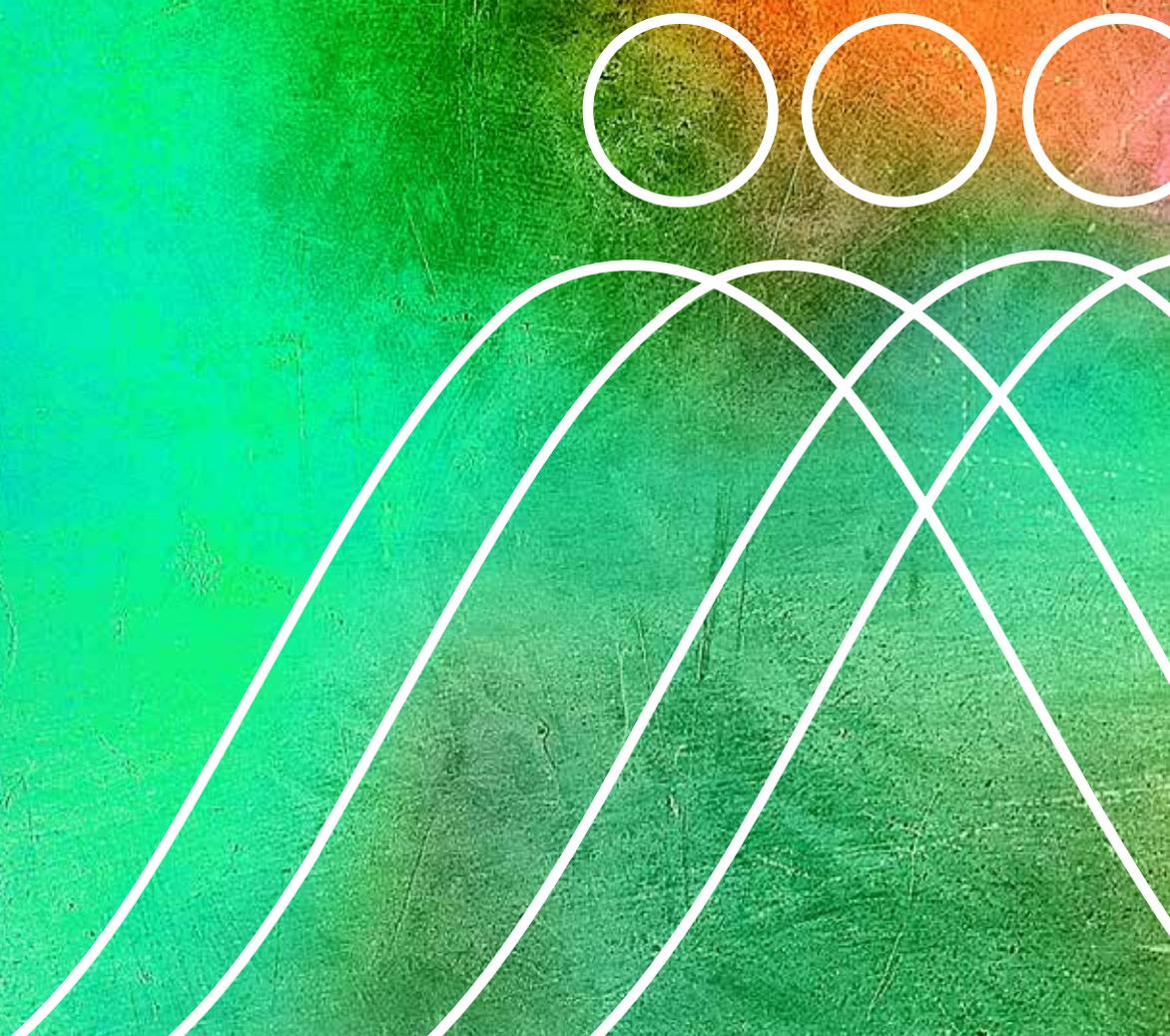


Critical obstacles to inclusive social development in Latin America and the Caribbean

Background for a regional agenda



UNITED NATIONS

ECLAC



Third session of the
Regional Conference
on Social Development
in Latin America and the Caribbean

Mexico City, 1–3 October 2019

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Mexico City, 1–3 October 2019

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Foreword

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is an international commitment to tackle the major obstacles that humanity must overcome to achieve sustainable development, to attend to all three dimensions of sustainable development, together —social, economic and environmental— and to address the central themes of poverty and inequality.

Ending poverty and extreme poverty and reducing inequality, in all their dimensions, remain core challenges for the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean. Although the region made major strides in this regard between the early 2000s and the mid-2010s, setbacks have occurred since 2015, including an increased incidence of extreme poverty. This is a matter for concern and a warning signal, especially amid low economic growth, profound demographic changes and transformation of the world of work in the region. The circumstantial challenges are compounded by the region's structural obstacles to achieving true sustainable development, including low productivity, high levels of inequality, social exclusion and neglect of the environment.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, poverty is most severe among children and adolescents, women, indigenous peoples, Afrodescendants and people living in rural areas. The region faces a challenge of reducing its high levels of inequality, which are unjust and inefficient, erode its social fabric and hinder development. This inequality originates from and is perpetuated by a culture of privilege, which also naturalizes social hierarchies, highly unequal power, and extremely imbalanced access to opportunities. The region and the world will only move forward once the rights and social and labour inclusion of all people are guaranteed.

The structural gaps in labour conditions and considerable inequalities in social inclusion that still exist in the region are some of the chief obstacles to progress in development and well-being. There is also the risk of gaps widening as a result of ongoing changes, which are related to various factors. These include reconfiguration of the labour market and the restructuring of production sectors in response to a new wave of technological changes (including increased robotization, digitalization and automation of processes), demographic trends related to ageing, the intensification of migratory movements and the occurrence of disasters, many of which are exacerbated by climate change. The outcomes of these processes are not predetermined and will depend on the actions of States and of the private sector, as well as on public policies, regulation and the capacities of civil society, in addition to the ability to reach agreements and consensus on the nature, pace and speed of change.

In this context, it is crucial to consider how to formulate a comprehensive response to the goals of sustainable development, which have the social dimension at their core. The Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean has established the notion of inclusive social development to highlight the centrality of social inclusion and the reduction of inequalities to the understanding of social development and the achievement of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda, with a regional perspective.

The current situation in the region makes advancing the commitment to a regional agenda for inclusive social development indispensable. Advancing this commitment also forms the basis of an agenda that underscores the key role of inclusive social development with equality at the centre, as a pillar of sustainable development and a prerequisite for economic development and environmental sustainability, and it is a means of supporting implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the region.

A regional commitment to inclusive social development, with a rights-based approach and universalism that is sensitive to differences, inevitably requires an effort to close gaps and reduce the inequalities in access to well-being suffered by the populations most at risk of vulnerability and exclusion and to eradicate the social footprint of the current development model. This requires the implementation of initiatives and strategies that promote social guarantees to which all people are entitled as citizens, with respect to fundamental goods such as social protection, decent work, access to social services and, in broad terms, equal opportunities for development and well-being.

It is essential, in this process, to have a clear understanding of the persistent obstacles to improvements in well-being and in the guarantee of inclusion in the various spheres of social development, leaving no one behind. For this reason, it is vital to tackle each of the many elements that together comprise the matrix of social inequality in the region, that impinge directly on the gaps and are manifested in a whole range of both material and symbolic impediments. This document identifies and describes the critical obstacles that give rise to and perpetuate the gaps hindering the achievement of inclusive social development. These critical obstacles are interrelated, meaning that combined action is needed, along with a focus on priority areas. A regional agenda for inclusive social development will need to accord those areas priority to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the region.

Alicia Bárcena

Executive Secretary
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Introduction

The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean face the great challenge of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, seeking a new model of development based on equality, dual social and labour inclusion, eradication of poverty, environmental sustainability and economic growth. To address this global challenge, first and foremost awareness must be raised of the integrated nature of sustainable development and its three dimensions: social, environmental and economic. In this regard, as the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has stated, social issues do not play out in the social sphere alone (ECLAC, 2016a), but also in the economy, in politics and in the environment; likewise, production diversification and structural change are not achieved exclusively through the economy (ECLAC, 2016a and 2016b). Certain economic and environmental phenomena and policies are at the root of social problems and their possible solutions, while increased productivity, economic growth and environmental sustainability also depend on social conditions (ECLAC, 2018a). Therefore, the actions proposed and implemented under the 2030 Agenda must address this interlinkage and interdependence, anticipating potential repercussions in the three spheres and seeking synergistic effects.

Secondly, given the central role the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda plays in achieving sustainable development, reducing the social footprint of the current development model must be a priority. This footprint is reflected in violations of rights, enduring poverty, and persistently high levels of inequality—including concentration of income and wealth—and vulnerability. It is also apparent in the substantial deficits of decent work, of social protection and of universal access to quality education and health care, in addition to the structural gaps that affect a large proportion of the population of Latin America and the Caribbean. This was highlighted in the document presented at the second session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, entitled *Linkages between the social and production spheres: gaps, pillars and challenges* (ECLAC, 2017). Viewed thus, it can be seen that the social footprint, like the carbon footprint, irremediably holds the region back from achieving sustainable development. To end this, there must be a firm joint commitment from countries, prioritizing actions that promote and accelerate the implementation of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda in the region. This must be done with full assurance of people's economic, social and cultural rights, with equality at the core, and with a view to substantive transformations that support progressive structural change through an environmental big push, to shape a new model of sustainable development (ECLAC, 2018b). To achieve this, it is essential to construct inclusive social development and foster a new generation of policies, as stated in the document that was presented at the first session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean entitled *Inclusive social development: the next generation of policies for overcoming poverty and reducing inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean* (ECLAC, 2016b).

At the second meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, in the document *Towards a regional agenda for inclusive social development: bases and initial proposal*, ECLAC combined the notion of social development—which since its conception has been linked to progress towards the greatest possible well-being for citizens, within a framework of freedom and dignity (ECLAC, 2016b)—with that of inclusion—relating to realization of rights, people's full participation in society, and access to policies that are crucial to well-being (ECLAC, 2017). In the document, ECLAC proposed that inclusive social development “is understood as the capacity of States to ensure the full exercise of people's social, economic and cultural rights, consolidate spaces for participation and recognition, and eradicate gaps in access to spheres that are fundamental for well-being, taking into account social inequalities and the axes that structure them from the perspective of universalism that is sensitive to differences” (ECLAC, 2018a). This definition refers to four elements of inclusive social development: (i) access by citizens to levels of well-being that guarantee the enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights, as part of a process of constant improvement in quality of life and development of capacities; (ii) addressing gaps in access to the dimensions of well-being, and social inequalities and the axes that structure them; (iii) mechanisms that transform policies, institutions and their environments, that end discriminatory practices, recognize the identities and specific needs of populations that have been historically excluded from well-being, and are guided by a rights-based

and universalist approach that is sensitive to difference, and; (iv) the dimension of social participation, which promotes the exercise of citizens' agency (ECLAC, 2018a, p. 77). Policies for inclusive social development should therefore be geared towards universality, although these may be complemented by targeted, selective or affirmative action policies that seek to break down access barriers to well-being (ECLAC, 2016a and 2016b), and advance with redistributive and recognition mechanisms.

Within the framework of the 2030 Agenda, reflection on inclusive social development is even more important, since social policies are critical to people's well-being and to the progress of the Agenda's social dimension. At present, the countries of the region have made very mixed progress towards the targets linked to the social dimension of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), putting their fulfilment at risk. While some targets have already been reached, such as reducing the under-five mortality rate to at least as low as 25 per 1,000 live births (Bárcena, 2019), recent estimates suggest other targets will be difficult to reach, such as ending extreme poverty in the region, owing to recent economic and distributive performance (Bárcena, 2019; ECLAC, 2019a).

Added to the above are the stark inequalities that persist in the region, which make achieving the targets related to the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda appear even more remote. As stated in the document presented at the first meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, *The social inequality matrix in Latin America*, the axes that structure and reproduce social inequality in the region include gender-based, racial, ethnic and territorial inequalities and those connected to the different stages of the life cycle. These axes intersect and thereby compound and exacerbate each other's effects. They appear in all areas of social development and rights, such as income, work, social protection and care, education, health, housing and basic services (ECLAC, 2016a), and the chance to live a life free from violence. Policies to reduce inequality take an even more central role, since they not only improve social well-being, but also contribute to fostering productivity and environmental stewardship. In this regard, ECLAC has emphasized the need to end the culture of privilege, which normalizes inequalities, establishes hierarchies with those in positions of privilege at the top and reproduces inequalities through social structures and institutions (ECLAC, 2018b).

Progress towards sustainable development, and particularly the challenge of implementing the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda at the regional level, requires careful consideration of the circumstances in which action is taken. This is a time of tectonic global shifts, marked by deep economic, social and environmental imbalances, and multiple obstacles to progress towards sustainable development, which increase the unsustainability of the existing development model (ECLAC, 2016c). The current economic panorama is characterized by growing complexity, different trade tensions between large world economies and a weakening of the global economy, and the resulting uncertainty is stifling economic growth (ECLAC, 2019b). All this is aggravated by formidable challenges to the multilateral system, an increase in geopolitical tensions (ECLAC, 2019c), an alarming landscape in terms of the degradation of ecosystems and climate change, and numerous other challenges linked to international migration, demographic changes and the Fourth Industrial Revolution and its effects on the world of work and various other spheres of life in society.

Lastly, as this document emphasizes, Latin America and the Caribbean has numerous opportunities to move towards inclusive social development, linked to the civilizing and rights-based framework of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the related commitment assumed by the countries of the region, technological changes, the transition to an environmentally sustainable economy, and greater institutional development. However, the region also faces a number of obstacles. These include stagnation or, in some cases, reversals in indicators of poverty, extreme poverty and income inequality (ECLAC, 2019a), as well as in the quality of employment and growing informality in the labour market (ECLAC, 2019c).

In short, the critical obstacles and emerging challenges linked to inclusive social development may be summarized in the following eight areas, which are described in more detail in this document: (i) deeply rooted poverty and vulnerability to poverty; (ii) structural, unjust and inefficient inequalities and the culture of privilege; (iii) gaps in human capacity-development—relating to education, health, nutrition—and in access

to basic services; (iv) deficits in decent work and uncertainties linked to technological changes in the world of work; (v) still partial and unequal access to social protection; (vi) a social institutional framework that is still under construction; (vii) insufficient social investment, and (viii) a set of emerging challenges, including violence, increasing exposure to disasters and the impact of climate change, demographic, epidemiological and nutritional transitions, migration and technological changes and the new capacities required by these changes.

Unless decisive progress is made, through public policies that have social development at their core, the economic onslaught and the growing impact of disasters and climate change will likely accentuate these obstacles, increasing the vulnerability of the population and further distancing the region from its aim of fulfilling the commitments agreed upon in the 2030 Agenda.

Mindful of this, at the second session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Montevideo in October 2017, the member States agreed, in resolution 2(II), to foster the construction of a regional agenda for inclusive social development “based on public policies that address the region’s structural inequalities and the new challenges arising from technological change and the necessary transition to an environmentally sustainable economy, with a focus based on rights, gender equality and the life cycle and an approach of universalism that is sensitive to differences, within the general framework of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development” (ECLAC, 2018c).

Also in resolution 2(II), the Regional Conference asked ECLAC, in its capacity as secretariat, to provide technical assistance for the construction of the regional agenda for inclusive sustainable development, considering the axes that structure social inequality in the region and the need to guarantee the population’s social, economic and cultural rights, with particular emphasis on policies that are fundamental to their well-being. These policies cover contributory and non-contributory social protection, health and education, food security and nutrition, care, productive employment and decent high-quality work, strengthening the social institutional framework and financing of social policies, and fostering South-South cooperation, promoting exchanges of experiences and lessons learned among countries.

In fulfilment of this mandate, in 2018 and 2019 ECLAC has supported the countries with the process of preparing a proposed regional agenda for inclusive social development. Based on the issues identified above, the starting point has been determined as the interdependence of the dimensions of sustainable development, with a focus on the need for a regional agenda to end poverty and increase equality and well-being, thus contributing to implementation of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean, addressing the current critical obstacles, and underscoring the importance of incorporating the priorities relating to the 2030 Agenda into a rights-based approach and universalism that is sensitive to differences. Based on an overview of the regional challenges to inclusive social development, it has been concluded that it is important to strengthen social policies, safeguard the progress achieved by the region, avoid setbacks and identify priorities for progress, to build welfare States that promote guarantees of social protection and social and labour inclusion for all people and that can strengthen the capacities and resources required to meet the current challenges. It is also essential to have a strengthened social institutional framework and a regional context that is committed to these aims, within the framework of multilateralism and with the possibility of building trust in international cooperation and collective action, to provide global and regional public goods.

The process followed as part of this regional construction included a preliminary working meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Santiago in April 2018, as part of the second meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the Caribbean on Sustainable Development; the second meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference in Panama City, in September 2018, when the document *Towards a regional agenda for inclusive social development: bases and initial proposal* (ECLAC, 2018a) was presented and the work plan for formulation of the agenda was adopted;¹ and the third meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference in Santiago in April 2019, as part of the third meeting of the Forum of the Countries of Latin America and the

¹ See the resolutions adopted at the meeting at [online] https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/18-00897_mds.2_agreements.pdf.

Caribbean on Sustainable Development, where a preliminary version of the proposed regional agenda for inclusive social development was presented and adopted in general terms.² In addition to the comments made during the last of these meetings, during the months of May and July 2019 official communications were received from countries with regard to the proposal. The proposed regional agenda for inclusive social development that will be discussed during the third session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean in Mexico City³ in October 2019 is based on all these discussions, in addition to contributions from civil society gathered in the specially created spaces for dialogue.⁴

The regional agenda for inclusive social development has been structured around of five core elements. The first comprises the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and their targets, which are directly and indirectly linked to the social dimension. Since the main aim of the regional agenda for inclusive social development is to support implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the region, the pillars and lines of action of the regional agenda, aimed at closing gaps and overcoming structural inequalities, are intrinsically related to the Sustainable Development Goals and their targets, with a synergy-based approach aimed at facilitating implementation of the 2030 Agenda and preventing duplication of commitments and efforts. Secondly, the concept of inclusive social development and its implications have been considered. The third element is the set of key dimensions addressed in the regional and subregional agreements on social development, as presented in the database of regional and subregional social development commitments.⁵ The regional agenda for inclusive social development thus takes into account the specificities and priorities of the region that are not necessarily reflected in the 2030 Agenda, as the fourth element. In addition, the missions and mandates of the ministries of social development and equivalent bodies are taken into account, as summarized in the Institutional Framework Database for Social Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean.⁶ The fifth and final element is analysis of the critical obstacles to inclusive social development in the region. These critical obstacles have been identified on the basis of the regional diagnosis contained in analytical documents pertaining to the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2018a, 2017, 2016a and 2016b) and the resolutions adopted at its successive sessions, as well as other recent regional analyses.⁷ They relate to phenomena that limit the effective enjoyment of rights and well-being by a significant portion of the population, also reproducing inequality and hindering progress towards inclusive social development. They reflect persistent institutional and social challenges in implementing relevant and effective policies based on a universalism that is sensitive to differences, in a context marked by emerging challenges. Moreover, these critical obstacles are interrelated and must therefore be addressed in an integrated manner, prioritizing coordinated action in the areas identified. The regional agenda for inclusive social development must address these areas as a matter of priority, as a means to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals in the region.

Given the magnitude of the critical obstacles and emerging challenges of inclusive social development, it is hoped that the analyses and reflections presented in this document will make it possible to determine, in an informed manner, which strategies, commitments and policies should be prioritized within regional and subregional integration bodies, to bolster sustainable development, with equality at its core, leaving no one behind in Latin America and the Caribbean.

² See the resolutions adopted at the meeting at [online]: https://www.cepal.org/sites/default/files/events/files/19-00286_mds.3_agreements.pdf.

³ See the document *Proposed regional agenda for inclusive social development* (LC/CDS.3/4).

⁴ See the reference document *Proposed regional agenda for inclusive social development: comments from civil society* (LC/CDS.3/DDR/4), which systematizes the process of dialogue with civil society regarding the regional agenda. On 30 May 2019, two webinars were held with civil society, one in Spanish and another in English, explaining the process of formulating the regional agenda for inclusive social development. Comments were subsequently received electronically until 15 June 2019.

⁵ See [online] <http://dds-d.cepal.org/compromisos/index.php>.

⁶ See [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/bdips/en/>.

⁷ See, for example, the various editions of *Social Panorama of Latin America* [online] <https://www.cepal.org/en/publicaciones/ps>.

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Critical obstacles to inclusive social development in Latin America and the Caribbean

- A. The persistence of poverty and vulnerability to poverty
 - B. Unfair and inefficient structural inequalities and the culture of privilege
 - C. Disparities in the development of human capacities —education, health and nutrition— and access to basic services
 - D. Decent work deficits and uncertainties associated with technological transformations in the world of work
 - E. A still partial and unequal access to social protection
 - F. Social institutional frameworks: a work in progress
 - G. An insufficient level of social investment
 - H. Emerging obstacles
- Bibliography

A. The persistence of poverty and vulnerability to poverty

As stated in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, eradicating poverty in all its forms and dimensions, including extreme poverty, is the greatest global challenge and an indispensable requirement for sustainable development. Viewed from a multidimensional perspective, poverty encompasses the denial of choices, opportunities and effective participation in society; and is a major violation of citizens' rights. The interrelationship between multiple shortcomings in terms of well-being and the cumulative effects of poverty and extreme poverty not only impede the development of people's potential and give rise to new infringements throughout their life cycle, but also foster the intergenerational transmission of poverty, which undermines the foundations of sustainable and inclusive economic and social development. Eradicating poverty is therefore central to the fulfilment of the 2030 Agenda.

According to *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2018* (ECLAC, 2019a), 184 million people were living in poverty in Latin America in 2017, equivalent to 30.2% of the region's population, while the number living in extreme poverty increased to 62 million, or 10.2% of the population (see figure 1). According to estimates made by ECLAC, between 2002 and 2014 poverty and extreme poverty rates both fell significantly in the region: poverty dropped from 44.5% to 27.8%, and extreme poverty decreased from 11.2% to 7.8%, with the steepest falls seen in the first half of the period. Between 2015 and 2016, however, there were successive increases in rates of poverty (in urban areas) and extreme poverty (in both urban and rural areas), which represented a major setback, especially in the latter case. Data for 2017 indicate an additional increase in extreme poverty (up 2 million people in absolute terms), while the poverty rate stabilized in 2016.

Figure 1

Latin America (18 countries): poverty and extreme poverty rates, and persons living in poverty and extreme poverty, 2002–2018^a

(Percentages of total population and millions of people)

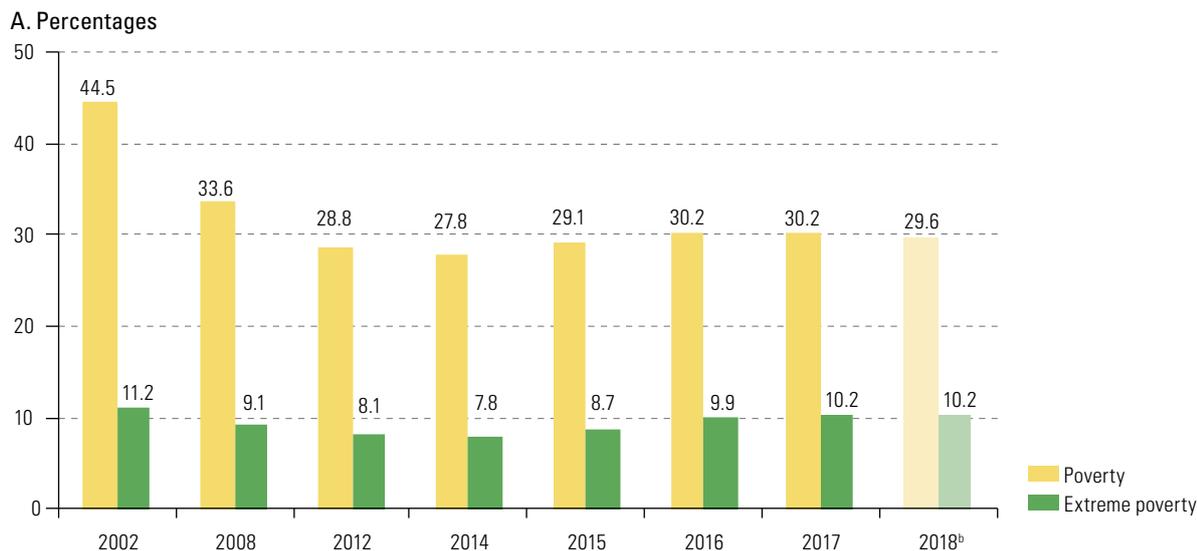
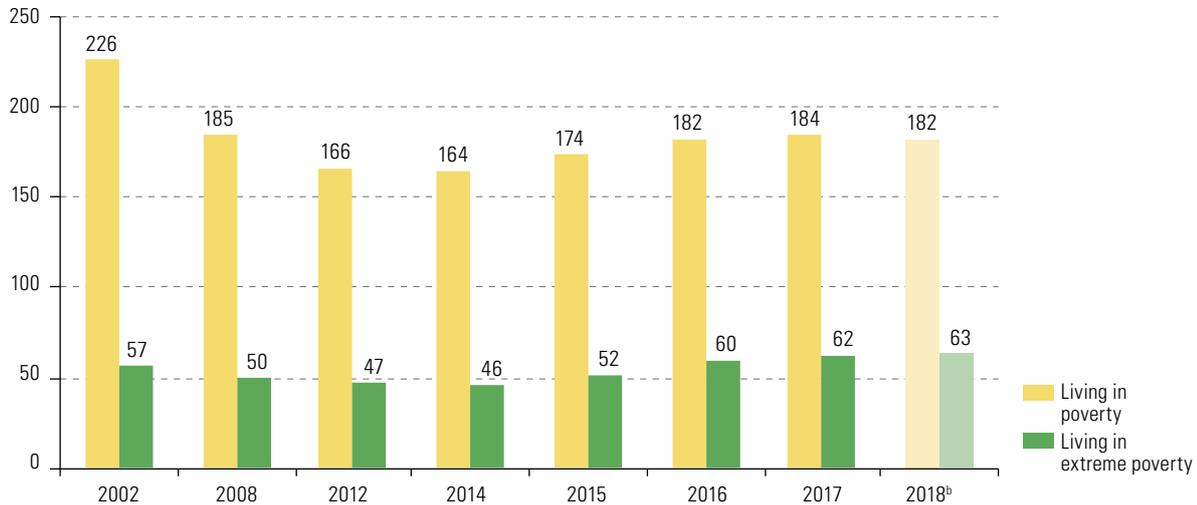


Figure 1 (concluded)

B. Millions of people



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Weighted average of data for the following countries: Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

^b The figure for 2018 is a projection.

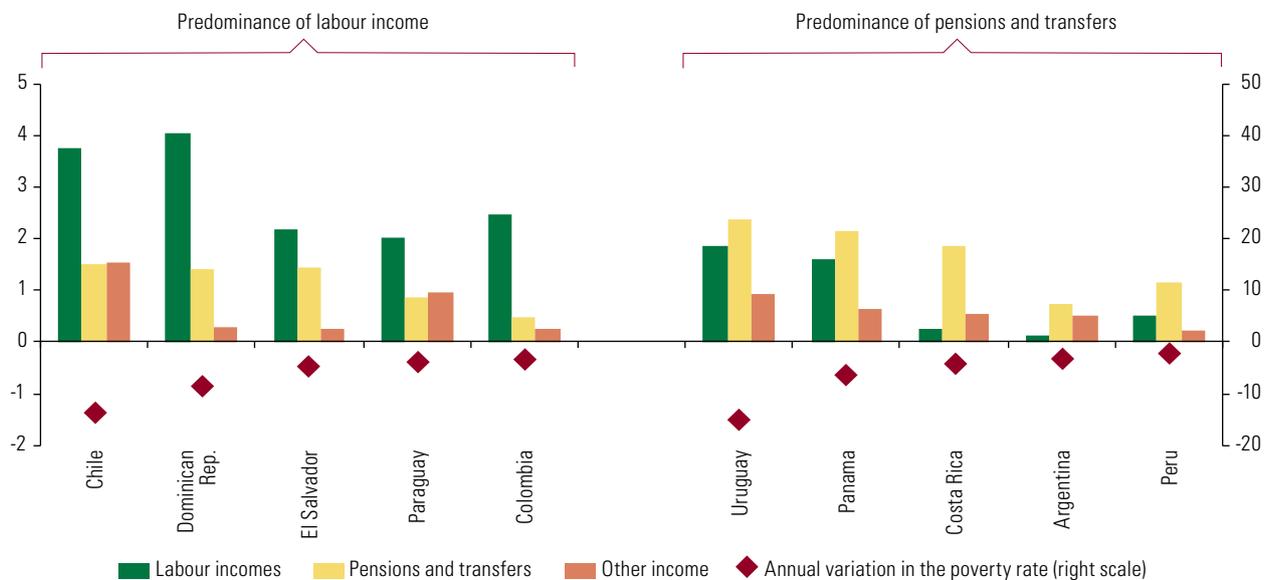
Trends in the region between 2014 and 2017 differed across countries; the ECLAC measurement shows that both poverty and extreme poverty continued to decline in most countries, albeit very slowly. Between 2012 and 2017, average household income growth was the key driver in countries where poverty decreased most rapidly (by 5% per year or more), which accounted for over two thirds of the total reduction in the poverty rate. Household income comes from three sources: employment, contributory and non-contributory pensions, and cash transfers and other income (such as from asset ownership and imputed rent on owner-occupied housing), including remittances from migrant workers. In some countries, income growth among poor households came mainly from increases in labour income. Elsewhere, pensions and transfers (public and private, including remittances) played a major role (see figure 2). As ECLAC has noted, “this corroborates the importance of endowing those living in poverty with greater resources and of bolstering labour income in combination with transfers and stronger social protection systems (ECLAC, 2019a, p. 82).

Despite the range of poverty rates at the national level, the countries of the region share common features: women are more likely than men to live in poverty or extreme poverty. Poverty also has the face of a child (in 2017, 46% of children and adolescents under the age of 15 were living in poverty, compared to 30.2% of the total population; and, while 1 in 10 people were living in extreme poverty, nearly 1 in every 5 children were in this grave situation). Poverty is also more prevalent among indigenous people, Afrodescendants, persons with disabilities (see box 1) and people living in rural areas, where the rate is more than double that of urban areas¹ (see figure 3). To honour the pledge that no one will be left behind, the gaps that exist between different population groups and areas of residence must be identified.

¹ In 2017, 46.4% of the inhabitants of rural areas were living in poverty, while 20.4% were living in extreme poverty. In the same year, poverty in urban areas stood at 26.3%, while extreme poverty was 7.8% (ECLAC, 2019a).

Figure 2

Latin America (10 countries): annual variation in total per capita income among households living in poverty, by income source, and annual variation in the poverty rate, 2012–2017^a (Percentages)

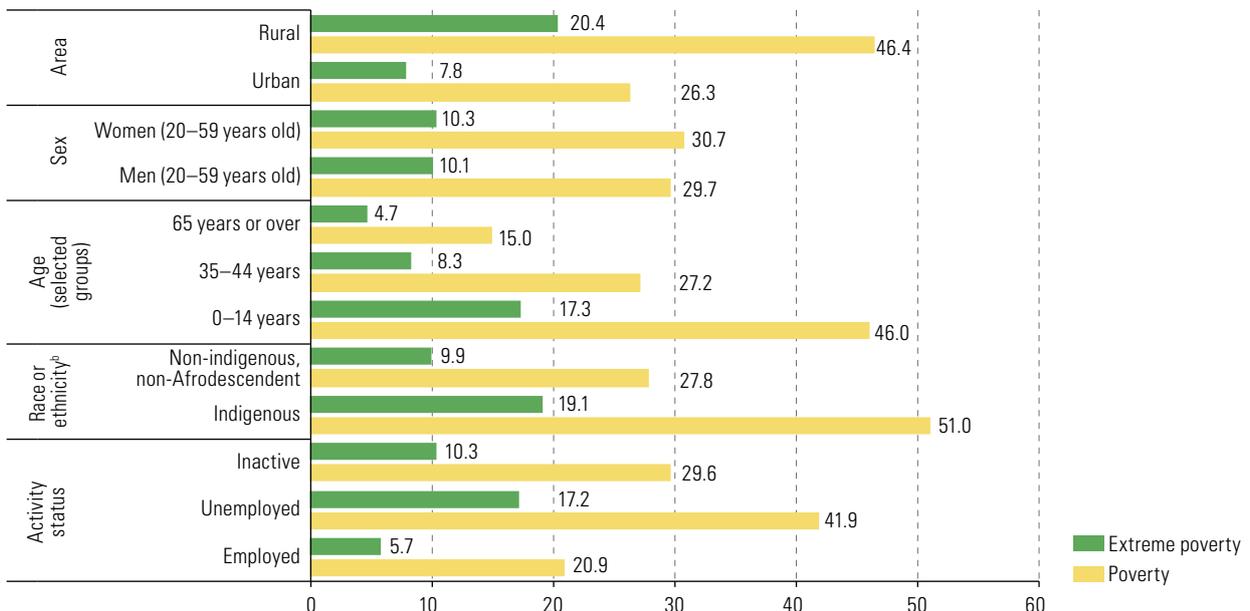


Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a The countries in each group are presented in order, according to the annual variation in their poverty rate. Data refer to 2012 and 2017, except for Chile (2011 and 2017), the Dominican Republic (2012 and 2016) and Panama (2011 and 2017).

Figure 3

Latin America (18 countries):^a rates of poverty and extreme poverty by area of residence and sociodemographic characteristics, 2017 (Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

^b Weighted average of the following countries: Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

Box 1

Disability and poverty

Poverty is one of the factors underlying the persistent exclusion of persons with disabilities. Studies on the relationship between disability and poverty agree that it is complex and interdependent, operating through various channels and at different levels. Disability is both a cause and, to a large degree, a consequence of poverty. Generally speaking, people living in poverty may be in poor health and have limited access to services to treat these problems; they also often lack adequate nutrition, live in substandard housing without access to safe drinking water and adequate sanitation, perform hazardous work and live in areas where they may be victims of violence—all of which may increase their chances of developing a disability. In addition, there are several factors that can increase the vulnerability of people with disabilities to a life in poverty. From a life-cycle perspective, excluding a child with a disability from the education system results in low educational attainment, which impairs the child's subsequent chances of obtaining decent work, with sufficient income and access to social protection. The labour market participation of persons with disabilities is further undermined by lack of accessibility to public thoroughfares and to workplaces, and also by discrimination and the persistence of negative stereotypes. Moreover, even when controlling for income, households that include a person with a disability will incur higher expenses owing to the costs associated with specialized health, rehabilitation and education services, the purchase and maintenance of assistive devices, medicines and transport, among other things. Lastly, meeting the care needs of a person with a disability may force another household member, often a woman, to withdraw from the labour market, thereby reducing household income. When there are no social protection mechanisms to cover or subsidize these costs and needs, they must be paid for by the family, which can further compound the situation of those living in poverty or cause families to fall into poverty.

Source: N. E., Groce and others, "Poverty and disability: a critical review of the literature in low and middle-income countries", *Working Paper Series*, No. 16, London, September 2011; L. Cheshire, *Disability and Inclusive Development Centre*, University College London; H. Ullmann and B. Atuesta, "Las transferencias monetarias no contributivas: un instrumento para promover los derechos y el bienestar de la población infantil con discapacidad en América Latina y el Caribe", *Documentos de Proyectos*, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/United Nations Children's Fund (ECLAC/UNICEF), forthcoming 2019.

Studies by ECLAC and others have shown that the incidence and depth of poverty is systematically higher in rural areas than in urban ones (ECLAC, 2016b; Rossel, 2012; ECLAC, 2012b and 2012c, among others). Rossel (2012) pinpoints some of the factors that explain why the rural population is more vulnerable to poverty. First, fertility rates tend to be higher, so rural households are likely to be larger than urban ones; moreover, poor rural households tend to have more members than non-poor ones. Adolescent pregnancy is also more common among rural populations than urban ones, which is also associated with limited opportunities and the intergenerational transmission of poverty. This may be caused by a combination of multiple deficits, related to access to education, job expectations and the absence or relative scarcity of sexual and reproductive health policies.

These trends, coupled with the fact that rural dwellers are at a disadvantage compared to the urban population in other dimensions of well-being, such as access to education, health care and social protection, means that the rural population is more vulnerable to poverty. Furthermore, as the axes of inequality combine and reinforce each other, creating cycles of exclusion, poverty in rural areas is also closely correlated with the greater presence of indigenous peoples, which, as noted, also tend to experience lower levels of well-being (ECLAC, 2016a and 2016b).

Despite the significant progress made in reducing poverty since the early 2000s, the fact that a large proportion of the population lives on incomes that are only slightly above the poverty line implies a situation of vulnerability;² in other words, people may be forced back into poverty by any change to their income and/or expenditures, such as those arising from economic downswings, disasters, unemployment or deteriorating working conditions, or health problems. As much of the progress on poverty reduction made in the region

² Households whose per capita income is less than 1.8 times the poverty line are considered vulnerable to poverty.

has been underpinned by an improvement in labour incomes, the persistence of structural gaps or a cyclical deterioration in labour market indicators can have a direct impact on household vulnerability to poverty.³ In 2017, more than 54% of the region's population was living in poverty or was vulnerable to falling into poverty: at one extreme is Uruguay, with just over 17% of its population in this situation, while at the other extreme, the figure in Honduras was almost 79%.

A key factor to take into account when crafting poverty eradication policies is the importance of coordinating them with long-term policies—both for productive development and generating decent work as well as those that offer permanent guarantees of social protection (ECLAC, 2018b). The development of multidimensional poverty measurements at the national level provides a key tool in this area, by making it possible to target sector proposals more effectively to ensure that it is linked to and produces simultaneous improvements in well-being and in the potential for developing individual capacities. This contributes to meeting the specific needs of different population groups and different territories, within the framework of comprehensive strategies for overcoming poverty, under a universal approach that is sensitive to difference.

B. Unfair and inefficient structural inequalities and the culture of privilege

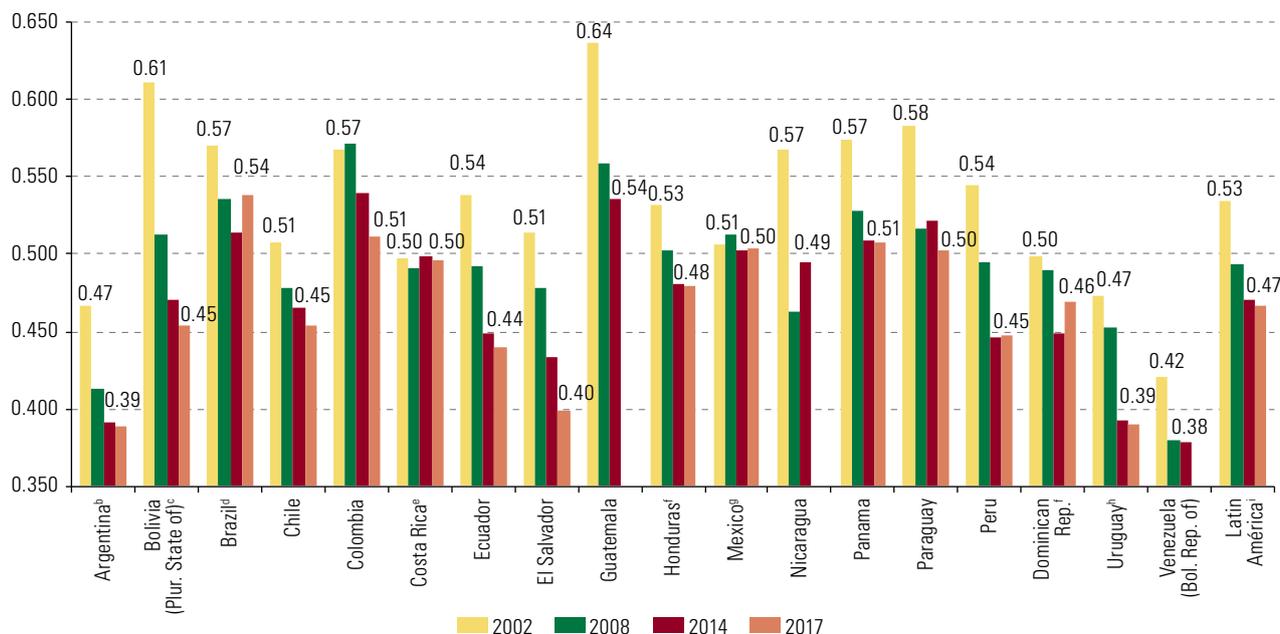
The high levels of inequality in the region conspire against development and pose a considerable barrier to the eradication of poverty, the expansion of citizenship, the exercise of rights and democratic governance (ECLAC, 2016a). Significantly reducing inequality is a global commitment embodied in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, which recognizes equality as a key factor for international stability and defusing conflicts. The pledge expressed in the 2030 Agenda that “no one will be left behind” clearly underscores its universalist and inclusive focus (ECLAC, 2018b and 2016c).

Inequality is a historical and structural characteristic of Latin American and Caribbean societies that has been maintained and perpetuated even at times of growth and economic prosperity (ECLAC, 2019a). Between 2002 and 2017, income inequality in Latin America, as measured by the Gini coefficient, fell from 0.534 to 0.466, which is a significant improvement. Nonetheless, the rate of decrease has slowed between 2014 and 2017, as shown in figure 4 (ECLAC, 2019a); and, despite the progress made, Latin America and the Caribbean remains the most unequal region in the world.

As was the case with poverty, the reduction in income inequality during this period was driven partly by labour market forces (lower unemployment and higher employment rates, an increase in female labour market participation, and improvements in labour income in the lower part of the distribution thanks to the rise in minimum wages in several countries). It was also supported by the social protection systems that have been established and strengthened in the region since the early 2000s. The coverage of contributory pension schemes has expanded significantly, a process associated with the growth of wage-earning jobs, the formalization of employment and changes in labour and social security legislation (ECLAC, 2018e). In addition, cash transfers and non-contributory pensions targeting low-income families have been expanded, which have also helped to contain the deterioration in the income distribution and prevent further setbacks in the fight against poverty in recent years. As noted above, in the most recent period, pensions and transfers were very important for poverty reduction in some of the region's countries, despite the average increase in poverty and unemployment levels and the interruption of the employment formalization process (ECLAC, 2019a).

³ After several years of decline, unemployment started to rise in 2015 (the year in which the downward trend in poverty and extreme poverty rates in the region was reversed), and the trend towards the formalization of employment came to a halt.

Figure 4

Latin America (18 countries): Gini coefficient of income inequality, 2002–2017^a

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a The calculation of the Gini coefficient included zero incomes.

^b Urban total.

^c Figures for 2017 refer to 2015.

^d Figures for 2017 are not comparable with those of previous years.

^e Figures from 2010 onward are not comparable with those of previous years.

^f Figures for 2017 refer to 2016.

^g Figures for 2016 were estimated on the basis of the 2016 statistical model for MCS-ENIGH continuity.

^h Figures for 2002 refer to the urban area.

ⁱ Simple average based on the nearest available year's data for each of the 18 countries.

It is also increasingly recognized that inequalities exist not only in the economic or resource sphere, but also in the exercise of individuals' rights, their capacities, their levels of autonomy and reciprocal recognition. Based on this broad concept, it is argued that, together with the inequalities associated with a person's socioeconomic level (or social class), gender, ethnic, racial and territorial inequalities and those connected to the different stages of people's life cycle, all combine to form the structural axes of the social inequality matrix in the region (ECLAC, 2016a). Moreover, disability, migratory status, sexual orientation and gender identity are additional axes that structure inequality. Various structural and institutional mechanisms of discrimination affect the perpetuation and transmission of inequality. The accumulation and interaction of the various forms of inequality creates a complex structure of social relations, with numerous forms of discrimination that manifest themselves as inequalities in autonomy, well-being and empowerment, and also as pronounced differences in the exercise of rights and in opportunities, capacities and treatment (ECLAC, 2016a). These are manifested in all areas of inclusive social development, such as access to and quality of education, health, decent work, basic infrastructure, social protection and the possibility of living a life free from violence.

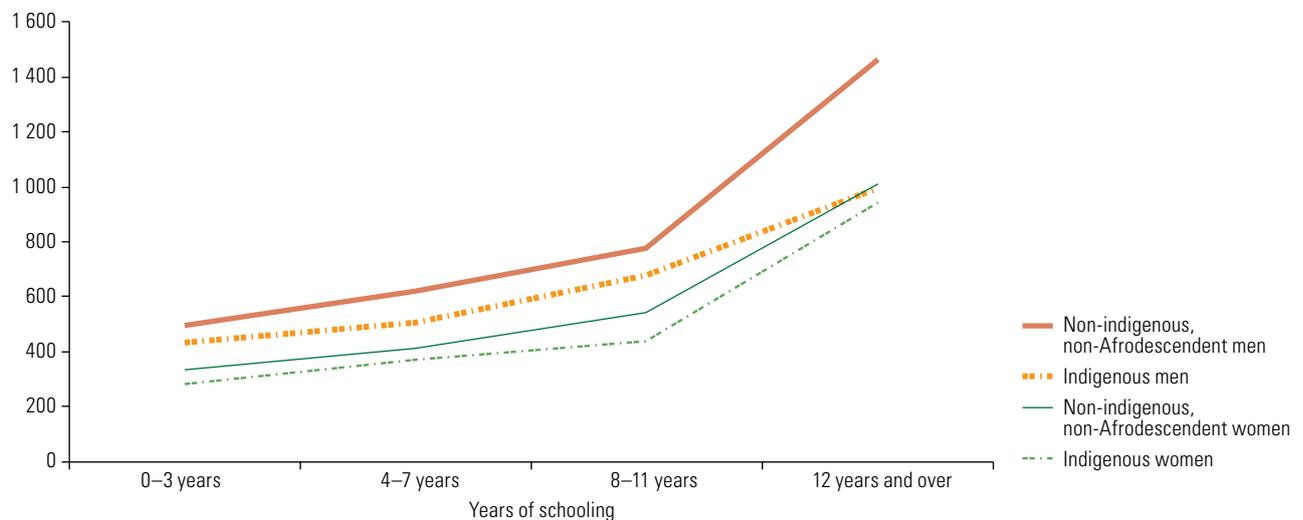
In recent decades the region has succeeded in lowering its inequality indicators in various domains and has made progress in different dimensions of social inclusion, such as the right to education and health care, and access to basic infrastructure (water, sanitation, electricity and the Internet). Nonetheless, significant inequalities persist in terms of both the coverage of the services related to these rights and their quality, which is inadequate and fragmented. As part of the effort to promote equality, it is worrying that benefits and coverage remain disjointed in the region, as evidenced also by the large disparities in the quality of services to which different population groups have access, and by their opportunities for labour inclusion and access to decent work.

Figure 5 provides a clear example of how gender and ethnic and racial inequalities intersect. It shows that the returns on education in terms of labour income are significantly lower for women than for men, and also for indigenous and Afrodescendent persons relative to non-indigenous, non-Afrodescendent persons. In other words, with the same levels of schooling, women, indigenous people and Afrodescendants, and especially indigenous and Afrodescendent women, receive significantly lower wages. This difference is even greater among those with more than 12 years of schooling (ECLAC, 2018c). This reflects the persistence in the labour market of mechanisms of discrimination and occupational segmentation by gender and ethnicity or race (ECLAC, 2016a).

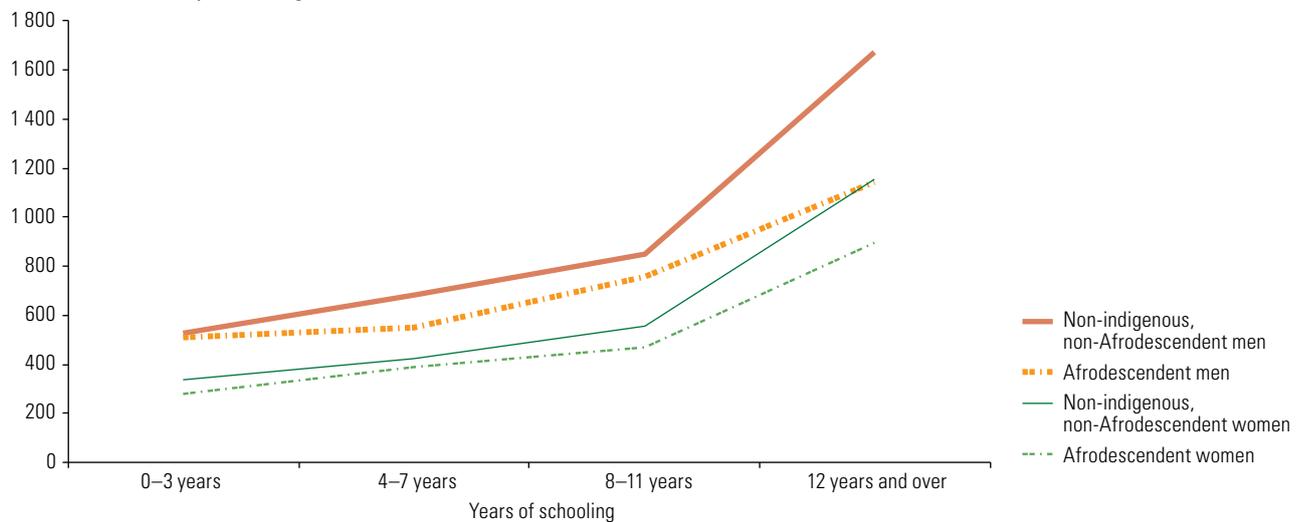
Figure 5

Latin America (selected countries): average monthly labour income of employed persons aged 15 or over, by sex, race or ethnicity and years of schooling, national totals, around 2015
(Purchasing power parity dollars at constant 2015 prices)

A. Nine countries, by ethnic origin (indigenous or non-indigenous)^a



B. Four countries, by racial origin (Afrodescendent or non-Afrodescendent)^b



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Includes: Brazil (2015), Chile (2015), Ecuador (2016), Guatemala (2014), Mexico (2016), Nicaragua (2014), Peru (2016), Plurinational State of Bolivia (2015) and Uruguay (2016).

^b Includes: Brazil (2015), Ecuador (2016), Peru (2016) and Uruguay (2016).

Social inequality in the region is based on a highly heterogeneous and poorly diversified production structure, underpinned by a culture of privilege inherited from a past of colonialism and slavery. This culture is a distinctive historical feature of Latin American societies that is perpetuated by institutions, established practices and values. The concept of a culture of privilege refers to a system of values that reinforces and perpetuates the advantages of specific population groups over the rest of society in a hierarchical social order based on race or ethnicity, economic status, political affiliation or ancestry. The culture of privilege normalizes social hierarchies and highly unequal access to the fruits of progress, political participation and production assets, operating as a major obstacle to equality in all its dimensions (ECLAC, 2018c). To overcome this situation, a culture of equal rights must be nurtured and strengthened through policies and institutions that promote equality, active citizen participation, the combating of all forms of racism and discrimination, balanced and sustainable local and territorial development, and the recognition and celebration of differences. The cultural dimension of inequality and development must also be taken into consideration, because while the profound changes needed can be brought about by politics and policies, more fundamental, longer-term transformations are needed, which would also make development processes more sustainable.

C. Disparities in the development of human capacities —education, health and nutrition— and access to basic services

In recent decades, the region of Latin America and the Caribbean has made great progress in terms of human capacities, such as health and education, and also in access to housing, basic services (drinking water, electricity and sanitation) and the Internet. Nonetheless, persistent gaps still hinder the full and healthy development of all people, which is why closing them is imperative for inclusive social development and for sustainable development in general. The first part of this section examines disparities in human capacity development, especially in the areas of education, health and nutrition; and the second part analyses access to basic services.

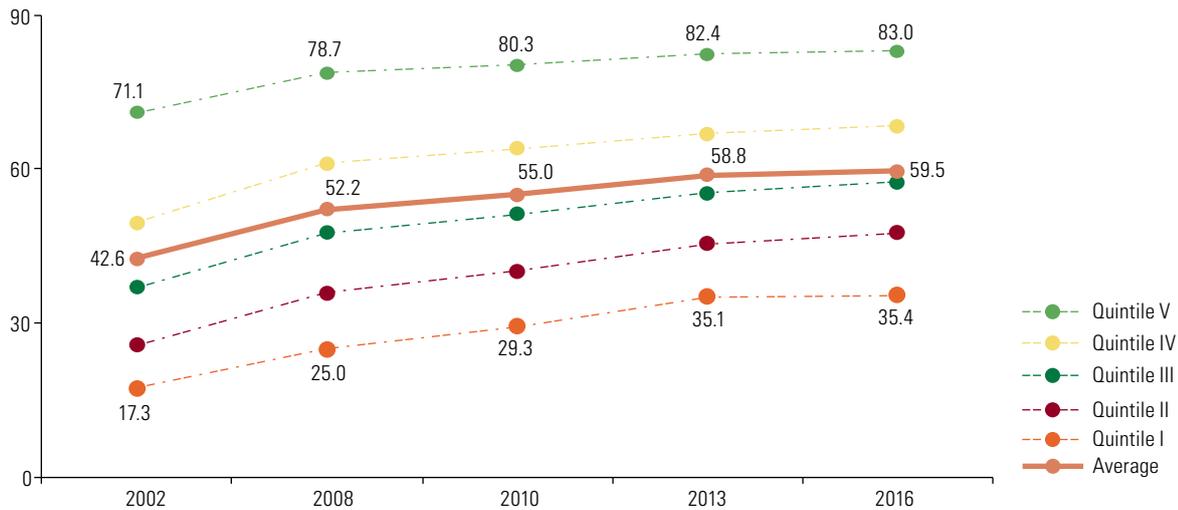
Since access to high-quality education is a key pillar of social inclusion and a crucial vector of labour inclusion and productivity growth, progress in this area is associated with the reduction of poverty and inequality, the improvement of health indicators, opportunities for access to decent work and upward social mobility, and an expansion of the possibility of exercising citizenship. For example, 6 out of every 10 Latin American young people between the ages of 20 and 24 have completed secondary education. Although this represents an improvement since the early 2000s, the ratio still needs to be increased considerably for completion of this education level to be universal. To this end, strategies should be strengthened to prevent students from dropping out of the school system. While, on average, 40% of young people in this age group did not complete secondary education, there is an average gap of 48 percentage points between young people in the top income quintile and those in the bottom quintile (see figure 6). Moreover, higher education remains the preserve of a small proportion of the population: on average, while over 40% of young people aged between 25 and 29 in the highest income quintile completed at least four years of tertiary education in 2016, only 3.6% of those in the lowest quintile reached the tertiary level (ECLAC, 2019a) (see figure 7). The Caribbean countries have also made great strides in the coverage of primary and secondary education, although, as in Latin America, access to tertiary education is very limited (ECLAC, 2019a).

These gaps are compounded by inequalities arising from differences in ethnic and racial origin. Although very significant improvements have been made in the educational attainment of indigenous peoples, in the five countries of the region that have this information,⁴ the proportion of indigenous youth aged between 20 and 24 years who have completed secondary education is significantly lower than that of non-indigenous, non-Afrodescendent young people, with differences of around 15 percentage points among

⁴ Simple average, based on data from household surveys in Brazil (2001, 2014), Chile (2003, 2013), Ecuador (2002, 2014), Guatemala (2002, 2014) and the Plurinational State of Bolivia (2002, 2013).

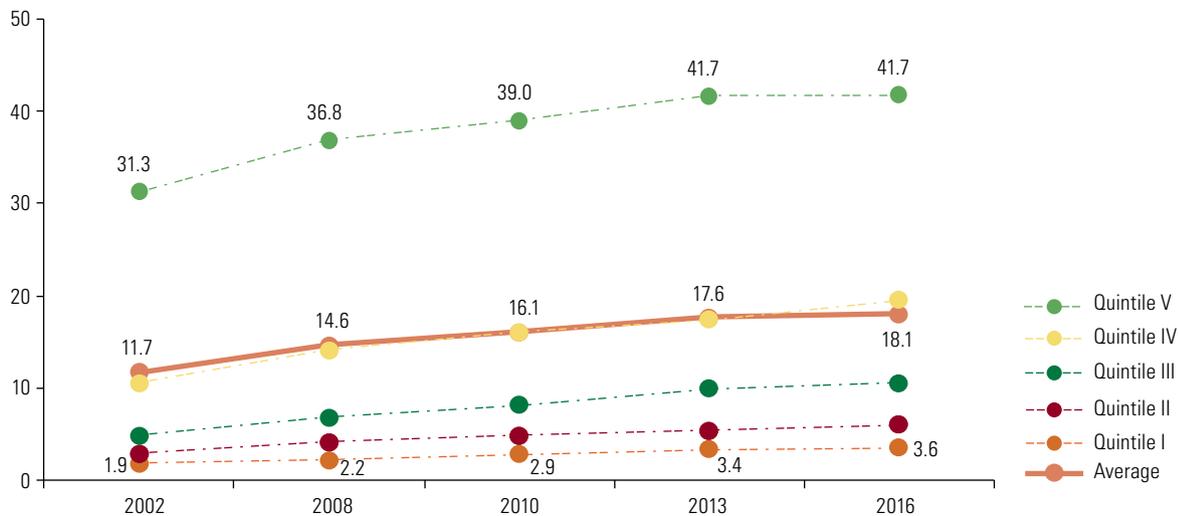
men and 20 percentage points among women (ECLAC, 2017b). Moreover, the combination of the axes of social inequality reinforces cycles of exclusion; for example, indigenous women have made less progress than indigenous men (contrary to the general regional averages).

Figure 6
Latin America (18 countries): young people aged 20–24 with complete secondary education, by income quintile, 2002–2016^a
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of household surveys from the respective countries.
^a Simple averages. The countries included are: Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

Figure 7
Latin America (18 countries): young people aged 25–29 with complete tertiary education (four years of study), by income quintile, 2002–2016^a
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of household surveys from the respective countries.
^a Simple averages. The countries included are: Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

The main problem in many of the region's countries is no longer exclusion from the education system, but rather that the education system segregates pupils according to their social and educational backgrounds, meaning that opportunities to remain in the education system and to obtain a satisfactory level of learning and benefits are not equal. The system offers a homogeneous curriculum rather than addressing pupils' heterogeneous and specific needs. The quality of education in the region is one of the fundamental shortcomings in the formation of human capacities. The countries of the region perform poorly in the various international standardized measurements for basic skills such as reading and mathematics, which today, together with digital skills, represent a population's minimum literacy levels. The results are also very uneven; despite the fact that, on average, women have made greater educational achievements in terms of completed years of schooling, there are still marked gender differences in terms of learning outcomes, which harms women's career paths. On average, girls perform better in measurements of reading, while boys do better in mathematics and science, which influences their future fields of study and employment (ECLAC, 2019a).

The close link that exists between education and the present and future opportunities that people have to improve their social, economic, employment and cultural status makes this dimension one of the critical obstacles to reducing inequalities and advancing towards inclusive social development. This issue has gained particular importance in recent years, as a key aspect of the equality paradigm, from the standpoint of narrowing gaps (in educational access, attainment and quality), both for the full exercise of rights, including the right to education and the exercise of citizenship, and for productivity growth and the development of processes to transform the production structure. This is evident both in the construction of cross-cutting capacities and in meeting the new demands associated with technological change. Education must be strengthened from early childhood, by ensuring access to high-quality services and paying attention to territorial inequalities and needs. Early childhood is a particularly important stage, because it is when the foundations are laid for an individual's future development and in which risks converge in development-sensitive areas, such as health and nutrition, early stimulation and education, as well as the possibility of growing up and developing in safe and supportive family and community environments. More decisive steps must also be taken to mainstream both a gender perspective and interculturality and to value diversity in education, to help education systems to dissipate asymmetric relationships and positions in society (ECLAC, 2019a) and recognize the value of and incorporate the knowledge and cultural development of different groups and peoples can provide.

Ensuring access to high-quality health services and to healthy and adequate nutrition is also key to maximizing people's development and, thus, contributing to sustainable and equitable development. Attending and doing well at school, performing well at work, and caring for or feeding a family requires an adequate level of health and nutrition. Health plays a fundamental role in poverty reduction, since good health increases a person's labour productivity, educational attainment and income (ECLAC, 2018c). Access to quality health checks and services in early life and childhood contributes critically to cognitive, physical and affective development, and also to the adoption of good habits that have long-term health effects. People's health needs and challenges change over the course of their lives; so, health policies need to adopt a life cycle approach with respect to prevention, early detection and timely treatment, in order to create virtuous circles that foster good health and nutrition habits (ECLAC, 2018b).

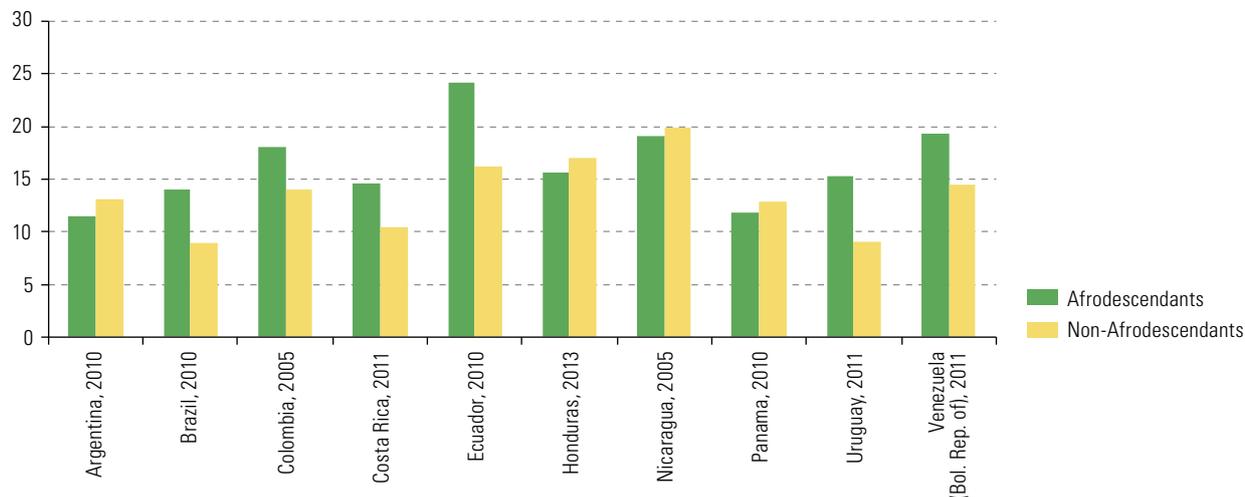
Although health indicators (both access and outcomes) have clearly improved, the region still faces major challenges in relation to the population as a whole, while specific population groups experience obvious disadvantages in their access to timely care and high-quality services that are territorially unbiased. For example, infant mortality, a summary indicator of the population's health, very clearly reflects the inequalities experienced by indigenous and Afrodescendent children in Latin America from birth. In 2010, the estimated infant mortality rate among the Afrodescendent population in countries reporting this information varied between 10 and 26 per 1,000; and in some countries it was up to 1.6 times higher than the rate recorded for non-Afrodescendent children (ECLAC, 2017d). Meanwhile, the infant mortality rate among indigenous children (29.4 per 1,000) is almost double that of their non-indigenous peers (16.3 per 1,000) (ECLAC, 2017b).

Similarly, education, health, childhood and youth policies have failed to provide an adequate response to the issue of adolescent pregnancy and motherhood. Adolescent fertility in the region is higher than would be

expected given its low total fertility rates, middle-income status, high levels of urbanization and the extent of female school enrolment. Adolescent fertility is extremely unequal across socioeconomic groups; adolescents living in poverty have much higher fertility rates than other population groups (Trucco and Ullmann, 2015). The same is true of rural populations versus urban ones, and of indigenous peoples and Afrodescendants compared to non-indigenous, non-Afrodescendant groups (ECLAC/UNICEF, 2018; ECLAC, 2017d). In six of the 10 countries for which data are available, adolescent maternity rates are, on average, 1.4 times higher among the Afrodescendent population than among non-Afrodescendants (see figure 8).

Figure 8

Latin America (10 countries): young women aged 15–19 who are mothers, by race, around 2010
(Percentages)



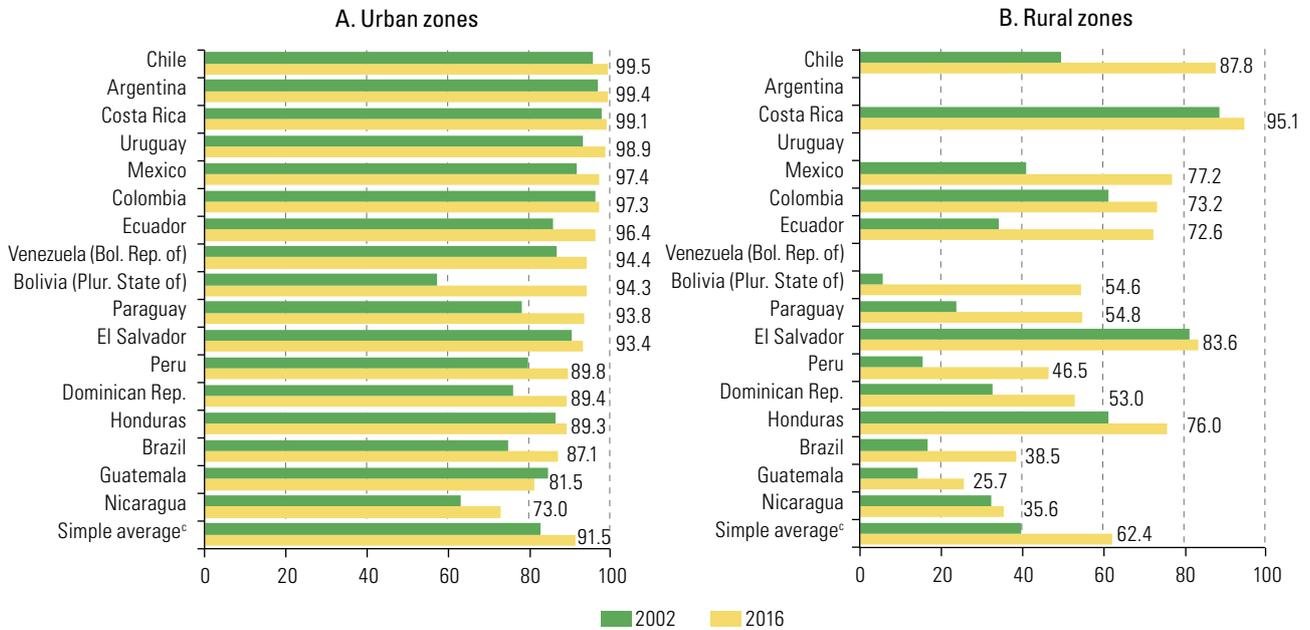
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of special processing of census microdatabases using REDATAM 7.

One way to reduce inequalities and move towards full enjoyment of the right to health is to achieve universal access to good-quality health care, by addressing the various overlapping barriers —economic, geographical, cultural, linguistic, attitudinal, accessibility, among others— that restrict effective access to health care (ECLAC, 2018b). However, even though several countries have legal provisions for universal health care, coverage in practice is weak, owing to the problems of financing and providing adequate services, which is a major obstacle to progress in achieving equality. From the equality standpoint, there is concern about the persistent high level of fragmentation and overlap in health services and coverage, which are evident in the wide disparities in the quality of services to which different population groups have access. Health systems in Latin America are generally organized around public sector services for people living in poverty, social security services for formal workers, and private services for those who can afford them (Titelman, Cetrángolo and Acosta, 2014). As a result, health systems remain segregated and patently unequal, providing different services of varying quality to different population groups.

Access to other basic services and their coverage are also central to the development of people's capacities. Despite the significant progress made, gaps persist in access to basic infrastructure (electricity, drinking water and sanitation), as well as to housing and the Internet (discussed in detail below), which perpetuate and exacerbate other inequalities. The coverage rates of water and sanitation services, which are essential for the population to enjoy good health and prevent communicable diseases, are greater among households in the highest income quintile than among those in the lowest (ECLAC, 2018d). For example, wide disparities persist in sanitation coverage between urban and rural areas in the region, although they have narrowed (see figure 9) (ECLAC, 2018c; Jones, Camarinhas and Gény, 2019).

Figure 9

Latin America (17 countries): population with access to adequate sources of sanitation, by geographical area, around 2002 and 2016^{a, b}
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Data available for the earliest year (around 2002) correspond to: Argentina, Chile and Paraguay, 2003; Colombia, 1999; Costa Rica, 2004; the Dominican Republic, 2005; Ecuador, El Salvador and Nicaragua, 2001; Guatemala, 2000; and Honduras, 2007. Countries are presented in order of level of access in urban areas in the most recent year for which data are available.

^b National total.

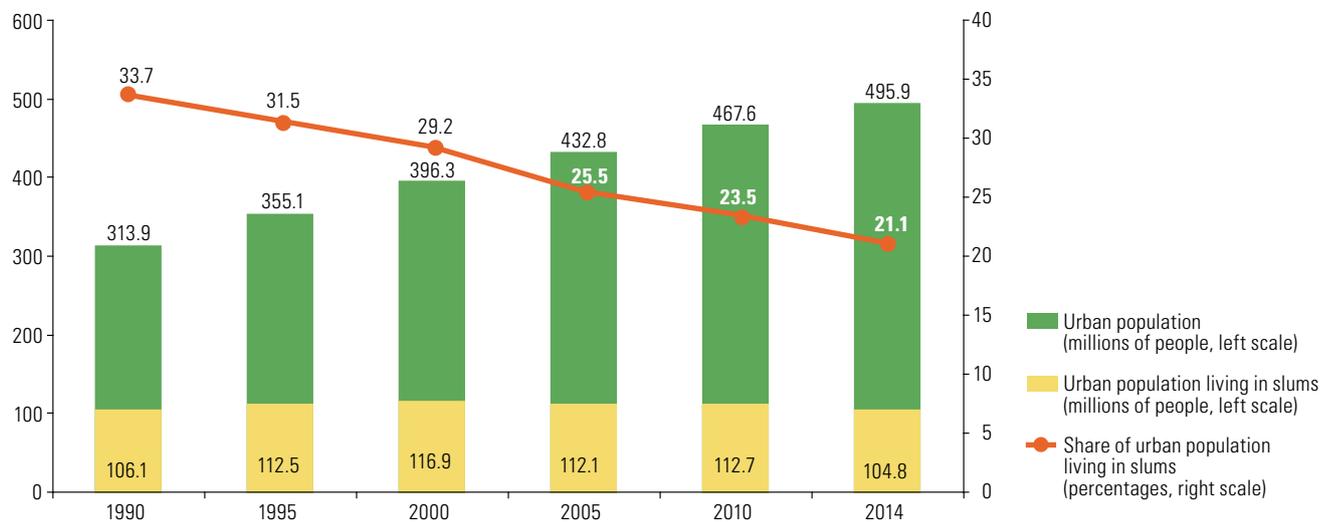
^c Does not include data for Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela or Uruguay.

As figure 9 shows, one of the clearest axes of inequality in terms of access to services is the territorial heterogeneity between urban and rural areas. Disparities in access to housing and basic infrastructure also manifest themselves within urban areas and are visible in slums and informal settlements with inadequate housing (Martínez and Jordán, 2009; UN-Habitat/CAF, 2014). The “urban gap” translates growth differentials into territorially segmented access to well-being within cities themselves. In the Caribbean, in addition to inequalities in access to services, people who live in slums, informal settlements and inadequate housing are often more exposed to environmental hazards and climate-change risks. Risk factors include lack of good quality housing, lack of basic services and poor location for accessing services (Jones, Camarinhas and Gény, 2019). Although the proportion of the region’s population living in these conditions has shrunk considerably (see figure 10), there are still over 100 million people living in slums (ECLAC, 2018c).

As housing quality is usually correlated with the concentration of urban poverty, housing deficits tend to go hand in hand with other indicators of poverty and deprivation, thus generating urban spaces of multidimensional exclusion and vulnerability (Jordan, Riffo and Prado, 2017). Housing plays a very important role in the face of a wide spectrum of needs among household members —some for physical protection, which is very important for health and disease prevention, and others that are more subjective, associated with well-being, privacy and intimacy, as well as the provision of the necessary spaces for development at different stages of the life cycle (Kaztman, 2011). Thus, in childhood, spaces and opportunities for play and study are fundamental; in youth, opportunities for emancipation are embodied by the possibility of living in one’s own home.

Figure 10

Latin America and the Caribbean: urban population living in slums, 1990–2014
(Millions of people and percentages of the urban population)



Source: United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat), “Global Urban Indicators Database”, Nairobi [online database] <https://unhabitat.org/books/global-urban-indicators-database/>.

In addition, access to more advanced services, such as digital infrastructure and Internet connection opportunities, is increasingly essential for capacity-building and full participation in society and the labour market, given the rapid technological transformations and their penetration into the different areas of people’s lives (ECLAC, 2019a). The deployment of mobile broadband networks that emerged in the last decade has enhanced connectivity and fostered very widespread use of digital technologies; but universal inclusion is still a distant goal. The connectivity level among households in urban areas is, on average, six times higher than in rural areas, with wide variations across countries (ECLAC, 2019a). Household income is also a determining factor in unequal connectivity levels. In order for technologies to have a significant impact on the lives of individuals and communities, access to them must be guaranteed, although this alone is not enough. As will be discussed in greater detail below, digital skills must be developed to enable the population to take advantage of technologies’ potential and not be excluded from these new societal dynamics.

D. Decent work deficits and uncertainties associated with technological transformations in the world of work

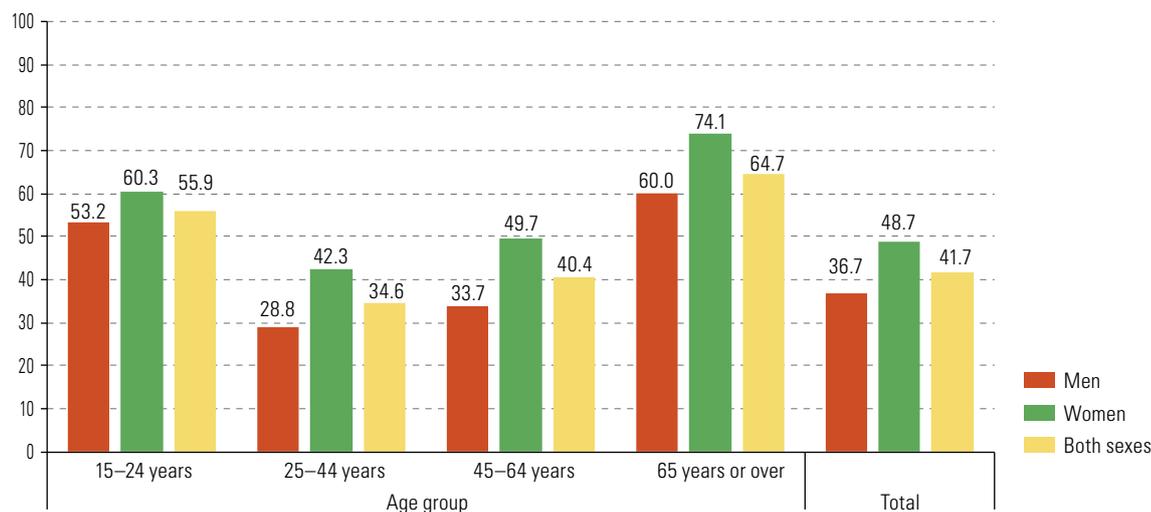
The world of work is critically important in the spheres of society that generate, exacerbate or diminish inequalities. According to ECLAC (2010, 2014a, 2016a and 2017a), work is the key to unlocking equality, personal development and economic growth. Productive and good-quality jobs and decent work are central elements for inclusive social development and a fundamental mechanism for building autonomy, for personal dignity and for exercising citizenship. This is reaffirmed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, especially Goal 8: “Promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all”

The generation of decent job opportunities, with pay no lower than national minimum wages and above the poverty lines, access to labour rights (including freedom of association and collective bargaining) and to social protection, adequate working hours, safe working environments and free from all forms of discrimination, allows economic growth and productivity to be translated into greater social inclusion, less inequality and increased well-being for individuals and households. In contrast, lack of access to decent work fosters poverty and social inequalities.

The structure and dynamics of the region's labour markets continue to display large deficits in their capacity to generate productive employment and decent work, along with deep gender, racial, ethnic and age inequalities. In 2016, 41.7% of employed persons in Latin America earned less than the respective national minimum wages, and the proportion was especially high among young (60.3%) and older (74.1%) women (see figure 11) (ECLAC, 2019a).

Figure 11

Latin America (18 countries): employed persons aged 15 years or over whose average earnings are below the national minimum wage, by sex and age group, around 2016^a
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

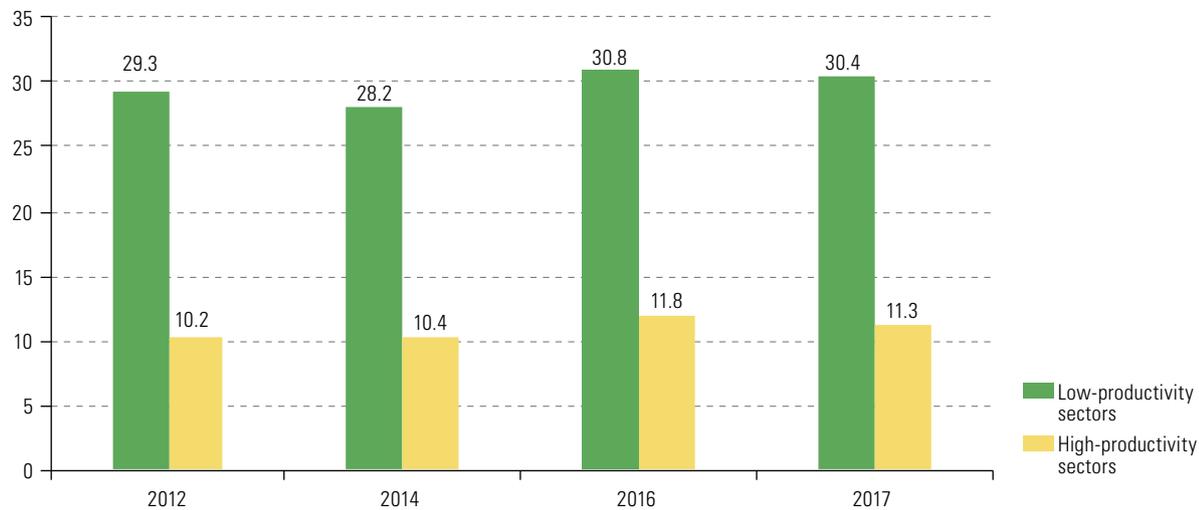
^a Simple averages. The countries included are Argentina (urban areas), the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay (urban areas).

The region's labour markets are the link between a highly heterogeneous production structure that includes a large proportion of low-productivity sectors and high levels of household income inequality. In Latin America, persons employed in low-productivity sectors earn less than half of what workers in medium and high-productivity sectors receive (ECLAC, 2018e). In 2017, the poverty rate among persons employed in low-productivity jobs (30.4%) was triple that of high-productivity employees (11.3%) (see figure 12) (ECLAC, 2019a). This structure also affects the composition of employment in the region, where a large proportion of the population is employed in low-productivity sectors. This is a key factor in explaining the reproduction of income inequality and unequal access to the labour-market regulation and social protection associated with formal employment.

Although the regional average share of wage-earning employment in total employment increased between 2002 (56.3%) and 2015 (60.9%), it stalled in 2017 (60.2%) (ECLAC, 2019a). There are also marked differences according to the socioeconomic level of the employed: the proportion of wage earners in the first income decile is just over one third (37%), compared to more than four out of five workers (82%) in the tenth decile (ECLAC, 2018e). The relationship between wage-earning workers and their employers is generally regulated by the countries' labour laws and therefore tends to have higher levels of contractual formalization and social benefits. Nonetheless, informality remains high, even among wage earners: according to ECLAC (2016d), 42.8% of wage earners did not have formal employment contracts around 2013; and the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2016) reports that this is likely to have remained the case until at least 2015.

Figure 12

Latin America (18 countries): employed persons aged 15 years or over living in poverty, by type of employment, 2012–2017^a
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Weighted average. The countries included are: Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

Disparities in the labour market are also associated with significant inequalities of gender, race, ethnicity, age, territory, disability and migration status, which constitute the structural axes of the social inequality matrix in the region (ECLAC, 2016a). The gender gap is evident in the formidable barriers to women's labour market participation, given the persistently unequal gender division of labour, in a scenario where women assume the greater part of unpaid domestic and care work. In 2017, women's labour market participation rate (50.2%) was still much lower than men's (74.4%). Furthermore, when labour market conditions deteriorate, women are more affected than men. Thus, between 2014 and 2017, the female unemployment rate increased by 3.1 percentage points to 10.4%, while the male rate rose by 2.3 percentage points to 7.6% (ECLAC, 2019a).

Various analyses have shown that, in Latin America, unemployment disproportionately affects the indigenous and Afrodescendent populations, especially women, which once again demonstrates the interaction among the axes of the social inequality matrix. This is reflected in the gaps in labour income per hour worked received by Afrodescendent and indigenous women compared to their male counterparts, and also compared to non-indigenous, non-Afrodescendent women and, especially, men. This difference persists even when controlling for education, and increases significantly among those with 12 years or more of schooling (the average hourly income of employed Afrodescendent women aged over 15 years in four countries of the region in 2014 was US\$ 6.50, compared to US\$ 8.30 in the case of Afrodescendent men and 11.4 in the case of non-Afrodescendent, non-indigenous men, a trend similar to that illustrated by the average monthly labour income in figure 5) (ECLAC, 2018c).

Youth labour market participation is another cause for concern: unemployment rates among young people are higher than for the total population in all countries of the region. In 2016, the simple average unemployment rate for young people aged 15–24 years in 10 Caribbean countries was 20.6% for men and 33.4% for women (ECLAC, 2017a). The difficulties young people face when entering the labour market are exacerbated by the various structural axes of the social inequality matrix. For example, unemployment among higher-income youth is on average three times lower than among those in the poorest income quintile (ECLAC, 2014b). The school-to-labour market transition is a major challenge for young people and highlights a series of barriers linked to difficulties in completing education and acquiring the skills needed for the labour market, and those linked to

care responsibilities, which disproportionately affect women and often limit their labour market participation. This situation is evidenced by the high proportion of young people who are in neither education or employment. In Latin America, the percentage of young women who are in neither education or employment (31.2%) is three times that of young men (11.5%), while a larger proportion of young people are in that situation in rural areas (24.9%) than in urban zones (20%). This indicator is also higher among Afrodescendent women (34%) than among non-indigenous, non-Afrodescendent women (26%), Afrodescendent men (15%) and non-indigenous, non-Afrodescendent men (13%) (ECLAC, 2019a).

The scarcity of equal employment opportunities for persons with disabilities is one of the underlying causes of poverty and exclusion for this population group and their families (ECLAC, 2019a). Even though low levels of educational attainment and a lack of vocational training are significant, persons with disabilities face multiple barriers to labour market entry, including misinformation, prejudice, discrimination, companies' lack of experience in employing persons with disabilities, the lack of an inclusive culture and policy, and poor accessibility of infrastructure (ECLAC, 2017a). In the case of migrants, their current situation in the region is characterized by the coexistence of high levels of employment with multiple inclusion gaps relative to the local population, which are evidenced in their unequal access to the formal labour market and affiliation to health and pension systems (ECLAC, 2019a).

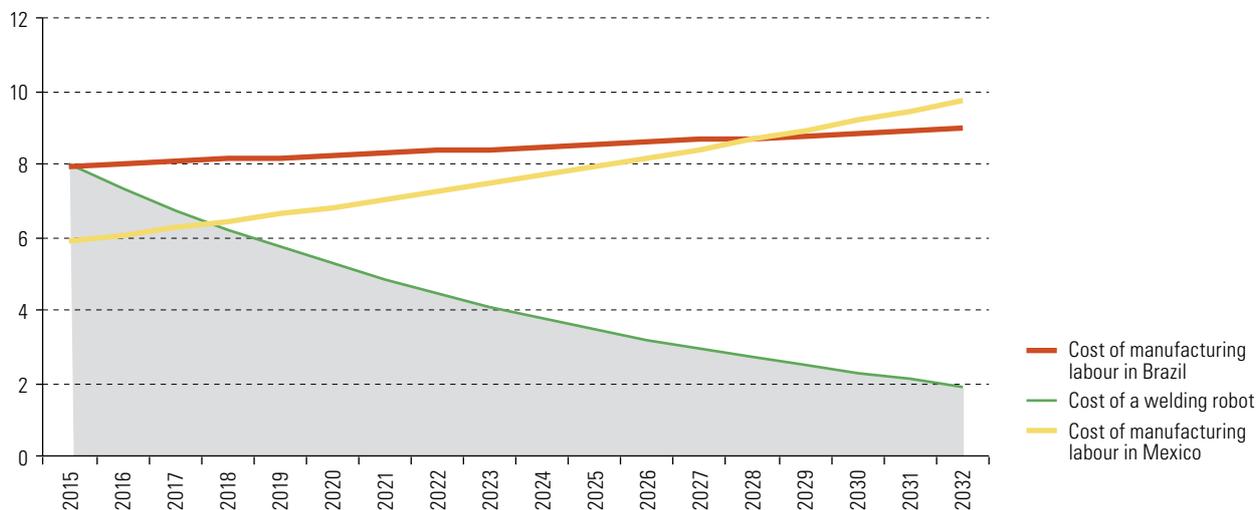
Child labour, in turn, is a serious violation of the rights of children and adolescents, and is clearly contrary to the notion of decent work and a major obstacle to inclusive social development. Currently, around 10.5 million children and adolescents are in child labour in Latin America (ILO/ECLAC, 2018). Child labour is both a product and the source of chains of inequality now and throughout the life cycle of its victims. It affects their future educational and employment paths, hindering access to services and basic rights for their comprehensive development, while also limiting their options for full and equal participation in the various spheres of society (ECLAC, 2018b). The incidence of child labour is highest among children who are also affected by other forms of exclusion: it is higher in rural areas and among indigenous and Afrodescendent populations (ECLAC, 2017a). All of the above, once again, highlights how the structural axes of social inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean are intertwined.

These challenges are being compounded by the impacts of the fourth industrial revolution, which is being driven by technological innovations that are causing rapid and profound changes in societies and labour markets. Disruptive technological changes in the labour market alter the type of jobs that are required—in some cases concentrating demand on highly qualified staff and, in others, on outsourced services provided through platforms, with lower-quality working conditions. They also lead to innovations that give rise to new models of production and organization of work that can make employment precarious and further weaken collective stakeholders, such as trade unions. For example, the sharp drop in the cost of robots and their greater functionality is accelerating their incorporation into industry, putting many jobs at risk. In Brazil and Mexico, the hourly cost of a welding robot is currently lower than the cost of labour in the manufacturing sector (see figure 13).

The impact of technological and organizational changes on employment and the labour market in the region are still uncertain. In terms of job creation and destruction, the impacts are likely to vary according to the country, the subregion, the sector and the type of firm. The net result will depend on macroeconomic dynamics and a series of political and institutional factors, including State and public institution action, labour regulations, trade union organization and the ability to create spaces for collective bargaining and political and social dialogue between stakeholders (ECLAC, 2017a). Although the net effect of new technologies on employment may be negative in the short term, it is possible to obtain positive results in the long run. However, this will require the adoption of policies aimed at promoting decent work and regulating the incorporation of new technologies into new business models (such as digital platforms) (ECLAC, 2018c).

Figure 13

Brazil and Mexico: average cost of a welding robot and of manufacturing labour, 2016–2032
(Dollars per hour)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *The Inefficiency of Inequality* (LC/SES.37/3-P), Santiago, 2018.

Serious consideration should be given to how both production and labour are organized, and the challenges it poses to inclusive social development, in societies and labour markets characterized by structural inequalities, low collective bargaining capacity, significant barriers to trade union organization, high levels of informality and weak social protection systems (ECLAC, 2018b). This reflection on the future of work must address, among other issues, the new challenges that technological transformation implies for social protection systems, including possible trends towards more precarious employment and a decrease in workers' contributory capacity (for example, the "new informality" associated with platform work). In this new scenario, it is also important to consider how to establish a social protection floor guaranteeing a minimum of economic security throughout the life cycle and how to finance it sustainably (Bertranou, 2016), and to recognize the increasing importance of technical and vocational education and training to prepare people for the new kinds of jobs and to equip them with the skill sets associated with technological change.

The other dimension that needs to be included in this discussion is the progressive structural change associated with the environmental big push required by sustainable development, involving new patterns of production and consumption and the development of technological capabilities and innovations focused on sustainability, which can be harnessed to create good quality jobs. There is considerable potential for the creation of new green jobs, which are defined by the International Labour Organization (ILO) as decent jobs that benefit the environment, whether in traditional sectors, such as manufacturing, construction (such as green buildings) or transport (clean transport, for example), or in new, emerging sectors, such as renewable energy, recycling systems and energy efficiency (ECLAC, 2017a).

In recent years, the social and solidarity economy—which refers to the activity of cooperatives, mutual societies, community organizations, social enterprises and foundations that produce goods and provide services that prioritize social objectives and solidarity over the need for economic gains—is presented in the region as an innovative alternative for generating decent work and income, and a response in favour of social and labour inclusion (ILO, 2011; Neto, Morais and Menezes, 2019). Its connection with local development strategies and approaches can activate virtuous synergies to advance the path of inclusive social development and decent work in the region.

E. A still partial and unequal access to social protection

Social protection is a right and, as a public policy, it aims to ensure a level of well-being that is adequate for the development of all people, while also facilitating access to social services and promoting decent work (Cecchini and Martínez, 2012; Cecchini and others, 2015). It therefore plays a fundamental role in fostering inclusive social development and is a key to eradicating poverty and leaving no one behind in efforts to meet the Goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Over the last two decades, the region of Latin America and the Caribbean has made progress in implementing rights-based comprehensive social protection policies and systems. Nonetheless, the effective capacity of States to guarantee universal social protection throughout the life cycle remains limited.

Individuals and families can access social protection benefits in two ways. First, they may have already made contributions through deductions from wages or other labour income earned in the formal labour market; the benefits in this case are often referred to as contributory social protection (or social security). Second, access may be based on criteria of need, which are linked to the risks faced at different stages of the life cycle or to the socioeconomic status of the individuals and families in question; the term non-contributory social protection (or social assistance) is used to refer to these benefits.

With regard to the financing of social protection, however, the contributory versus non-contributory dichotomy has limitations. Firstly, contributory benefits, in addition to being financed by direct contributions from workers and employers, are also partly financed by State transfers sourced from general revenues. Secondly, non-contributory social protection is financed from general income taxes—under the principle of solidarity—and also from international cooperation or resources generated by public enterprises. Nonetheless, the recipients of non-contributory benefits also contribute indirectly to their financing through the payment of taxes, such as value added tax (VAT) (Abramo, Cecchini and Morales, 2019).

Between 2002 and 2016, the weighted average rate of affiliation or contribution to health-care systems by persons aged 15 years or over in 14 Latin American countries increased from 36.8% to 57.3%. In the same period, the weighted average rate of affiliation or contribution to pension systems by employed persons aged 15 or over in 18 Latin American countries rose from 37.5% to 48.1%. This progress is a reflection of the more auspicious labour market in that period, as well as the legislative and policy changes that encouraged the formalization of employment in sectors that traditionally display high levels of informality, such as domestic service, microenterprise and self-employment (ECLAC, 2018e). However, despite the progress made, coverage gaps persist, especially among workers from the lowest income brackets, those living in rural areas and women. For example, in 2016, while 65.1% of employed persons aged 15 or over in the highest income quintile were affiliated to a pension system or contributed to one, only 19.4% of those in the first quintile were in that situation. Moreover, the proportion drops to 16.3% in the case of women in this group, which is evidence of employment with fewer social protections (see figure 14) (ECLAC, 2019a). Similarly, in 2015 only 22% of those employed in rural areas were affiliated to a pension system, compared to 55% of urban employees (ECLAC, 2018e).

In order to address the coverage gaps in social protection, the countries of the region have, in addition to implementing various strategies to expand contributory social protection, introduced a number of non-contributory programmes, such as cash transfers (conditional or otherwise) to overcome poverty, together with social pensions and labour and productive inclusion programmes. These have embraced broad sectors of society, such as informal workers, women living in poverty, rural populations, indigenous peoples and Afrodescendent populations, who have historically been excluded from social protection benefits (Abramo, Cecchini and Morales, 2019). They also contribute to one of the functions of social protection linked to access to social services and social promotion policies. Firstly, cash transfers tend to include conditionalities aimed at increasing recipient families' use of the education system and health services. Secondly, other non-contributory social protection benefits, such as school feeding programmes, play a role in this regard by serving as a link between sectoral and social protection policies. In several countries, these social protection programmes are linked to programmes targeting labour and productive inclusion, with the aim of moving towards more sustainable protection strategies.

Figure 14

Latin America (18 countries): employed persons who are affiliated or contribute to a pension system relative to the total number of employed persons aged 15 or over, by income quintile and sex, around 2002 and 2016^{a b c}
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Simple averages by quintiles. The countries included are: Argentina (urban areas), the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay (urban areas).

^b Worker affiliation to pension systems is recorded in Colombia (1999), Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Paraguay (2003), the Dominican Republic, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia. In the remaining countries, the indicator used corresponds to the contribution paid into pension systems or to comparable measurements. The data for Mexico for 2016 are not strictly comparable with those of previous years owing to changes in the wording of some of the questions on social security access. Further details of these changes, their effects on the estimation of social security coverage (health and pensions) and procedures to adjust the estimation are provided in CONEVAL (2017).

^c In Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Dominican Republic and Guatemala, the figures refer to wage earners.

In 2017, conditional cash transfer (CCT) programmes were being implemented in 20 Latin American and Caribbean countries, covering 20.7% of the region’s total population (133.5 million people living in 30.2 million households) with expenditure equivalent to 0.37% of regional GDP (see figure 15). The number of people in recipient households exceeded the number of people living in extreme poverty and covered 71.3% of those in poverty (Abramo, Cecchini and Morales, 2019). Around 2017, the amounts of CCT programmes in 13 of the region’s countries represented between 3% (Plurinational State of Bolivia) and 39% (Uruguay) of the income deficit of the population living in poverty. In other words, they only covered a small part of the gap between monthly per capita household income and the poverty line (Cecchini, Villatoro and Mancero, 2019). These data highlight the importance of further expanding the coverage and increasing the amount of CCTs in the region (ECLAC, 2016b). The potential that these transfers have had as a mechanism of financial inclusion for people in the lowest income quintiles has also been highlighted, because they are often paid through bank accounts in the formal financial system. In general, small businesses and individuals of lower socioeconomic status face many difficulties in accessing the financial system, which has the effect of deepening inequality, because they have to rely on their own resources (scarce by definition) to progress and protect their living conditions (ECLAC, 2017a).

Figure 15

Latin America and the Caribbean (20 countries): persons in recipient households covered by conditional cash transfer programmes as a proportion of the total population, and public expenditure on conditional cash transfers as a proportion of GDP, 1996–2017
(Percentages)



Source: L. Abramo, S. Cecchini and B. Morales, "Social programmes, poverty eradication and labour inclusion: lessons from Latin America and the Caribbean", *ECLAC Books*, No. 155 (LC/PUB.2019/5-P), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2019.

^a Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay.

The Latin America and the Caribbean region has also seen significant growth in the number of social pension schemes, which has risen from 15 in 2000 to 34 in 2017. At the same time, their coverage increased from 11.7% of individuals aged 60 years or over in 2000 (5 million people) to 25.1% in 2017 (19.3 million people), with expenditure equivalent to 0.65% of GDP in 2017. The proportion of persons with disabilities covered by social pensions increased from 2.1% in 2000 (1.5 million people) to 6.4% in 2017 (4.5 million) with expenditure equivalent to 0.28% of GDP in 2017 (Abramo, Cecchini and Morales, 2019). Nonetheless, social pension amounts are not only smaller than those of contributory pensions, but also less than minimum wages (ECLAC, 2016b). Around 2017, out of 13 countries in the region for which this information was available, only five (Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Paraguay and Uruguay) transferred amounts through social pensions that covered or overcame the income deficit of those living in poverty. In the remaining eight, social pensions only covered between 8% (the Dominican Republic) and 87% (Panama) of that shortfall (Cecchini, Villatoro and Mancero, 2019).

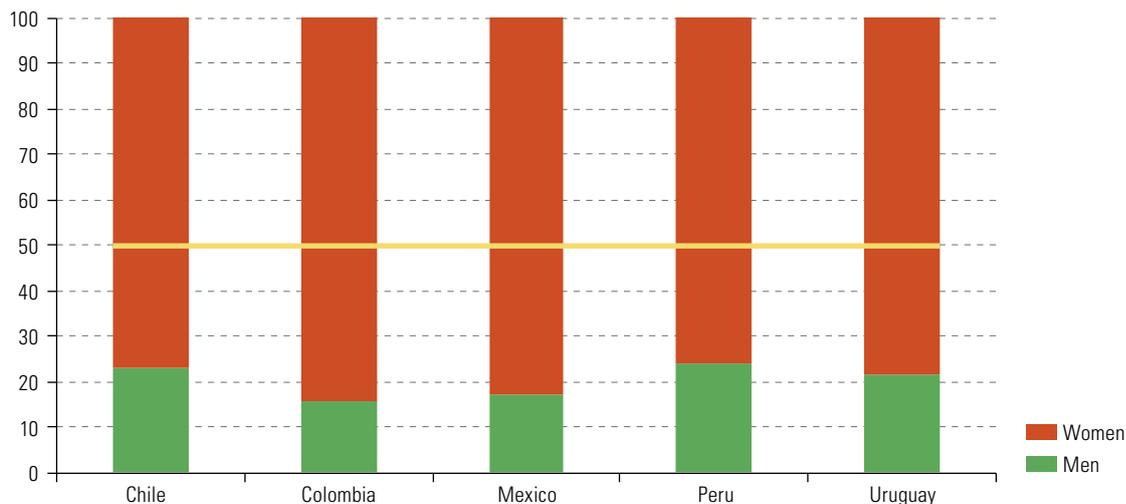
From a rights perspective, the region has started to discuss the introduction of a basic income, understood as an unconditional, constant and regular universal payment from the State to the country's inhabitants, to enable them to satisfy their basic needs. In Brazil, a universal basic income law was passed in 2004, which provides that all Brazilian citizens and foreign nationals living in the country for more than five years, regardless of their socioeconomic status, are entitled to receive a cash transfer sufficient to cover minimal food, education and health expenses. Despite its universal approach, the law provides that the basic income should be implemented gradually at the discretion of the government, that priority should be given to those most in need, and that the amount of the transfer should reflect the country's phase of development and budgetary capacity (Britto and Veras Soares, 2010).

A basic income would represent an evolution of conditional cash transfers, which have legitimized cash transfers generally, and the possibility —or, in some cases, the right— to obtain an income other than by ownership of assets or employment. It also would complement and strengthen social protection systems to address both persistent poverty and inequality and the uncertain impact of technological change processes. In addition, it could unleash social emancipation processes: by freeing people from the most serious consequences of material dependency, a basic income could lead to a rearrangement of social hierarchies, increase the bargaining power of women, young people and other groups in situations of discrimination and subordination, and open up spaces of greater autonomy for all people (ECLAC, 2018c).

The countries of the region also need to move forward in creating or strengthening care systems, to protect and provide greater levels of well-being for children, older adults, persons with chronic illnesses and persons with disabilities, as well as for caregivers, by mainstreaming a rights- and gender-based approach into their design. Women are the main providers of unpaid care in the home (see figure 16), and the weak public care policies in most of the region's countries, coupled with the persistence of the current gender division of paid and unpaid work, impede their full incorporation into the labour market and the realization of their life projects. This could be overcome with a more equitable distribution of care work between men and women in the home. Public care policies should consider the situation of both the individuals needing care and their caregivers, as well as the set of benefits in terms of time frames, economic resources, services and regulations related to care (ECLAC, 2016d; Ellingstaeter, 1999; Lamaute-Brisson, 2010; Pautassi, 2007; Rico and Robles, 2017). Progress on these policies is still limited in the region and should be made a priority for social protection systems (ECLAC, 2016d).

Figure 16

Latin America (5 countries): distribution of hours of unpaid work in households containing a couple, by sex, 2007–2015 (Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *The Inefficiency of Inequality* (LC/SES.37/3-P), Santiago, 2018.

The region has also made progress in implementing comprehensive early childhood protection systems, which seek to support children in the different stages of development in the first years of life. These apply a multidimensional perspective and coordinate the provision of services, goods, transfers and regulations that benefit this population group (ECLAC, 2017a). These policies can have a significant impact in terms of reducing inequality in the long term. Actions need to be coordinated across different dimensions: between sectors, between administration levels and in relation to the different stages of childhood development (a model that could also be adopted to provide protection in other stages of the life cycle).

Lastly, it should be noted that social protection is one of the most important functions of public social spending, accounting for an average of 4.1% of GDP in 2016, according to data from a group of 17 Latin American and Caribbean countries (ECLAC, 2019a).⁵ However, social protection should be viewed not only through a lens of expenditure, but also investment, since it provides an opportunity to create a virtuous circle of autonomous income generation with important multiplier effects on productivity and growth. At the individual level, social protection improves education and health, as well as labour inclusion and thus the earning capacity of families. At the community level, social protection has multiplier effects on local economies, since cash transfers fuel consumption and demand. At the aggregate level, social protection has an impact not only through its economic stabilizer function in sustaining domestic demand during crises, but also through increased demand and aggregate labour participation, and by fostering social cohesion and the reduction of violence, thus contributing to a more growth-friendly environment (ECLAC, 2018c).

F. Social institutional frameworks: a work in progress

The institutional framework of social policies —understood in the broadest sense to cover health, housing, education, culture, work and social protection— to a large extent provides the foundation that determines their scope, effectiveness, efficiency and sustainability in achieving their objective of improving people’s well-being and enjoyment of rights. The institutional framework fosters social policies and programmes that are subject to explicit and transparent rules and standards recognized by the stakeholders, and, to the extent possible, minimize specific, politically partisan or simply inefficient criteria in their use. It also implies the capacity to incorporate change and innovation in an orderly manner to confront emerging development challenges, new social demands and changes in political cycles (ECLAC, 2018b and 2017a; Martínez, 2019).

In terms of fulfilling the 2030 Agenda, the institutional framework is where broad commitments and consensuses should be expressed, through the implementation of long-term policies with broad social legitimacy. This, however, is far from being a reality; in most of the region’s countries it is a work in progress. Cooperation between the region’s countries and the exchange of experiences in this domain could provide an opportunity to make joint progress in strengthening social institutions and transforming entrenched culture-of-privilege practices, by promoting social policies that foster a culture of equality.

In the countries of the region, social legislation has been characterized by sectoral dynamics, with education, health, social security and employment playing the leading roles. Since the 1990s, the focus has been on new issues, such as social development and the rights and well-being of certain segments of the population; and the notion of social protection systems has been adopted. Of the region’s 33 countries, the constitutions of 22 mention the right to education explicitly, 20 the right to work and social security, and 19 the right to health —subjects on which most countries also have specific legislation. The notion of social development is mentioned in just one constitution, and nine countries have specific legislation on the subject (Martínez, 2019).

In many cases, social policies and programmes generally, and social protection in particular, are built on fragile institutional foundations and are subject to sudden shifts in orientation, limited capacity for coordination between the relevant government agencies, and little clarity in their objectives and scope. Most ministries of social development were created in the 1990s, so they are relatively recent compared to other sectoral ministries (ECLAC, 2018b) (see figure 17).

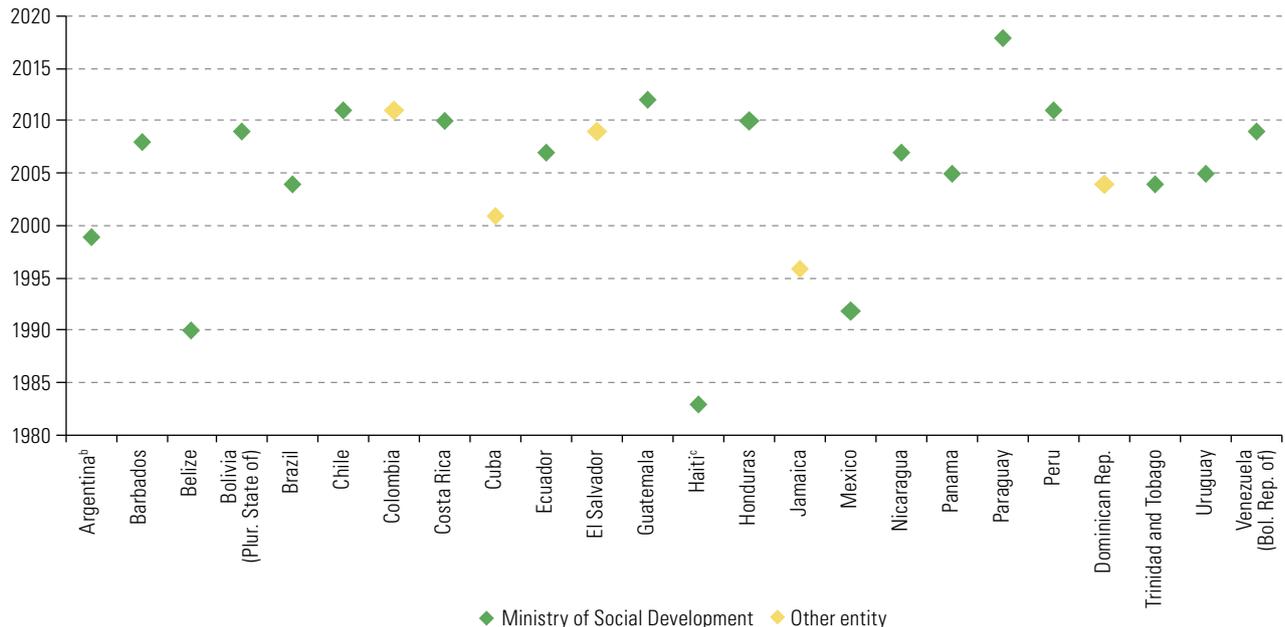
These entities often lack the political and budgetary clout needed to fulfil their mandates, especially compared to ministries in other sectoral areas. Although many of them are held up as an example of how to implement processes to identify target populations and to carry out monitoring and evaluation processes, their development capacities and potential are limited, and they face major challenges in terms of results-based and process management, professional capacities, and technical and financial resources. Nonetheless, in several countries of the region, these mechanisms have played a central role in the coordination and implementation

⁵ The figure refers to central government social spending.

of large-scale, comprehensive poverty reduction strategies, combining cash transfers with access to rural and urban productive inclusion services and programmes (such as the *Brasil sem Miséria* Plan), the creation and implementation of a national care system (Uruguay) and comprehensive early childhood care systems (Chile and Uruguay). These overcome the historically predominant approach of isolated poverty alleviation programmes and move towards the establishment of social protection systems and consideration of well-being as a right.

Figure 17

Latin America and the Caribbean (24 countries): year of creation of ministries or other mechanisms devoted to social development^a



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of official information from the countries.

^a Excludes countries for which the date of creation of the Ministry of Social Development is unknown (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Dominica, and Trinidad and Tobago).

^b The Ministry of Social Development of Argentina was renamed the Ministry of Health and Social Development in September 2018.

^c The Ministry of Social Development and Labour of Haiti was created in 1983 from the former Ministry of Labour.

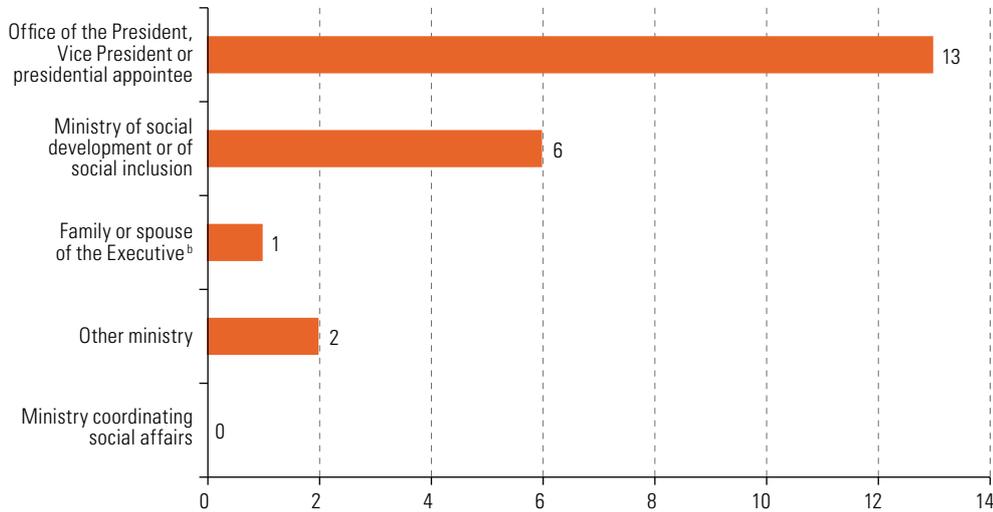
In the framework of the 2030 Agenda, intersectoral coordination is important, both between the various areas of social policy and between social policy and economic and environmental policies. Social problems are multicausal and multidimensional, so the responses to them must be formulated in a multisectoral manner, through a comprehensive model in which public policy management includes dialogue among the multiple actors involved (governments, civil society and trade union organizations, academia and the private sector). Such partnerships and collaborative relationships require practical coordination mechanisms and must form a fundamental part of a new governance model that aspires to “leave no one behind”.

Aligned with this priority feature of social policy, collegiate bodies or social welfare offices (social policy coordination bodies) have served as a mechanism to address this challenge. This is particularly clear at the central government level, since these entities are present throughout the region and normally involve government agencies from the various social sectors (such as health, education, housing and work) and, in general, from the political and economic levels as well. Their work includes both the analysis of issues that involve the different social functions, as well as those related to specific issues (poverty, disability or migration, among others), or population groups that require tailored policies for their full inclusion (such as women, children and adolescents, indigenous peoples or Afrodescendants).

As shown in figure 18, of the 22 collegiate bodies 13 are coordinated by the Office of the President or of the Vice President, or by a top political appointee. In six cases, a ministry of social development or of social inclusion is responsible for coordination.

Figure 18

Latin America and the Caribbean (22 countries): type of authority responsible for coordinating social policy, 2019^a
(Number of institutions)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of official information from the countries.

^a The countries included are: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Belize, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay.

^b This refers to authorities appointed on the basis of a family relationship, typically, the first lady.

Despite the progress made, the analysis of development and social inclusion in other public policy areas is seldom coordinated. There is also ample scope for progress in forming collegiate bodies at the subnational or local level, as part of the necessary vertical coordination of public policy and as an important strategy for taking territorial diversity into account in the design and implementation of social policy. This is all the more necessary when considering the shortcomings of existing physical, economic and technical resources at the local level, especially in the rural sector.

The experience of conditional cash transfer programmes and interagency agreements to expand social protection programmes and systems is an example of greater coordination and the creation of an institutional framework commensurate with the current social development challenges facing the region. Nonetheless greater investment in resources and more decisive political action are needed to enhance the development of that framework and, thus, advance implementation of high-quality social policies.

In terms of policy coordination, social protection systems in the region have made significant progress, but generally maintain a dual mechanism, with little connection between the contributory and non-contributory components. This undermines the comprehensive nature of the system and, in turn, bolsters a concept of recipients as rights-holders. Great strides have also been made in labour market regulation during the first decade and a half of the twenty-first century. Nonetheless, major challenges remain in terms of strengthening and institutionalizing that regulation from a rights and social-protection perspective (Velásquez, 2017), in a context where rates of labour informality remain high (and have risen again since 2015). In addition, the challenges posed by the current technological revolution and changes in labour legislation are intensifying in some countries, where processes that make employment more flexible and precarious are intensifying. Lastly, the development of integrated care policies or systems, and their coordination with the other components of social protection systems, is an area in which much greater progress is needed in the region (Rico and Robles, 2017). In short, social institutions not only need to be strengthened; they also need to be redesigned and rebuilt.

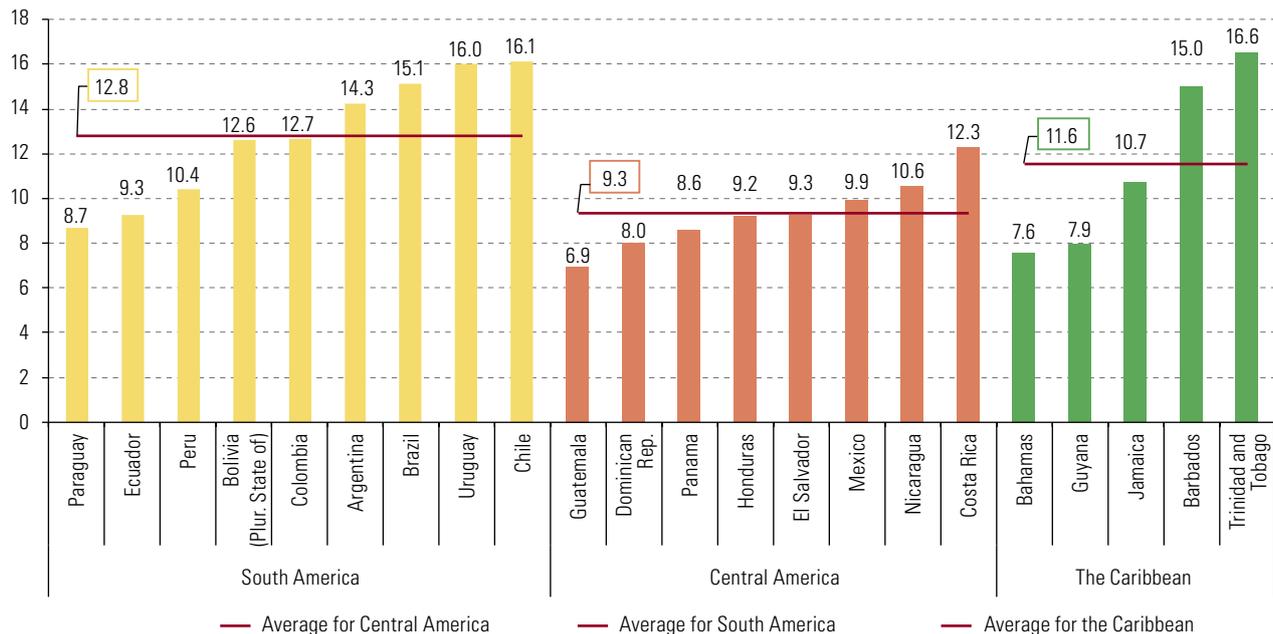
G. An insufficient level of social investment

Social policies need to be adequately financed if they are to achieve inclusive social development. A major regional challenge is to ensure sufficient funding to meet the need for high-quality social policies, transforming the notion of current expenditure into one of social investment and improving the record keeping of those resources, information dissemination and accountability at all stages of the budget cycle (programming, formulation, approval, execution, monitoring and evaluation).

Central government social spending in 17 Latin American countries was 11.2% of gross domestic product (GDP) in 2016, the highest level since 2000. It accounted for 51.4% of total public expenditure by central governments. In the English-speaking Caribbean, the average for 2016 was 11.6% of GDP, accounting for 38% of total public expenditure (ECLAC, 2019a) (see figure 19).⁶

Figure 19

Latin America and the Caribbean (22 countries): central government social spending, by country and subregion, 2016^a (Percentages of GDP)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of official information from the countries.

^aThe data for Barbados are for 2015. The data for Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia are general government figures. The data for Uruguay do not include figures for the Social Insurance Bank.

Increased funding for investment in social policies is needed to achieve inclusive social development and sustainable development generally. In addition, the quality of expenditure must be an ongoing concern. The challenge is to make complementary progress in prioritizing social policies, making the best use of resources and ensuring more efficient and effective management in order to achieve the corresponding policy objectives.

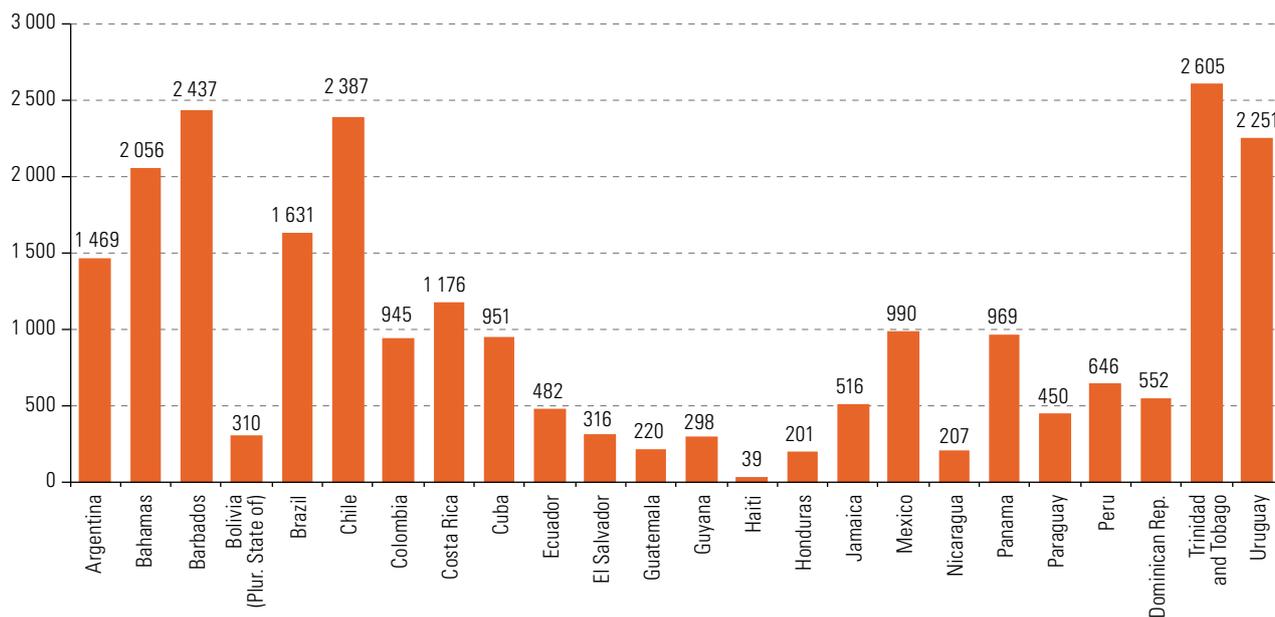
Although average per capita central government social spending in Latin American countries almost doubled between 2002 and 2016, to reach US\$ 894, this was very mixed across subregions and countries. While the per capita average for South America was US\$ 1,175, in the countries of Central America, Mexico and the Dominican Republic, it was just US\$ 579. In the five countries of the English-speaking Caribbean for

⁶ Average of five countries: Bahamas, Barbados, Guyana, Jamaica, and Trinidad and Tobago.

which data are available, the situation reflects a bipolarity, since three of them are located at the highest level of per capita expenditure, similar to or even above the highest-spending countries of the Southern Cone, and two have amounts equivalent to the Central American average (ECLAC, 2019a) (see figure 20).⁷

Figure 20

Latin America and the Caribbean (24 countries): per capita central government social spending, 2016^a
(Dollars at constant 2010 prices)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of official information from the countries.

^a The data for Barbados are for 2015. The data for Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia are general government figures. The data for Uruguay do not include figures for the Social Insurance Bank.

As noted in *Social Panorama of Latin America, 2018* (2019a, p. 24), “the region lags far behind in the availability of resources for social spending, both in absolute terms and in relation to the countries of the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and the European Union”. For example, expenditure on social protection in European Union countries averaged 28.1% of GDP in 2016,⁸ compared to 11.2% in Latin America.⁹ “At the same time, the detailed data reveal once again that the Latin American countries where the greatest efforts are required to combat poverty and which are most in need of services to guarantee social rights and achieve the social goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (in areas such as health, education, social protection and access to drinking water, electricity and sanitation) have the fewest resources, both in absolute terms and as a proportion of their GDP.” (ECLAC, 2019a).

A key determinant of a country’s capacity to fund social policies is its tax burden. In 2017, total tax revenues in Latin America and the Caribbean amounted to 22.8% of GDP, compared to an average of 34.2% among OECD countries (OECD and others, 2019).

The data indicate that the problem of financing social policies could, at least partly, be solved by making tax collection more effective and designing less regressive tax structures, in addition to increasing tax burdens. This is a major challenge for the region, as tax evasion and avoidance in Latin America cost 6.3% of GDP in 2017 (2.3% in the case of VAT and 4.0% in the case of income tax), equivalent to US\$ 335 billion (ECLAC, 2019b) (see figure 21). “If countries could reduce a portion of this non-compliance, the additional revenue could provide a major impetus for achieving the social and economic targets of the Sustainable Development Goals” (ECLAC, 2019b, p. 34).

⁷ The figures are higher in some of these countries, since they have broader institutional coverage, such as that of general government, encompassing the subnational governments which finance much of the education system, as well as certain health expenditures (ECLAC, 2019a).

⁸ See Eurostat [online] <https://ec.europa.eu/eurostat/tgm/table.do?tab=table&init=1&plugin=1&pcode=tps00098&language=en>.

⁹ See [online] the Social Investment Portal in Latin America and the Caribbean <https://observatoriosocial.cepal.org/inversion/en>.

Figure 21Latin America (16 countries): income tax and value added tax non-compliance, 2017^a

(Percentages of GDP)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Fiscal Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean 2019* (LC/PUB.2019/8-P), Santiago.

^a Estimates are based on national studies on income tax and value added tax (VAT) non-compliance. The figures correspond to a weighted average based on GDP at current prices in dollars. The countries included in the income tax analysis are Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay. The VAT analysis covers Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

Tax evasion in the region costs more than four times the total amount spent on conditional cash transfer programmes (0.37% of GDP) and non-contributory pensions (0.65% of GDP), as well as on labour market policies to promote labour inclusion and employment protection (0.45% of GDP) in six Latin American countries. It also outweighs the investment made by central governments of Latin America and the Caribbean in the various social expenditure functions: education (3.9% of GDP in Latin America and 4.1% in the Caribbean), health (2.2% and 3.0% of GDP, respectively), social protection (4.1% and 3.1%, respectively), housing and community amenities (0.7% and 1.1%, respectively) and environmental protection (0.1% and 0.0%, respectively) (ECLAC, 2019a). As a point of reference, a study for 18 Latin American countries estimated the average cost of universalizing a cash transfer equivalent to one poverty line, for persons aged 65 and over and for households with children and adolescents, as equivalent to 2.8% of GDP (around 2011). However, the figures varied widely among countries, ranging from 0.7% of GDP in Argentina to 5.4% in Honduras (Filgueira and Espíndola, 2015).

The sustainability of the financing of social policies is central to their effectiveness and institutionalization, and for addressing the social footprint of the current development model (ECLAC, 2017a). Only by mobilizing domestic resources —through more effective and progressive tax collection, less evasion and greater prioritization of social issues— will it be possible to achieve the long-desired sustainability (ECLAC, 2018b) and thus generate the synergies needed to achieve the targets of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). As explained above, the region has thus far failed to take the necessary steps to improve such resource mobilization, so the deadlines of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development underscore the urgency of establishing new social and fiscal compacts to this end.

H. Emerging obstacles

The region is facing a number of emerging phenomena and some old issues —but with new angles or facets— that also constitute critical obstacles to progress towards inclusive social development (ECLAC, 2018b).

1. The various forms of violence

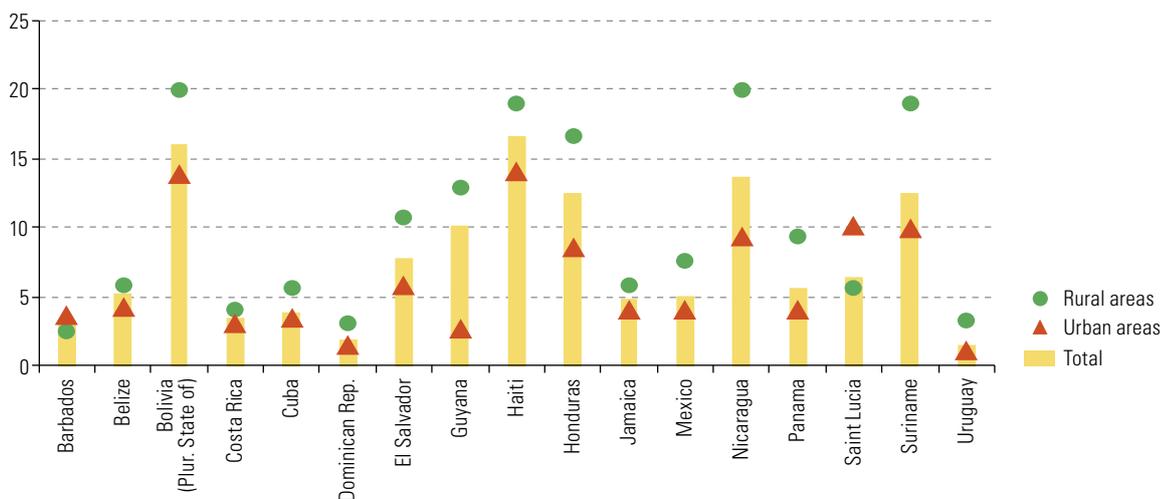
Latin America and the Caribbean is the most violent region in the world, perhaps surprisingly given its level of economic, political and social development. For example, the region's homicide rate, at 22.1 per 100,000 people, is five times the global average of 4.4. Such high rates are also evident in other manifestations of violence, such as assaults and incidents of sexual violence (ECLAC, 2018b). Violence in all its manifestations threatens people's present and future, especially in the case of children, young people, women, indigenous and Afrodescendent peoples, migrants, and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) people,¹⁰ among others. It restricts their life choices, destroys the social fabric and undermines democracy. Consequently, it is essential to recognize security and life without violence in all its manifestations as inalienable rights, and to nurture cultural change based on peace, tolerance and the celebration of human life in all its diversity.

Violence is not a new phenomenon in Latin America and the Caribbean, it can be traced back to the region's origins. The starkest manifestation of violence in the region was the system of slavery that resulted from the transatlantic trafficking of Africans carried out by the European conquerors (ECLAC, 2017a and 2017b), and the genocide perpetrated against indigenous peoples. Nevertheless, its recent manifestations stand out for their intensity, explosive growth and territorial expression, as well as their cross-border nature and links to organized crime. Indeed, in the areas most plagued by violence, organized crime competes with, and sometimes supplants, the State (ECLAC, 2018b). In the worst affected countries, it fuels higher migration rates, particularly among youth. Moreover, the incursion of organized crime into the State apparatus, in order to expand and consolidate its power, is a serious threat to democracies and erodes the general population's (already low) trust in public institutions (Miraglia, Ochoa and Briscoe, 2012).

Underlying this phenomenon is a trend towards violent acts being seen as part of daily life and behaviour, which can have an especially severe impact on children, adolescents and women. Thus, in a number of the region's countries (such as Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Suriname), between 10% and 15% of women aged 15-49 believe that it is normal for a husband to hit his wife. These views are even more commonly held in rural areas than among urban populations (see figure 22) (ECLAC/UNICEF, 2018). The most extreme manifestation of violence against women is femicide. According to official data compiled by the Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean, 1,903 women were murdered because of their gender in 15 countries in Latin America and three in the Caribbean in 2014.

Figure 22

Latin America and the Caribbean (17 countries): women aged 15–49 who think that it is normal for a husband to hit his wife, by country and area of residence, 2010–2016 (Percentages)



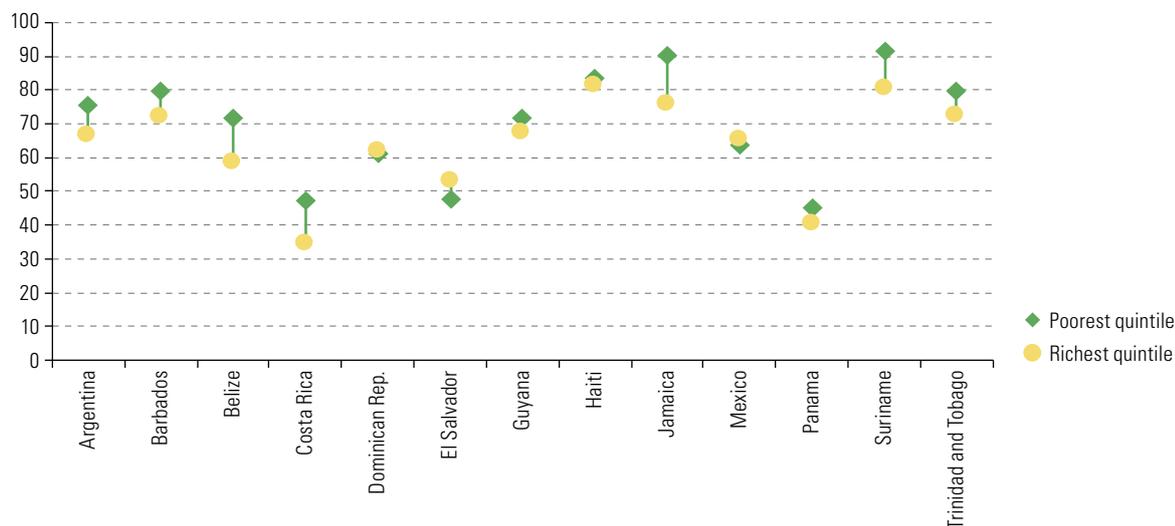
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNICEF Data [online database] <https://data.unicef.org/>; multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS), demographic and health surveys (DHS) and other representative national surveys.

¹⁰ While the acronym LGBTI refers specifically to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people, in this context it should also be understood as encompassing other people who face situations of violence and discrimination based on their actual or perceived sexual orientation, gender identity and sex characteristics, including those who may identify with other terms (UNAIDS, 2015).

In several of the region's countries, more than 50% of children aged between two and 14 years are subjected to some violent form of discipline, irrespective of their socioeconomic status (see figure 23). Children who are exposed to violence, abuse and neglect in the early years of life suffer long-term consequences, including lower levels of socio-emotional development, and they are more likely to act out violently with other children and adults (ECLAC/UNICEF, 2018). The culture of violence in resolving disputes that is predominant in the region extends to the various spaces of social interaction (including the family and school), and it generally affects children of all social classes and groups.

Figure 23

Latin America and the Caribbean (13 countries): children aged 2–14 who are subjected to some violent form of discipline, by income level, 2006–2015 (Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), UNICEF Data [online database] <https://data.unicef.org/>; multiple indicator cluster surveys (MICS), demographic and health surveys (DHS) and other representative national surveys.

The violence experienced in schools mirrors society and its trends. This culture of violence is the result of social behaviour of low tolerance and appreciation of diversity, and it, primarily, fuels aggression towards those who come from population groups that have historically faced discrimination. This invokes factors of discrimination that historically and socially extend beyond the school environment, but which, at the same time, require the education system to act to promote changes in new generations (Trucco and Inostroza, 2017). The opening up of the educational space to broad sociocultural diversities has generated tension with the cultural tradition of competition and discrimination, which makes it difficult to accept differences or to value diversity and coexistence within schools. Low tolerance of difference is also expressed among the students themselves, who imitate the discriminatory and violent forms of behaviour that they observe in their family and social environment, and reproduce them as direct or symbolic interpersonal violence within the school space (Trucco and Ullmann, 2015).

Youth is one of the stages of the life cycle most affected by the phenomenon of violence in the region; violence is one of the key contributors to the burden of disease at this stage of the life cycle, especially among men (ECLAC, 2014b; Trucco and Ullmann, 2015). The high profile and rise of youth involvement in gangs or different forms of organized urban violence is undeniable and feeds the stigma of young people as the protagonists of violence, associating them in the public imagination with negative labels such as "deviant" or "dysfunctional". However, research has shown that youth violence is actually a consequence of the marginalization and exclusion of this population group in various parts of the region, and that it offers a social inclusion alternative (inclusion in exclusion). Studies show that the features of social exclusion most

frequently encountered at the origin of situations of youth violence are urban marginality, lack of access to channels of social mobility and consumption, exclusion from education and the workplace, the socialization of aggression and crime from an early age (in families and neighbourhoods), and frustrated hopes when additional years of schooling fail to guarantee better opportunities for employment or well-being for many young people (ECLAC/OIJ, 2008; ECLAC, 2014b).

Violence is distributed heterogeneously throughout the region and affects some countries more than others. It also varies within each country, manifesting itself in a particular manner in the urban space, with much of the violence taking place against the backdrop of marginal city zones. Neighbourhoods, favelas and some urban areas are characterized not only by poverty and unequal access to services (as discussed in section C, in connection with the obstacle posed by inequality associated with slums), but also by violence, which is a burden which perpetuates and exacerbates social exclusion. For socio-historical reasons, several of the region's countries, such as those of Northern Central America or the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, are experiencing political crises or a weakening of the State structure, which, combined with changes in cocaine trafficking routes to the United States since Colombia ceased to be the main hub, have made these countries particularly susceptible to violence. The manner in which these criminal organizations insinuate themselves into each city and each country depends very much on the institutions and social fabric, as well as the power structures of the organizations themselves. These same factors determine the type of social integration that occurs at the territorial level and the degree to which youth and other local population groups become involved in society (ECLAC, 2014b; Trucco and Ullmann, 2015). These situations of violence have triggered strong migration flows in the region, which put the population that is forced to migrate at greater risk of violence and rights violations (as will be discussed below).

Research has shown that, while poverty is an aggravating factor in all types of violence, inequality and growing economic and social polarization are much more systematically correlated with violence (Trucco and Ullmann, 2015). Moreover, and this is highly relevant in the region, "the axes of the social inequality matrix and the sociocultural patterns underpinning that matrix, such as racism, sexism, homophobia and transphobia, lead to their own particular manifestations of violence" (ECLAC, 2018b, p. 37). The high rates of violence perpetrated against people of African descent in some countries of the region are clear manifestations of racism. Afrodescendants, particularly young people, are more likely to be stopped and searched on the street because of racially-biased police checks, and are arrested, imprisoned and sentenced to harsher penalties.¹¹ Of the total number of homicide victims in Brazil in 2017, 75.5% were Afrodescendants, while 66% of the total number of femicide victims in the same period were women of African descent (IPEA/FBSP, 2019).¹² Similarly, among Afrodescendent adolescent and young men between the ages of 12 and 29 years, the risk of exposure to violence was significantly higher than among persons of the same age group who self-identified as white: in 2012, the risk of a young Afrodescendent males becoming a victim of homicide was 2.6 times greater than for a young white male (Brazil, 2014 cited by IPEA/FBSP, 2017). Moreover, young women of African descent aged 15–29 were 2.2 times more likely to be murdered in Brazil than white women in the same age group (Brazil, 2017, cited by Gomes and Laborne, 2018).

Discrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity also leads to very high rates of violence against members of the LGBTI community (OHCHR, 2012, cited in ECLAC, 2018b, p. 38). These axes of discrimination and violence are particularly prevalent when rates of violence are high and institutions to protect the rights of these people are weak. An Amnesty International report has documented that, in the Central American countries most affected by violence (El Salvador, Guatemala and Honduras), LGBTI people are particularly exposed to this phenomenon, which has an intrinsic relationship with the multiple forms of

¹¹ This practice, known as "racial profiling," characterizes police attitudes towards detention and control that use racist biases either unconsciously or deliberately. Certain population groups, especially young Afrodescendants, are subjected to various forms of violent treatment without a legitimate law enforcement objective. Such attitudes may stem from racism rooted in society and in police institutions. The programme of activities for the implementation of the United Nations International Decade for People of African Descent calls on States to take further measures to eliminate this phenomenon (OHCHR, 2019).

¹² The data also show that the gap between homicide rates among the Afrodescendent and non-Afrodescendent populations has been growing: between 2007 and 2017, the homicide rate increased by 33.1% for Afrodescendants and by 3.3% (10 times less) for the non-Afrodescendent population. As a result, in 2017 the rate was 43.1 per 100,000 among the Afrodescendent population and 16.0 per 100,000 people among non-Afrodescendants. In the case of women, the homicide rate for those of African descent rose by 29.9% during the same period, while the rate for non-Afrodescendent women increased by 4.5% (IPEA/FBSP, 2019).

discrimination faced by LGBTI persons in the various spheres of their family and work life, and even by society at large. Of the LGBTI asylum seekers and refugees from these countries who were interviewed, 88% said they had suffered sexual and gender-based violence in their countries of origin (UNHCR, 2017, cited in Amnesty International, 2017).

Another relevant factor in this regard is the effect of mass media, including new digital media, on promoting and validating violent relationships. Digital technologies and social networks have transformed modes of interaction and are allowing new phenomena to emerge, such as instantaneous mass communication, anonymity, the automatic recording of interactions and access to previously unimaginable messages of violence. All of this undoubtedly has an impact on the effects and types of violence that are possible in social interactions, and makes the regulation and prevention of violence more complex.

In general, a multisectoral approach must be taken to addressing the issue of violence. In terms of prevention, one of the key issues to be tackled is the predominance of males in indicators of physical violence (both as victims and as perpetrators), a characteristic that is reiterated in the various spheres and becomes more evident throughout the life cycle. Socialization processes do not usually place sufficient emphasis on the positive values that could be gained from a new masculinity that is no longer based on traditional roles. School socialization also has a responsibility to provide a space for the construction of a positive masculine identity that does not resort to violence (Trucco and Inostroza, 2017).

2. Disasters and climate change

The greater frequency of disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean means that it is increasingly necessary to design strategies to reduce people's exposure to these events. Strategies should include a mitigation plan and social and economic measures that will enable individuals, families and communities to recover from the loss of both physical and productive assets and reductions in their levels of well-being. To address the social and economic impact of disasters, linkages must be created among policies from different sectors that can respond in a complementary manner to these events, in terms of both prevention and mitigation (ECLAC, 2014c). There is an increasing recognition within development and humanitarian assistance spheres of the potential linkages between social protection, disaster management and climate change adaptation (Beazley, Solórzano and Sossouvi, 2016).

The effects of human activity on nature over the past 50 years are unprecedented in human history. The main direct factors affecting the destruction of nature are, in descending order: changes in land and sea use; direct exploitation of animals, plants and other organisms (including hunting, fishing and deforestation); the introduction of alien species; pollution; and climate change. These direct factors are linked to indirect drivers, such as population growth, unsustainable production and consumption trends, technological development, and governance and transparency issues, among others (IPBES, 2019).¹³

Along with the increasing degradation of nature, disasters are becoming more frequent. These are defined as "severe alterations in the normal functioning of a community or a society due to hazardous physical events interacting with vulnerable social conditions, leading to widespread adverse human, material, economic, or environmental effects that require immediate emergency response to satisfy critical human needs and that may require external support for recovery" (IPCC, 2012, p. 5).¹⁴

Despite ongoing debates, there is growing recognition of the links between extreme weather events and climate change (IPCC, 2013), which is understood as "the planet-wide variation in the Earth's climate being brought about by natural and especially man-made causes. This is a consequence of the increasing retention

¹³ The Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services (IPBES), established in 2012, is an independent intergovernmental body with over 130 member States and provides decision makers with the most recent empirical data on the state of biodiversity and of the ecosystem services it provides to society. For further information, see [online] <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/blog/2019/05/nature-decline-unprecedented-report/>.

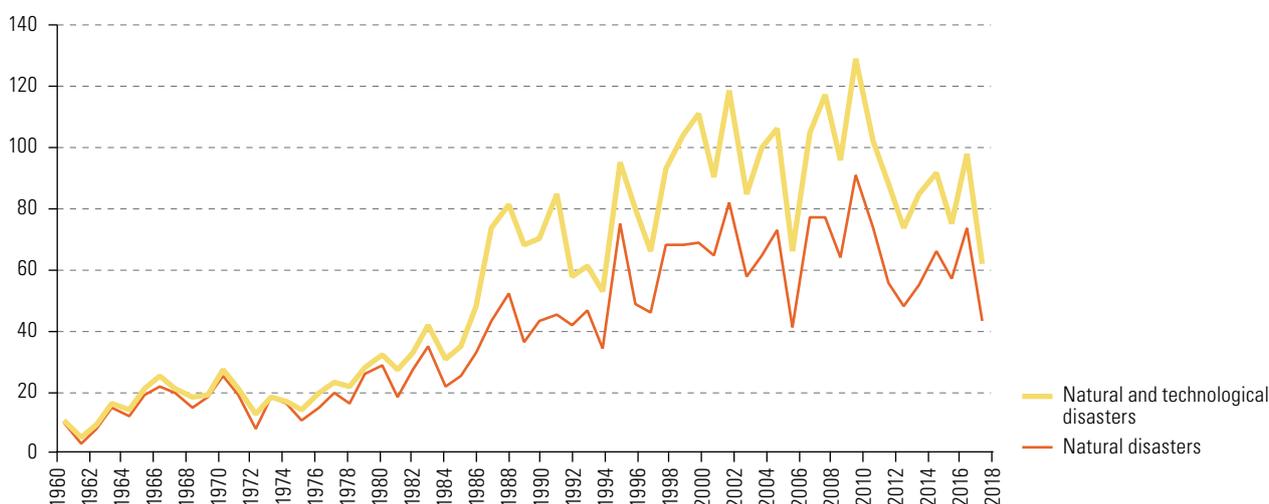
¹⁴ While "natural disasters" are usually referred to, it is more relevant to talk about disasters (in terms of their effects on population, the economy and the environment) that are the result of a combination of natural phenomena, human action and the pre-existing conditions of physical, social, economic and environmental vulnerability of people and human settlements (Cecchini, Sunkel and Barrantes, 2017).

of the Sun's heat in the atmosphere known as the 'greenhouse effect'" (Bárcena and others, 2018, p. 3). Climate change has multiple effects on the territories and on the social well-being of their populations, and they affect vulnerable population groups more intensely. Together with other factors, including rapid urbanization and a lack of access to basic services, poverty and inequality are the greatest determinants of a population's susceptibility to climate change (CAF, 2014; ECLAC, 2018e). Climatic factors, such as temperature extremes and the upward trend in temperature, precipitation extremes, increased carbon dioxide (CO₂) concentrations, drought conditions, glacier retreat, deforestation and ocean acidification, that occur in different areas and in different combinations, are associated with key vulnerabilities and risks to livelihoods and the availability of income. Key risks include decreased food production and food quality, water availability in semi-arid and glacier-melt-dependent regions and flooding in urban areas, all of which have an impact on land-use changes and deforestation; and the spread of vector-borne diseases to other latitudes and altitudes (ECLAC, 2015; IPCC, 2014). Thus, climate change and climate-related disasters bring about a variety of effects, including increased risk of poverty, rising levels of inequality, displacement and migration, in areas such as food security, health and education. Climate-related disasters accounted for 91% of all 7,255 events recorded worldwide between 1998 and 2017, with floods being the most frequent type of disaster (CRED/UNDRR, 2018). At the regional level, more than half of the Caribbean countries are extremely vulnerable to the impacts of climate change, and 75% of the Mesoamerican countries are at high risk (Haiti is the most vulnerable country in the region) (CAF, 2014). Rural territories are particularly affected owing to the susceptibility of agricultural activities to climate change, an issue that is of particular concern for Mesoamerica and the Caribbean, given the prevalence of smallholder and subsistence crop farming (CAF, 2014).

In Latin America and the Caribbean, both "natural" disasters (geophysical, meteorological, hydrological, climatological, biological and extraterrestrial) and "technological" disasters (mainly originating from industrial activities and transport) have become steadily more frequent over the past 60 years, up by a factor of 5.7 between the 1960s and the last decade (2009–2018). While there was an average of 14 natural disasters and 1.7 technological disasters per year in the 1960s, between 2009 and 2018 the average frequencies increased to 63 and 27, respectively (see figure 24). Thus, while natural disasters have become 4.4 times more likely to occur in recent decades, the frequency of technological disasters has increased by a factor of 16.1.

Figure 24

Latin America and the Caribbean: incidence of natural and technological disasters, 1960–2018^a



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), EM-DAT: International Disaster Database [online] <http://www.emdat.be/>.

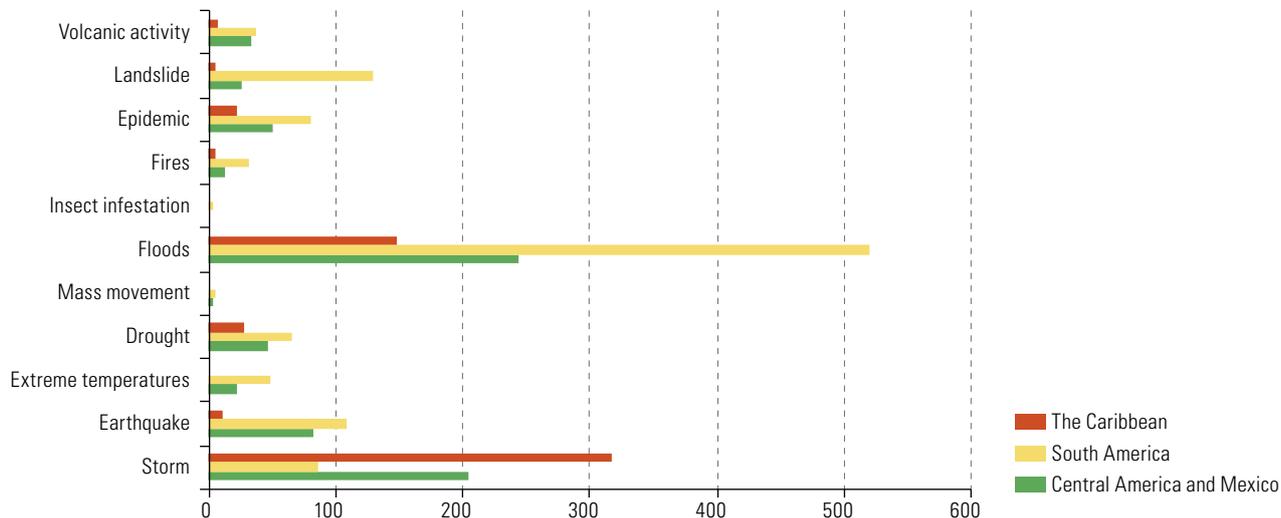
^a Natural disasters include geophysical, meteorological, hydrological, climatological, biological and extra-terrestrial disasters (including meteorite, asteroid and comet impacts). Technological disasters include industrial accidents (chemical spills; collapses of industrial infrastructure; explosions; fires; gas leaks; poisonings; radiation; and oil spills), transport accidents (air, road, water or rail transport) and miscellaneous accidents; explosions; fires and others).

Between 1960 and 2018, almost 3,400 disasters occurred in Latin America and the Caribbean, as a result of which some 571,000 people died and 295 million people were otherwise affected. Economic damages have been estimated at nearly US\$ 313 billion for the same period (CRED, 2019).

The impacts of these events on the countries and subregions of Latin America and the Caribbean vary, depending on their geographical location (see figure 25). While flood-related disasters (47%), followed by landslides (12%), are the most common disasters in South America, in Central America and Mexico floods account for 34% of all disasters, followed by storms (28%). Meanwhile, of all the disasters that occurred in the Caribbean between 1960 and 2018, 58% were storms.

Figure 25

Latin America and the Caribbean: number of disasters, by type and subregion, 1960–2018



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Centre for Research on the Epidemiology of Disasters (CRED), EM-DAT: International Disaster Database [online] <http://www.emdat.be/>.

It is not only the number and type of disasters that differ, but also the intensity of their socioeconomic impact. Small island developing States face the greatest economic losses relative to GDP (UNDRR, 2017). Moreover, there are not only differences among countries, but also within them: disasters have a greater impact on communities or people who live in poverty and disproportionately and increasingly bear the brunt of their effects. Various population groups—such as women, older people, persons with disabilities, children, indigenous peoples, *campesinos* and family farmers—are particularly vulnerable. Women are also more likely to lose their life in these events than men (Trucco and Ullmann, 2015); and the economic losses of populations living in poverty have been estimated to be two or three times greater in relative terms than those of the non-poor (Cecchini, Sunkel and Barrantes, 2017). This is due to both the vulnerability of their assets (Hallegatte and others, 2017) and their limited access to disaster risk management tools (Vakis, 2006). As poverty remains eminently rural in many countries, the decline in subsistence crop yields due to extreme droughts tends to render these groups even more vulnerable (ECLAC, 2016c).

As is true of the effects, the capacity for recovery also tends to be uneven across the population, strongly influenced by factors such as gender, age, disability and territory (ECLAC, 2017a). Disasters can also destroy income-generating productive assets, such as stocks and reserves of commercial goods, agricultural assets (such as livestock), work materials, workshops or means of transportation (ECLAC, 2017a). Moreover, disasters, especially technological ones, can have very severe consequences for natural resources, which, in addition to far-reaching environmental effects, also carry serious economic and social costs. Unemployment and loss of income owing to a disaster can have a significant impact on the well-being of individuals or families in the short term (including in terms of survival), resilience and life prospects (ECLAC, 2017a). In other words, disasters are both a cause and consequence of poverty and vulnerability. A recent catastrophic example was

the disaster caused by the overflow of the tailings dam of mining companies in Brazil (especially in the cities of Mariana and Brumadinho and the surrounding areas, in the state of Minas Gerais). Besides claiming more than 300 human lives, mostly mining company workers, this had a severe impact on local ecosystems, by totally destroying rural communities and fertile family farming land, and polluting several rivers in the region which, in addition to their importance for the ecological balance of these territories, were a source of subsistence for *campesinos*, indigenous peoples and surrounding populations.¹⁵

In the case of indigenous peoples, attention has been drawn to the various ways in which they are affected by climate change and the specific threats that it poses to their culture, livelihoods and ways of life, in view of the combination of characteristics, such as the higher incidence of poverty among indigenous peoples and their greater dependence on renewable natural resources for economic, social, cultural and other activities (ILO, 2018). At the same time, these peoples can be considered agents of change in climate change mitigation and adaptation measures, drawing on their traditional knowledge and practices (ILO, 2018). Article 7, paragraph 5 of the Paris Agreement also calls for parties to be guided by the knowledge of indigenous peoples and local knowledge systems, among other things, with regard to climate change adaptation efforts.

Rights of access to environmental information, public participation in environmental decision-making processes and access to justice in environmental matters are very important for the analysis and design of measures related to disaster prevention and response mechanisms. Particular assistance should be extended to indigenous peoples through actions to prevent their livelihoods from deteriorating and safeguard their cultural rights, among other things. In this connection, the provisions of the Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean include guaranteeing assistance to persons or groups in vulnerable situations (including indigenous peoples) to prepare requests and obtain a response for environmental information (article 5, paragraph 4), and ensuring that in the implementation of the Agreement, each Party shall guarantee that its domestic legislation and international obligations in relation to the rights of indigenous peoples and local communities are observed (article 7, paragraph 15) (ECLAC, 2018f).

By guaranteeing basic levels of income and access to social services (health, education and housing, among others) and promotion, social protection strengthens response capacity (Cecchini and Martínez, 2012) and makes people less vulnerable. It is therefore a key factor in coping with disasters before, during and after they occur. However, this is not clearly discernible in existing programmes and policies in the region, so work remains to be done. It has also been argued that social protection can enhance people's capacity to cope with the negative effects of climate-related shocks and loss of livelihoods by providing regular and predictable benefits, such as cash transfers (Ulrichs and Slater, 2016).

The greater frequency of disasters gives rise to multiple social policy challenges, including: developing integrated strategies aligned with international frameworks and agendas (such as the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030, the SDGs and the Paris Agreement); enhancing integrated disaster response actions by the different institutions; building national social protection systems with disaster risk management components; fostering the integration of social information systems (vital for both disaster risk management and social protection programmes); and encouraging integration and cooperation among national, regional and local actors in social policy management to address disaster risk.

3. Demographic, epidemiological and nutritional transitions

The Latin American and Caribbean region is undergoing major demographic, epidemiological and nutritional changes that are giving rise to new challenges for inclusive social development.

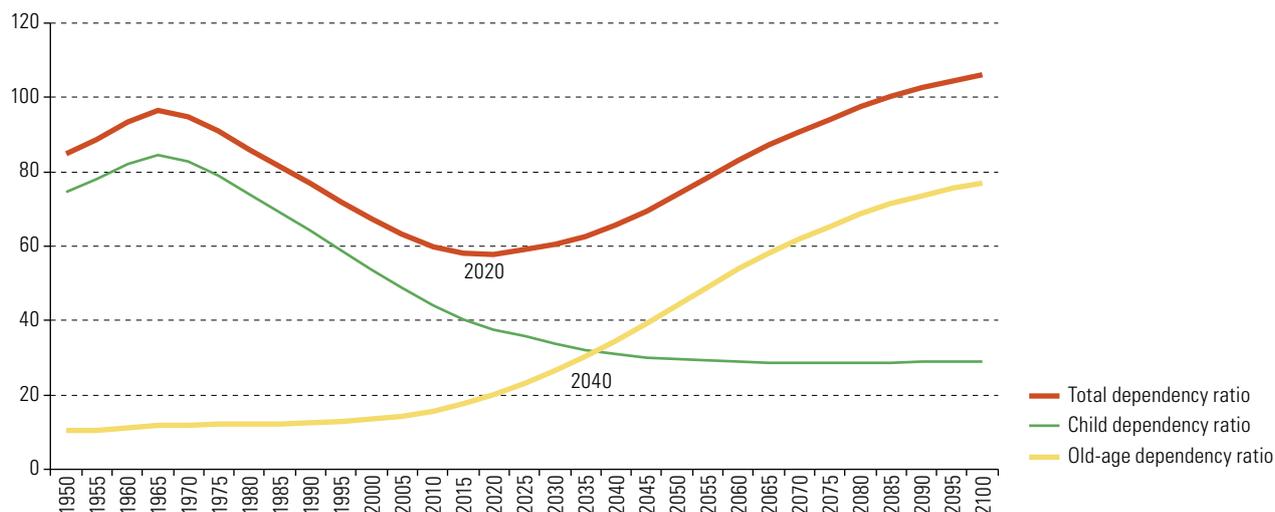
This is an era of far-reaching demographic changes, characterized by sharp declines in fertility and lower mortality rates. Although the region's different subregions and countries vary widely in terms of fertility trends, rates in Latin America and the Caribbean dropped from an average of 5.5 children per woman in the period 1965–1970 to 2.05 between 2015 and 2020 (Huenchuán, 2018).

¹⁵ For further details on the report of the scientific fact-finding mission, see [online] <https://docplayer.com.br/36029559-Relatorio-tecnico-determinacao-de-metais-na-bacia-do-rio-doce-periodo-dezembro-2015-a-abril-2016.html>.

There has also been a steep fall in mortality rates, reflected in a significant increase in life expectancy. On average, the over-60s population is projected to grow faster in Latin America and the Caribbean than any other region in the world, with a projected 71% increase over the next 15 years (United Nations, 2015, cited in ECLAC, 2016a). The accelerated process of population ageing, the feminization of old age, the fact that older persons increasingly live in urban areas, and a prematurely ageing rural population (owing to the migration of younger generations to urban areas) pose new and pressing challenges for inclusive social development in the region (ECLAC, 2018b).

These changes in fertility and mortality rates have increased the ratio of the working-age population relative to those of non-working age, in what is referred to as the “demographic dividend”. In conjunction with greater participation by women in the labour market, this has contributed to an increase in household income and to progress in reducing poverty and increasing well-being.¹⁶ Yet, as figure 26 shows, a projection of current demographic trends indicates that the region’s dependency ratios are set to rise in the coming decades, as the proportion of dependent older persons increases (ECLAC, 2017b). This will put additional fiscal pressures on pension and health systems and increase the demand for elderly care, which often falls to the women in the family, thus turning a demographic dividend into a demographic burden.

Figure 26
Latin America and the Caribbean: child and old-age dependency ratios, 1950–2100
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) on the basis of United Nations, “World Population Prospects: The 2017 Revision”, 2017 [online] <https://esa.un.org/unpd/wpp/>.

Note: Child and old-age dependency ratios refer to the populations aged 0–14 and 60 years or over respectively, as ratios of the working-age population, aged 15–59. The total dependency ratio is the sum of the two.

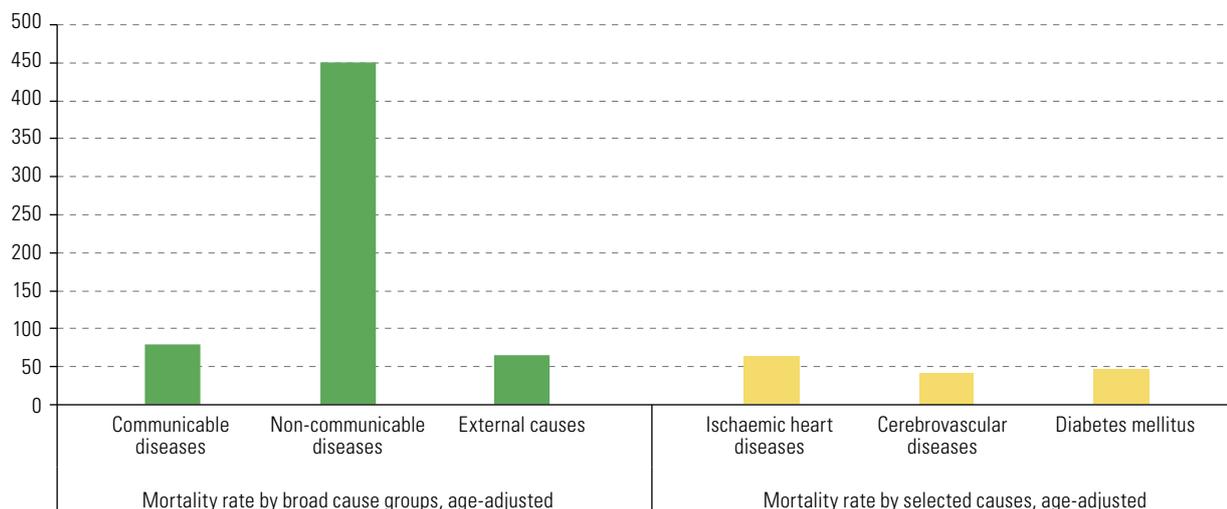
From the standpoint of inclusive social development, there is an urgent need to invest in universal and comprehensive social protection institutions and systems that can meet the demands of the future dependent population and guarantee their rights. Such institutions and systems need to incorporate access to care and ensure that their benefits are adequate, especially those intended for the burgeoning older population. The positive contribution that older people can make to societies must be recognized and enhanced, and steps must be taken to break down the barriers to their full inclusion. At the same time, many countries have not taken advantage of the demographic dividend to enhance the development of people’s capacities (particularly those of children, adolescents and young people), to build care systems that facilitate women’s labour participation, or to invest in programmes that foster access to decent work, before the next demographic phase of high dependency ratios begins.

¹⁶ The demographic dividend refers to a period of potential economic growth in which the size of the working-age population increases and the dependency ratio decreases, linked to the decline in fertility and, consequently, the size of households (ECLAC, 2009).

Related to this, the countries of the region are experiencing changes in their epidemiological profile, with major shifts in morbidity and mortality patterns, characterized by a declining prevalence of communicable diseases and the spread of non-communicable ones (such as diabetes, ischaemic heart disease and cerebrovascular disease) (PAHO, 2017). Non-communicable diseases are the main cause of mortality, while communicable diseases account for fewer than 15% of deaths in Latin America and the Caribbean (see figure 27). Fundamental drivers of this epidemiological transition have included advances in health systems and increased coverage and improved access to health services, immunizations and water supply and sanitation services.

Figure 27

Latin America and the Caribbean: age-adjusted mortality rates by broad cause group and by selected cause, 2016
(Per 100,000 inhabitants)



Source: Pan-American Health Organization/World Health Organization (PAHO/WHO), *Core Indicators: Health Situation in the Americas 2018* [online] http://iris.paho.org/xmlui/bitstream/handle/123456789/49511/CoreIndicators2018_eng.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y.

While the new epidemiological profile is closely related to population ageing and the way of life in modern societies, particularly the sedentary lifestyles and eating patterns, it is also important to highlight the increasing impact of the environment on mortality and morbidity. Globally, between 22% and 25% of the disease burden is attributable to modifiable environmental factors, such as polluted water, lack of access to sanitation and hygiene services, urban ambient air pollution and indoor air pollution from solid fuel use, with children most vulnerable to these factors (Prüss-Üstün and Corvalán, 2006; PAHO, 2011; Prüss-Üstün and others, 2016). Moreover, climate change and rising average temperatures, which are particularly evident in the Caribbean and tropical areas, have a significant health impact that is reflected, for example, in a potential increase in waterborne diseases and vectors such as the Zika and chikungunya viruses (PAHO, 2017).

This new epidemiological scenario calls for the urgent rethinking and retargeting of health and social protection systems that adopt a universal and comprehensive approach and take measures to prevent non-communicable diseases throughout the life cycle, by making changes to eating habits, levels of physical and social activity, and long-term treatment, and taking the environmental factors into account. Many countries in the region also need a system that can prevent and treat persistent communicable diseases, such as cholera and dengue, as well as those arising as a result of climate change, which makes the task even more complex (ECLAC, 2018b).

Coincidentally, the profound changes in eating habits and lifestyles of recent decades mean that the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean now face a double burden of malnutrition (FAO, 2006; FAO and others, 2018). Today, most countries in the region must address the challenges associated with eradicating malnutrition due to deficiency, or undernutrition, together with emerging challenges related to overnutrition,

reflected in overweight and obesity. The main factors associated with this nutritional transition are part of a set of economic, social and cultural conditions that have led to a marked shift in food production and markets, the structure and role of families, technologies for work and recreation, the media, and the characteristics of poverty and marginalization. These result in increasing physical inactivity and sedentarism, as well as unhealthy diets, all of which are factors associated with overweight and obesity (Marmot and Wilkinson, 2006; Fernández and others, 2017).

In addition to constituting a denial of rights and a serious public and private health problem, the double burden of malnutrition has negative consequences for the development of educational capacities and outcomes, for social and labour inclusion, and for societies' productivity levels. For example, the combined impact of the double burden of malnutrition is estimated at 4.3% and 2.2% of GDP per year in Ecuador and Mexico, respectively. In Chile, where undernutrition has already been eradicated, the cost of overweight and obesity is put at 0.2% of GDP (Fernández and others, 2017).

The region's new nutritional profile thus raises a set of multidimensional challenges that must be addressed from a health, educational and production perspective, in order to respond simultaneously to undernutrition and obesity. For this, health and social protection systems need to invest in measures to keep the double burden of malnutrition and its associated diseases at bay.

4. Migration at the crossroads of inclusive social development

Although migrations have always been a feature of all societies, in the current context of a globalization replete with imbalances and contradictions they have acquired a peculiar role within the reproduction of societies and the inequalities that characterize them (Canales, 2016). In recent years, migration has become a salient problem —although a very heterogeneous one— that is common to all the countries of the region. Public policies in general and social protection policies in particular have started to be implemented and adapted, but there is still a long way to go, as new global pressures, starting with the current United States migration policy towards Latin America and the Caribbean, have given greater urgency to this issue. Moreover, the region is not immune to forced migratory flows triggered by unpredictable natural and climatic disasters, or by economic crises and political instability in countries of the region itself, for which responses are required.

There are currently three patterns of international migration in the region, which have been visible since the second half of the twentieth century: (i) emigration outside the region, (ii) historical immigration from overseas; and (iii) migration flows within the region. While emigration flows to major destinations outside the region have dwindled in recent decades, immigration from other regions has also declined. At the same time, movements within the region have intensified the most (Martínez and Orrego Rivera, 2016, p.12). According to available census data, an estimated 30 million Latin American and Caribbean people were living outside their country of birth in 2010, compared to the 26 million revealed by the data from the 2000 census round (both within and outside the region). This corresponds to 4% of the total population of Latin America and the Caribbean. National censuses show that the total foreign population (the sum of intraregional and extraregional immigration) residing in countries of Latin America and the Caribbean stood at 7.6 million people around 2010, equivalent to nearly a quarter of the number of emigrants and just 1.1% of the region's total population (Martínez and Orrego Rivera, 2016, p.12). On the other hand, estimates by the United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs (DESA) indicate that the region's international migrant stock amounted to some 9.5 million people around 2017, which is equivalent to 1.5% of its total population, with some heterogeneity between one country and another.¹⁷

In the subregion comprising Mexico and Central America, international migration has become more intense and complex over the past two decades. According to DESA estimates, the migrant stock in 2017 represented 1.2% of the population, equivalent to 2.09 million people. Five trends characterize the composition of migratory flows in this subregion: (i) negative net migration balances in all countries (except Costa Rica

¹⁷ For further information, see [online] https://www.un.org/en/development/desa/population/migration/data/estimates2/data/UN_MigrantStockTotal_2017.xlsx.

and Panama); (ii) relatively smaller flows within the subregion, except for Nicaraguans migrating to Costa Rica and Guatemalans to Mexico, which represents a circular and recurrent cross-border flow; (iii) the peculiar case of Belize, with emigration to the United States and immigration from neighbouring countries (in order of importance, Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras and, to a lesser extent, Mexico), which are small in absolute numbers, but represent 16.7% and 14.5% of the population, respectively; (iv) the United States as the main destination country for Mexican and Central American emigration, and (v) extraregional emigration to Europe and South America, which has remained at levels well below the flow to the United States (Canales and Rojas Wiesner, 2018).¹⁸ Migrant flows of unaccompanied children and adolescents has intensified in this subregion in recent years, fuelled mainly by violence, insecurity and lack of employment in their countries of origin, together with the pursuit of better standards of living and family reunification.

In South America, as in the region as a whole, there is more outward than inward migration, although flows are relatively less heavy than those from Mexico and Central America. The main migratory trends in South America include the intensification of intraregional population movements; the growth and diversification of countries of origin and destination of immigration from outside the region; and the persistence of extraregional emigration. The emigrant population around 2010 amounted to 8.4 million people (2.1% of the total subregional population) and the immigrant population totalled 4.8 million (1.2% of the total subregional population) (Stefoni, 2018, pp. 10-11). In more recent years, migratory pressure has intensified significantly, mainly owing to the large volume of immigration from Haiti (driven by poverty and the effects of the 2010 earthquake) and the crisis in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela. According to DESA estimates, by 2017 the subregion's migrant stock was equivalent to 1.4% of its population, or around 6 million people.

In the Caribbean, the primary link with the United States has historically been a distinguishing feature of migration. According to DESA estimates for 2017, the subregion has the highest international migrant stock as a percentage of the total population compared to other subregions in Latin America and the Caribbean (3.2%, equivalent to 1.4 million people). Coastal and inland storms and flooding can also trigger the migration and displacement of large proportions of Caribbean populations living near the coast, many of them in low-lying areas. Some countries have started to consider the issue of internal migration and population location in the context of natural disaster prevention and mitigating the effects of climate change (Jones, Camarinhas and Gény, 2019). The impact is usually felt most keenly by the poorest of the poor, especially women, girls and older people.

The trends inferred from census data should be treated with caution given the sensitivity of migratory movements to short-term factors, such as economic and political fluctuations. Recent events related to disasters or instability in certain countries, such as the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, or the United States' foreign policy stance, are transforming migration patterns that compound the aforementioned trends. In the case of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, for example, in early June 2019 the International Organization for Migration (IOM) estimated that 4,001,917 individuals from that country had been reported by host governments as migrants, refugees or asylum-seekers. The countries of the region have been the main destinations for these people: Colombia (672,947), Peru (383,209), Chile (326,775), Argentina (148,511), Ecuador (99,583), Brazil (68,499), Panama (58,132) and Mexico (48,955), among others.¹⁹ This situation clearly poses a cross-cutting humanitarian and social inclusion challenge for the region.

Shifts in migratory flows have put additional pressure on public service delivery systems and social and humanitarian assistance programmes. These pressures also represent heavier budgetary burdens and require fiscal solutions to support them. Countries have started to make progress on social protection policies to address the specific needs of migrants and protect their rights; but many difficult challenges lie ahead. Regardless of the heterogeneity of migration patterns, all Latin American and Caribbean countries are facing inclusive social development challenges related to the vulnerability of migrants at one or more stages of the migratory cycle (at the place of origin, during transit, at the place of destination and, possibly, upon returning,

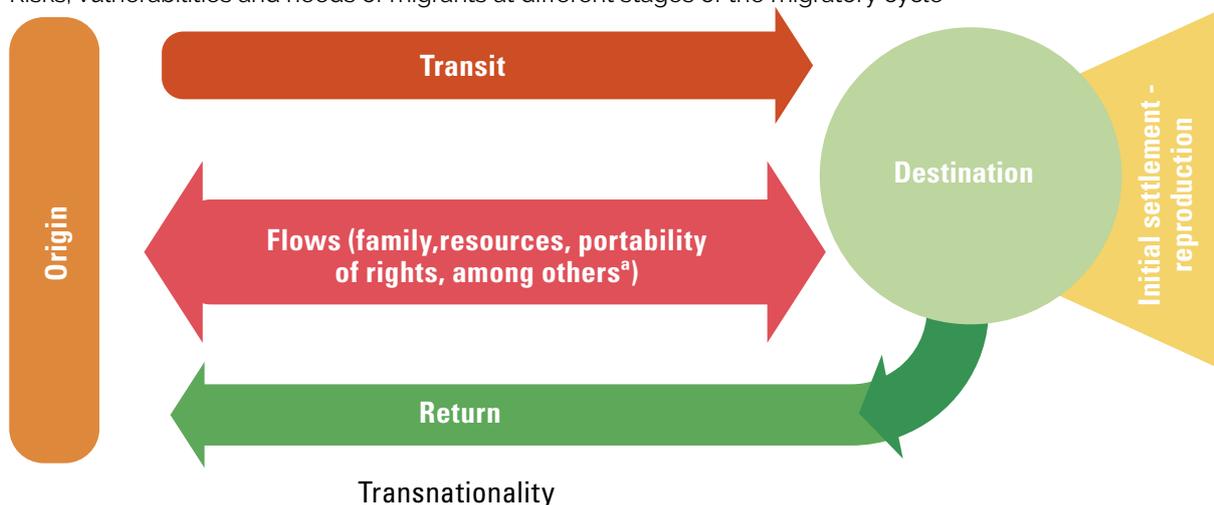
¹⁸ A negative net immigration balance means that more people emigrated from the country than immigrated into it.

¹⁹ These figures do not necessarily imply individual identification, nor registration of each individual, and may include a degree of estimation, depending on each government's statistical data processing methodology. As numerous government sources do not account for people from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela without a regular immigration status, the total number is likely to be higher. For further information, see [online] <https://r4v.info/en/situations/platform> (with data as at 6 June 2019).

voluntary or involuntary, to their country of origin), depending on the specific aspects of their migration. One way to identify and analyse the risks and vulnerabilities specific to migrants is to consider each of the different potential stages of the migration cycle and their interrelationships (Maldonado Valera, Martínez Pizarro and Martínez, 2018). Diagram 1 describes the different stages of the migration cycle and shows the relationships between origin, transit, destination and eventual return, as well as the transnational space generated by the different flows and links forged by the migration. It must be understood that there are specific risks at each stage of the cycle (and within these, also risks related to the characteristics and stage of the life cycle of the migrants themselves), which are associated with different requirements that increasingly pose new problems for social protection policies.

Diagram 1

Risks, vulnerabilities and needs of migrants at different stages of the migratory cycle



Source: C. Maldonado, J. Martínez and R. Martínez, “Protección social y migración: una mirada desde las vulnerabilidades a lo largo del ciclo de la migración y de la vida de las personas”, *Project Documents* (LC/TS.2018/62), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), September 2018.

^a Naturally, the transnational flows associated with migration also include the circulation of ideas, practices, skills, social capital and cultural norms (see [online] <https://comparativemigrationstudies.springeropen.com/articles/10.1186/s40878-016-0032-0>).

Suffering from a lack of job opportunities and access to basic services and social protection in their country of origin, or from situations of increasing violence (as discussed above), migrants seek alternative sources of financing and do not have enough information to migrate safely. At this stage, the “right not to migrate” means that countries of origin have a long-term obligation to ensure development environments that guarantee basic levels of well-being and enjoyment of rights, so that people are not forced to migrate. Closely linked to the conditions in which migration from the place of origin is undertaken, in the transit process there are a number of legal and factual risks and obstacles to reaching the country of destination that expose migrants to precarious transport conditions, sexual exploitation, extortion and sometimes even kidnapping, compounded by limited access to health services. In fact, given these barriers, it is possible that the original migration project will fail and the transit phase will become a permanent condition, creating the need for social and economic integration that was not initially foreseen and for which the transit countries are seldom prepared. In any event, the transit phase is a situation of great potential vulnerability in all aspects, in which physical security and survival are immediate challenges. Particularly dramatic is the situation of unaccompanied children and adolescents in the northern Central American countries, who are fleeing poverty and social violence, and migrating to join family or in search of new development opportunities.

Both in the transit phase and in the destination country, there are many difficulties and limitations associated with irregular migration status, including a high risk of having to endure worse working conditions and labour exploitation, greater exposure to becoming victims of trafficking and child labour. In the destination country, and particularly during the initial settlement process, there are risks of less inclusion and even isolation in the

absence of pre-existing migrant networks. This may result in less access to the formal labour market or in precarious labour activity characterized by overqualification, low income and poverty, social segregation and isolation, overcrowding and lack of housing services, as well as discrimination (Carrasco and Suarez, 2018). In the destination country there are also risks related to the inclusion of children (and other dependents) of migrants in basic health, education and food services. Return (voluntary or otherwise) entails risks in terms of social, economic, family and institutional reintegration, with varying prospects and difficulties, including rejection in the country of return.

There are also challenges related to disaffiliation from, and eventual loss of, social protection pension and health benefits, both at the time of migration and in the event of a return to the country of origin. It is therefore important to set up bilateral and multilateral arrangements that make social protection rights and benefits effectively portable, or strengthen such arrangements where they already exist. Lastly, migration processes always involve the reorganization of care work in transnational households with members in the origin and destination countries, where having sufficient income and providing care through family or community networks is often a major problem for migrants who leave their children behind. This must be taken into account in public policies, as part of the need to generate universal care systems in countries of origin and of destination.

In short, for all countries of the region, international migration is a challenge on the road to inclusive social development. It is therefore essential to design and implement a comprehensive policy framework for each context, including regional agreements, that consider the most important gaps and social protection instruments at each stage of the cycle. This would aim to systemically address a segment of the population (migrants) that until now were not a priority for public policies but will continue to be present in all the countries of the region and whose political relevance will continue to grow as has happened elsewhere in the world (Castles and Miller, 2014).

5. Technological changes and capacities

New technologies are transforming our societies in profound ways, and it is difficult to predict the sum total of the changes and their likely effects. This uncertainty arises from the speed with which new technologies are being developed, their variety, their knock-on effects on the economy and society, as well as the capacity of governments, other actors in the world of work (companies and trade unions) and civil society to respond to such rapid changes. This change in the production sphere is known as the “fourth industrial revolution” or “Industry 4.0”; but new technologies are also penetrating other dimensions of development, generating new opportunities and challenges in health, education, work, participation, communications, public management and other areas. This raises a number of questions: What changes do these new technologies imply, both for the world of work and production and for society in general? What are the challenges faced by societies, institutions and the various actors in dealing with these changes? How prepared are the countries of the region to face the challenges and reap the benefits? What can be done to prevent the gaps from widening and stop a large proportion of the population being left out of an increasingly digital society? How to move forward without leaving anyone behind?

Technological transformations are having significant effects on several dimensions of inclusive social development: on education and training (both in terms of teaching content and in how to access information); on forms of employment and labour relations; on health (from the management of health services and communication between medical staff and patients, to the provision of prevention, detection and treatment services); on modes of participation and daily interaction; on access to culture; on the relationship between the State and citizens; and on social relations and communication codes.

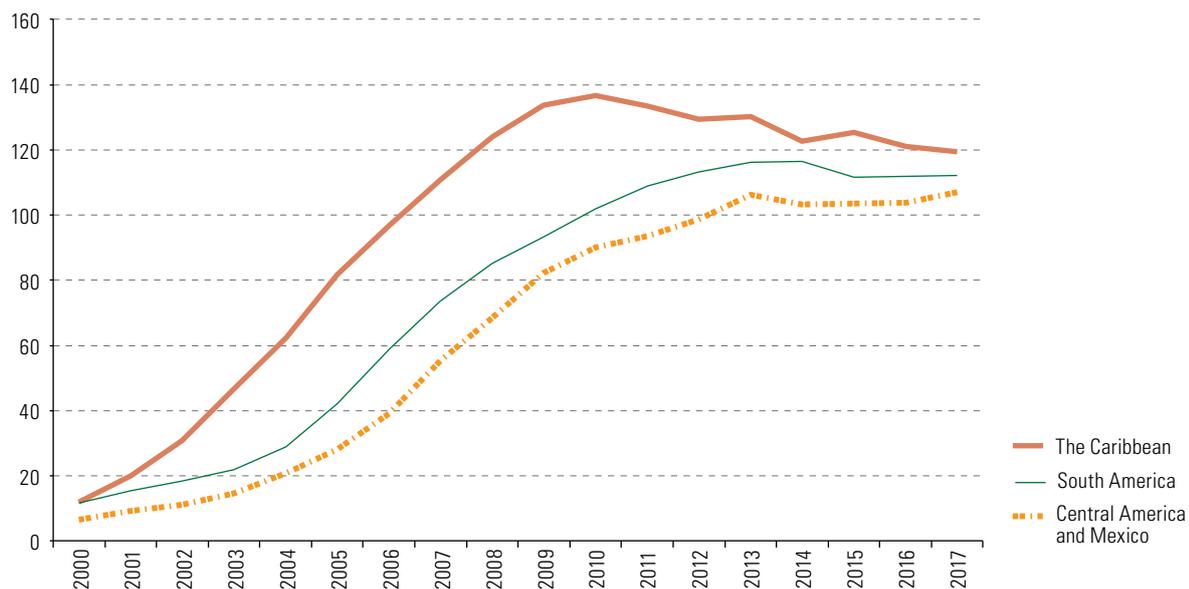
One of the most significant transformations is increasing digitalization, which is spreading rapidly and covers different areas of economic, social and environmental development. Experience from the third industrial revolution has shown that a digital divide already exists in terms of access to, and use of, information

and communication technologies (ICTs). The general circumstances in which a person lives are decisive in whether he/she is able to take advantage of the full potential of digital technologies (Wessels, 2013); so, for the entire population to be included in the digital world and the new technologies, income inequalities, and social inequalities generally, must be addressed. In the most unequal region of the globe, where structural differences persist, the challenges of inclusion in this digital world need serious consideration.

The region has improved the levels of connectivity coverage and access to digital equipment, as shown by the growing number of network connections and increased access to devices. Figure 28 shows the expansion of access to mobile telephony and that, regionwide, there are over 100 mobile telephones per 100 inhabitants, or more than one device per person. At the country level, those with the fewest connections per 100 people are Cuba (40.17) and Haiti (57.42). Access to mobile telephony has made it possible to extend Internet access to sectors and populations that previously were excluded. Moreover, these devices allow unlimited connectivity, as the availability of an Internet connection at any time or place expands.

Figure 28

Latin America and the Caribbean: mobile-cellular telephone subscriptions, by subregion, 2000–2017
(Per 100 inhabitants)



Source: International Telecommunication Union (ITU).

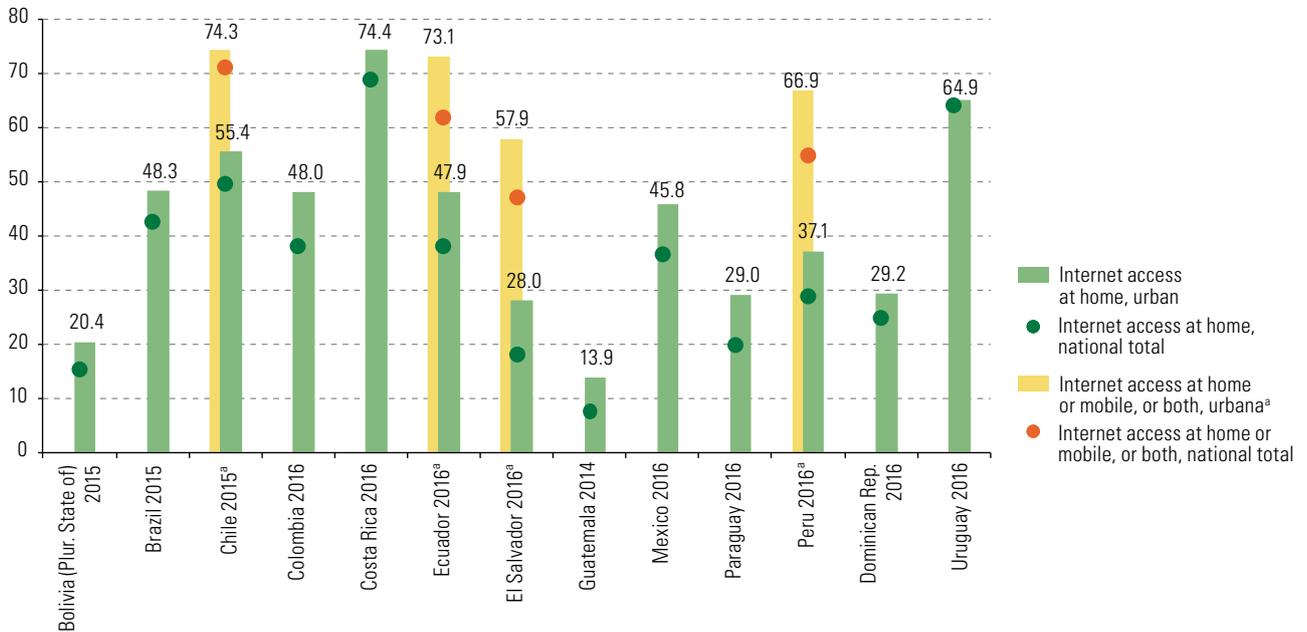
Note: Estimates correspond to the simple average for each subregion.

Despite the spread of mobile connectivity, there are still access disparities in terms of the quality of connection and the multiplicity of available devices. The first digital divide needs to be rethought in the current context of mobile connectivity. In terms of household Internet access, as discussed in section C, there are still major differences according to territory and socioeconomic level (Galperin, 2017; ECLAC, 2019a). “The connectivity level among households in urban areas is, on average, six times higher than in rural areas, with wide variations across countries [...]. Guatemala and the Plurinational State of Bolivia are among several countries with very precarious access to connectivity in the outlying areas of the cities, where less than 5% of the rural population has Internet access from home. Mobile connectivity plays an important role in Internet access for households in the rural areas of Chile, Ecuador, El Salvador and Peru” (ECLAC, 2019a, pp. 159) (see figure 29).

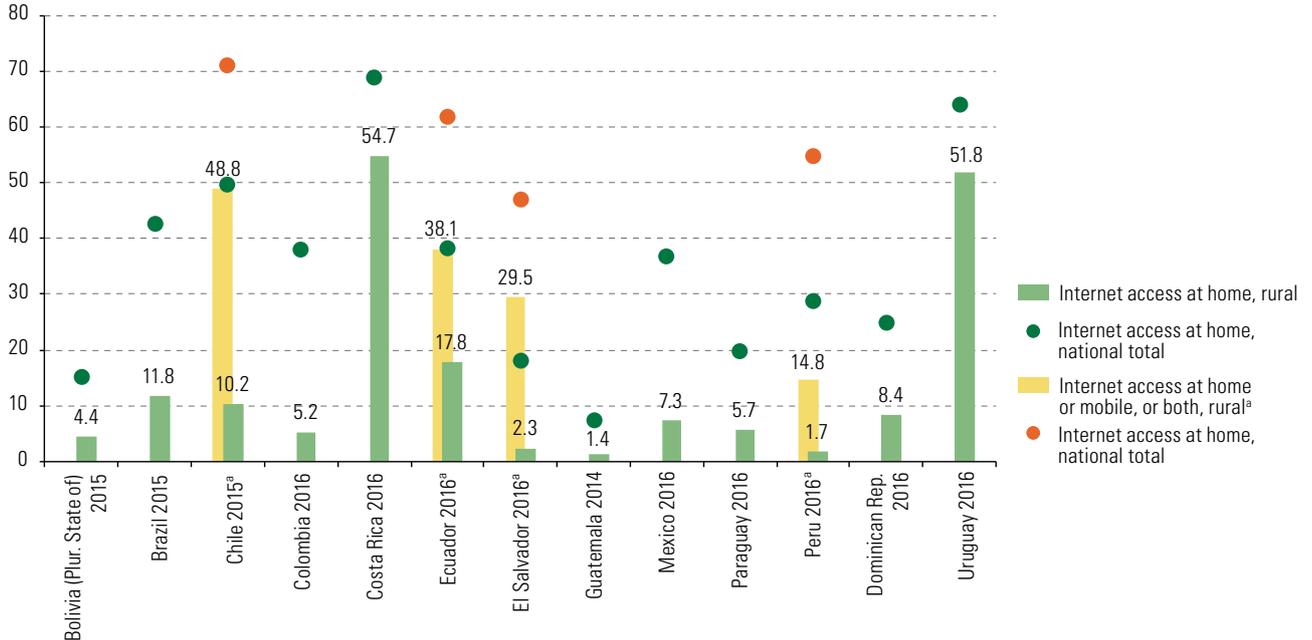
Figure 29

Latin America (13 countries): Internet access at home and mobile Internet, by total population and geographical area, around 2016
(Percentages of the total population)

A. Urban areas



B. Rural areas



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

^a Includes access through mobile devices (wireless Internet, smartphones and others).

Apart from the extent to which digital technologies are used, the type of activities undertaken also varies, which means that the opportunity to participate fully in the digital society is limited to a small proportion of the Latin American population. OECD data for 2017 show that a very small proportion of 16–74 year-olds in Costa Rica (28.8%), Chile (23.8%), Brazil (17.8%), Colombia (8.9%) and Mexico (8.4%) use the Internet to perform financial tasks, such as checking their bank account, compared to the OECD average of over 60%.²⁰ For other types of activity, such as reading or downloading newspapers or magazines online, the countries in the region analysed also have usage rates below the OECD average (42%).²¹

Moreover, as mentioned in the discussion related to decent work and the labour market (see section D), growing access to these new technologies and their impact on the future of the labour market poses new challenges for the education system, as thought must be given to the skills that need to be provided by the formal system so that young people can actively participate in an increasingly digitized society. There is a tendency to think of young people as digital natives who automatically have the skills to grow in this context. Nonetheless, according to Jara (2018), various studies show that not all young people have the most basic digital skills to handle the most commonly-used applications and very few know the most advanced ones, such as spreadsheets (see, for example, Kennedy and others, 2008). Moreover, in relation to information management skills in the digital environment, the International Computer and Information Literacy Study (ICILS), conducted in 2013, showed that few students have the expected skills even in the most developed economies, in circumstances where access to, and frequent use, of personal computers in homes and schools is increasingly widespread (Frailon and others, 2014). Education policies must therefore address the challenge of mainstreaming acquisition of the skills needed for this technology-driven world.

School is a key space for providing skills and tools to exploit ICTs beyond academia, as well as being an environment where guidelines are given to reduce risks (Trucco, 2018). The Third Regional Comparative and Explanatory Study (TERCE), conducted in 2013, reveals digital gaps in network use by children according to their socioeconomic status, as students of the highest socioeconomic level are more likely to use a computer for recreational purposes (playing computer games or surfing the Internet). In contrast, the gap is reversed as regards playing with friends and especially in reading. In other words, children from less advantaged economic sectors, with limited access to technology, more frequently engage in traditional activities in their free time (Trucco, 2018). This gives rise to new debates on network access and use by children and adolescents, and on how the Internet remains a key actor (Pavez, 2014), and calls for reconsideration of the Internet's role, the uses and risks associated with this age group, and the type of skills that need to be developed in the home and at school.

The fact that the impact of new technologies is still uncertain makes it essential to have public policies, institutions and processes for dialogue and social covenants that make it possible to turn new technologies, as well as other ongoing processes, into opportunities for closing gaps rather than widening them. Otherwise, the effects of limitations on access and use are of particular concern.²² If access and basic skills are not universalized in order to take advantage of these tools, this new dimension of inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean will continue to be reinforced, which will then widen other gaps in terms of inclusive social development.

²⁰ See [online] https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ICT_HH2#.

²¹ The percentages in this case are 35.6% in Costa Rica, 34.1% in Mexico, 40.7% in Brazil, 20.5% in Chile and 17.7% in Colombia. See [online] https://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?DataSetCode=ICT_HH2#.

²² For example, several studies have reported that various segments of the population are being left behind in the digital society, including older people (Sunkel and Ullmann, 2018) and persons with disabilities (Ullmann and others, 2018).

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The countries of Latin America and the Caribbean face the great challenge of implementing the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, seeking a new model of development based on equality, dual social and labour inclusion, eradication of poverty, environmental sustainability and economic growth. With this in mind, the member States of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean have undertaken to foster the construction of a regional agenda for inclusive social development.

This document identifies and describes the critical obstacles that contribute to the existence and persistence of equality gaps, which in turn hinder achievement of inclusive social development. The obstacles are: deeply rooted poverty and vulnerability to poverty in the region; structural, unjust and inefficient inequalities and the culture of privilege; gaps in human capacity development and in access to basic services; deficits in decent work and uncertainties linked to technological changes in the world of work; still partial and unequal access to social protection; a social institutional framework that is still under construction; and insufficient social investment. To these obstacles must be added a set of emerging challenges, including different forms of violence; disasters and climate change; demographic, epidemiological and nutritional transitions; migration; and technological changes.

As stressed in this document, these obstacles are interrelated. Coordinated action to address them must therefore be prioritized within the framework of a regional agenda for inclusive social development, to enable the region to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals.