensuring that autonomy, along with the exercise of a number of related rights, such as the right to food, to health, to leisure and to full membership in society (ECLAC, 2017c). The statistics cited here are therefore quite telling in terms of the present living conditions of a large number of Afrodescendent women in the region and the conditions that they will face in old age. Many of those who do not belong to a pension system are and will be obliged to continue to work throughout their later years or at least as long as their health permits. Once they grow too old to continue to perform paid work and since they have no pension income, they will be at a very real risk of lapsing into poverty or indigence.

Figure 10
Latin America (4 countries): pension system coverage of employed persons of 15 years of age or more, by ethnicity/race and sex, 2015
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of household surveys of the respective countries.

Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown.

The Political Platform of Afrodescendent Women Leaders for the International Decade for People of African Descent underscores the need for States to establish equitable social security systems that do not discriminate against persons on the basis of ethnicity/race or sex and thus safeguard the rights of Afrodescendent workers (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2015). In Brazil, the Black Women’s Charter echoes this stance in its call for guarantees for black women’s right to social security and to a pension (Geledés Black Women’s Institute, 2015).

The importance of compiling national data on these subjects and ensuring that these statistics are disaggregated by sex and ethnicity/race is underscored by the fact that persons of African descent aged 60 years or more make up a substantial portion of the population in the region, ranging from 6.7% of the total Afrodescendent population in Ecuador up to 15.2% in Cuba (ECLAC, 2017b). These figures, especially when viewed in conjunction with the fact that women tend to outnumber men at more advanced ages, point up the need to design and implement policies aimed at ensuring that Afrodescendent women will enjoy decent living conditions in their old age.

E. Unpaid work

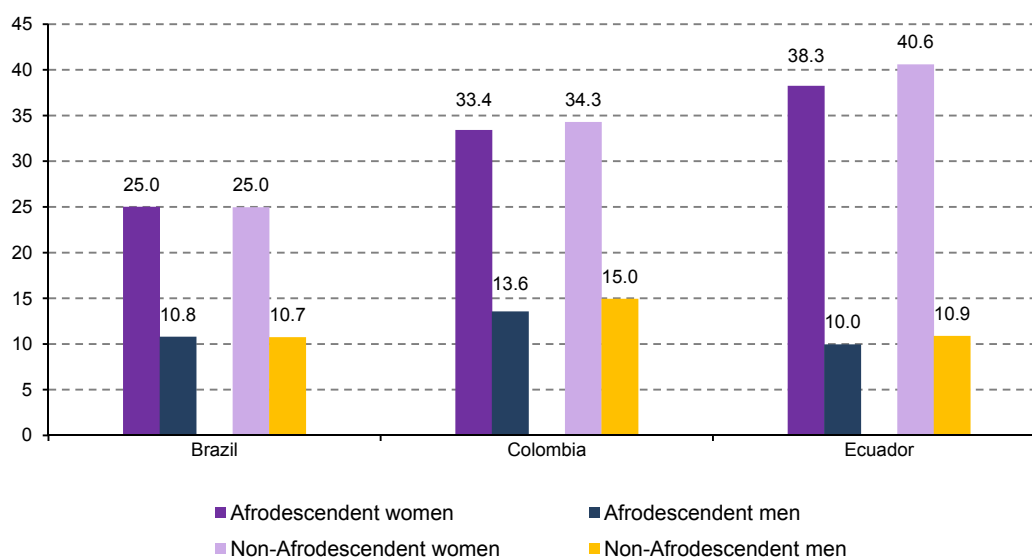
As has been observed by ECLAC (2016a) in the past, the discussion surrounding the issue of economic autonomy cannot be confined to a consideration of the autonomy afforded by paid work, since that form of employment relies for its existence on the performance of what are usually unpaid reproductive and caregiving tasks that are essential in order for human societies to function. These latter forms of work go largely unrecognized and undervalued because the traditional sexual division of labour defines them as being “women’s work”.

The category of unpaid work includes caregiving (primarily caring for children, persons who are sick, persons with disabilities and older persons, along with other members of society in positions of vulnerability) and domestic chores (washing, cooking and cleaning, as well as other types of tasks such as paying bills and volunteer social work) (Aguirre, 2009). These activities represent a workload

for women that makes it difficult for them to enter the paid workforce and tends to steer them into informal, low-paid forms of employment that offer less job security and little social protection. This pattern contributes to the reproduction of social inequality and poverty (ECLAC, 2016a).

In countries where Afrodescendent women are identified as such in the tabulations of time-use survey results, the data reflect the general trend in the sexual division of unpaid work, with women of African descent devoting more time to unpaid work than their male counterparts do. No significant differential appears to exist between the total hours per week devoted to such work by women of different ethno-racial groups, however (see figure 11).

Figure 11
Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador: amount of time devoted to unpaid work by the population of 15 years of age and over, by ethnicity/race and sex, 2012
(Hours per week)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of time-use surveys of the respective countries.

Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown.

While the time-use survey results for Brazil do not show any difference between the amount of time spent performing unpaid work by Afrodescendent women and non-Afrodescendent women, a study conducted by Melo and Castilho (2009) found that the average number of hours devoted to domestic tasks²³ varies substantially from one occupational group to another, regardless of whether the persons in those occupations are men or women.

Women in the “management” category are the ones reporting the fewest number of hours devoted to domestic tasks. The main reason for this is presumably that, since they earn more, they are better able to pay domestic workers (a majority of whom, in Brazil, are black women) to perform those tasks on their behalf (Melo and Castilho, 2009). This study also shows that women in poorly paid occupations are the ones who devote the most hours to unpaid domestic work and caregiving; in view of the position of a majority of Afrodescendent women in the Brazilian labour market, these time-use survey results may well be an indirect reflection of the fact that they actually do spend more time performing unpaid domestic and caregiving tasks.

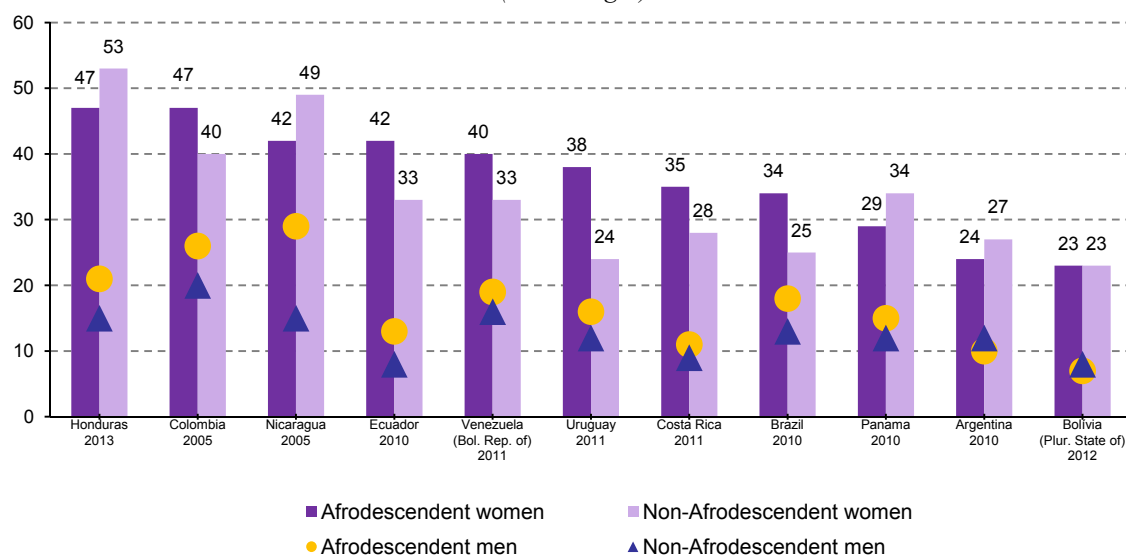
²³ “Domestic tasks” is the category used by the Brazilian Geographical and Statistical Institute (IBGE) in its measurements of the time devoted to unpaid work.

The issue of unpaid domestic and caregiving work directly intersects with the issue of pension system coverage. Given how scanty public caregiving systems in the countries of the region are and how many older Afrodescendent women do not have (and will not have) the pension income they would need to pay for private caregiving services once they can no longer perform paid work, this situation may be fueling a vicious circle whereby the younger women in the family group take on these caregiving tasks and will therefore have greater difficulty in securing jobs and in pursuing a career path. Thus, quantifying the actual value of domestic work, as noted by the Afro-Brazilian thinker Dulce Pereira (1983), is a way of according recognition to the historically important role played by black women in providing economic support for their families.

This is an issue of fundamental importance in Latin America, as it is estimated that approximately 30 million men and women between the ages of 15 and 29—or more than 22% of all young people in the region—are not involved in either of the two main spheres of activity that provide a gateway into society: the education system and the labour market. This segment of the population is composed of a very heterogeneous group of people who have differing reasons for not being a part of either of these two systems, but it is known that a majority of its members are women (73%) and urban residents (66%) and that a significant number of them are already mothers who are shouldering a heavy unpaid workload in their homes. Given the shortage of caregiving systems and arrangements that would allow these women to reconcile the demands of schooling, work and personal and family life, the challenge of completing their studies and finding employment is a very formidable one (ECLAC, 2016a and 2017b).

In the 11 countries for which the relevant data are available, a majority of the people who neither study nor perform paid work are women, regardless of the ethno-racial group to which they belong (see figure 12). The widest gender gaps in this respect are found among non-Afrodescendent youth in Honduras and Nicaragua (roughly 38 and 34 percentage points, respectively), while the widest gender gaps in the case of Afrodescendent youths are observed in Ecuador and, again, in Honduras (29 and 26 percentage points, respectively).

Figure 12
Latin America (11 countries): proportion of the population of young persons between the ages of 15 and 29 who are neither in school nor employed, by ethnicity/race and sex, latest year available
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2016* (LC/PUB.2017/12-P), Santiago, 2017.

Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown or respondents did not provide information on their employment status.

In 6 of the 11 countries for which the relevant data are available, a larger percentage of Afrodescendent women than non-Afrodescendent women are neither gainfully employed nor in school. The differentials between the women in these two ethno-racial groups are quite substantial, although smaller than the corresponding gender gaps are. Uruguay, Ecuador and Brazil have the widest gaps: 14 percentage points in Uruguay and 9 percentage points in Brazil and Ecuador, followed by the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Colombia and Costa Rica, in all of which a differential of 7 percentage points separates women of African descent from their non-Afrodescendent counterparts.

In those countries where more non-Afrodescendent women than Afrodescendent women are neither in school nor gainfully employed, the ethno-racial gaps are smaller. Although this differential amounts to approximately 7 percentage points in Nicaragua, it narrows to 6, 5 and 3 percentage points in the cases of Honduras, Panama and Argentina, respectively.

A comparison of the figures for young women of African descent with young non-Afrodescendent men brings out the interlocking inequalities associated with sex and ethnicity/race quite starkly. In Argentina, the percentage of young women of African descent who are neither in school nor gainfully employed is at least twice as high as the percentage of young non-Afrodescendent men in that situation, and the differential amounts to approximately 2.5 times in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia and Panama. In Honduras, Nicaragua, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay, three times as many young women of African descent as young non-Afrodescendent men are neither in school nor gainfully employed, and the figure rises to four times as many in Costa Rica and over five times as many in Ecuador (ECLAC, 2017b).

The gap between Afrodescendent men and non-Afrodescendent men is also substantial. In 9 out of the 11 countries that have compiled the relevant data, higher percentages of young men of African descent than of young male non-Afrodescendants are neither in school nor employed and, in the case of the two countries in which the opposite is true (Argentina and the Plurinational State of Bolivia), the differentials are substantially narrower than they are in the other countries in this group.

F. Women of African descent and their right to territory

The harsh treatment of slaves under the colonial system triggered the formation of settlements in various regions of Latin America and the Caribbean known as *quilombos* (Brazil), *palenques* (Colombia) or *cumbes* (Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela). These settlements were located in remote, sparsely populated areas, often in the middle of forests or jungles and were established by escaped slaves, some of whom were known as Maroons or *Cimarrones*. In many of these territories, communities of persons known as *Quilombolas* or *Palenqueras* still exist today. Over the centuries, they have reaffirmed their ancestral cultural heritage as black peoples of African descent and have forged their traditions into an intrinsic relationship with their environment.

The very specific characteristics of these rural Afrodescendent communities (IPEA, 2013) and of the women who belong to them warrant an in-depth consideration and analysis, as the bonds of solidarity in whose maintenance these women play a leading role represent an important milestone in the formation of identity and territory (IPEA, 2013).

The concept of territory is, in fact, the key element that is at the heart of these population groups' and communities' social, political, economic and cultural forms of organization. It is a meaning-laden concept that presupposes an appropriated geographic space, and this process of appropriation—territorialization—conveys identities—territorialities—that are imprinted in these processes, which are therefore dynamic and mutable and which give material expression at each point in time to a certain order, a certain territorial configuration (Porto-Gonçalves, 2009).

The recognition of these communities' territories and their right to remain on those territories is an issue that is shared by settlements in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Honduras, Nicaragua and other Latin American and Caribbean countries for which the knowledge-identity-territory relationship continues to be the central element in their lives and organizational processes (Walsh, 2004).

For these communities, being displaced from their territories entails the loss of their ethnic, cultural and territorial identity, which is linked to their extended family and their community, to their rivers, farms, hills and animals, as well as to their celebrations, spiritual ceremonies and their special ways of relating to one another (Regional Feminist Articulation for Human Rights and Gender Justice, 2015). Displacement necessarily entails a break with the configuration of the territorialities that have been built up throughout the historical process of these groups' formation and deprives them of a material world that encapsulates their lives and their identities.

This is why the mounting threats to the rights of Afrodescendent communities —threats posed, for the most part, by the encroachment of “development” projects on their territories— are a cause of such great concern.

The series of evictions of Garifuna communities in Honduras from their lands is just one example of the kinds of threats these communities face. The Honduran Garifunas are not only marginalized but are seeing their territories along the Caribbean coast threatened by the arrival of foreign investors looking to set up tourist attractions and facilities in the area. As they are deprived of their lands, many Garifunas, especially the younger members of these communities, are migrating to other countries (Jiménez, 2015) as they find themselves bereft of their right to remain on their territory and follow their own ways of life.

Research should be undertaken in order to better understand the role of Afrodescendent women in the fight to defend their communities and territories, since it is clear that these women are at the forefront of their communities' struggle to survive and to preserve their culture (Lamus Canavate, 2012). It is well known, for example, that the Afro-Colombian Raizal and Palenquera women have played a pivotal role in the social and political movements that have won recognition of the ethnic territorial rights of the communities that are now under threat, as well as in all the various initiatives undertaken to consolidate those rights within the framework of State policies (DNP, 2010).

One of the ways in which the leadership role played by women of African descent in the defense of their communities' traditional territories has been expressed is in the Political Platform of Afrodescendent Women Leaders for the International Decade for People of African Descent. In that document, the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women call upon States and governments to rethink the laws that hinder and destabilize the self-directed development of Afrodescendent communities and override their exercise of their ancestral rights. They also call upon States and governments to honour the national and international agreements on the rights of Afrodescendent communities which they have signed by involving the Afrodescendent population in decision-making concerning investment projects that will have a significant impact on their communities (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2015).

The Land, Territory and the Rights of Women of African Descent Regional Meeting, at which women leaders from various Latin American and Caribbean countries gathered, is another example. The women attending that meeting urged the States of the region to safeguard the collective and territorial rights of women of African descent so that they may continue to work through political, economic and academic avenues to help uphold their communities' way of life and ensure their social, political and economic inclusion. They also called upon the region's governments to accord political and policy recognition to the territorial and collective rights of the Afrodescendent communities and peoples of the region and to promote the genuine participation of the women belonging to these communities and peoples (RRI, 2016).

Article 14 of the ILO Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), which has been signed and ratified by a large number of the countries in the region,²⁴ recognizes the rights of ownership and possession of the indigenous and tribal peoples, including rural Afrodescendent communities, in independent countries over the lands that they have traditionally occupied. Article 6 of the Convention states that the signatory governments shall “consult the peoples concerned, through appropriate procedures and in particular through their representative institutions, whenever consideration is being given to legislative or administrative measures which may affect them directly” (ILO, 1989).

Guarantees for the territorial rights of Afrodescendent communities is not only a question of doing justice; these guarantees are also the cornerstone for the development and consolidation of their economies and for the sustainable management and preservation of the biodiversity in the areas where they live (AECID, 2016).

The Afrodescendent communities’ rights over their territories are the foundation for the development of their local production capabilities and for ensuring their food security, which in turn will reinforce the economic autonomy of the women belonging to these communities. Safeguarding these communities’ full enjoyment of those rights will also contribute to their sustainable development and management of their resources and will help to ensure the preservation of these communities, their identity and their way of life.

²⁴ The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean that have signed and ratified ILO Convention No. 169 are: Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

III. Physical autonomy for Afrodescendent women

Within the framework of women's exercise of their full autonomy, physical autonomy is expressed in two main dimensions of citizenship: sexual and reproductive rights and the right to a life free of violence, which is directly linked to women's freedom and autonomy over their bodies, as personal and private territory over which every woman should have legal power and the capacity to take sovereign decisions (ECLAC, 2016a).

In a context of enduring racism and other types of discrimination, for women of African descent, physical autonomy represents the capacity to take free and informed decisions about their lives, bodies and sexuality, and it means living free of violence, able to exercise their rights fully, particularly sexual and reproductive rights. Accordingly, the more discrimination and violence occurs in racist and patriarchal societies, the more their physical autonomy is under threat owing their high degree of vulnerability.

Over the past 40 years, the Regional Gender Agenda has attempted to draw attention to the flagrant violence faced constantly by women, especially racialized women, and to the lack of freedom surrounding their exercise of sexuality and maternity, and to propose measures to effect a substantive change (ECLAC, 2016b). The physical autonomy of Afrodescendent women has been addressed in a series of agreements signed by the countries in the course of the thirteen sessions of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean held regularly since 1977.

The Brasilia Consensus (2010), for example, called for "preventative and punitive measures as well as measures for protecting and caring for women that further the eradication of all forms of violence against women in public and private spheres, with special attention to Afrodescendent, indigenous, lesbian, transgender and migrant women, and those living in rural, forest and border areas" (ECLAC, 2011a, p. 33). The Santo Domingo Consensus (2013) called for the implementation of gender-sensitive measures to guarantee access to quality health services, including sexual and reproductive health services, particularly for women, girls, adolescent girls, young women, indigenous and Afrodescendent women, rural women and women with disabilities (ECLAC, 2014b).

The agreements adopted by the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (2013 and 2015) go even further in recognizing the centrality of access to and full exercise of sexual and reproductive rights for women in all their diversity (ECLAC, 2016a), as well as that the elimination of the multiple forms of discrimination and gender-based violence is fundamental to governments' commitment to advance towards development with equality (ECLAC, 2013).

In agreement 97 of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development (2013), States commit to “ensure that policies and programmes are in place to raise the living standards of Afrodescendent women, by fully enforcing their rights, in particular their sexual rights and reproductive rights” (ECLAC, 2013).

Lastly, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development acknowledges that it is not possible to achieve gender equality or to guarantee a healthy life in a sustainable development framework without recognizing women’s autonomy in matters of sexuality and reproduction,²⁵ and without ensuring they may enjoy a life free of violence.²⁶ The 2030 Agenda also calls upon governments to empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status (target 10.2).

A. Effects of patriarchy and racism on the social representations of Afrodescendent women

Women’s physical autonomy is at the core of the feminist agenda which, in the context of societies that are historically structured by racism, imposes the greatest challenges upon Afrodescendent women, bearing in mind institutional racism, racist and misogynistic violence and the stereotypical images that have been built up over the centuries of the body and sexuality of black and Afrodescendent women.

According to bell hooks, the hegemonic white culture produced an iconography of black women’s bodies that represented them as highly sexed, the perfect incarnation of primitive and unbridled eroticism, ingraining in the common awareness the idea that black women were pure body, with no mind (Hooks, 1995). It is no therefore no coincidence that the perception of Afrodescendent women’s capacity and intelligence is determined by race and gender (Muñoz, 2014), whereby their physical attributes are viewed as “exotic” or “exuberant”, and they are ignored as whole persons endowed with complex subjectivities and intellectual capacity. All this contributes to restrict their possibilities of individual and collective development, locking them into roles that directly reflect those stereotypes, such as cooks, servants and dancers, among others. The natural acceptance of these representations, according to bell hooks (1995), continues to inform the way that black women are viewed today, still seen as bodies made to serve or objects of sexual consumption.

The social representations that construct black women in terms of a sexualized or racialized body, without affectivity (Pacheco, 2013, p. 28), order their lives and affective possibilities, excluding them from the “affective market” and naturalizing their place in the “sex market” of erotization. The difficulty of forging stable affective and sexual relationships is part of a social phenomenon that Brazilian academics have called “the solitude of black women” (Pacheco, 2013). This phenomenon has fuelled the formation of single-parent families headed by Afrodescendent women which, in addition to all the possible psychological and emotional implications, also leaves them solely responsible for their families in terms of economic commitments and the care work a family group demands.

²⁵ Sustainable Development Goal 3 (“Ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages”), which includes targets in sexual and reproductive health (targets 3.1, 3.3 and 3.7), and Goal 5 (“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”), which includes targets on sexual health (targets 5.1, 5.2, 5.3 and 5.6).

²⁶ Sustainable Development Goal 5 (“Achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls”), which includes targets relating to ending all forms of discrimination and violence against women and girls (targets 5.1, 5.2 and 5.3), Goal 10 (“Reduce inequality within and among countries”), which includes targets on promoting the inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex and other status, and ensuring equal opportunity and reducing inequalities of outcome (targets 10.2 and 10.3), and target 16.2, on ending all forms of violence against children.

A 2014 study by the researcher Rocío Muñoz revealed how racism and sexism continue to feed the construction of stereotypes of Afrodescendent women in contemporary Peruvian society. After analysing testimonies of Afro-Peruvian women, Muñoz concluded that their bodies are subject to two complex forces: on the one hand, the exaggeration and amplification of their sexuality and, on the other, undervaluation of status (Muñoz, 2014). This undervaluation has effects on these women's construction of subjectivity, given that the esthetic devaluation of black phenotypes by the racist Eurocentric imaginary encourages the rejection of their bodies and physical traits of blackness, such as curly hair. Thus, the association between "black" and "bad" deeply wounds the self-esteem of Afrodescendent women and is expressed in their non-recognition by the dominant patterns of beauty, in the internalization of racist stereotypes and the effort to "soften", "whiten", hide or disguise blackness.

Muñoz concludes that there is a type of valuation, mainly of the sexual, that directly relates the conception of a black woman to her interpretation as an object. The historical construction marked by "thingification", the exaggeration of sexuality, harassment, violence and subjugation (Muñoz, 2014) of these women remains alive and is strengthened daily by racist language, by the media and the common perception, which, in contexts of racist and patriarchal violence, deeply affects the dignity and physical autonomy of Afrodescendent women.

Observing the urgency of combating these stereotypes and reinforcing black women's self-esteem in the region, the Political Platform of Afrodescendent Leaders in the International Decade for People of African Descent urges States to take measures to raise the awareness of media professionals of the nature and impact of discrimination against Afrodescendent women, showing them their responsibility in the non-perpetuation of prejudices (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2015). Also in this regard, the Black Women's Charter of Brazil called for campaigns to end the reproduction of stereotypes of gender, race and ethnicity, gender and sexual orientation in the media, and for the creation of new/other regimes of visibility of the black population, especially black women, supported by a different imaginary capable of breaking with the racist and sexist codes that underpin existing discourses (Geledés Black Women's Institute, 2015).

This situation, which is common to most of the countries of the region, was critical in the recognition by the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 (2016), that the persistence of discriminatory and violent cultural patterns was one of the structural obstacles underpinning the existing unequal power relations in the region, that would have to be eliminated to achieve gender equality by 2030. Achieving this is essential to ensure the autonomy and full exercise of the human rights of all women and girls, especially since, for women, gender inequality is compounded by other inequalities, such as those based on socioeconomic status, ethnicity and race, age, place of residence and physical and mental capacities (ECLAC, 2017a).

B. Inequalities in access to health care and services

Any analysis of the life of Afrodescendent women commonly runs into the problem that data are lacking on this population group. It is therefore urgently necessary that governments respond to the demand for information, especially in such areas as health, where it is very difficult to find data to support a documented approach to this group's physical autonomy.

Including ethno-racial variables in health information systems is a basic requirement for implementing the health rights of Afrodescendent peoples, in order to generate systemic information on their living conditions and morbidity and mortality profiles and thus provide epidemiological evidence to support the formulation of relevant and effective policies and programmes in order to achieve equity between peoples, understood as a measure of social justice (ECLAC/UNFPA/PAHO, 2013, p. 29). Having these variables in data sources is not only useful for producing the information and analysing it accurately; it is also essential for good governance, lobbying and oversight.

Afrodescendent organizations need to know and understand the information on their health status to engage in agendas of negotiation with public services and ministries to demand that States meet their health-related obligations (ECLAC/UNFPA/PAHO, 2013, p. 29).

In this connection the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women has called upon ministries of health and health surveys, as a matter of urgency, to generate statistics disaggregated by race and ethnicity, as a tool for diagnosing the health status of Afrodescendent populations, especially women (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2015).

Recently, the Plan of Action for the Decade for Persons of African Descent in the Americas (2016–2025), under the area “Development”, presented as an objective to foster the inclusion of the Afrodescendent approach in the social determinants of health through intersectoral policies and promotion of health programmes for the Afrodescendent population (OAS, 2016).

Looking at the physical autonomy of Afrodescendent women from the perspective of health requires considering, first, their degree of affiliation with health services. Although the majority of countries in the region formally guarantee the right to health care, in some cases the State is not the main provider of the means to exercise that right (Urriola, 2009). Where access to health care is related to the individual’s capacity to hire private services, the population groups found mainly in the lowest socioeconomic strata, as tends to be the case of Afrodescendent women in many of the region’s countries, often find themselves unable to fully exercise that right.

Where access to health services is universal, it is essential to reflect upon the differences in the quality of treatment provided to different groups. Data from Brazil show that black women have been the group expressing least satisfaction with the health care received, in a proportion 0.4 percentage points higher than black men, 5.3 percentage points higher than white women and 5.6 points higher than white men (Paixão and others, 2011).

Poorer satisfaction with treatment among Afrodescendent women could reflect ethno-racial discrimination in treatment or the presence of institutional racism in the establishments responsible for providing health services. Again in Brazil, the probability of a black woman seeking and not receiving treatment in the health system is 2.6 times higher than for a white man, demonstrating the weakness of health care with regard to Afrodescendent women (Paixão and others, 2011).

A study by the Office of the Ombudsman of Peru finds a similar pattern in the health care received by Afrodescendants, especially women, in Peru. According to the Office, various Afro-Peruvian citizens indicated that they did not attend health institutions because of the poor quality of services and, in some cases, discriminatory treatment. Afrodescendent women even reported being treated in aggressive and sexual terms (Peru, Office of the Ombudsman, 2011). This indicates that the existence of discriminatory practices in the provision of health services by the State limits not only the effectiveness of medical treatment, but also the probability that ethnic groups who are discriminated against will attend health centres at all (Peru, Office of the Ombudsman, 2011).

The Afrodescendent population faces situations over the course of the life cycle that amount to repeated breaches of these rights and thus directly impact on their health status. It is known, in fact, that “in terms of social determinants, the factors that generate exclusion and marginalization, such as discrimination and racism, are expressed most permanently in damage to health, producing significant differences in mortality levels and life expectancy”, as well as other indicators. It is essential to be aware of the epidemiological patterns of the Afrodescendent population, and of Afrodescendent women in particular, to design public policies and programmes that will be effective for this group, also considering differences by stage of the life cycle and place of residence (ECLAC, 2017b, p. 232).

Major challenges remain in the region as regards women’s health, especially among women from the groups that suffer worst discrimination, including the HIV epidemic. In Guatemala, for example, although most of the Garífuna population is located in tourist areas and is more vulnerable to HIV/AIDS and sexual violations, health policies are not geared towards the reality of their sexual and

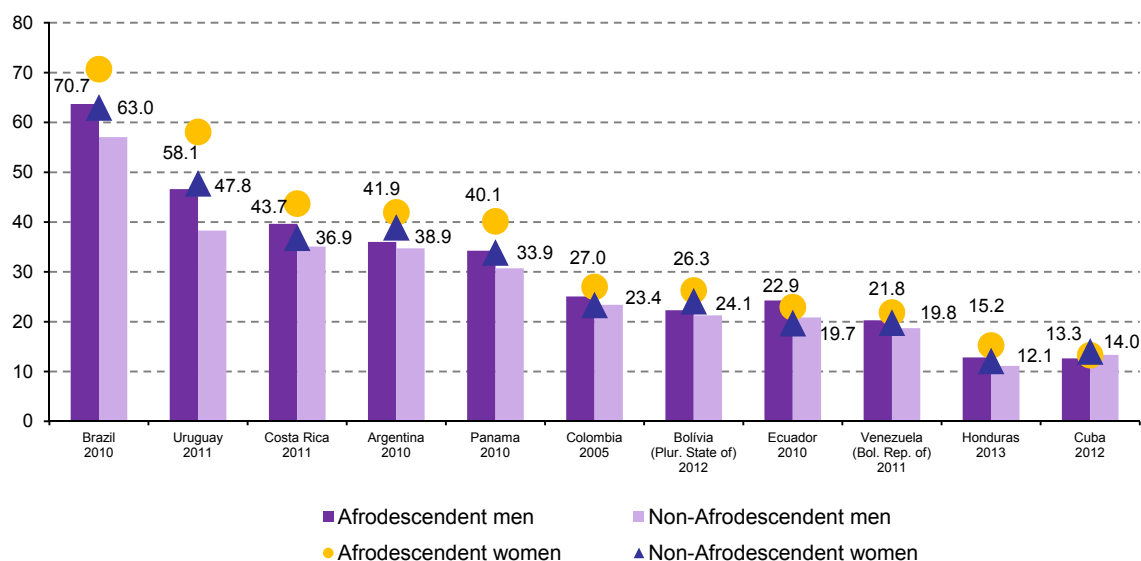
reproductive identity (CERIGUA, 2011). In Peru, the Ica Department, one of the areas with the largest proportion of Afrodescendent population, has the highest levels of HIV in the country, showing the vulnerability suffered by this population (ADS/OAS, 2017).

This is in addition to new and complex scenarios, such as the outbreak of the Zika virus, which impacts the poorest groups of women—where indigenous and Afrodescendent women are concentrated—harder and exposes them to high-risk pregnancies. In Brazil, one of the countries worst affected by the epidemic in 2015 and 2016, 8 of every 10 children born with microcephaly and other virus-related brain disorders were born to black women (Maisonnave, 2016). The Zika virus, therefore, is not just a public health emergency, but also the outcome of persistent social inequities, showing how certain groups of women are worse affected by the lack of universal access to sexual health and family planning services (UNFPA, 2016).

Another important point in the analysis of women's physical autonomy refers to the gaps between the sexes in the prevalence of disability. In fact, in over half the Latin American and Caribbean countries, disability is more prevalent among women than among men, a tendency that grows stronger with age (ECLAC, 2016a). In turn, the less favourable living conditions of the Afrodescendent populations, added to the context of institutional discrimination and racism, lead to accumulated health risks, which are intensified in old age and are reflected in disability prevalence rates.

Figure 13 shows that, in all the countries with data available, except Cuba, disability prevalence is higher in the Afrodescendent population aged 60 years and over than the non-Afrodescendent population of the same age. In the simple average for 11 countries, non-Afrodescendent older persons present a disability rate of 29.9%, compared with 32.7% for Afrodescendent older persons.

Figure 13
Latin America (11 countries): persons aged 60 years or over with at least one disability,
by ethnicity/race and sex, latest year available
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), “Situación de las personas afrodescendientes en América Latina y desafíos de políticas para la garantía de sus derechos”, *Project Documents* (LC/TS.2017/121), Santiago, 2017.

Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown.

The data also show a worrying reality: disability among older persons in the region affects Afrodescendent women more markedly in all the countries examined, except in Cuba and Ecuador.

It is true that disability prevalence in old age is higher among women, regardless of racial or ethnic origin. This may reflect their higher life expectancy, which increases the possibility of having a disability as a result of an accident, chronic illness or ageing itself. It must also be considered that women—especially Afrodescendent women—experience this stage of their life cycle amid greater economic vulnerability and less access to social protection mechanisms. This increases the risk of any health problem becoming a disability owing to lack of resources to pay for support services and the technical assistance needed to lessen the impact of a limitation acquired with age, exposing women, mainly Afrodescendent women, to particular vulnerability and exclusion (ECLAC, 2016d). Difficulties in accessing health care caused by institutional racism must also be considered among the reasons for this adverse situation for Afrodescendent women.

In turn, some of the most important challenges in the region in relation to women's physical autonomy are the persistence of adolescent maternity; child pregnancy (in many cases stemming from forced maternity and sexual violence); the unmet family planning needs owing to weak public investment in contraceptive methods; and the greater economic responsibility placed on women for reproductive issues (ECLAC, 2016a). The situation of the region's Afrodescendent women vis-à-vis these priority challenges needs to be analysed, in order to understand how ethnicity and race impacts on their physical autonomy and sexual and reproductive health.

1. Sexual and reproductive health

According to the Afro-Colombian intellectual Mara Viveros Vigoya, the inclusion of ethnicity and “race” in the context of sexual and reproductive health may be traced to the feminist charge of social inequalities between the countries of the North and the South, whereby women in the countries of the South, subject to ethno-racial categorizations, had greater difficulties in accessing reproductive health services and reliable information on contraceptive methods (Viveros and Gil, 2006).

Box 3

Traditional Afrodescendent medicine: its role in Afrodescendent women's health and challenges for its recognition and inclusion in public policies

In many Afrodescendent communities, women play a key role in health as principal guardians of knowledge of traditional and ancestral medicine (Lozano, 2011).

In Colombia, for example, in many of the regions where the Afrodescendent population is concentrated, the first line of health care are “bone-setters, snakebite healers, curers of the evil eye, traditional herbalists and midwives” as the main players on the health-care scene (Rodríguez, Alfonso and Cavelier, 2009). In turn, in Peru, in some Afro-Peruvian communities, midwives continue to be the main players during pregnancy, childbirth and the puerperium, with a role that is exclusive or parallel to that in Western medicine (Carrillo, 2013).

Public policies cannot form bridges between the knowledge of local communities and that of Western medicine unless they recognize traditional health practices. Although there are local initiatives where, for example, work with midwives has been sponsored by State institutions, these institutions do not always take an inclusive approach to traditional practices, but are motivated instead simply to increase the rates of institutional care at childbirth (Rodríguez, Alfonso and Cavelier, 2009).

In order to respond to the demand for respect and incorporation into the national health system of traditional Afrodescendent medicine practices and knowledge, and to improve protocols in care provided by traditional medicine, it is essential to embrace a less Western-centric and more inclusive approach to traditional medicine as a life choice of the Afrodescendent population when working with midwives and other figures in traditional medicine (Rodríguez, Alfonso and Cavelier, 2009), promoting public policies that enable a two-way exchange between traditional and Western medicine (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2015).

It is also essential to acknowledge that culturally appropriate health care also means training and including community-based health professionals and authorities, which is one of the specific obligations undertaken by States that have ratified the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169) of ILO (article 25) and the Durban Programme of Action (paras. 110 and 133) (Rodríguez, Alfonso and Cavelier, 2009).

Box 3 (concluded)

Recognizing the specificities of the general health status and social welfare of black communities will contribute to progress in ensuring the right of Afrodescendent women to access to sexual, reproductive and ancestral health (CONAMUNE, 2015).

Source: B. Lozano, “Colombia: mujeres negras, sujeto social y cooperación internacional”, document presented at the Forum “Experiences of Afro-Colombian Women and International Cooperation in Colombia”, Bogotá, Spanish Agency for International Development Cooperation (AECID), 3 November 2011; C. Rodríguez, T. Alfonso and I. Cavelier, *Raza y derechos humanos en Colombia: Informe sobre discriminación racial y derechos de la población afrocolombiana*, Bogotá, University of Los Andes, 2009; National Coordinator of Black Women (CONAMUNE), *Agenda política de las mujeres afrodescendientes del territorio ancestral afroecuatoriano de las provincias de Imbabura y Carchi*, 2015; M. Viveros and F. Gil, “De las desigualdades sociales a las diferencias culturales: género, “raza” y etnicidad en la salud sexual y reproductiva en Colombia”, *Saberes, culturas y derechos sexuales en Colombia*, M. Viveros (ed.), Bogotá, Tercer Mundo Editores, 2006; M. Carrillo, M. (coord.), *Salud sexual y salud reproductiva en el pueblo afroperuano*, Lima, Center for Afro-Peruvian Studies and Promotion (LUNDU), 2013; Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, *Plataforma Política de Lideresas Afrodescendientes ante el Decenio Internacional de los Afrodescendientes*, Managua, 2015.

Viveros Vigoya argues that there are at least three direct links between sexual and reproductive health, ethnicity and “race”, which can be tracked relatively easily in Latin American history. The first refers to health status per se and the notable inequalities that may be identified in the quality-of-life indicators of the black and indigenous populations compared with the rest of the national population. The second refers to the relationship between the therapeutic knowledge of the different ethnic groups and the medicinal knowledge of European origin. The third has to do with the relationship that the medical institution maintains with ethnically categorized groups (Viveros and Gil, 2006).

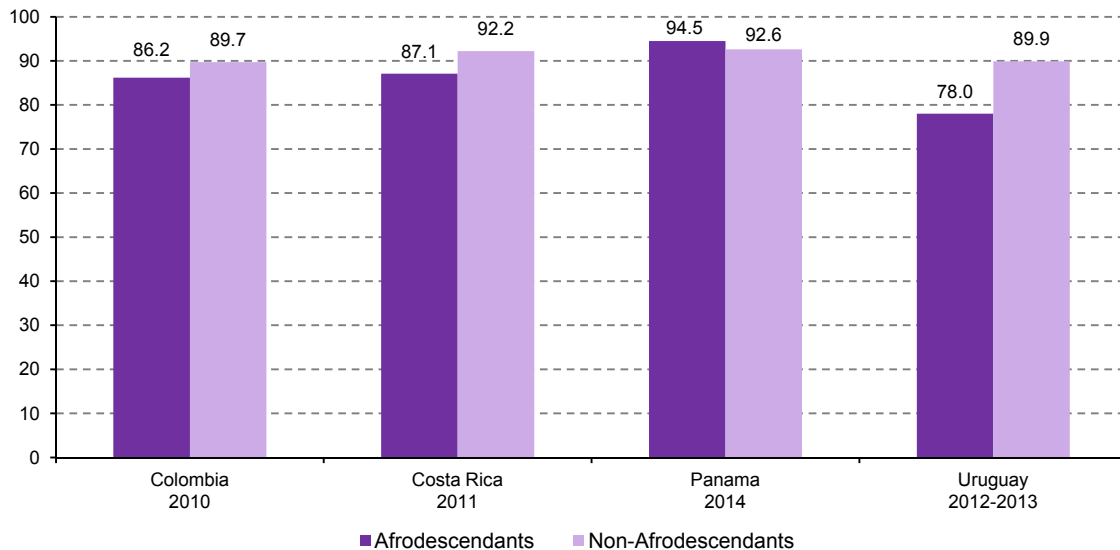
The first link underlined by Viveros Vigoya, the flagrant ethno-racial inequalities in health indicators, is the main subject of this section. In turn, the relationship between the medical institution and racialized groups, the third link she identifies, generally reflects a rationale of reproduction of racist stereotypes within the State institutional structure —institutional racism—, which will be discussed in more detail in chapter IV. Lastly, the recognition, appreciation and defence of the traditional medicine of Afrodescendent communities is a strategic objective of many documents produced by Afrodescendent women’s movements in the region. Accordingly, some discussion is merited by this topic, which is the second link identified by Viveros.

Although, as noted earlier, the only health care during pregnancy in some Afrodescendent communities may be provided by midwives or other authoritative figures in traditional medicine, access to antenatal care and childbirth with the assistance of a trained health care professional remains a challenge for the women of the region overall, regardless of ethnicity or race (ECLAC, 2016a).

Although fewer Afrodescendent women have had at least four antenatal check-ups than non-Afrodescendent women in three of the four countries with data available, the differences are not so pronounced (see figure 14). Nevertheless, particular operational definitions of this indicator can disguise larger differences. Data from Brazil, for example, show that almost three times as many mothers of Afrodescendent children had no antenatal check-ups at all, compared with mothers of non-Afrodescendent children (Paixão and others, 2011).

Maternal mortality is another issue of concern because of its high levels in the region and its prevalence among population groups where various types of discrimination intersect. In this regard, the maternal mortality rate is a true indicator of the inequities that plague women throughout their lives, determined by the level of development of the country, their area of residence, their socioeconomic level and their access to good-quality health services, given that most maternal deaths are preventable.

Figure 14
Latin America (4 countries): women who had at least four antenatal check-ups,
by ethnicity/race, latest year available
(Percentages)



Source: Multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS) for Costa Rica, Panama and Uruguay; National Population and Health Survey for Colombia.

Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown.

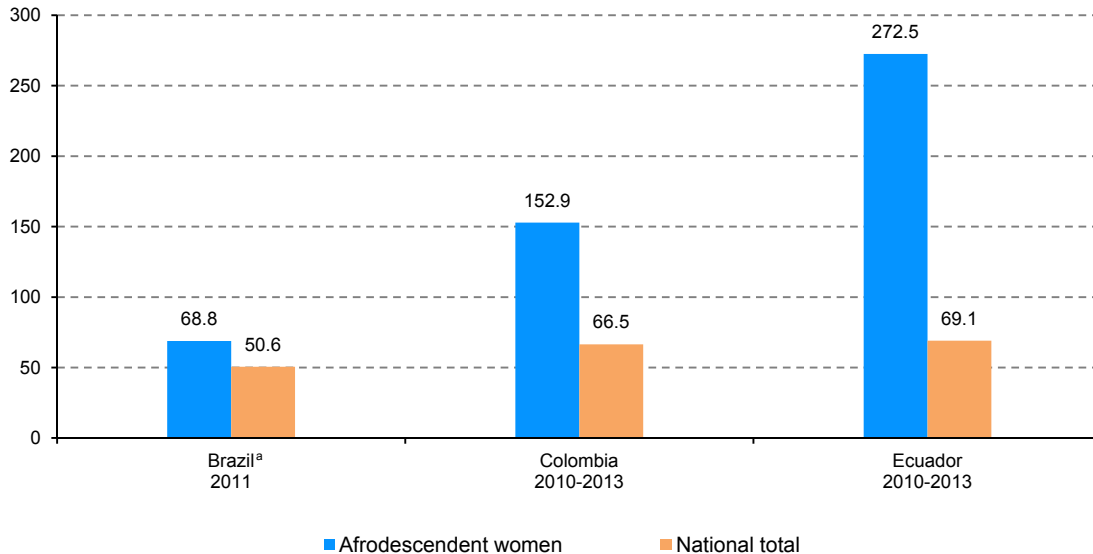
Although the maternal mortality rate has fallen in most of the Latin American and Caribbean countries over the past two decades, it remains fairly high among Afrodescendent women. Given that some of the region's countries, among them Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador, now include ethno-racial origin in birth and death records, flagrant inequalities in this regard to the detriment of Afrodescendent women are plain to see.

Ethno-racial inequality in maternal mortality is quite marked in Brazil, with Afrodescendent women showing rates almost 20 percentage points, or a multiple of 1.4, higher (see figure 15). At the same time, a study aimed at identifying maternal mortality rates in young Brazilian women taking the racial variable into account found that the rate among black women was almost double the rate for non-Afrodescendent women in the 20–24 age group: 44.5 per 100,000, compared with 23.4 per 100,000 (Paixão and others, 2011).

The cases of Colombia and Ecuador stand out for the huge gaps between the national figures and those for Afrodescendent women. In Colombia, the maternal mortality ratio for Afrodescendent women is 2.3 times the national rate, while in Ecuador it is almost four times higher (see figure 15).

As well as maternal mortality, another measurement that is highly relevant for women in the sphere of reproductive health is unmet need for family planning, which represents the proportion of the female population married or in a consensual union who do not wish to have more children or would prefer to delay their next child, but are not using any contraceptive method. Although the answer to family planning need may be access to and use of contraceptives, there are multiple reasons why women do not use them, including lack of information on the different methods or where to obtain them, lack of financial resources to buy them, fear of side effects, religious beliefs, and her partner's opposition, among others.

Figure 15
Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador: maternal mortality ratio by ethnicity/race, around 2011
(Number per 100,000 live births)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of the Ministry of Health of Brazil, National Administrative Department of Statistics (DANE) and National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC).

^aThe total refers to the white population, not the national total.

Constraints on the exercise of reproductive rights are closely linked to poverty and lower levels of formal education, all of which leaves Afrodescendent women at a disadvantage in terms of participating in the labour market on an equal footing. As a result, for example, the Declaration of the Fifth National Congress of Afro-Ecuadorian Women affirms that access to health and contraceptives and sexual and reproductive health issues are still barriers that affect them (CONAMUNE, 2015).

A specialized study on the Afro-Peruvian population (Benavides and others, 2015) reports that just over half (55.3%) of Afrodescendent female heads of household or partners used contraceptives to avoid pregnancy.

In the Dominican Republic, where 80% of the population is of African descent (United Nations, 2007), unmet need for family planning measured by the National Multipurpose Household Survey (ENHOGAR) of 2013 was 11.4% among women aged 15–49 years who were married or in a union. In other words, at least 1 in 10 women of childbearing age wishing to delay or limit the number of children was not using any method of contraception (ONE, 2015). For this same population group, the Demographic and Health Survey (ENDESA) of 2013 placed unmet need for family planning at 8.5% in the same period (CESDEM, 2014). Although the results of the two surveys do not match, which makes the analysis of the indicators more complex, they do form a basis for analysis of the situation of Afrodescendent women in the country.

In Brazil, too, racial inequalities are reflected in the use of contraceptive methods. Among white women, use of modern contraceptive methods stood at 26% in 1996, and showed a significant jump, to 51.6%, by 2006. Among Afrodescendent women, the figure rose from 19.1% to 45.2% over the same period. Despite the improvement, the percentage point difference between the two groups remained (Paixão and others, 2011).

The methods most used by women in different racial groups also enable some conclusions on racial inequalities in Brazil. In 2006, among white women aged 15–49, the main method was the pill (30.5%), followed by sterilization (21.7%) and condoms (15.5%). Among black women in the same

age group, the main methods were sterilization (29.7%), the pill (23.2%) and condoms (16%), suggesting that black women tend to be directed towards the most radical forms of birth control (Paixão and others, 2011).

Box 4

Brazil: access to health care, sexual and reproductive health and racial inequalities

The Brazilian publication *Relatório Anual das Desigualdades Raciais no Brasil; 2009-2010: Constituição Cidadã, seguridade social e seus efeitos sobre as assimetrias de cor ou raça* presents a series of data produced from various sources, such as administrative records, the National Household Survey 2008 and the National Demographic and Health Survey 2006, which indicate the asymmetries existing between different racial groups as regards access to health care, and to sexual and reproductive health care.

Despite the universalization of health care services in Brazil, some indicators reflect difficulties in fully achieving this at an operational level and point to ethno-racial biases in the system's rates of coverage. Persons of African descent, especially black men, are more exposed to failures of coverage of the health system: in 2008, 26.9% of black men and 23.7% of black women had no health coverage. The figures for white women and white men were around 14.9% and 13.3%, respectively, that same year. In other words, the system failed to ensure effective coverage for 26.9% of black men and 23.7% of black women—or the equivalent of one in four.

Racial inequalities are also very evident in private health care. While 34.9% of the white population had a private health insurance scheme in 2008, less than half that percentage of the Afrodescendent population did, at 17.1%. When the gender marker is introduced, it is seen that 33.6% of white men had private health insurance, compared with 16.8% of black men. Among women, 36% of white women had private health insurance, compared with 17.5% of black women.

With regard to women's sexual and reproductive health, the National Household Survey 2008 reported that 40.9% of black women over the age of 40 had never had a mammogram, compared with 26.4% of white women the same age. Among women aged 25 or over, 18.1% of blacks had never had a Pap smear, the test used to detect the human papilloma virus (HPV), compared with 13.2% of whites.

Fertility trends also show marked differences between white and Afrodescendent women. In 2008, the total fertility rate for black women was 2.13 children per woman, compared with 1.62 for white women. Examination of this indicator by age group shows that 17.2% of the total fertility rate of black women corresponded to the 15–19 age group, compared with 13.7% for white women. This reveals a higher relative proportion of Afrodescendants than whites among adolescent mothers, in the total universe of liveborn children.

Source: M. Paixão and others, *Relatório Anual das Desigualdades Raciais no Brasil; 2009-2010: Constituição Cidadã, seguridade social e seus efeitos sobre as assimetrias de cor ou raça*, Rio de Janeiro, Garamond Universitaria, 2011.

One of the greatest obstacles to women's autonomy early in their life cycle is adolescent motherhood, which is even more worrying in the case of young women of African descent, who experience repeated processes of hypersexualization of their bodies at an early age.

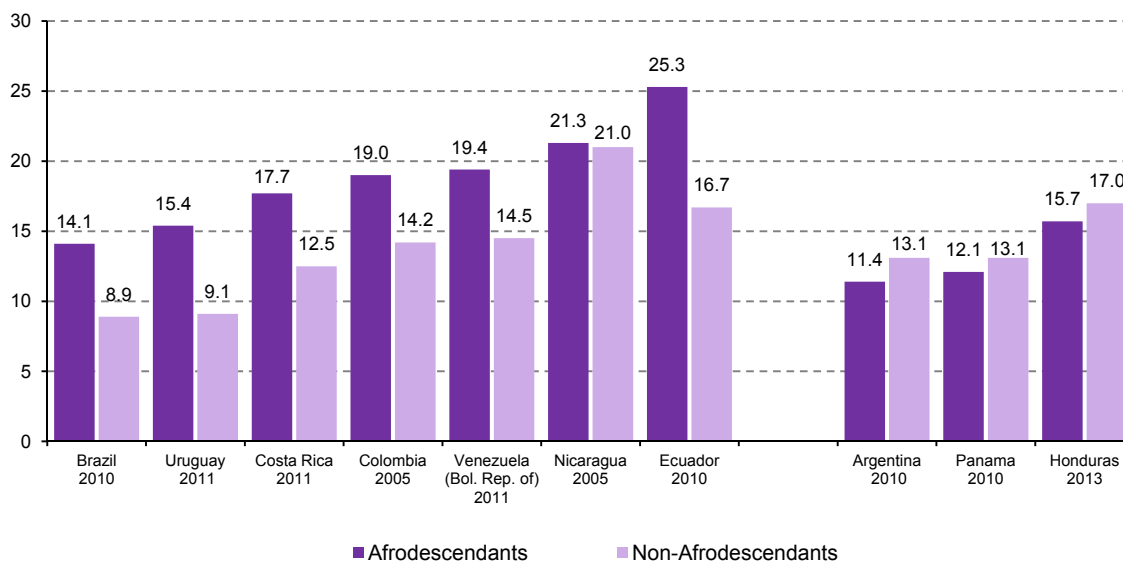
Figure 16 shows that the percentage of Afrodescendent girls aged between 15 and 19 with children remains high and, in general, exceeds the percentage among non-Afrodescendants the same age. In 10 countries with data available, between 14% and 25% of Afrodescendent adolescents have at least one child and, in 8 of these countries, adolescent maternity is higher among Afrodescendants than non-Afrodescendants.

In Ecuador, which has the highest rates of motherhood among young Afrodescendent women, a quarter of this age group are mothers. Ecuador also has the largest gap between women of ethno-racial groups, of around 8.6 percentage points to the detriment of Afrodescendants, followed by Uruguay, with 6.3 percentage points. The cases of Colombia and Nicaragua are also striking, since in these countries a fifth of Afrodescendent girls aged 15–19 are mothers.

Adolescent pregnancy is, in reality, a complex phenomenon which is aggravated by the intersection between race and other factors, such as socioeconomic status and level of schooling. A study on Afrodescendent youth in Latin America (Rangel and Del Popolo, 2011), based on data from the 2000 census round, shows the interrelations between level of education and adolescent fertility.

The study found that maternity ranged from 5% to 11% among Afrodescendent girls with higher levels of education, to between 21% and 37% among the least educated. The differences were broadly similar in all the countries analysed. In four of the nine countries included in the study (Ecuador, Colombia, Costa Rica and Nicaragua), Afrodescendent girls with less than five years of schooling were the group with the highest rates of early maternity, which backs up the arguments regarding the intersection of inequities (Rangel and Del Popolo, 2011).

Figure 16
Latin America (10 countries): adolescents aged 15–19 years who are mothers,
by ethnicity/race, latest year available
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2016* (LC/PUB.2017/12-P), Santiago, 2017.

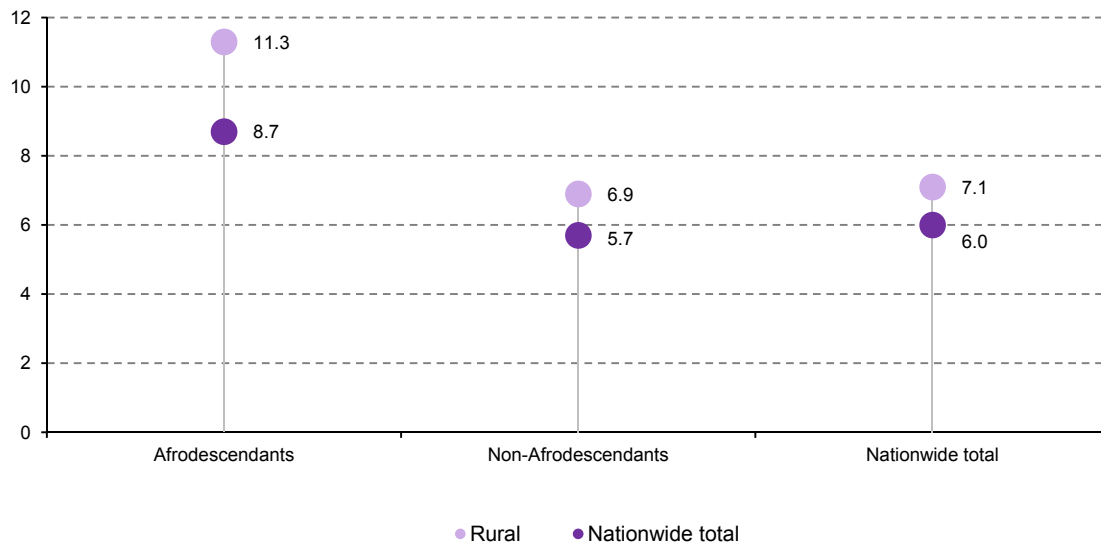
Note: Does not include the indigenous population or cases in which ethnicity/race is unknown.

In Uruguay, the data on adolescent pregnancy confirm the trend signalled by the joint study by the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and ECLAC (Rangel and Del Popolo, 2011), which observed that Afrodescendent girls are more exposed to early pregnancy than non-Afrodescendent girls, with a difference of three percentage points. Area of residence also plays an important role in higher pregnancy rates at early ages. When this factor is crossed with ethnicity or race, young Afrodescendent women in rural areas show the country's highest rates of adolescent pregnancy (see figure 17).

As noted in *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2016*, “weak government responses in combating violence, the near total absence of sex education programmes in health services that include the ethno-racial dimension, and the deterioration of public services in areas that have larger Afrodescendent concentrations, are some of the critical factors that wreak havoc on the lives of women, girls, adolescents and young people” in this population group (ECLAC, 2017b).

Although the data are scarce, they consistently show the inequities that characterize the life cycle of Afrodescendent women and how this hinders the construction of their physical autonomy and the full exercise of their rights. The progress, hurdles and setbacks in sexual and reproductive health care call for a regional and national focus on the mechanisms used to control women's sexuality and how these operate, and on the simple fact that they represent a form of violence perpetuated throughout all stages of a woman's life (ECLAC, 2016a, p. 237).

Figure 17
Uruguay: girls aged 12–19 years who have liveborn children, by ethnicity/race, 2011
(Percentages)



Source: National Women's Institute (INMUJERES), *Estadísticas de género 2016: "Análisis de las desigualdades de género y su incidencia en la pobreza"*, Montevideo, 2016.

C. Violence against Afrodescendent women: an expression of patriarchy and racism

Increasingly, Latin America and the Caribbean has been able to arrive at social consensus based on the idea that acts of violence against women are a violation of their human rights and a cruelty that manifests gender discrimination and unequal power relations between men and women. The issue has become a public concern and, in this regard, has pushed States to sign commitments to ensure the conditions for a life free of violence. Among the multiple international agreements to which States have committed over the past few decades, the Inter-American Convention on the Prevention, Punishment and Eradication of Violence against Women (Convention of Belém do Pará) stands out at the regional level.

Recognizing that misogynistically and racially motivated violence exposes Afrodescendent women to greater levels of vulnerability, in the Plan of Action for the Decade for Persons of African Descent in the Americas (2016–2025), the Organization of American States (OAS) endorsed the inclusion of the Afrodescendent approach in the agenda of the Follow-up Mechanism to the Belém do Pará Convention (MESECVI) and urged States to do likewise in their regular reports to MESECVI (OAS, 2016).

Gender-based violence thrives amid stereotypes that belittle and dehumanize women of African descent. Unless the expressions of violence —be they psychological, physical, sexual, institutional or of any other sort— that occur in the context of racist and patriarchal societies are addressed through policies of prevention, care and reparation, women, especially Afrodescendent women, cannot be assured of being able to fully exercise the autonomy to which they are entitled by fundamental human rights.

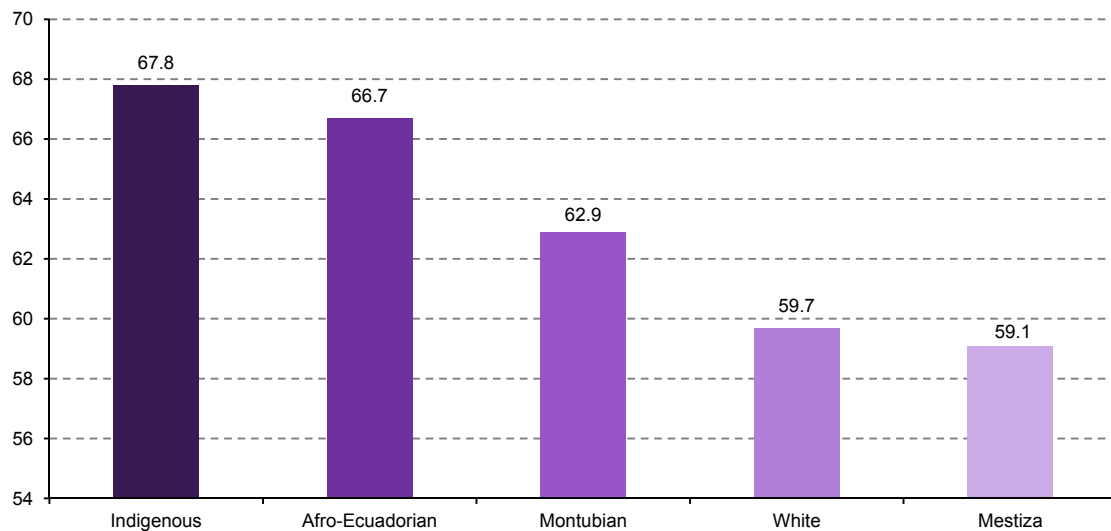
This issue continues to be critical, because it makes the mere fact of being born a woman into a risk factor in the countries of the region where the number of victims is becoming increasingly

evident and is even rising in some countries. This despite all the investments of financial resources in campaigns, capacity-building, training, awareness-raising, training of judges, lawyers, social workers and many others. Although the region has made progress in its legal and judicial structures for ensuring a life free of violence for all women, it has not been able to put an end to the tragic phenomenon of violence in all its forms.

Violence against women has profound social implications, even when it does not reach the extreme of causing loss of life. Ethnicity and race is known to be a factor making women more vulnerable to violence, which exacerbates its dramatic impact.

Data from Ecuador demonstrate that indigenous and Afro-Ecuadorian women have been the most frequent victims of violence, with a significant difference with respect to white or *mestiza* women.

Figure 18
Ecuador: women who have experienced some type of gender-based violence,
by ethno-racial self-identification, 2011
(Percentages)



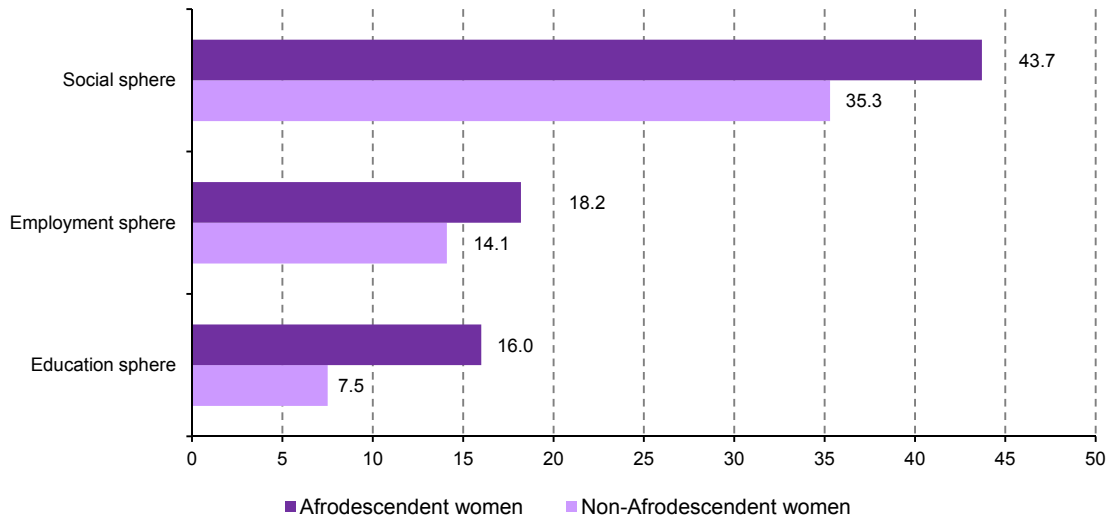
Source: National Institute of Statistics and Censuses (INEC), "Encuesta Nacional de Relaciones Familiares y Violencia de Género contra las Mujeres", Quito, 2012 [online] http://www.ecuadorencifras.gob.ec/documentos/web-inec/Estadisticas_Sociales/sitio_violencia/presentacion.pdf.

Data from a study exploring factors associated with violence against Afrodescendent, black, Raizal and Palenquera women in Colombia in 2012–2013, published by the country's Observatory on Gender Issues of the Presidential Advisory Council for Women's Equity, specify how violence significantly affects young Afrodescendent women (Colombia, Office of the President of the Republic, 2013). According to health sector records, between the second half of 2012 and the first half of 2013, the highest number of Afrodescendent females who were victims of violence were girls aged 10–14 years (17%) followed by young women aged 15–19 (13%). Those aged 20–24 years accounted for 15%, and those aged 25–29 years, 12%. Lastly, women aged 30–34 years accounted for 11%. These age groups thus represented 68% of all cases.

Another important finding of the study related to the type of violence suffered by young women of African descent: it was established that sexual violence affected them at an earlier age than other types of violence, accounting for 94% of cases of sexual violence identified by the health sector against young people up to the age of 24 (Colombia, Office of the President of the Republic, 2013).

In Uruguay, in 2013, gender-based violence suffered by Afrodescendent women in the different spheres in which it occurs was documented and classified. In all cases, non-Afrodescendent women were less frequently victims than black women, again throwing into stark relief the grave inequalities and discrimination that lie at the intersection of patriarchy and racism.

Figure 19
Uruguay: prevalence of gender-based violence occurring in the past 12 months,
by sphere, by ethnicity/race, 2013
(Percentages)



Source: National Women's Institute (INMUJERES), on the basis of National Institute of Statistics, Continuous Household Survey 2006, 2010 and 2014.

In 2013, for example, women of African descent suffered twice the levels of violence in the education sphere in Uruguay as other women. This draws attention to the reproduction of stereotypes and violence in a milieu that should be welcoming and supportive of individual personal development. This, naturally, has impacts on school attendance and completion rates among those most likely to suffer violence—in this case, Afrodescendent women.

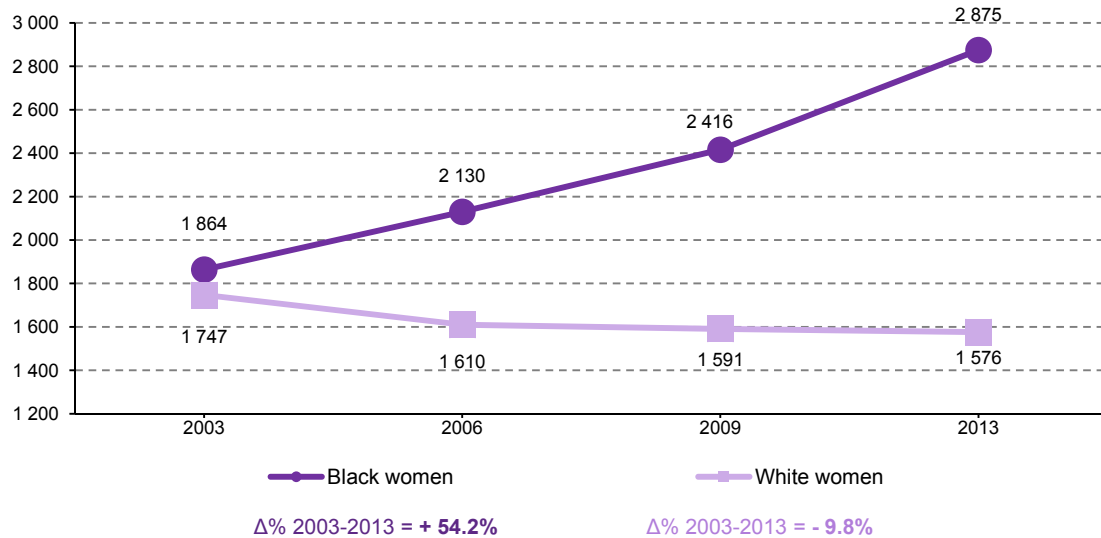
Femicide, the gravest and more deplorable act of violence against women, is not only an act of barbarity but one of the clearest symptoms of a historically unequal society (Monárrez, 2009). Femicide is a phenomenon that represents the culmination of a chain or continuum of combined forms of violence, ranging from insults, intimidation and threats to sexual harassment, domestic violence and rape, and finally the killing of a woman simply because of her gender. It is crucial to grasp the fact that femicide is not circumscribed to the act of murder itself, but encompasses a far more complex context that includes the social, political, cultural and economic background that fuels it (Monárrez, 2009).

In the case of Afrodescendent women, femicide takes on other nuances linked to racism and conditions of poverty and marginality. Intimate partner femicide—that is, the murder of a woman by her partner or former partner—has profound implications because of the rips it causes in the social fabric and the violent power relations it reveals within relationships that should be based on love and respect.

In this respect, data from the Office of the Attorney General of the Nation of Colombia show that, in over half the cases of femicide of Afrodescendent women on which information is available for 2012 and 2013, the aggressor was the victim's partner or former partner (Regional Feminist Articulation for Human Rights and Gender Justice, 2015).

In the case of Brazil, for example, although the official records do not yet reflect the total number of femicides committed since 2015 —when the country typified the crime as such in its criminal code— data on the total killings of women point to a cruel phenomenon, in which the intersection of patriarchy and racism is heavily implicated.

Figure 20
Brazil: killings of women, by race or colour, 2003–2013
(Absolute numbers)



Source: J. Waiselfisz, *Mapa da violência 2015: homicídio de mulheres no Brasil*, Brasília, Latin American Faculty of Social Sciences (FLACSO), 2015.

As figure 20 shows, while murders of white women fell by almost 10% between 2003 and 2013, the figure for black women rose by 54.2% over that same period.

Data from the Atlas of Violence (*Atlas da Violência*), published by the Institute of Applied Economic Research (IPEA), show that, for the same period, the rise in the total number of homicides of black persons in Brazil (men and women) was around 7.7% (IPEA, 2017b), a far smaller rise than the surge in killings of black women.

Examination of the period following the entry into effect of the Maria da Penha Law shows a large difference persisting between women of the two racial groups, which shows that gender violence does not affect groups of women in the same way and that government measures have differentiated impacts. Between 2007 and 2013, the figures were tragic: 17,818 killings of black women and 10,844 of white women —a difference of almost 7,000 cases. Killings of white women fell by 2.1% between 2006 and 2013, but killings of black women rose by 35% in the same period (Waiselfisz, 2015).

For comparison purposes, analysis of the murder rate per 100,000 women —thereby controlling for changes in the composition of the population over time— gives a more accurate picture than absolute figures. In Brazil, between 2003 and 2013 the homicide rate fell from 3.6 to 3.2 per 100,000 white women, but rose from 4.5 to 5.4 per 100,000 black women (Waiselfisz, 2015).

Although it is broadly recognized that violence is a multidimensional phenomenon and thus needs to be tackled in a multidisciplinary manner, the institutions responsible for addressing the issues do not always manage to come together to organize their work in an integrated manner. This makes it considerably more difficult for women to complete the critical road from complaint to punishment of

the aggressor, since the process is long, convoluted, costly and time-consuming —time during which they often suffer violence again. This situation is made all the more complex by the institutional racism that permeates the State institutional framework in the region, which further threatens the rights of Afrodescendent women.

This scourge in society should prompt States not only to legislate, but also to ensure that the information is being produced to support public policy design and execution with adequate resources to tackle it. Although women, and women of African descent in particular, are the ones directly affected, the phenomenon burdens the whole of society with the related socioeconomic costs.

From the figures presented, there can be no doubt of the absolute necessity of laws and plans to combat violence against women, constructed following an intersectional rationale and taking into account the diversity of women and situations to which they are exposed, and including intersectional strategies to prevent and tackle violence. The first comprehensive anti-violence laws in the region were passed more than a decade ago and the first domestic violence laws have been in place for over 20 years: it is time for an urgent appraisal of how these are working from an intersectional perspective, that is, how effective they are at protecting women in the various social groups, especially those groups in which the intersection of different axes of discrimination exposes them to worse rights violations.

Lastly, it is necessary to eradicate patriarchal, discriminatory and violent cultural patterns and to invest in preventing violence and combating gender and ethno-racial stereotypes, thereby shifting social, cultural and institutional perceptions and attitudes towards gender-based violence, with a particular emphasis on Afrodescendent women.

IV. Decision-making autonomy for Afrodescendent women

Women’s autonomy in the sphere of decision-making relates to their presence at the various levels of the powers of State and to their full participation in public life, in spheres of public policy participation, formulation and definition. It thus refers to their right to accede to positions of representation in public bodies, in the power structures of political parties and in civil society organizations. This sphere of women’s autonomy “must be considered from an intersectional perspective that recognizes women’s plural identities and affords insight into the difficulties that women—in their specificity and diversity—face in accessing decision-making posts.” (ECLAC, 2016a, p. 117).

To talk about the autonomy of women of African descent in this sphere requires acknowledging the prominent role they have historically played in the defence of the black and Afrodescendent population, as guardians of ancestral knowledge and practices and as political leaders alongside their communities throughout the colonial/slaver and Republican history of Latin America and the Caribbean. The political movements they forged ensured the survival of groups and communities for centuries and, moreover, preserved and renewed cultural, symbolic and religious practices that are fundamental for the reconstruction of the identity of the diaspora population of African descent (Santos, 2012).

In this regard, it must be borne in mind that the political actions and mobilization of women of African descent in the region has existed since the first enslaved African woman set foot in Latin American and Caribbean territory and rebelled against violence and the slave system. Afrodescendent women’s contemporary organizational processes carry with them the legacy of these insurgences and are thus imbued with that ancestral meaning and strength. It is crucial to shift the perspective towards these processes and acknowledge the power of the political thinking forged in organizations of Afrodescendent women and black feminists, in order to end the “noisy silence” that renders these women invisible as makers of their own destinies.

A contribution born out of black feminist thinking in the region that gives an insight into the political leadership of Afrodescendent women in the various spheres is the concept of “Iyalode”,²⁷ reclaimed from the Yoruba tradition by the Afro-Brazilian intellectual Jurema Werneck. Werneck

²⁷ The word “Iyalode” (from the Yoruba language, *Ìyálóde*) literally means “mother of public matters” (Awe, 2005). According to Oyèronké Oyèwùmí (2017), a Nigerian feminist, the prefix *ìyá* (mother) also means “mature woman”; accordingly, it is a sign of maturity, seniority and, thus, responsibility and social status.

argues that Iyalode was originally a feminist chieftaincy title given to the woman representing her gender in collective decision-making bodies in precolonial Yoruban cities (Werneck, 2010). Werneck points to the figure of the Iyalodes as evidence that female leadership and responsibility in important religious, cultural and political matters have an ancient history and long predate European history and colonialism in Africa (Werneck, 2005).

This example suggests that, for women, the erection of the European mercantile slaver regime meant a violent break with ancient patterns in the exercise of power, both at the personal bodily level and at the collective level, and in political aspects and their relation with the sacred domain (Werneck, 2005).

The diaspora likely brought a transformation in the intersubjective meaning of the Iyalodes figure, whose presence and contemporaneity are affirmed in the twenty-first century, according to Werneck, by corporal and oral narratives passed from mouth to mouth to attentive eyes and ears in the different spheres in which inherited tradition is renewed. In the case of Brazil, Werneck affirms that this phenomenon can be seen in any black community, where women in roles of leadership or collective responsibility take actions that claim a future for all subordinated groups through their struggle for better material living conditions and their individual behaviours aimed at affirming the relevance of the immaterial perspective to the present (Werneck, 2005). At the same time, the term Iyalodes has been appropriated by the Brazilian black women's social movement to refer to organizations and attributes of leadership and representation (Werneck, 2010, p. 7).

A. Community action, identity-based organization and impact on public policies

Although the presence of Afrodescendent women in institutional decision-making spheres is still too limited and does not reflect their demographic weight in societies, they have a historical track record of social and political participation in their territorial communities and identity-based organizations.

The Afro-Colombian intellectual Betty Ruth Lozano (2011) draws attention to the leadership that women of African descent have “always” played in their communities as midwives, singers and traditional doctors. Lozano argues that religion and medicine are two spheres in which black women have stood out. These are two of their indisputable leadership roles in the community.

In Ecuador, even before the establishment of the National Coordinator of Black Women (CONAMUNE) in 1999, groups of Afrodescendent women organized around *Pastoral Afro* were responsible for work aimed at promoting community health (IPEA, 2013), which supports the argument made by Lozano.

The community has a key place in the construction of Afrodescendent women's decision-making autonomy because, as they establish strong links between their individuality and the collective, they consolidate their relationship with their community of belonging and thus build leaderships from within that space. They stand out for their roles as social, community and political leaders, in the effort to obtain better living standards, decent access to health care, the construction of day-care centres and schools, and an end to political violence and many other demands that form part of the quests for collective well-being.

In a ruling on forced displacement handed down in 2013, in which the Constitutional Court of Colombia follows up on the protection of the right to life, integrity and personal safety of displaced women and women in organizations working for the displaced population, the Court corroborates the leading role played by women of African descent and their communities. In the record of those proceedings, document 098/13 certifies that these women lead and participate in organized processes to avoid the overexploitation of the environment, maintain and defend their ancestral territories, conserve traditional ways and customs, prevent their children from being recruited by illegal armed groups, and pursue small-scale agriculture and commerce for the sustenance of their families and communities (Constitutional Court of Colombia, 2013).

Box 5 Uruguay: the *Ufama al Sur* cooperative in Montevideo

The leadership of Afrodescendent women in the community sphere is not new but has been seen in many initiatives across Latin America and the Caribbean, in both the rural and urban domains.

In Montevideo, in 1996, women belonging to the *Mundo Afro* organization found that members of their community considered the issue of access to housing a priority, especially in the case of female-headed families, and accordingly set up the *Ufama al Sur* cooperative.

In 1998, *Mundo Afro* joined the *Ciudad y Región* organization and together they designed a work-based accommodation programme, within a common framework, of cooperatives of families with a certain degree of autonomy. They began to work on a project to convert an old, abandoned building of workshops into a complex of 36 dwellings, common areas, recreation yards and a rooftop garden for a group of Afro-Uruguayan female-headed or single-parent families.

The project scope also included the construction of a neighbourhood civic centre and sports facilities, demonstrating the initiative's commitment to forming areas and places for recreation and community life. This was the first such project among the Afrodescendent organizations in Montevideo and has been very important for their consolidation and social visibility.

After over a decade of work, the dwellings—which have been recycled using blocks made by the women themselves—were handed over in 2010, contributing to improving living standards of the Afro-Uruguayan population in Montevideo and revitalizing a significant neighbourhood for this group, since historically blacks and Afrodescendants had lived in the southern neighborhood where the initiative is located.

The project was selected for the 2005 Latin American and Caribbean Good Practices Transfer Competition of the Habitat Colombia Foundation. Financed with funds from the Ministry of Housing and the Departmental Government of Montevideo, it was the first project to have encompassed urban renewal, racial identity and gender.

Today similar arrangements are being promoted with a view to establishing a sustainable programme of access to housing for Afro-Uruguayans, as part of government affirmative action and symbolic reparation in the framework of the International Decade for People of African Descent proclaimed by the General Assembly of the United Nations for 2015–2024.

Source: Prepared by the authors, on the basis of H. Rodríguez, G. Muslera and C. de los Santos, "Logro personal y colectivo: sinergia y tenacidad impulsaron la concreción del proyecto Cooperativa UFAMA al Sur", Montevideo, 23 June 2010 [online] <http://archivo.presidencia.gub.uy/sci/noticias/2010/06/2010062308.htm>; World Habitat, "Cooperative UFAMA al SUR, Montevideo" [online] <https://www.bshf.org/es/premios-mundiales-del-habitat/ganadores-y-finalistas/cooperativa-ufama-al-sur-montevideo/>; Habitat Colombia Foundation, "Cooperativa Ufama al Sur", 2005 [online] http://americalatinagenera.org/newsite//images/649_cooperativaufamaalsur.pdf; Polytechnic University of Madrid, "Cooperativa Ufama al Sur (Montevideo, Uruguay)" [online] <http://habitat.aq.upm.es/dubai/06/bp0787.html>.

Especially since the 1980s, in the run-up to the Durban Review Conference, Afrodescendent movements took on a new character, and a scenario developed of strong political mobilization around ethnicity and race (Agudelo and Lemos, 2014), while innumerable black women's organizations emerged in different parts of the region.

The mobilization of these organizations in different countries led to the First Meeting of Afro-Latin American and Afro-Caribbean Women, which was held in the Dominican Republic in 1992 and convened activists from all over the region. Symbolically, this event was a major framework for these organizations at the regional level, since it produced two important decisions: the establishment of the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women and the proclamation of 25 July as International Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women's Day.²⁸

²⁸ As well as the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, which was formed in 1992, other transnational networks of Afrodescendent movements were set up in the region in this period, including the Continental Network of Afro-American Organizations, set up in 1994 in Uruguay, the Central American Black Organization (ONECA), established in 1995, and the Afroamérica XXI network, founded in 1996. The Afro-Latin American and Caribbean Strategic Alliance was created in 2000, during the preparations for the Durban Review Conference. A network of regional offices for the analysis and promotion of public policies on racial equality was also set up in 2004, as well as the Coalition of Latin American and Caribbean Cities against Racism, Discrimination and Xenophobia. The Regional Articulation of Afrodescendants in Latin America and the Caribbean (ARAAC) was formed in 2012 (Agudelo and Lemos, 2014).

The Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women presents itself as a space for the coordination and empowerment of Afrodescendent women to build democratic, equitable, fair, multicultural societies free of racism, racial discrimination, sexism and exclusion (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2015). It was created to join up efforts to combat gender and racial oppression by exposing the marginal conditions in which Afrodescendent women live in the region and to combat the stereotypes and prejudices they have historically faced, as well as to promote the participation of Afrodescendent women in all spheres of public life, especially in decision-making.

One of the priority tasks of the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women is to put pressure on States to construct public policies to change the situation of the grouping (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2015). In the international sphere, its strategy is to impact on global conferences convened by the United Nations, and it accordingly played a key role at the Fourth World Conference on Women, held in Beijing (1995), and at the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance, held in Durban (2001), at which its representatives were involved both in the respective preparatory processes and at the conferences themselves (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2012).

The Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women is also committed to the formation of new Afrodescendent leaders in the region, and today runs a programme on political formation and leadership for Afro-Ecuadorian women. The programme's main pillars, as well as political training, are impact and social management (Wetherborn, 2017).

One of the most prominent recent actions of women of African descent in the region was the Black Women's March Against Racism and Violence and in Favour of Living, which took place in Brazil on 18 November 2015 and convened over 50,000 black women (Santos, 2015). The demands of black women's movements were listed in the "Black Women's Charter" (2015) delivered by representatives of the movement at a meeting with the then President of Brazil, Dilma Rousseff, after the march (Geledés Black Women's Institute, 2015).²⁹

The theme of the decision-making autonomy of Afrodescendent women figures among the priorities of most black women's organizations in Latin America. At the end of 2016, the National Coordinator of Black Women (CONAMUNE) declared, at its Fifth Congress, that although Afro-Ecuadorian women have worked on their political empowerment, they still need more representation in elected positions (CONAMUNE, 2015).

The final agreements of the Afro-Bolivian Women's Gathering, held in late 2016 with over 100 women of African descent in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, draw attention to the need to work on generating political and leadership places at the national, departmental and municipal levels, strengthen the formation of female leaders and drive the inclusion and strengthening of Afro women in trade union organizations in their communities and their presence and participation in the next national elections (*Prensa Rural*, 2016; Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Office of the Ombudsman, 2016; *El Mundo*, 2016).

Political action by women of African descent, both in their respective countries and through the coordination of international networks, has been very important in denouncing the invisibility and marginalization imposed on them, even in political organizations to which they belong, such as the feminist movement, where historically white women's experience and voices have prevailed, and the

²⁹ The Black Women's Charter (2015) sets forth the political orientations of the group and was divided into 10 main themes: the right to life and liberty; the promotion of racial equality; the right to work, employment and the protection of female black workers in all activities; the right to land, territory and housing/right to the city; environmental justice, defence of the commons and the non-mercantilization of life; the right to social security (health, social welfare and social security); the right to education; the right to justice; the right to culture, information and community; and public safety.

black movement, where the male figure has prevailed. Thus, black women's movements emphasize the importance of recognizing the voices and experiences of the group, deconstructing stereotypical representations and breaking away from the idea of a "natural place" of subordination which is their fate in racist social structures (Gonzalez, 1979).

Afrodescendent women's organizations have made notable efforts to progress and impact on public policy proposals in the past decade. As well as specific organizations, and hand in hand with indigenous women's organizations and networks, progress has been made in the analysis of issues in national contexts and plans and agendas have been produced for impact on political and social action. For example, the Political Agenda of Indigenous and Afro-Honduran Women 2012–2013 —by means of a participatory process that encompassed the problems of indigenous and Afro-Honduran women, including Garifuna women and women of the English-speaking black peoples throughout the country— made proposals and established responsibilities for each of the public institutions by area of development, sector and level of government (DINAFROH/UN-Women/OHCHR, 2013).

Another notable initiative is the *Political agenda of Afrodescendent women in the ancestral Afro-Ecuadorian territory of Imbabura and Carchi provinces*. This agenda is a political tool created by the women living in these territories and a strategy for demanding effective respect for their rights. It arose as a result of the need to substantiate dialogues with public policy institutions in order to narrow gaps and lobby for equality with equity (CONAMUNE, 2015).

Guatemala's National Policy for the Promotion and Development of Women (PNPDIM) and Equity of Opportunities Plan (PEO) 2008–2023 make explicit mention in all pillars and objectives of "Mayan, Garifuna and Xinka women". They also include as an objective the promotion of measures to ensure autonomy for full participation and representation of Mayan, Garifuna and Xinka women in decision-making processes, in the various structures of the powers of State and in the formulation and evaluation of public policies, plans, programmes and projects (Presidential Secretariat for Women, 2009).

An important role was also played by the Centre for Afro-Costa Rican Women which, together with the Caribbean Project Association, pressured the State to include the ethnic self-identification variable in the national census of the 2000 round (Costa Rica, Office of the President of the Republic, 2015).

B. Presence in political power

Despite the progress made by Afrodescendent women through organizational processes in the past few decades and although they occupy significant places in civil society organizations, from where they have consolidated strong leaderships, they are still underrepresented in elected and appointed political positions, in the upper echelons of political parties, and in the executive, legislative and judicial spheres of the State at the national and subnational levels.

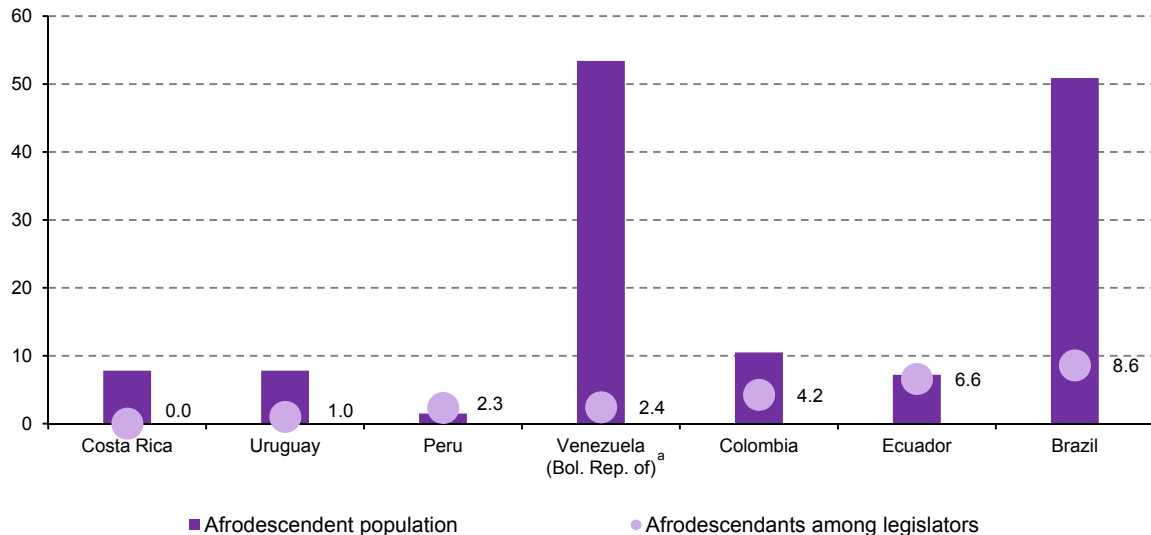
Data from seven Latin American countries show that the population of African descent is underrepresented in relation to its demographic weight in national parliaments in most cases, as shown in figure 21.

Brazil and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela are the countries that have the largest disparities between the population of African descent and its proportional representation in parliament.³⁰ In Brazil, where blacks represented 50.9% of the population in the 2010 census round,

³⁰ Mala Htun (2014) presents the data on the Afrodescendent population in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela including the population that self-identifies as "brown". Data from ECLAC (2017b), however, report the country's Afrodescendent population at around 3.4% according to the 2011 census, which contrasts heavily with the 53.4% given by Htun. Using the ECLAC data, the disparity between the proportion of Afrodescendants in the national population (3.4%) and in parliament (2.4%) is still notable but less sharp. Another nuance to this discussion, however, is that, as noted in chapter I, owing to the prevailing racial discrimination, Afrodescendants may not declare themselves as such, preferring to self-identify in intermediate categories, as is the case of the term brown (*moreno*).

only 8.6% of parliamentarians were black. Added to the non-existence of indigenous parliamentarians in the lower chamber of parliament in Brazil, it is clear that the upper echelons of politics continue to be a domain of white racial privilege.

Figure 21
Latin America (7 countries): afrodescendants in the national population
and in national parliaments (single or lower chambers), 2013
(Percentages)



Source: M. Htun, “Political inclusion and representation of afrodescendant women in Latin America”, *Representation: The Case of Women*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014.

^a The figure for the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela includes the population that self-identified as “brown” (*moreno*).

By contrast, in Ecuador blacks are represented in a more balanced manner in parliament: Afrodescendants represented 7.2% of the population in the 2010 census and around 6.6% of the National Assembly in 2013.

Costa Rica stands out for having no Afrodescendent member of parliament in 2013, when 8% of the population was Afrodescendent. Another notable case is Peru, where the proportion of Afrodescendants in parliament exceeded the proportion in the population at large (Htun, 2014).

For women, in particular those of African descent, the situation is even more critical owing to the intersection of racial and gender discrimination typical of Latin American societies and political systems. Looking at female participation in elected or appointed positions of political power, it is apparent that political parties are largely reluctant to cede space to members seeking to develop their political career at the highest levels (Johnson, 2006), and confine them to a marginal —almost invisible— role in the power structures within parties (Roza, Llanos and Garzón de la Roza, 2010). The fact that these women are in the lowest socioeconomic strata imposes a serious barrier to financing their campaigns, a determining factor for electoral success (Speck and Mancuso, 2012).

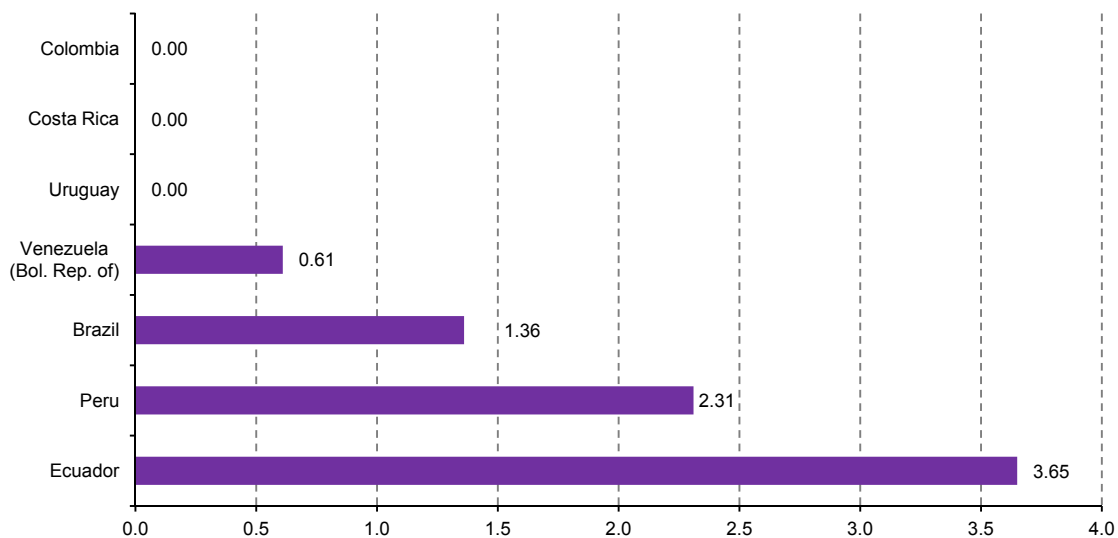
Most of the Latin American countries have organizational structures at the national level responsible for designing and implementing policies aimed at Afrodescendants, underpinned by legal instruments. However, many of these occupy a low position in the State hierarchy, which not only risks the endurance of protection for the rights of peoples of African descent, of the fight against racism and of the promotion of racial equality, but also restricts their capacity to influence and take action on public policies (Rangel, 2017). In this context, despite the progress seen in the region in the

past decade in establishing institutions responsible for coordinating policies for the Afrodescendent population, political participation has not been made a priority. Electoral reforms which have brought affirmative action for gender equality (quota or parity laws) lack articles referring specifically to Afrodescendent women. What is more, in the case of indigenous women, affirmative action occurs only in the electoral law of the Plurinational State of Bolivia (Benavente and Valdés, 2014).

The National Planning Department (DNP) of Colombia indicated, in a statement that could apply to all the Latin American countries, that political participation has been one of the main domains of exclusion for Colombian women and, even more so, for black and Afro-Colombian women, and the irrefutable value of their contribution and participation in the country's economic, political and cultural life is still not properly acknowledged (DNP, 2010).

In seven of the countries with the largest Afrodescendent population in Latin America, the limited presence of black women in parliaments reflects their exclusion from political parties and from coalitions, as well as the problems of recognition they face in these domains. The variations run from absolute absence in Colombia, Costa Rica and Uruguay to a maximum of 3.65% in Ecuador in the 2013 data (see figure 22), showing that Afrodescendent women are even more underrepresented than Afrodescendent men and non-Afrodescendent women (Palomares, 2013). The exception is Peru, where all (three) Afrodescendent parliamentarians in 2013 were women.

Figure 22
Latin America (7 countries): Afrodescendent women among legislators
in national parliaments (single or lower chambers), 2013
(Percentages)



Source: M. Htun, "Political inclusion and representation of afrodescendant women in Latin America", *Representation: The Case of Women*, Oxford, Oxford University Press, 2014.

In Ecuador, where women of African descent have the largest presence, proportionally speaking, in the national assembly, they numbered five of a universe of 137 legislators in 2013. In Peru, there were three Afro-Peruvian women of a total of 130 parliamentarians. In Brazil, where Afrodescendants represent around 25% of the population (IPEA, 2011), only 1.6% of legislators were black women in 2013. That year, parliament in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela had just one Afrodescendent woman.

These results reaffirm the importance of designing quota and parity policies from an intersectional perspective, because if they are applied in isolation from other affirmative action policies they reproduce the inequalities that mark the living conditions of Afrodescendent and non-Afrodescendent women. The black women's movement, as noted by Bloj (2013), has contributed to the parity debate the proposal of parity intercultural democracy, insisting on the impact of the ethno-racial variable for reducing the equality gap. It is understood that as long as quota systems fail to recognize racial inequality, the system will continue to reproduce racial exclusion. This requires Afrodescendent women to be included in the lists of political parties on the basis of the principle of parity intercultural democracy and through affirmative action in quota laws which also respect the principle of alternation (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2007).

This is consistent with the demands made in the Political Platform of Afrodescendent Leaders in the International Decade for People of African Descent, launched in March 2015. In this document, female Afrodescendent Leaders affirm the importance that Afrodescendent women be able to decide on their own futures in the political domain, and they therefore urge States to adopt all possible measures to promote access by Afrodescendent women to decision-making spheres and increase their participation in elected positions and in political power, at the national and local levels alike. They also emphasize that quota laws for increasing women's political participation must ensure the inclusion of Afrodescendent women and their presence in spheres of power and decision-making, as well as in mechanisms for participation in civil society bodies. Lastly, the Platform recognizes the key role that political parties play and calls upon them to include Afrodescendent women's demands, as well as strategies for implementing them, in their campaigns (Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, 2015).

The Black Women's Charter of Brazil, presented in the run-up to Black Awareness Day,³¹ also emphasizes the importance of fostering political participation of women of African descent in decision-making and in public bodies, ensuring parity and the material and symbolic conditions for their empowerment and strengthening. It also underlines the need to reform the country's political system, in order to build new parameters for Brazilian democracy, for the exercise of power, seeking the participation of groups excluded from decision-making and reorganizing forms of representation and expression of the interests of different groups, and the social oversight of the State (Geledés Black Women's Institute, 2015).

Their limited representation in national parliaments has not prevented Afrodescendants from building platforms from which to strengthen their political leadership, such as Meetings of Afrodescendent Parliamentarians and Political Leaders of the Americas and the Caribbean, of which the fifth was held in Costa Rica, in August 2016. According to the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, the organization responsible for the specific session on Afrodescendent women, almost 90 female Afrodescendent parliamentarians and leaders from 16 countries of the region have participated in panels on themes such as: political participation and parity; human rights, data and statistics, public policies and affirmative action; body, sexual rights, reproductive rights and affirmative action; among others (Wetherborn, 2016).

In their declaration, an outcome of that meeting, female parliamentarians and leaders affirmed that, as protagonists of their lives, their peoples and their countries and as depositories of ancestral strength, they renewed their commitment to fight for fair, egalitarian societies free of discrimination of any kind. The demands set forth are headed by the clamour for political participation and parity in the various spheres for the empowerment of women of African descent in the region (Association of Afro-Colombian Women and others, 2016).

³¹ Black Awareness Day is celebrated in Brazil every 20 November, which allegedly marks the death, in 1695, of Zumbi de los Palmares, the leader of one of the largest communities of blacks escaped from slavery recorded in the colonial history of Latin America, the *Quilombo dos Palmares*. The institution of this date was the result of the collective efforts of a group of activists in Brazil, who adopted it as their main symbolic date in 1978 (Pereira, 2013).

It is true that a significant number of women have reached ministerial rank in the executive powers of the region over the past decade. However, Afrodescendent women have little presence. A landmark was the investiture of Portia Simpson Miller —considered by Forbes magazine to be one of the world’s 100 most powerful women in 2006— as Prime Minister of Jamaica in 2006–2007 and 2012–2015. This is highly significant given that only another six black or Afrodescendent women were included in that list (Forbes, 2006).

Women’s presence in the highest ranks of the executive power in their countries has not necessarily brought changes in the exercise of power, nor has it greatly improved the conditions of access and participation by women in those spheres. This is because, as in the case of candidatures to elected positions, these have been conditioned by the will of the leaderships of political parties and by party financing, which rarely favour women.

The insufficient presence of Afrodescendent women is seen again at the local level. A study on the political participation of indigenous and Afrodescendent women in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Colombia and Ecuador (Bloj, 2013) identifies some advances in Afrodescendent female representation at the local level in these countries, but the progress is not linear and achievements made at particular times have been lost at others. The study also finds that, the forms of organization of Afrodescendent women tend to have a cultural imprint that has not been consolidated in decision-making spheres, largely as a result of the convergence of highly conservative communities and national realities marked by explicit or covert racist discourses and practices (Bloj, 2013).

In La Paz, capital of the Plurinational State of Bolivia, the study found, at the time (2013), one mayor, one local councillor and one national parliamentarian who were women of African descent. In the case of Colombia, the study reported that of the more than 1,100 municipalities, only nine black female mayors had been elected in the latest round of elections and that, in the departmental assemblies of the country’s 32 administrative departments, there were only seven Afro deputies. In Ecuador, it reported at least three Afrodescendent women serving as councillors in the Province of Esmeraldas: two in Rioverde and one in San Lorenzo. No Afrodescendent women were found in local power in Guatemala, while exclusion, poverty and invisibilization were named as key factors in the scant growth in representation of Garifuna women in power (Bloj, 2013).

An important finding of the study was that not all black women who reach public office recognize themselves as Afrodescendent or self-identify as such (although by their physical traits they appear such); this is a phenomenon pointed out by the black women’s movement, insofar as the few representatives there are do not always have an awareness of the issues or, put another way, are not committed to the human rights and collective demands of Afrodescendent women (Bloj, 2013).

Lastly, it must be emphasized that until the cruel phenomenon of political violence is recognized and eradicated, there will be no possibility of ensuring the full participation of women, especially Afrodescendent women, in national decision-making. When women who have historically been subjugated in subordinate positions dare to leave this “natural place” (Gonzalez, 1979) and dispute political power with non-subordinate groups, reprisals and attempts to halt social progress are all too common.

The report by the National Planning Department (DNP) of Colombia states that persecution and threats towards Afro-Colombian women participating in organized processes are not uncommon and refers to a survey conducted by the National Association of Displaced Afro-Colombians (AFRODES) in 2007 among a sample of women, which found that 27.1% reported having reduced their involvement in organized processes after receiving threats (DNP, 2010).

C. Between institutional racism and the institutionalization of racial and gender equality policies

Bento (1992) noted that, from a macro perspective, racism and gender oppression are systems of structural inequalities built over historical processes, created and recreated through routine practices. These systems reproduce social relations between people and organized groups as if they were regulated and institutionalized practices.

Years later, the same author indicated that focusing on institutional racism refers us to the nature of institutions and the fact that their purpose is to define a mode of regulation, maintain a status quo, make it last and ensure its transmission. This conservative trait of institutions holds back efforts to democratize their structures through pro-equality policies (Bento, Silveira and Gibran, 2014).

Bento argues that the uniform and homogenous profile of those occupying positions of power and prestige in institutions—in the majority white males—point to more than narcissism: they reveal the prevalence of a perspective and world view of a group which makes itself the object of all institutional investments. Everything is to be “for him”, “by him” and “according to him” and the entry of other social stakeholders, which could change perspectives, operations and daily practices, is interpreted as threatening. It is thus necessary to focus on the power relations and explain, in this context, the different ways in which whiteness and maleness manifest in the daily work of these institutions and what they uphold and perpetuate (Bento, Silveira and Gibran, 2014).

The term “institutional racism” refers to institutional structures that mark out, quite unmistakably, the spaces and privileges of whites and blacks, going beyond the limited spheres of the individual. Through State structures, daily racism becomes cross-cutting and acts systemically to maintain and perpetuate privileges and hegemonies (Morales, 2013).

Frankenberg (1995) signals that whiteness is a world view characterized by a set of cultural practices that are normally not marked or named. It is thus always hidden but acts forcefully, defining unequal living conditions for different population groups. However, this is not limited to objective living conditions. Subjectively, whiteness, as an ideological process, is evidenced in the way in which non-whites are represented and in the places where the social imaginary places them, creating conditions for permanent violence against them. It also manifests in the way in which white and non-white subjects see each other and everyone else.

This objectivity and subjectivity marks and delimits ethno-racial identity and the sense of belonging of the Afrodescendent population. And this ethno-racial identity, forged through a relational process of oppression, becomes a political and cultural hotbed which is also the starting point for different forms of resistance that mark the history of the Afrodescendent population in Latin America and the Caribbean.

As noted, Afrodescendent women, despite institutional racism and the resulting inequalities in access to institutional decision-making spheres, maintain an important presence in various organizations and networks, from which they fight to be seen and gain presence, voice and vote on an equal footing. This is reflected in their presentation of proposals in various regional meetings, in the Regional Gender Agenda and in the definition of public policies in the context of the discussions surrounding the 2030 Agenda. In all these instances, they recognize that their autonomy needs to be strengthened, beyond the individual, by a collective recognition of their rights, which must be expressed in public policies, laws and standards that ensure the redistribution of power, recognition of their status as rights-bearers and representation in decision-making spheres.

In the past few decades, the struggle of the social movements, in particular Afrodescendent movements, has driven the generation of State institutions with public budgets to promote racial equality in 14 Latin American countries,³² a significant number and an indicator of the subject's greater weight on the region's public agenda (ECLAC, 2017b; Rangel, 2017). The varying political

³² Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

strength of the various social groups to impact on the construction of these entities, depending on the dynamics within each country, has resulted in very uneven development of legal frameworks and public policies with an ethno-racial perspective (Antón, 2010). The functions these institutions perform depend on their size and scope, which are very heterogeneous at the regional level. Some of them have less staff and budget than others and, as a result, perform more limited functions. The key function is the formulation and implementation of policies to mainstream the racial dimension in public policies, although some of them also carry out research, provide free legal advice to victims of racism, advise legal bodies, promote the inclusion of the issue in educational materials for schools, promote culture, and so on (ECLAC, 2017b).

However, in some cases, mechanisms for promoting racial equality are almost symbolic in nature. Sometimes they have no official function and, where they do, they are not effective social authorities and do not have the minimum conditions to play a coordinating or influential role in policymaking (Rangel, 2017).

Something that is graver still is that some of these entities do not have Afrodescendent women at the senior level (Bento, Silveira and Gibran, 2014), which calls into question their legitimacy since, as affirmed by Nancy Fraser (2008), there can be no redistribution or recognition without representation. In this regard the maxim used by Rosa Soares (2005) in a study on the work of Boaventura de Sousa Santos —“nothing about us without us”— could not be more relevant.

It is tremendously important to emphasize the need for Afrodescendent women in State institutions and high power structures, not only out of a commitment to the principles of justice, equality and representation, but also because their presence there is the one factor that can make institutions more sensitive to the intersections of gender and race or ethnicity in the design and implementation of public policies and ensure that policies will be more suited to the needs and proposals of Afrodescendent women. That is, public policies conceived from an intersectional perspective must not only be directed at Afrodescendent women, but must treat them as central agents, with power in their design and implementation.

In Brazil, the National Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality (SEPPPIR) and the National Secretariat of Policies for Women (SPM) were established in 2003. Both have ministerial rank and responsibility for mainstreaming the gender and race perspectives in government action. These institutions represented a framework in the consolidation of public policies aimed at the Afrodescendent population and at women. Between 2003 and 2016, SEPPPIR and SPM undertook a series of important joint initiatives. One of these was the Programme for Gender and Racial Equity, which firms and public and private institutions and firms could join voluntarily. Institutions which achieved 70% of agreed action plans received a pro-equity seal.³³ Another example of institutional confluence between gender and race issues in which SEPPPIR and SPM played a fundamental role was the holding of national conferences on policies for women and for promotion of racial equality, and the adoption of the respective national policy plans at these conferences.

Today, these bodies have been closed or have become more fragile and many of their achievements in human rights relating to gender and Afrodescendent and indigenous populations are being eroded.³⁴

³³ In its fifth edition, the programme had 88 firms and organizations registered, covering almost 1 million workers, including contractors, interns and young apprentices. Of these 88 firms, 68 were awarded the pro-equity seal.

³⁴ The National Secretariat for Policies to Promote Racial Equality (SEPPPIR) was created 2003 with ministerial rank and reporting directly to the Office of the President of the Republic. In 2008, the Secretariat obtained full ministerial status, which lasted until October 2015, when it was absorbed, as a secretariat, into the newly established Ministry of Women, Racial Equality and Human Rights. Between 2015 and 2017, SEPPPIR was part of two newly created ministries which were then dissolved. Today, it reports to the Ministry of Human Rights. So many institutional changes in such a short period, as well as the related budget cuts, are worrying signs that could compromise the consolidation and progress of the important work carried out by SEPPPIR between 2003 and 2015, in terms of the formulation and implementation of public policies to combat racism and promote racial equality in different areas. These include several in the areas of health, education, employment and work, poverty reduction, promotion of family agriculture and agrarian reform, recognition and titling of *Quilombola* lands, and research and establishment of systems of indicators (Rangel, 2017).

Colombia has two institutions for coordinating policies for Afrodescendent populations today: the Directorate of Affairs for Black, Afro-Colombian, Raizal and Palenquera Communities (DACN), created in 1993 and reporting to the Ministry of Home Affairs, and the Directorate of Population, established in 2008 and reporting to the Ministry of Culture. The latter directorate also works for other population groups, such as indigenous peoples, persons with disabilities, victims of armed conflict, at-risk youth, early childhood and other interest groups (Rangel, 2016).

At the same time, the country's gender institutions have reaffirmed their commitment to Afrodescendent women. An example of this is the *Guidelines for national public policy on gender equity for women (High Presidential Council for Gender Equity, 2012)*, which set as a specific objective to ensure a differential approach to rights in policies and in the action of the national government at the sectoral and territorial level, in order to achieve the recognition of women's differences and diversities, particularly Afro-Colombian, black, Palenquera, Raizal, indigenous, campesina and Rom women, as well as the recognition of the intersection of multiple forms of discrimination and the disproportionate effects of certain practices and social issues on women.

In Peru, the intersectional perspective has been used in the Law on Equal Opportunities between Men and Women, instituted in 2007. Article 6 of the law commits to promoting the economic, social and political participation of rural, indigenous, Amazonian and Afro-Peruvian women, as well as their integration into decision-making spaces in community, organizations, associations and industrial organizations, among others, ensuring their access to fair pay, indemnities and labour and social security benefits, according to the law, on an equal footing with men (Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations, 2014).

Peru also created the Department of Policies for the Afro-Peruvian Population in 2010. This Department reports to the Vice Ministry of Interculturality, which is part of the Ministry of Culture (Rangel, 2016). It is responsible for designing and implementing policies, plans and programmes to protect and promote the rights and development of the Afro-Peruvian population, ensuring its development with identity in a framework of equality of rights, and for generating mechanisms to disseminate and draw attention the contribution of the Afro-Peruvian population to national history and development, from an intercultural perspective, with a main emphasis on the role of women and girls (Ministry of Culture, 2016). The National Development Plan for the Afro-Peruvian Population 2016–2020 is the public policy instrument aimed at lifting the Afrodescendent population from the poverty and invisibility in which it is submerged with respect to the rest of the population, with sights set on 2020.

Uruguay created racial equality mechanisms in 2005, which operate as specific secretariats responsible for matters relating to Afrodescendent persons in sectoral ministries, in order to promote and strengthen their access to social programmes and services. These mechanisms currently operate in the Departmental Government of Montevideo, the Ministry of Education and Culture and the Ministry of Foreign Affairs. In particular, the Department of Afrodescendent Women was established within the National Women's Institute (INMUJERES), reporting to the Ministry of Social Development. The Department's purpose is to promote plans, policies and programmes to ensure the full exercise of citizenship by the Afrodescendent population in general and Afrodescendent women in particular (INMUJERES, 2016).

The progress seen in the past few decades in the region, although worthy of recognition and commendation, is still insufficient, given the general exclusion that marks the lives of Afrodescendent women in the region. Institutions mandated to tackle ethno-racial and gender-based discrimination, combat inequalities and promote equality can only be effective in their role if they move beyond symbolic policies and take effective, evidence-based action and are endowed with adequate budgets and staff to carry it out.

Lastly, the countries of the region must link these institutions' specific policies with national development plans and gender equality plans and elevate them to strategic priorities, in order to achieve women's autonomy and ensure the rights of women in all their diversity, and Afrodescendent women in particular.

V. Final remarks

The failure of most of the Latin American States, for years, to consider the issues of Afrodescendants is unjustifiable in a region that is historically and structurally marked by profound ethno-racial inequalities. The precarious living conditions to which Afrodescendent groups have been subjected since the abolition of slavery in the various countries demonstrate that formal equality before the law did not bring an end to racism and discrimination.

In this regard, a fundamental step towards structural change in the matrix of social inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean is to put an end to the denial of the existence and persistence of racism and the idea that we live in inclusive democracies. States and societies must assume the weight of the historical legacy of colonization and centuries of slavery, recognizing that the systems of social hierarchization that these engendered continue to gain strength and negatively impact the lives of a population group that numbers at least 130 million in the region. Without such a transformation, there can be no progress towards societies free of discrimination, capable of developing public policies to impact on the reparation of the enormous debts of equality owed to populations of African descent.

The current situation of Afrodescendent women in the region reveals that, despite the progress seen in the past decade, their living conditions still show deep inequalities with respect to other social groups. They are rendered invisible as differentiated policy subjects, they suffer poverty at higher levels than the rest of the population, they are underrepresented or absent in decision-making and they are more likely to experience the breach of their individual and community right to live a life free of violence.

As argued in this document, the absence of persons of African descent in the countries' official statistics reinforces racism, insofar as this population is not made visible to society overall. Lack of awareness of their specific issues entrenches the subordination and hinders the formulation of pro-equality policies to change their living conditions and those of their communities. The development of statistical information of adequate quantity and quality on Afrodescendent persons, disaggregated by sex, is an essential task in each of the countries of the region to break the "noisy silence" referred to by Lélia Gonzalez (1987) with regard to ethno-racial inequalities.

The right to information forms part of the battery of human rights standards. The production of information and the right to egalitarian and non-discriminatory access would ensure the recognition of a group which has historically contributed to the economic, social, political, intellectual and cultural development of the region. Removing this population, especially women, from invisibility is fundamental to improve knowledge of the Latin American social reality in order to formulate and

implement better policies to progress towards closing ethno-racial and gender-based gaps. Statistics should serve as a tool to promote rights. Failure to produce statistics on the pretext that persons of African descent are a minority of the population is not valid from a human rights perspective.

The production of statistical information is also useful so that Afrodescendent organizations themselves can monitor and conduct public oversight of measures undertaken by States and demand greater effectiveness in the policies and programmes aimed at them. In this regard, it was mainly since the 1980s and thanks to Afrodescendent and women's Afrodescendent movements that socioeconomic disparities with respect to other groups began to be statistically visible, and specific public policies could be considered to tackle this inequality.

In the region, generally speaking, there were significant advances in the production of census statistics as of the 2010 census round. However, some countries' censuses still have no ethno-racial self-identification on the basis of categories that denote African descent. This is in addition to outstanding issues with analysis and dissemination of the existing information. Those categories should thus be included in the next census round in those countries.

In addition, most of the countries which already identify the Afrodescendent population in the national census still face challenges in the production of statistical information, such as the inclusion of ethno-racial self-identification in the various national surveys (such as household surveys) and in administrative records.

In this respect, the addition of the ethno-racial variable and its breakdowns by sex in administrative health records is essential for issues relating to Afrodescendent women's physical autonomy. This process is still incipient in the region, especially as regards vital statistics, although progress has been made in some countries. Even so, the production of basic epidemiological data, which would enable the identification of health determinants that are essential for designing and implementing scientifically-based and culturally appropriate health policies is still a significant challenge in Latin America and the Caribbean. Progress in this regard is essential to generate epidemiological evidence to identify gaps with respect to the non-Afrodescendent population and determine priority measures given the real problems that affect Afrodescendent women in different contexts.

In relation to physical autonomy, it must be borne in mind that stereotypical images of black women permeate population culture and public policy (Hill, 2000). It is therefore necessary to examine their representations in the media very carefully and make sure that the State institutional apparatus does not reproduce these stereotypes. States should commit to investing in research—in which Afrodescendent women themselves play lead roles—in order to include them in public policies and in daily representations in accordance with their specific and diverse reality and thus put an end to regimes of representation that undermine their dignity and autonomy.

States in the region must give priority to combating the social scourge of violence against women, aggravated in the case of women of African descent by racism. To project adequate institutional responses to such violence, States need to establish a more effective regulatory framework to progress towards satisfying the interests and expectations of victims, which in turn requires a basis of consistent quantitative and qualitative information. This also requires investment in adequate resources to conduct studies and analysis to show the patterns of killings of Afrodescendent women on the basis of gender or ethnicity or race in each of the countries.

The figures set forth in this document, which show Afrodescendent and indigenous women's greater exposure to gender violence, underscore the fundamental need for public policies to be constructed from an intersectional perspective that takes into account the diversity of women and of the situations they face and is included throughout the whole cycle of development of strategies to prevent and combat violence.

It warrants mention that in some of the indicators analysed in this study, such as educational attendance among the population aged 18–24 and the population aged over 15 employed in professional and technical positions, Afrodescendent women are better placed than non-Afrodescendent women in

some Central American countries, such as Honduras, Nicaragua and Panama. Argentina also fits this pattern. *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2016* (ECLAC, 2017b) put forward several hypotheses in this respect, which show the need for further study and in-depth research.

One possibility relates to potential biases in ethno-racial self-identification in the data sources, particularly in countries that included self-identification for the first time in the 2010 census round. Biases occur not only because of the conceptual and methodological approaches used in formulating the questions, but also because of other aspects of the census process, such as training, awareness-raising, and participation by Afrodescendent people, to mention a few of the most relevant.

Another, different reading refers to historical processes that determine who Afrodescendent men and women are in each country today. In the Central American countries, there is at least one distinction between the so-called “colonial blacks” and “Antillean blacks” or “English blacks” (as they are called in Panama and Honduras, respectively). Although both groups descend from enslaved Africans, they have suffered the impacts of slavery differently, and they also have different positions in the social structures that were formed during the creation and consolidation of the nation States. Nonetheless, a more in-depth analysis is needed of the Afrodescendent situation in each socio-historical context, as well as better evaluation of measurements to improve their quality.

Beyond the possible explanations for these trends, the figures show consistently, albeit with certain limitations, that inequality disadvantaging Afrodescendent populations is much deeper than inequality in the other direction. This should strengthen the commitment of States to always considering the ethno-racial dimension in public policies at the stages of design, implementation and evaluation.

Afrodescendent women’s organization in Latin America and the Caribbean agree that the economic factor is a strategic field for addressing the historical oppression of the group. In this respect, it is widely known that, in the past decade, social programmes and conditional income transfers have helped to reduce poverty in the region, which has undoubtedly had a positive impact on Afrodescendent women and men. However, most of these programmes lack an intersectional perspective, so in almost all cases their impact on black women is not visible or quantifiable.

Attention must also be drawn to some of the main achievements of the past decade in economic autonomy for Afrodescendent women. In some countries, such as Brazil, affirmative action in technical and tertiary education has enabled massive entry of young blacks into university for the first time. This is particularly notable in the case of women, who have been conquering important positions in academic spheres. As well as the effects this has on their future employment prospects, incomes and, of course, socioeconomic living standards, their presence in these spheres is also being reflected in the production of knowledge. A renovation is taking place in Brazilian social theory, given that Afrodescendent subjects themselves, especially women, are producing knowledge on themselves and the reality they experience from within a sphere that enjoys broad social legitimacy, which is very important in a context that is historically and structurally marked by racism and racial discrimination.

However, achievements in the field of education are not always rewarded by the labour market, and this is particularly the case for Afrodescendent women. The prejudicial stereotypes that still affect these women hinder their access to more prestigious and more powerful jobs, raising barriers to skilled labour integration for women who have been able to complete university studies, for example. Data from some countries in the region show that Afrodescendent women with the same level of education, receive less income than Afrodescendent men and than non-Afrodescendent men and women, testifying to a labour income gap at the intersection between ethno-racial and gender discrimination.

In the labour sphere, this document has shown that the intersection between ethno-racial and gender discrimination also leads to lower rates of pension system affiliation among women of African descent. Consequently, States and the private sector should adopt concrete measures for the sustained inclusion of Afrodescendent women in formal employment, in order to ensure their social protection and their right a decent old age.

Given the absence or underrepresentation of Afrodescendent women in firms, principally in managerial positions, there has been little chance for the fruition of approaches that are built historically on the basis of different cultural, economic and political suppositions, that could bring new ways of facing key problems experienced by the region's societies (Bento, 2016). The implementation of affirmative action or policies by firms to include Afrodescendent women and men in their staff is very important for their sustained integration into formal employment and should be encouraged by States. Such policies or affirmative actions include the establishment of special programmes to hire persons of African descent, capacity-building programmes to improve the qualifications of Afrodescendants for positions not traditionally held by them or positions at a higher level in the employment hierarchy, and the adoption of targets and programmes reduce salary inequalities between Afrodescendants and non-Afrodescendants and to increase Afrodescendent presence in management positions (IDB/Ethos Institute, 2016).

In this regard, moving forward on the legal protection of paid domestic workers in the region is an urgently needed measure of justice, especially for Afrodescendent, indigenous and migrant women, who are overrepresented in this occupational category. States must commit to making labour rights in this category equivalent to those of other workers. In this respect, to date, over a dozen countries in Latin America and the Caribbean have signed and ratified the Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), which still leaves a significant proportion of the almost 18 million domestic employees in the region exposed to precarious labour conditions.

This document has also demonstrated the existence in the region of a large contingent of young Afrodescendent women who are not engaged with the main axes of social inclusion: the education system and the labour market. This mostly occurs because of the family and care responsibilities imposed upon them. Ensuring the existence of care policies, to enable young women to devote themselves to education or paid employment, is essential for changing this unfair scenario. At the same time, for young Afrodescendent women to properly enjoy the most creative and productive phase of their lives, they need their families and communities to have a decent socioeconomic situation, free of the risk of poverty.

In this regard, it is necessary to bear in mind that autonomy for Afrodescendent women in Latin America and the Caribbean cannot be achieved from a perspective of individual empowerment or autonomy. These women have always fought side by side with Afrodescendent men for better living conditions for their peoples and communities, aware that individual achievements are not enough to change the historically unequal structure that has marked the region since early colonization. All measures aimed at improving the living conditions of Afrodescendent women must consider the broader context of their communities, with particular commitment to the eradication of poverty and ensuring real opportunities for development. In turn, achievement of economic, physical and decision-making autonomy for Afrodescendent women may symbolize great progress in the lives of all women in the region, since Afrodescendants occupy the lowest levels of the social pyramid and the consequences of their progress will impact the entire social structure of the Latin American and Caribbean countries.

This document has attempted to draw attention to the historic role that Afrodescendent women in Latin America and the Caribbean have played as political leaders alongside their communities, as religious leaders and as guardians of ancestral knowledge and practices. On the basis of this role, a powerful social organization of Afrodescendent women has grown up in the region over the past few decades. This movement, through local and national networks and the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women, seeks to install its struggle for recognition, redistribution and representation on the State political agenda, in keeping with the terminology proposed by Fraser (2008).

The governments of the Latin American and Caribbean countries should respond to the claims of Afrodescendent women's movements, support them in the establishment of their guidelines and priorities, and commit to the resulting pro-equality agendas. Investment in the development of information campaigns, research, analysis and public policies on gender, intersected with race and ethnicity, is strategic for promoting justice and establishing more democratic societies.

Recognizing the multicultural nature of our societies, it is necessary to move the discussion on representation forward and accept that the exclusion of women and men of African descent from institutional spheres of the State, especially spheres of power and decision-making, forms a substantive part of the historical debt of equality owed to this population. Accordingly, States must assume the commitment to support Afrodescendent women in the process of political participation, acknowledging the space that is owed to them and working to redress their exclusion from political power, be it elected or appointed positions in the executive, legislative or judicial branch at the national or subnational level.

It is also essential that Afrodescendent women form part of the racial equality mechanisms built within the State, as well as existing gender equality mechanisms, so that they can participate in decisions on the strategies for reducing the historical debt of equality. Democratizing institutional spheres on the basis of the relationship with civil society implies ensuring the participation of leaderships that are recognized and enjoy legitimacy in this domain. It means enabling the discussion of other world views, exploring what Afrodescendent women want for themselves and their communities in Latin America and the Caribbean, what type of development they wish for and how to deal with our rich cultural plurality and the grave environmental problems in the region.

In this regard, within institutions, the conception, execution and oversight of the policy analyses that emerge as essential in their claims and demands should be spearheaded by the leaderships of Afrodescendent women's movements, and indigenous women's movements, in collaboration with women's groups already acting in different areas.

Lastly, despite socioeconomic indicators showing that women of African descent face more poverty and violation of economic and social rights than other groups, it must be borne in mind that these do not represent a predestinated fate or a "natural place" as the Afro-Brazilian activist intellectual Lélia Gonzalez (1979) termed it. The inequalities that hold back and restrict the lives of these women are the product of extremely violent power relations which also keep them subordinated as a social group in a context of domination. These relations also colonize the social imaginary, associating this group and each of its members individually with poverty, poor schooling and inability to integrate into the labour market, among other things. It must therefore be recognized that, despite all the evidence regarding the social position of Afrodescendent women in the region and their victimization by a complex web of systems of oppression and discrimination, these women are subjects and agents of their own history, with their daily struggles for physical, cultural and ancestral survival, resisting and rebelling against injustices and inequalities. It is high time that States recognized the fundamental role that these women have played in processes of nation-building, as well as the urgent need to integrate them as true rights-bearers, by eliminating all the barriers that prevent them from occupying their rightful place in society.

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The multiple inequalities historically experienced by women of African descent in Latin America and the Caribbean form part of a complex system of structural discrimination handed down from the colonial era of slavery. Analysis of the effects of intersecting forms of discrimination in the region shows that most Afrodescendent women still lack the socioeconomic resources and power they need to attain physical, economic and decision-making autonomy. In order to link up efforts to combat racism with endeavours to end gender discrimination and achieve Afrodescendent women's autonomy, society must assume the major challenges involved in ensuring the individual and collective recognition of Afrodescendent women as bearers of rights.