

Afrodescendants and the matrix of social inequality in **Latin America**

Challenges for inclusion

Summary



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This document was prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and is a summary of the study “Afrodescendientes y la matriz de la desigualdad social en América Latina: retos para la inclusión”; *Project Documents* (LC/PUB.2020/14), prepared by ECLAC and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) and published in October 2020.

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Inequality is a historical and structural characteristic of Latin American and Caribbean societies that has been maintained and perpetuated even in times of growth and economic prosperity. It is a multifaceted phenomenon characterized by a complex web of intersecting socioeconomic inequalities, which are compounded by a succession of gender, ethno-racial, territorial and age inequalities throughout a person's life cycle. The inequalities and well-being gaps experienced by Latin America's Afrodescendent population, which currently numbers 134 million people (or 21% of its total population), are undoubtedly one of the axes that structure the social inequality matrix and a key element of the culture of privilege —a historical feature of Latin American societies, which originated in its colonial and slave-owning past but has been perpetuated to the present day by values, practices and institutions.

The Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) and the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) have put forward a study on Afrodescendants and the matrix of social inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean,¹ of which this is a summary, as part of a continuing commitment to provide up-to-date information and knowledge about the situation of the Afrodescendent population, prepare policy recommendations for States, build national capacity and promote experience-sharing in order to make progress in recognizing and guaranteeing the rights of the Afrodescendent population, in response to a request by the Government of Costa Rica. The objective of this study is to provide the most up-to-date picture possible of the inequalities experienced by Latin America's Afrodescendent population in key areas of development and rights, including the incidence of poverty and access to basic infrastructure, education, health, decent work and social protection. In all these areas, the study focuses specifically on the situation of Afrodescendent women, children, adolescents and young people. It also examines such issues as: the regulatory framework for combating racism and promoting racial equality, including the Afrodescendent population's right to its ancestral lands; the importance of the Afrodescendent movement and organizations; the demographic context and the statistical visibility of the Afrodescendent population; the various forms of violence against it; the links between racism and migration; and the current institutional framework in the region for guaranteeing Afrodescendants' rights and promoting their equality, together with some policy measures that have been implemented to achieve this.

A. Conceptual framework

Latin America is characterized by wide sociodemographic diversity arising from historical processes, such as the conquest of the territory, colonialism and the enslavement of indigenous and Afrodescendent people, as well as various migration movements that have occurred throughout the region's history. These processes have brought together diverse peoples and population groups in the same territory, with relationships characterized by great asymmetries of power and access to resources, which have led to high levels of inequality and exclusion, as well as to numerous ethnic and racial conflicts marked by intolerance, racism and misogyny.

¹ See Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC)/United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), "Afrodescendientes y la matriz de la desigualdad social en América Latina: retos para la inclusión", *Project Documents* (LC/PUB.2020/14), Santiago, 2020.

The study's analysis framework is based on the concept of the social inequality matrix (ECLAC, 2016a) and its importance in understanding the dynamics of production, reproduction and persistence of Latin America's deep structural inequalities. One of this concept's most important contributions has been to facilitate a holistic and comprehensive vision of the various axes that structure and explain the persistence of social inequalities in the region, as well as to recognize that they not only coexist in a given time and space, they also intersect, reinforce one another and have a knock-on effect throughout a person's life cycle. This helps to identify and analyse hard cores of inequality and exclusion and of those that, systematically, have been left behind: in other words, individuals, communities and population groups experiencing multiple intersecting axes of inequality and discrimination simultaneously, including women, children, adolescents, young people, persons with disabilities and migrants of African descent. This vision is crucial both for analysing social inequalities and their impact on the various dimensions of rights and development, and for formulating and implementing policies and strategies capable of overcoming them and charting the path to equality.

1. The matrix of social inequality in Latin America

In Latin America, social inequality is an obstacle to poverty eradication, sustainable development, the expansion of citizenship and the exercise of individual rights, as well as to democratic governance. It is based on a highly heterogeneous and non-diversified production matrix and on a culture of privilege, which is a defining historical feature of Latin American societies.

To lessen social inequality in Latin America, first it is necessary to identify the axes that structure and reproduce it, as well as its impacts on the various dimensions of rights and development. This calls for analysis based on reliable and systematic statistical data, which shed light on all the dimensions of inequality and make it possible to design quality public policies based on a rights agenda and an approach of universalism that is sensitive to differences (ECLAC, 2016a, 2018a and 2019a): in other words, policies designed to fulfil the principle of universal access to the social services crucial to guaranteeing rights. This also requires decisive action to remove the barriers to access, discrimination and social exclusion that are more severe for some populations (ECLAC, 2020a).

The first axis of Latin America's social inequality matrix is the socioeconomic stratum, or social class (ECLAC, 2016a). The central elements of this axis are the structure of ownership and the distribution of resources and productive and financial assets, and one of its clearest manifestations is income inequality, which is both the cause and effect of other disparities in areas such as health, education, decent work and social protection.

However, the inequalities that exist and persist in Latin America are also determined by the axes of ethno-racial status, gender, territory and age. In addition to these five basic axes, there are others, such as sexual orientation and gender identity, disability and immigration status, which intersect to form the complex web of the social inequality matrix.

To understand ethnic and racial inequalities—and the way they intersect with the other axes that structure social inequality—it is essential to consider the importance of racism in their creation, persistence and reproduction. According to Theodoro (2019), racism is an ideology that classifies, orders and ranks individuals based on their phenotype, on a scale of values in which the European white model is the superior positive pole and the African black model is the inferior negative pole. Racism is present in everyday social relationships, legitimizing social hierarchies in which it becomes acceptable and justifiable for certain people, considered superior because of their skin colour and other phenotypic traits, to occupy privileged social positions, while others, who are naturalized in their low status, are consigned to subordinate positions and spaces. Thus, racism transforms diversity into inequality and shapes a society based on the existence, naturalization and reproduction of inequality (Theodoro, 2019).

2. Race and ethnicity as social constructs

Race and ethnicity are complex concepts with no fixed references and should be considered within their historical context. However, there is a degree of consensus among experts that the term "race" emerged in Europe in the early sixteenth century and, in the seventeenth century, equivalent terms began to appear in a

number of other languages, especially in the process of European domination of people from other continents. The eighteenth and nineteenth centuries saw the spread of an idea that the human species was subdivided into races related to different continents and characterized by particular physical features (such as skin colour, hair texture or nose and skull shape). Moral, psychological and intellectual characteristics were attributed to such physical traits, which allegedly predetermined the “civilizability” of some races—but not others. At that time, supposed scientific doctrines were established that served to justify domination over certain peoples and unequal treatment of some social groups (ECLAC, 2016a and 2017b; Guimarães, 1999). Until the early twentieth century, the predominant theory was that human variations could be classified into racial differences linked directly to biological variations or other human characteristics. The refutation of these concepts and scientific evidence that race is an idea with no biological relevance for human beings has not diminished its political and social importance because, in practice, the concept of race is still key in societies where skin colour, physical appearance or ethnic and racial origin are determinants of the distribution of power, resources and well-being among individuals and social groups. “Race” is an effective social construct for maintaining and reproducing differences, hierarchies and forms of subordination, exclusion and privilege. In other words, while races do not exist in the physical world, they do in the social world, and not only do they structure social relationships, they also guide institutional behaviours and human actions (Hasenbalg, 1979; Guimarães, 1999; Wade, 2011).

Following the scientific proof that races do not exist biologically and are, in fact, social constructs, ethnicity-related concepts began to be used more frequently, especially in academic literature, and a closer alignment was made between the concepts of race and ethnicity, in the sense that both refer to identities as being contextual, situational and multiple.

To meet the need for a language that encompasses the reality of the broadest possible range of Latin American countries, while respecting their heterogeneity and the existing diversity of denominations and categorizations, this document follows the example of earlier ECLAC studies in employing the term “ethno-racial status” to refer to the situation of Afrodescendent individuals and communities. It was therefore considered essential for this study to take into account important realities and expressions relating to phenotypic traits, as well as those where identity, cultural and territorial aspects are gaining importance, given that forms of self-identification and expression of this identity vary widely from country to country.

3. The intersectional approach in analysing the multiple dimensions of inequality

The study’s conceptual framework also incorporates the contribution of the intersectionality concept to understanding the situation of Afrodescendants in Latin America. The intersectionality approach was developed in gender studies in the 1990s and sprang from black feminism, led by Afrodescendent women academics and activists from the United States, Britain, Canada and Germany, based on the realization that gender studies were failing to address Afrodescendent women’s issues adequately, and the same was true of women in race relations studies. Intersectionality draws on race relations studies and has been gaining increasing acceptance in Latin America (ECLAC, 2018b).

There are many points of convergence between the intersectionality and social inequality matrix approaches. Both can, and should, inform one another, in order to enrich the analysis of the ways and means by which social inequality, racism and the culture of privilege are reproduced in Latin America, as well as to improve the design and implementation of policies able to reduce them drastically and to work towards a culture of equality and rights.

Three ideas from the intersectionality approach are especially useful to the study. The first is that any analysis of the multiple dimensions of inequality, exclusion and subordination should forego the “additive” perspective. This is consistent with the social inequality matrix concept, which emphasizes that, in the concrete reality of individuals and social and population groups, inequalities of class, gender, race, ethnicity, age, territory, disability, sexual orientation, gender identity and immigration status not only accumulate, they also intersect and reinforce one another. The second is the need to move away from the perspective of

establishing an a priori hierarchy of the different axes or systems of subordination, inequality and oppression because recognizing that one of these axes can take precedence over others in a given time and place does not minimize the theoretical importance of considering race, class and gender as categories of analysis that structure all relationships (Collins, 2015). The third idea is that intersectional analysis should be applied to the whole of society, not only to oppressed and excluded groups, because everyone, not just racialized minorities, has an “ethnicity” or specific identity, with particular permutations of race, gender and class, which determines their life experiences and access to different resources and areas of rights (Yuval-Davis, 2011).

The need to recognize the intersection of ethnic and racial inequalities with socioeconomic, gender, age and other inequalities, in order to improve the analysis, design and implementation of policies to guarantee the rights of Afrodescendants, is reflected clearly in the Programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent, which recommends that States adopt and implement policies and programmes to provide effective protection to Afrodescendants facing multiple, aggravated and concomitant forms of discrimination on other related grounds, such as age, sex, language, religion, social origin or disability.

At the regional level, the governments of Latin America and the Caribbean have incorporated the social inequality matrix and intersectionality perspectives progressively into the debates of ECLAC subsidiary bodies. The various meetings of the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Regional Gender Agenda have promoted the adoption of an intersectional perspective (which also considers ethno-racial status) in analysing the situation of women, revealing the intersection of different axes of inequality and discrimination that exacerbate their subordination (ECLAC, 2018b). The intersectional perspective is also present in the context of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, as well as in the implementation of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development and the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, which include Afrodescendent populations explicitly, highlighting socioeconomic, gender, generational and territorial, as well as ethno-racial, perspectives (ECLAC, 2019b).

Within the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, States have recognized ethnic and racial inequalities as one of the axes that structure the region’s social inequality matrix. In the Conference, countries in the region have agreed to tackle the gaps defined in the social inequality matrix to break down the barriers to access to social services and well-being experienced by various population groups, including people of African descent, especially Afrodescendent women. The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development reaffirms this vision and includes among its principles the approach of universalism that is sensitive to differences as a means for moving forward in eliminating ethnic and racial inequalities in Latin America (ECLAC, 2020a).

B. Regulatory framework for promoting equality and guaranteeing the rights of the Afrodescendent population in Latin America

A desire to combat racism and promote equality between individuals and peoples has been one of the foundations of the United Nations since the Universal Declaration of Human Rights was enacted in 1948. The Declaration defines the basic rights of all human beings irrespective of their race, ethnicity, nationality, social status or sex, terms that have been incorporated gradually into regional and national regulatory frameworks. The Declaration was followed by the adoption of a number of other rights referring explicitly to the race issue, several world conferences, the establishment of time frames for combating racism and, finally, the launch of the International Decade for People of African Descent (2015–2024) and the adoption of the 2030 Agenda and its Sustainable Development Goals. The 2030 Agenda expresses the commitment of the vast majority of countries to promote equality for all and sets targets for inequality, non-discrimination, cultural diversity and the disaggregation of data and statistics by race and ethnicity.

At the regional level, ECLAC subsidiary bodies, which bring together ministers and senior government officials from Latin America and the Caribbean, in particular the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, have also incorporated the issue of the rights of people of African descent and made progress in formulating regional agendas and following up international agreements from a Latin American and Caribbean perspective. The commitments arising from these conferences, including the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 and the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development (ECLAC, 2013, 2017a and 2020a), are instruments for reinforcing action in the national, subregional and regional spheres and for boosting deployment of the Programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent and the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Regulatory frameworks are a key aspect of the institutional framework for combating racism and for promoting the equality and guaranteeing the rights of Latin America's Afrodescendent population. They are the product of a long and complex historical and political process that has been shaped by a variety of actors and institutions (Afrodescendent movements and organizations, other civil society organizations, academics and researchers, national governments and international agencies). By denouncing racism and inequality and acting to promote self-identification and to affirm its identity and self-organization, Afrodescendent civil society has done much to further the gradual establishment of a legal framework for asserting and defending its rights.

Two important international rights instruments that deal with the issue of race are the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (1965) and the Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, 1989 (No. 169) of the International Labour Organization (ILO). The Convention affirms that "any doctrine of superiority based on racial differentiation is scientifically false, morally condemnable, socially unjust and dangerous" (United Nations, 1965) and is the first international human rights instrument to raise the need for affirmative action to achieve equality, the enjoyment of rights and fundamental freedoms for certain racial and ethnic groups. The Convention concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, 1989 (No. 169) has provided Afrodescendent communities with an important instrument for defending their territories and collective rights.

Most countries have undertaken to prevent, eliminate, prohibit and punish acts and manifestations of discrimination and intolerance as enshrined in other regional instruments, including the American Convention on Human Rights (Pact of San José) (1969), the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Protocol of San Salvador) (1988) and the Inter-American Convention Against All Forms of Discrimination and Intolerance (2013).

At the subregional level, the Andean countries signed the Andean Charter for the Promotion and Protection of Human Rights (2002), which affirms that member states are multi-ethnic and multicultural and recognizes the existence of the individual rights of Afrodescendants and the collective rights of Afrodescendent peoples and communities, including rights of ownership of the lands or territories they traditionally occupy and the right to preserve their own forms of social organization, exercise of authority and administration of justice (OEA, 2002). In addition, the Treaty on Social Integration of the Central American Integration System (SICA) is based on the principles of non-discrimination on such grounds as race or ethnicity and the preservation and restoration of cultural pluralism and ethnic diversity, within a framework of respect for human rights. The Treaty also affirms that social integration will be built by respecting the values and cultures of the different ethnic groups and of the Central American community as a whole (SICA, 1995).

At the national level, the condemnation of discrimination on such grounds as race, ethnicity or colour is enshrined in the constitutions of 13 Latin American countries. In five of these countries (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico and Plurinational State of Bolivia), Afrodescendants are recognized explicitly in the constitution and, in three (Ecuador, Mexico and Plurinational State of Bolivia), Afrodescendent peoples are recognized. Furthermore, 16 countries have laws against racial discrimination and class it as a crime, 15 have assigned a national day to celebrate the Afrodescendent population and 14 have government mechanisms for combating racial discrimination generally or for Afrodescendent issues specifically (ECLAC, 2017b and 2017c).

The situation has continued to evolve positively in recent years. In 2019, Cuba adopted a new constitution repudiating any manifestation of racism or discrimination. Costa Rica established the country's multi-ethnic and multicultural nature and Mexico recognized Afro-Mexican peoples and communities as part of the nation's multicultural composition. Chile enshrined in law recognition of the Chilean Afrodescendent tribal people and its cultural identity, language, historical tradition, culture, institutions and worldview, as well as its right to be consulted on any legislative or administrative measures that might affect it directly, in accordance with ILO Convention No. 169.

Other countries are at an earlier stage in this process. In Guatemala in 2016, the Congressional Committee on Indigenous Peoples presented a bill to recognize Guatemala's Afrodescendent Creole people. El Salvador has acknowledged that there are still issues to be resolved with regard to the Afrodescendent population and has emphasized its commitment to comply with the priority measures of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development (ECLAC, 2019b).

A number of Latin American countries have also incorporated into their regulatory frameworks the demand for recognition of the right to collective ownership of ancestral territories occupied by Afrodescendants. In different ways and at different rates, processes have been undertaken for the collective titling of such territories. One of the outstanding challenges that needs to be met in order to achieve progress is the recognition of Afrodescendent communities inhabiting such territories as subjects of collective rights, a fundamental demand of the Afrodescendent movement.

Finally, Peru has declared the full enjoyment of fundamental rights by Afro-Peruvians to be of national interest and a priority concern, with the aim of furthering their development and inclusion, during the International Decade for People of African Descent. To this end, it has determined that all government sectors and levels should formulate and implement programmes, projects and actions for reinforcing the fundamental rights of Afro-Peruvians, with a vision of social inclusion and full participation in all aspects of society.

C. The Afrodescendent movement and organizations, participation and representation

Governments' adherence to international and regional norms and the adoption of national norms to combat racism and promote racial equality have stemmed largely from the demands of Afrodescendent movements, while at the same time helping to strengthen these movements. Afrodescendent mobilization has been growing steadily, especially since the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance in Durban (South Africa) in 2001. It has shaped the agenda of the Latin American Afrodescendent movement whose central objectives include: ending the invisibility (including statistical invisibility) of Afrodescendants; securing recognition for their contribution and that of Afrodescendent communities and peoples in the region's development and cultural diversity; combating all forms of racism; and promoting their full inclusion in development processes, while guaranteeing their human rights.

The mid-1980s saw a flood of studies on the Afrodescendent issue, with the result that there is now a bibliography, more extensive in some countries than in others, reflecting on this important issue. The literature includes studies on racism and racial inequality, mechanisms of inclusion and exclusion affecting the Afrodescendent population, its levels of poverty and access to health, education, work and social protection, as well as the various forms of violence to which it is exposed, the role of Afrodescendent political organizations in democracy, the political sphere and government agendas, and the implementation of legal instruments and public policies in favour of Afrodescendent individuals and communities.

During the first half of the twentieth century, Afrodescendent movements and organizations conducted major collective actions, notably five Pan-African Congresses. In the 1970s and 1980s, three Congresses of Black Culture in the Americas were held, which promoted continental linkages between people of African descent. Thereafter, while cultural issues remained important, a stronger focus was placed on the political

agenda and the debate about how to tackle racism and reduce exclusion, discrimination, poverty and racial inequality (Davis, Paschel and Morrison, 2012; ECLAC, 2017b). New networks and initiatives emerged that have helped to consolidate a region-wide Afrodescendent social movement.²

Afrodescendent social mobilization in the 1990s had a major impact on both the political sphere and civil society. Political recognition of grassroots organizations and community leaders led to a positive response in a context where democracy was being restored and the rights agenda was furthered in a number of countries in the region. Similarly, the transnational action of the Afrodescendent movement's continental networks pivoted its political and advocacy strategies towards United Nations agencies and other international agencies and multilateral banks.

The World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance was a historic milestone for Afrodescendent organizations, as it succeeded in introducing into the international arena the need to continue developing more effective practices for tackling structural racism. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action marked a turning point, opening up a new phase in the political history of the region's Afrodescendent population. Over the past decade, this mobilization has been driven by a number of bodies, including the First World Summit of African Descendants in 2011 and the Regional Conference on the International Decade for People of African Descent in 2015.

As a result, Afrodescendent organizations have come to play an increasingly important role in mobilizing and fighting for racial equality. However, quantifying them numerically has remained a challenge. An exploratory study identified at least 869 organizations, which were present in all Latin American countries, with Ecuador, Colombia and Brazil being the countries with the most consolidated organizational structures where demands were coordinated more effectively. The issues prioritized by Afrodescendent organizations are: combating racism and exclusion; recognition and preservation of Afrodescendent culture; defence and promotion of rights, including the right to collective ownership of land; and women's empowerment, advocacy and leadership training. There are also organizations dedicated to artistic expression, local development and defending the rights of young Afrodescendants and Afrodescendent lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people (ECLAC, 2017b).

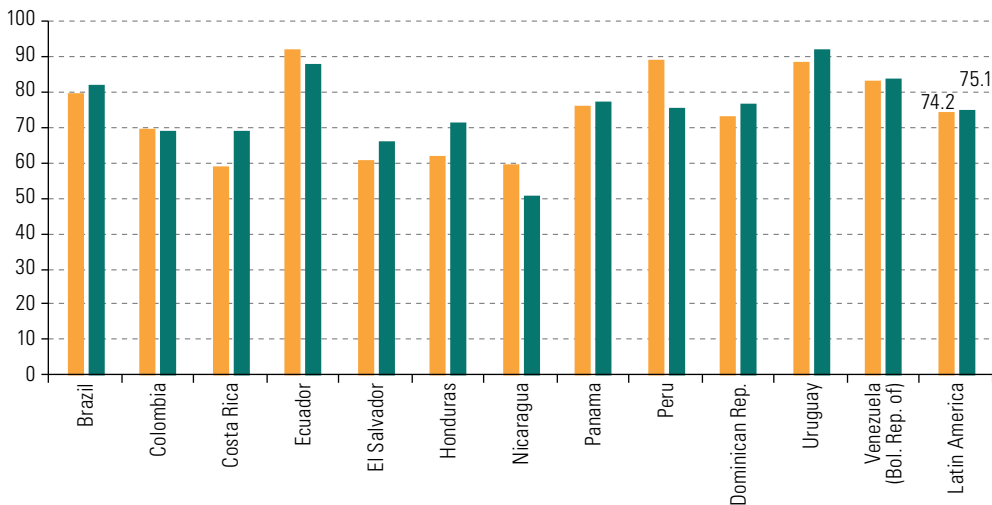
In the case of Afrodescendent women, the simultaneous experience of gender inequalities and ethnic and racial inequalities and oppression has become a political and cultural hotbed that is also the starting point for different forms of resistance that mark the history of the Afrodescendent population in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2018b). The Afrodescendent women's movement in the region sprang from the feminist movement, in an effort by Afrodescendent women to make their distinctive situation visible, based on their struggle against racism and for self-identity, which did not always accord with the priorities of the women's movement at large. Afrodescendent women have continued to play a major role in shaping the Regional Gender Agenda, as demonstrated by the agreements emanating from the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean. Although there has been progress in providing indicators of women's participation in decision-making processes, racial and ethnic disaggregation is not always considered, making it difficult to monitor the presence of Afrodescendent women in decision-making spaces. A study by Mala Htun (2014), presenting data from seven of the Latin American countries with the largest Afrodescendent population, reveals the limited presence of Afrodescendent women in parliaments, highlighting their underrepresentation in political parties and coalitions, as well as the problems of recognition they face in such spaces. These results reaffirm the importance of designing quota and parity policies from an intersectional perspective, which requires Afrodescendent women to be included in the lists of political parties on the basis of the principle of parity intercultural democracy and through affirmative action (RMAAD, 2016). It is essential for Afrodescendent women to become more visible and for workshops and media campaigns to be held to raise awareness. It is also vital to mainstream Afrodescendent women's participation into the design and implementation of public policies devised from an intersectional perspective. Political violence against Afrodescendent women must be recognized and addressed.

² They include the Network of Afro-Latin American, Afro-Caribbean and Diaspora Women (established in 1992), the Strategic Latin American and Caribbean Afrodescendent Alliance (previously known as the Continental Network of Afro-American Organizations), the Afro-América XXI network, the Global Afro-Latin and Caribbean Initiative (GALCI) and the Network of Afrodescendent Parliamentarians of the Americas and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2017b).

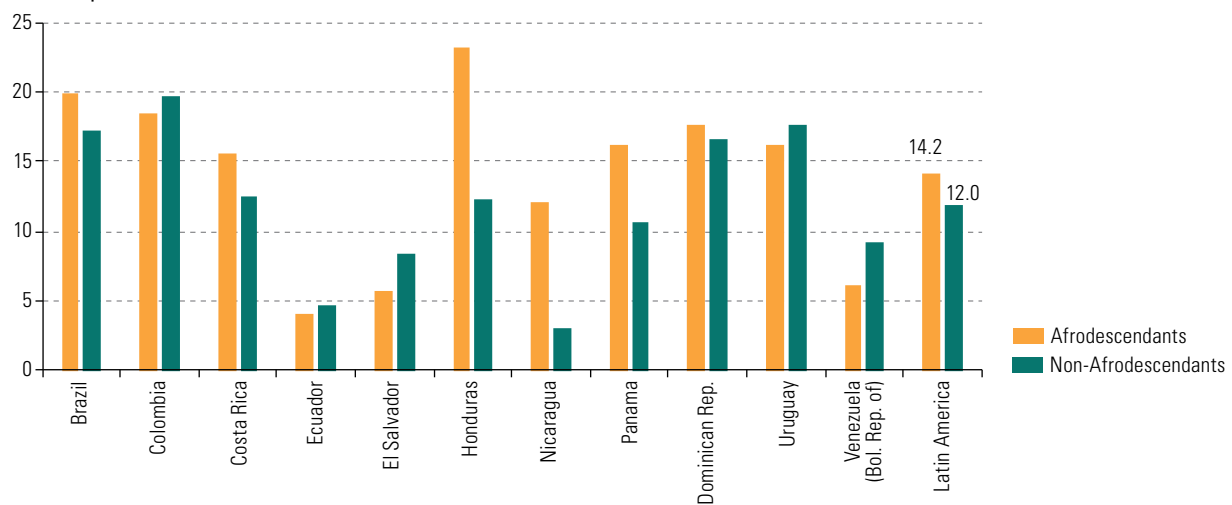
Since slavery began to be abolished in the second half of the nineteenth century, the presence of the Afrodescendent population in formal spaces of political participation, such as suffrage, has long been limited by illiteracy, economic dependence and subjection to an estate and bosses, in addition to legal restrictions. Available data suggest that, in the regional aggregate, the participation rate in elections is similar for Afrodescendants and non-Afrodescendants³ and that more Afrodescendants declare having participated in a demonstration than non-Afrodescendants, with some variations in the two indicators from country to country (see figure 1).

Figure 1
Latin America (12 countries): political participation, by ethno-racial status, 2015^a
(Percentages)

A. Voted in the last presidential election



B. Participated in a demonstration in the last six months



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of special tabulations of the Latinobarómetro 2015 survey for the respective countries.

^a The figures for Latin America are a simple average of the countries.

An important aspect of collective action by the Afrodescendent movement has been to incorporate into political parties' objectives and agendas issues relating to the situation of Afrodescendants. The struggle for the political inclusion of Afrodescendants in the agendas of existing parties has been successful, as have efforts to

³ Throughout this document, when reference is made to the non-Afrodescendent population, it does not include the indigenous population or those whose ethno-racial status is unknown.

establish their own parties. Despite these advances, multiple expressions of direct and indirect discrimination towards people of African descent persist in society as a whole, especially in its dominant sectors, and racism has remained and is reproduced as a structural feature of Latin American society. In nearly all countries for which information is available, Afrodescendants describe themselves as part of a discriminated group and nearly two thirds consider ethnic and racial conflict in their countries to be either very fierce or fierce.⁴

Finally, the Afrodescendent political agenda includes a proposal to deepen and widen democracy, which is an important issue not only for Afrodescendent populations but also for the governance of nation states and for strengthening democracy as a whole.

D. Statistical visibility of the Afrodescendent population and the right to information

By adopting the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, the vast majority of the world's countries committed to improving significantly the availability of disaggregated data for supervision and accountability, through target 17.18, including explicitly ethnic and racial characteristics, as a key means for furthering the objective of identifying those being left behind. In the region, they encompass Afrodescendent populations and indigenous peoples, two groups that should not be left behind in terms of statistical visibility either.

Thus the 2030 Agenda sets out the historical demands of these groups, which are included in international human rights standards and have been expressed in various regional and global conferences and agreements.⁵ The demand for the right to information of Afrodescendent populations was made explicit in the preparatory process for the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and, as from 2001, collective actions by the Afrodescendent social movement for the right to information and statistical visibility intensified.

Since then, there have been various actions in the region to promote the inclusion of self-identification of people of African descent in censuses and other statistical instruments, a prerequisite for data disaggregation. In the context of the International Decade for People of African Descent, it is of utmost importance for recognition policy to establish a strong conceptual position regarding the language of self-identification. This will have an impact on the way in which it is expressed in ethno-racial self-identification questions in censuses and other statistical instruments, including administrative records.

The development of ethno-racial self-identification questions relates to the processes of inclusion of the concepts of "Afrodescendant" and "*negro or preto*" (black) in official discourse and the narrative construction of Latin American nation states. The issue of African descent has become complex, mobilizing an identity deriving from multiple configurations defined by historical, cultural, ontological, economic, geographical and political patterns. Nowadays, being of African descent means more than just skin colour or phenotypic traits, or even the experience of slavery as a definitive marker (because of contemporary migrations from Africa to the Americas). The definition of who is and is not Afrodescendent becomes relevant when it comes to determining who are the subjects of rights and the legal frameworks protecting those rights and, most important of all, who should or should not be identified as such in official statistics. The inclusion of questions about self-identification as Afrodescendent should be seen as more than just a statistical fact. It is a proposal or claim for political recognition of Afrodescendent identity in shaping nation states, which represents a break with the old monocultural model and a shift towards the expansion of citizenship, consolidation of multicultural States and deepening of democracies in the region.

In Latin America, identity recognition policies have been consolidated through consensus processes over the past 30 years, especially this century. However, discussions on the inclusion of self-identification have been

⁴ According to special tabulations of the Latinobarómetro 2015 survey for the countries included in figure 1.

⁵ At the regional level, the production of knowledge and information is one of the seven priority measures for Afrodescendants defined in the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development (ECLAC, 2013). This issue is also included in the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 and in the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

complex and subject to tensions between national statistical institutes and Afrodescendent organizations. Although all Latin American countries have an Afrodescendent population, the inclusion of Afrodescendent self-identification questions in population and housing censuses did not become widespread until the 2010s. In the censuses of the 1980s, this occurred only in Brazil and Cuba (where self-identification questions had been included since the nineteenth century), followed by Colombia in the 1990 round. In the 2000 round, Afrodescendent self-identification was included in the censuses of 8 countries out of the 20 countries that conducted censuses during the decade, while 1 country did so partially.⁶ In the 2010s, the number of countries that captured the Afrodescendent population in censuses has increased to 14.⁷ As a first step, the scenario planned for the 2020 round is for all Latin American countries to include questions about Afrodescendent self-identification, with the exception of the Dominican Republic and Haiti. It would be desirable to achieve universal inclusion.

The operationalization of self-identification (reflected in the design of questions and response categories) varies widely in response to each country's reality, the key being to consider all the denominations that are meaningful to Afrodescendent individuals and communities, in accordance with the different social and territorial contexts. Most of the results from the 2000 round of censuses were challenged strongly by Afrodescendent and indigenous organizations, leading to intensive advocacy and technical analysis during the intercensus period. This resulted in a series of recommendations at the regional level, with a view to the 2010 round, which had been developed in collaboration with national statistical institutes, Afrodescendent organizations, international agencies specializing in such matters, academia and other non-governmental organizations involved in this work (ECLAC, 2009 and 2011; ECLAC/UNICEF/UNFPA, 2011). These recommendations are still valid and it is desirable for them to be considered in the new round of censuses.

The document "Afrodescendientes y la matriz de la desigualdad social en América Latina: retos para la inclusión" analyses in detail how countries have designed these questions and the changes that have occurred from one census round to another. In the 2010 round, most countries included "Afrodescendant" and "Afro" as response categories relating to nationality (such as Afro-Bolivian, Afro-Colombian, Afro-Ecuadorian, Afro-Honduran or Afro-Peruvian). At the same time, racial categories such as *preto*, brown or mixed race (*pardo*), black or mulatto were retained. The only two countries to use racial categories based solely on skin colour are Brazil and Cuba, both of which have kept the same categories that were used in colonial and nineteenth century surveys as they have come to acquire significance socially and in building identity.

The full participation of the Afrodescendent population in the census process, from the preparatory phase to the dissemination and analysis of results, is one of the main international and regional recommendations and also one of the commitments undertaken by countries in the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development. It helps to define categories that make sense to Afrodescendent populations, to legitimize censuses, to increase commitment to the census project and, in principle, to make available valid, high-quality information. The 2010s saw a turning point in terms of the participation of people of African descent, with statistical offices showing greater openness to the establishment of participatory mechanisms, in different forms and with varying degrees of participation. To prevent failures and setbacks in the 2020 round, the lessons learned from the previous round should be taken into account, paying heed to the weaknesses and obstacles found in the previous census, as well as to current challenges. This analysis should be based on technical and political dialogue between statistical offices, Afrodescendent organizations and other stakeholders, such as academics and scholars of Afrodescendants and ethnic and racial rights and inequalities, with support from cooperation agencies.

Even though self-identification of the Afrodescendent population in population censuses has been, and still is, fundamental for the analysis of Latin American societies and for the political struggle and recognition of these groups, it must extend beyond censuses. However, only limited progress has been made so far. In view of the need for disaggregated information as a key tool for characterizing societies, policymaking and accountability, the main disadvantage of censuses is that they are carried out every 10 years and therefore do not allow for relatively continuous monitoring, least of all in the case of short-term social phenomena. In surveys of employment, income and living conditions, just 9 countries have included Afrodescendent self-identification at least once since

⁶ This was Guatemala, which included only the the Garífuna people in 2002.

⁷ In the 2010s, no population censuses have been conducted in Haiti, El Salvador or Nicaragua, although the latter two countries are expected to incorporate questions about Afrodescendent self-identification, as they did in the previous decade.

2010 and, in surveys of population, health and related matters, only 10 countries have done so. In agricultural censuses, the universe is a mere four countries and, in the case of vital statistics, just seven countries include Afrodescendent identification in the register of deaths and four include it in the register of births.

Administrative records have great potential for statistical purposes, given their continuity and timeliness. They include records on health, education, births, deaths, social protection, social security, violence and employment. Brazil, Colombia, Cuba and Ecuador have made major advances in the inclusion of Afrodescendent identification in health information systems, which provide valuable experience for progressing to other types of continuous records, as Brazil and Cuba have done, including electoral registers. The current crisis caused by coronavirus disease (COVID-19) has highlighted the urgent need to move towards including Afrodescendent self-identification in national statistical systems. Unfortunately, in most countries it is not possible to measure the impact of the pandemic on Afrodescendent populations, whose poor social indicators increases their risk of infection and death. The data would help to shed light on the situation and hence to define differentiated and effective actions and to monitor their outcomes.

With regard to surveys, despite the fact that some countries may face constraints associated with sample size (in cases where Afrodescendants are a minority group in the population), a number of recent studies (including this one) have shown the importance of surveys in obtaining conclusive information on different aspects of Afrodescendants' living conditions. In any case, countries with a small Afrodescendent population should not only include self-identification but also review sample designs. This is vital to exploit further the enormous potential of household surveys for obtaining disaggregated indicators that require continuous monitoring, such as unemployment and income poverty. Survey systems are also the only ones able to examine different areas of development in more depth, including areas relating to the labour market, sexual and reproductive health and time use, to name but a few.

All this demonstrates the need for stronger action to make information available over time in a reliable and timely manner. This means consolidating the inclusion of Afrodescendent self-identification throughout the national statistical system by means of comparable criteria and questions, which calls for periodic evaluations to allow for continuous quality improvements. Some countries took care to include the same self-identification questions across the different data sources. While this has not been the norm, most countries have introduced improvements in this regard in recent years.

It is also crucial to produce, disseminate and analyse disaggregated information, generating up-to-date knowledge. Key to this is information access and accessibility. The region's national statistical institutes have made significant progress in the democratization of information, by creating applications that allow microdata from censuses, surveys and records to be processed online, and even allow databases to be downloaded. Major advances have been made in population and housing censuses, with disaggregation of the data on the Afrodescendent population typically included in the dissemination of results and in the different census products (including special studies, dynamic querying, tabulations and maps). Even though, in several countries, data on Afrodescendants can be disaggregated in various sources, official publications do not always include this disaggregation.

For Afrodescendants to exercise their right to information, it is not enough for them to be able to access data publicly, as this requires certain technical skills. There is a need to build national capacity for information use and analysis, which has, indeed, been one of the systematic demands of State agencies and Afrodescendent organizations in countries in the region. Although numerous training activities have been carried out in this area over the past decade, they should be coordinated and sustained over time, which calls for resourcing.

A final issue that goes beyond self-identification is cultural adequacy and relevance and the specific information requirements of Afrodescendent organizations. This poses major challenges, given the design of conventional statistical instruments, which have been created in accordance with hegemonic and monocultural concepts.

With regard to the commitments made in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, as part of the International Decade for People of African Descent and in other international and regional undertakings mentioned earlier, it is clear that enormous challenges remain in terms of the statistical visibility of the Afrodescendent population, and urgent political will is required to meet these challenges.

E. The Afrodescendent demographic context

The progressive inclusion of ethno-racial self-identification questions in population and housing censuses now provides answers to the most elementary questions: how many people are of African descent and where are they? These data are crucial, not just as basic inputs for public policy and planning but also because they serve to confirm the existence of the Afrodescendent population and make it visible to States and societies that deny its existence. Based on available census figures, Latin America's estimated Afrodescendent population is currently 134 million people, accounting for 21% of the region's total population (see table 1). Although this figure should be treated with caution and may be considered a conservative estimate owing to continuing problems of ethno-racial identification in some countries, they confirm wide variations across the region in terms of the size and relative share of the Afrodescendent population in individual countries.

Table 1

Latin America (20 countries): Afrodescendent population, according to the latest census and 2020 estimates^a
(Thousands of people and percentages)

Country and census year	Afrodescendent census population	Percentage of Afrodescendent population	Estimated total population by 2020	Estimated Afrodescendent population by 2020
Argentina, 2010	149.6	0.4	45 195.8	168.5
Bolivia (Plurinational State of), 2012	23.3	0.2	11 673.0	27.1
Brazil, 2010	97 171.6	50.9	212 559.4	108 278.4
Chile, 2017 ^b	9.9	0.1	19 116.2	11.5
Colombia, 2018	2 982.2	6.8	50 882.9	3 482.9
Costa Rica, 2011	334.4	7.8	5 094.1	396.0
Cuba, 2012	4 006.9	35.9	11 326.6	4 064.1
Ecuador, 2010	1 041.6	7.2	17 643.1	1 268.8
El Salvador, 2007	7.4	0.1	6 486.2	8.4
Guatemala, 2018	47.2	0.3	17 915.6	57.3
Honduras, 2013	115.8	1.4	9 904.6	138.1
Mexico, 2015	1 381.9	1.2	128 932.8	1 490.5
Nicaragua, 2005	23.9	0.5	6 624.6	30.8
Panama, 2010	300.6	8.8	4 314.8	380.8
Paraguay, 2012	3.9	0.1	7 132.5	4.3
Peru, 2017 ^c	1 049.9	3.6	32 971.8	1 178.1
Uruguay, 2011 ^d	149.7	4.6	3 473.7	159.9
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of), 2011 ^e	936.8	3.4	28 435.9	978.3
Estimates based on other sources				
Haiti ^f	---	95.5	11 402.5	10 889.4
Dominican Republic ^g	---	8.6	10 847.9	932.9
Total		20.9	641 934.0	133 946.2

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of special tabulations of population censuses; for Cuba: National Office of Statistics and Information (ONEI), *El color de la piel según el Censo de Población y Viviendas 2012*, Havana; for Mexico: "Encuesta Intercensal 2015" [online] <http://www.beta.inegi.org.mx/proyectos/enchogares/especiales/intercensal/>; for Paraguay: Department of Statistics, Surveys and Censuses (DGEEC), *Atlas Demográfico del Paraguay, 2012* [online] <https://www.dgeec.gov.py/Publicaciones/Biblioteca/atlas-demografico/Atlas%20Demografico%20del%20Paraguay,%202012.pdf>.

^a For the 2020 estimates, population figures were drawn from the *Demographic Observatory of Latin America and the Caribbean 2019* (ECLAC, 2020d) and the percentages of Afrodescendants were applied on the basis of the latest census or available source.

^b Includes people who, in the question on which indigenous people they belonged to, specified in the "other" category that they were Afrodescendants.

^c As the question was asked of the population aged 12 and over, to obtain a figure for the total population, the Afrodescendent percentage of this age group was applied to the total population surveyed.

^d The question on main ethnic origin was used in this study, meaning that the figure in the table corresponds to people who replied that their main origin was "Afro or black". The question on recognition of origin with multiple response categories gives a total of 255,074 people of African descent, representing 7.8% of the national population.

^e In the study, the total Afrodescendent population was obtained by adding together the "black" and "Afrodescendent" categories and excluding the "brown" category.

^f The percentage of the Afrodescendent population was calculated on the basis of the genetic study by Simms and others (2010, pp. 49–66).

^g The percentage of the Afrodescendent population was based on the mother tongue of the head of household (Creole), included in the 2014 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) of the National Statistics Office (ONE).

Brazil is the country that has by far the largest number of Afrodescendants (just over 100 million), accounting for more than half its total population. In terms of the relative share of Afrodescendants, the vast majority of Haiti's population (just over 10 million) is of African descent. Third, after Brazil and Haiti, is Cuba, where 36% of the population is of African descent (just over 4 million people), with a smaller proportion of Afrodescendants in Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador and Panama, accounting for 7%–10% of the total population. In the remaining countries, Afrodescendants account for less than 5% of the total population. Colombia's Afrodescendent population is estimated to be close to 3.5 million people and that of the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico and Peru, around 1 million people.

Afrodescendent organizations in several countries in the region have challenged these results, alleging underreporting, mostly when the self-identification question was included in the census for the first time, as in the case of Peru's 2017 census. However, a similar situation occurred in Colombia, where the 2018 census was subject to a significant underestimation of the Afrodescendent population, despite the fact that this country already had a tradition of including ethno-racial self-identification questions in censuses (Colombia's statistics office conducted a critical evaluation of the results of the latest census).

In seven countries in the region, it is possible to compare the census figures for the 2000s with the census figures for the 2010s. In six of these countries, the Afrodescendent population has increased, in both absolute and relative terms, at a higher growth rate than that of the national population (Brazil, Costa Rica, Cuba, Guatemala, Ecuador and Honduras, the exception being Colombia). Although fertility and mortality are the main components of a country's population growth, they fail to explain the high growth of the Afrodescendent population between one census and the next because, although the fertility rate among Afrodescendants tends to be higher than among the rest of the population, it is still relatively low (ECLAC, 2017b). Thus, a significant part of this growth has to be the result of increased Afrodescendent self-identification, which itself reflects the mobilization and growing political role of the Afrodescendent population whose demands are emerging from the democratic recovery.⁸

Afrodescendent populations in Latin America live predominantly in urban areas. In the 15 countries for which data is available, the percentage of Afrodescendants living in cities ranges from 59.2% in Honduras to 96.6% in Uruguay. It exceeds 70% in all countries, except for Colombia, Guatemala and Honduras. Of note is the fact that, in 8 of the 15 countries, the settlement of Afrodescendent groups in cities is higher than that of the non-Afrodescendent population and, in the remaining 7 countries, the opposite is true. This factor should be taken into account when comparing socioeconomic indicators in accordance with ethno-racial status because an absence of gaps at the national level may be due to the effect of location in urban or rural areas and so mask inequalities affecting the Afrodescendent population. This makes it necessary to disaggregate the information in order to examine the various situations arising from intersecting ethnic, racial and territorial inequalities.

The censuses also reveal that, in every country, the Afrodescendent population is distributed virtually nationwide. However, an analysis of territorial distribution reveals (sometimes significant) differences from the rest of the population, including its greater territorial concentration. Four main patterns can be seen: historical settlement areas linked to territories of arrival during the slavery period; remote areas that formerly provided a haven for enslaved people fleeing to freedom; areas associated with displacement and migration from neighbouring countries; and other settlement areas demonstrating territorial redistribution as a result of internal migration processes, which tend to be the areas where each country's capitals or cities are located (although, to an extent, Afrodescendent populations have been present in Latin American capitals for a long time because they were points of destination for the slave trade).

In all countries, it is also possible to identify a set of municipalities with a greater presence of people of African descent. In several countries, there are many municipalities with a clear predominance of Afrodescendants, forming a majority population.⁹

⁸ The document "Afrodescendientes y la matriz de la desigualdad social en América Latina: retos para la inclusión" describes different situations that confirm the importance of both the design of a question and its response categories and the need to pay attention to the entire census process and to the participation of the Afrodescendent population at all stages of implementation.

⁹ Even in countries where the percentage of Afrodescendent population is low at the national level, it is possible to find municipalities with between 10% and 40% of Afrodescendent population, well above the national average.

A detailed analysis of the territorial distribution of the Afrodescendent population, considering both absolute and relative magnitudes, is crucial to understanding the intersection and reproduction of ethnic and racial inequalities and to targeting policies. In several cases, the areas where Afrodescendent populations are concentrated are also the country's most deprived or least developed areas. Even where they are not themselves the most disadvantaged areas (such as large cities), Afrodescendants are concentrated in the most deprived neighbourhoods in these areas. The incorporation of a differentiated approach into policies, which takes into account the right to cultural integrity for instance, makes this an issue that every country should examine further, to ensure that such policies are valid and effective.

With respect to demographic profiles, which provide the basic information needed to guide the design of public policy and investment in it, census figures reveal that Afrodescendent populations are at either a complete or advanced stage of demographic transition, mainly as a result of a decline in fertility, a reduction in mortality and an increase in life expectancy. In some countries, such as Cuba and Uruguay, which are already in the post-transitional stage, Afrodescendent populations are ageing a little less, while in other countries the opposite is true.

The information as a whole reveals that, in 11 of the 14 countries, the demographic dividend (reduced age dependency, where the proportion of people of working age exceeds that of potentially inactive people) is more favourable among Afrodescendent populations. However, reaping the demographic dividend entails rethinking policy and investment in education, health, employment and social protection. Quality education policies need to be reinforced, ensuring that Afrodescendent children, adolescents and young people not only manage to complete primary and secondary education but also have equal access to higher education where profound inequalities persist, as shown below. As population ageing among Afrodescendent populations is already under way, it is also paramount to eliminate health inequalities throughout the life cycle, as the cumulative risks will lead to an increase in these inequalities in old age.

F. Poverty, stratification and access to services

Poverty and extreme poverty in Latin America continue to be a major problem and an obstacle to inclusive social development. The sudden emergence of the COVID-19 pandemic in early 2020 has exacerbated this situation dramatically, compounding the obstacles to achieving the goal in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of ending poverty in all its forms everywhere and ensuring that no one is left behind.

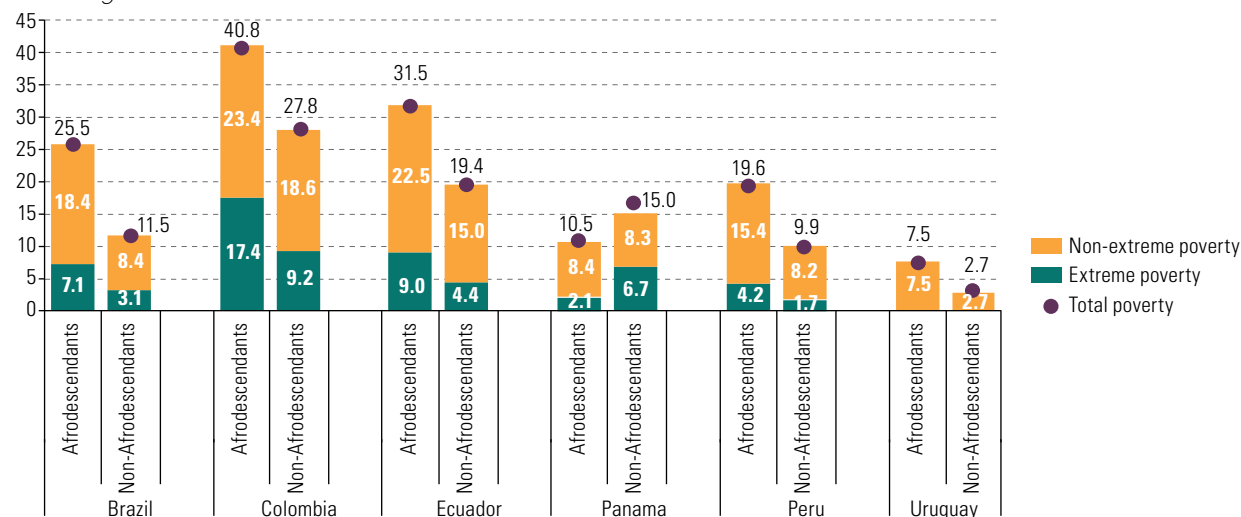
The ability to analyse the income poverty status of Latin America's Afrodescendants and the related equality gaps is limited by the fact that only six countries currently include the self-identification of Afrodescendants in their household surveys (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Uruguay). However, existing information shows that, in five of these six countries, both poverty and extreme poverty are significantly higher among the Afrodescendent population than among the non-Afrodescendent population (see figure 2). The persistence of wide inequalities in this area, even in countries with low poverty rates, such as Uruguay, goes to show that ethnic and racial inequalities can remain even in cases where poverty levels are low.

Any analysis of the inequalities affecting the Afrodescendent population should identify not only gaps in relation to the non-Afrodescendent population but also the intersection of ethnic and racial inequalities with the other axes that structure social inequality in Latin America, such as gender, age and territory. This improves the analysis of the multiple and combined factors that increase the likelihood of certain population groups finding themselves in a situation of poverty, extreme poverty or vulnerability to poverty, while also facing bigger obstacles to overcoming any such situation. Better strategies and policies could also be developed for overcoming them.

When considering the territorial dimension of inequality, the percentage of people in rural areas living in poverty and extreme poverty is found to be higher than in urban areas, in the case of both Afrodescendants and non-Afrodescendants. However, the levels recorded among Afrodescendants are higher in all the countries and areas of residence under review, with the exception of Panama.

Figure 2

Latin America (6 countries): incidence of poverty and extreme poverty by ethno-racial status, around 2018^a
(Percentages)



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

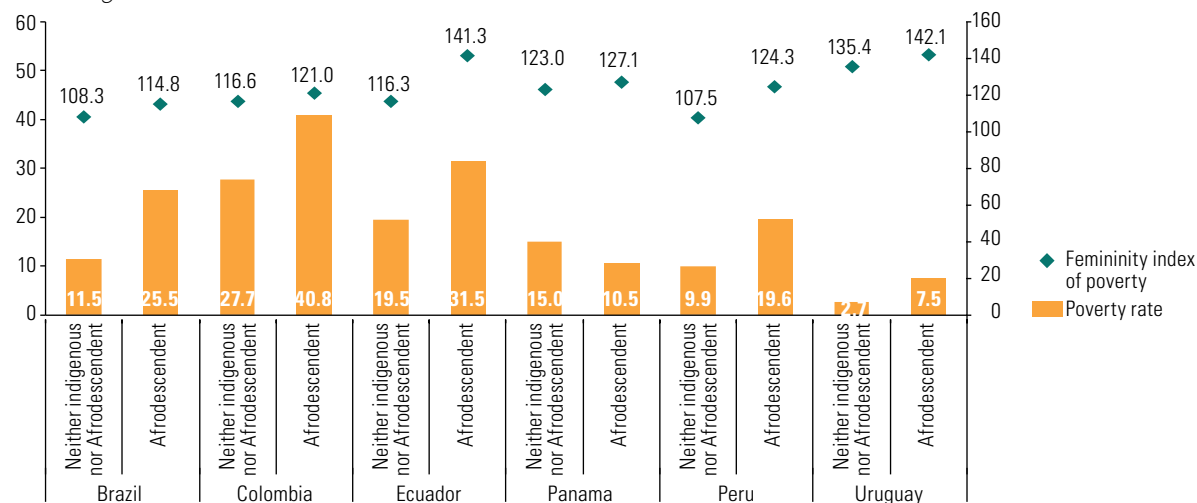
Note: The non-Afrodescendent population does not include those who self-identify as indigenous or those whose ethno-racial status is unknown.

^a Data for Brazil, Colombia, Panama, Peru and Uruguay refer to 2018, while data for Ecuador refer to 2017. In Ecuador, the ethno-racial self-identification question is asked of persons aged 5 years and older and, in Peru, it is asked of those aged 14 years and older.

There has also been a trend towards the feminization of poverty, which is more accentuated among women of African descent.¹⁰ In the six countries for which information is available, the proportion of Afrodescendent women in poor households exceeds that of Afrodescendent men, with the femininity index of poverty ranging from 114.8 in Brazil to 142.1 in Uruguay (see figure 3). This shows the importance of not only designing and implementing poverty reduction policies with both a gender and ethno-racial perspective but also ensuring that such policies are capable of analysing the intersection between these two perspectives fully.

Figure 3

Latin America (6 countries): poverty rate and femininity index in poor households, by ethno-racial status, around 2018^a
(Percentages and index)



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

Note: The non-Afrodescendent population does not include those who self-identify as indigenous or those whose ethno-racial status is unknown.

^a Data for Brazil, Colombia, Panama, Peru and Uruguay refer to 2018, while data for Ecuador refer to 2017. In Ecuador, the ethno-racial self-identification question is asked of persons aged 5 years and older and, in Peru, those aged 14 years and older.

¹⁰ The femininity index in poor households shows disparities in the incidence of poverty (or extreme poverty) between women and men aged 20–59 years. A value higher than 100 indicates that poverty (or extreme poverty) affects women more than men. A value lower than 100 indicates the opposite. The ECLAC Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean carries out systematic monitoring of this indicator (see [online] <https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/feminity-index-poor-households>).

Overcoming poverty is not enough to achieve well-being. As ECLAC has found (2019c), a high percentage of Latin America's population that has managed to rise above the poverty line and is currently in middle-income strata remains in a situation of acute vulnerability and at high risk of falling back into poverty when faced with a range of different events, including job loss, catastrophic illness, disaster or crisis (such as the COVID-19 pandemic). Apart from being overrepresented among those in poverty and extreme poverty, the Afrodescendent population is also overrepresented in low-income strata and underrepresented in middle- and high-income strata. Gaps between the Afrodescendent population and the non-Afrodescendent population are widest at the income extremes: in the poorest income strata, the participation of Afrodescendants is between 2 and 3 times greater than that of non-Afrodescendants in Peru, Brazil and Uruguay and 1.5 times greater in Colombia and Ecuador. In the highest income strata, the participation of the non-Afrodescendent population ranges from 2 to 3 times greater than that of the Afrodescendent population in Ecuador and Colombia to approximately 4 times greater in Brazil and Peru and 7 times greater in Uruguay.

Deprivation of access to adequate housing and basic infrastructure services, such as safe water, sanitation, electricity and the Internet, is yet another structural expression of poverty, as well as being a factor in the reproduction of poverty. Access to safe water and basic sanitation is a prerequisite for enjoyment of the right to health and food security, especially for vulnerable children and older persons (ECLAC, 2017b). Lack of access to improved drinking-water sources and sanitation leads to health problems, notably gastrointestinal diseases, which continue to cause a significant number of deaths and the loss of years of healthy life. It also affects school attendance and performance. Access to electricity is another basic service that is crucial to people's well-being, as well as being key to a country's development and that of the territories and communities comprising it. It is associated with other fundamental rights, such as the right to health and adequate nutrition.¹¹ Access to electricity is also necessary for lighting, security services and telecommunications, making it crucial to guaranteeing the rights to education, adequate housing, culture and recreation. Lack of access to modern energy sources forces many households, especially the poorest and those living in rural areas, to continue using solid fuels, which generate high levels of air pollution. This, in turn, causes illness and death from respiratory problems.

Access to adequate sources of water and energy is also key to easing the burden of unpaid work, as it reduces the time spent collecting water and fuel, such as fuelwood —tasks usually performed by women and girls. It also helps to lessen the consequences of handling the heavy weights and travelling the often long distances involved to collect and transport them (ECLAC, 2017c). For these reasons, policies for expanding water supply systems, sanitation, the distribution of safe water and extending the power grid can have a significant gender impact, especially by alleviating women's workload. They can also have an impact on reducing inequalities in access to this right suffered by Afrodescendent populations, which are overrepresented in situations of poverty and social exclusion. The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated the negative effects of overcrowded housing and lack of access to improved drinking-water sources, sanitation, electricity and the Internet. These factors make it much more difficult, if not impossible, to maintain the recommended physical distancing and hygiene measures to prevent infection, serious forms of the disease and death.

As might be expected, owing to their overrepresentation in situations of poverty and vulnerability to poverty, as defined in monetary terms, the percentage of Afrodescendants who live in overcrowded housing and who suffer severe or moderate deprivation of access to basic services is higher than that of non-Afrodescendants, in both urban and rural areas, in most of the countries for which information is available. Although living conditions tend to be better in cities than in the countryside, inequalities are more acute in urban areas.

The most recent census data indicate that, in urban areas in 11 out of 15 countries,¹² the percentage of Afrodescendants deprived of access to water ranges from 3.1% in Costa Rica to 29.9% in Mexico. In three of the four remaining countries, the percentages of deprivation among the Afrodescendent population are even higher: Cuba (34.4%), Ecuador (39.9%) and Plurinational State of Bolivia (47.9%). Nicaragua is an extreme case, with this indicator rising to 81.4%.¹³ In all the countries under review, with the exception of Argentina,

¹¹ Among other things, it facilitates food preservation and cooking and the preservation of medicines, as well as heating, ventilation and cooling.

¹² Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

¹³ This is explained largely by cases where water is piped to a point outside the dwelling or supplied by a well (ECLAC, 2017b).

Cuba and Panama, the Afrodescendent population suffers more deprivation than the non-Afrodescendent population. In rural areas, problems of access to water for the population as a whole are exacerbated and, in 11 of 15 countries, the Afrodescendent population fares the worst when it comes to severe deprivation.

Information from household surveys in six countries indicates that, in urban areas, access to electricity is virtually universal. There are therefore no wide ethnic and racial gaps in this respect. In rural areas, there is also broad coverage (around 95% or more), with the exception of Uruguay's Afrodescendent population and Peru's entire population. The biggest gap is found in rural areas of Uruguay, where there is a 10 percentage-point difference between Afrodescendants and non-Afrodescendants in access to electricity.

Lastly, access to more advanced services, such as digital infrastructure, and to Internet connection opportunities, is increasingly essential for social inclusion and for development opportunities for individuals and communities. In spite of progress over the past two decades in increasing coverage and access to digital equipment, especially mobile phones (ECLAC, 2019a and 2019d), technological change is taking place against a backdrop of persistent structural inequalities, and the expansion of new technologies is coupled with digital divides that compound pre-existing inequalities in access to information and knowledge. Households' levels of connectivity are very uneven, depending on the country, households' socioeconomic level and place of residence (ECLAC, 2020b). The COVID-19 pandemic has exacerbated these gaps, precisely because it increases the need to use the Internet for essential activities of daily living, such as buying food, medicine and other basic supplies, as well as for teleworking and supporting school activities.

A comparison of Internet access by the Afrodescendent and non-Afrodescendent population in the five countries for which information is available from 2018 household surveys (Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay)¹⁴ reveals significant gaps to the detriment of the Afrodescendent population. Uruguay is the only country where more than half the Afrodescendent population (52%) has Internet in the home but, even there, the rate is much lower than that of the non-Afrodescendent population (70%). In Brazil, Colombia and Ecuador, the proportion is close to 30% and, in Peru, it is less than 25%. The gap ranges from 11.5 percentage points in Ecuador to 21.0 percentage points in Brazil.

The results of the analysis show how important it is for strategies of poverty eradication and access to basic services vital to guaranteeing rights and social inclusion to be sensitive to differences. In other words, they should include policies and programmes that are not only aimed at all those living in poverty, extreme poverty, vulnerability or deprivation of rights but also contain measures, strategies and actions targeted specifically at the Afrodescendent population and the various groups within it. When implementing such policies, it must also be feasible to identify the differential causes of poverty and vulnerabilities in these groups and to promote actions and interventions for addressing them.

G. Health inequalities

Guaranteeing the right to health for the entire population is a prerequisite for reducing inequalities and achieving inclusive social development. The health inequalities experienced by the region's Afrodescendent populations not only represent a serious infringement of this right, they also undermine their chances of lifelong full and healthy development, with significant repercussions for society as a whole.

Analysed using the paradigm of the social determinants of health, the factors leading to health inequalities stem from the set of circumstances in which people are born, grow, work, live and age, and the forces shaping their daily lives. The economic, social, regulatory and political context determines people's risk of falling sick and their ability to prevent disease and seek treatment if they do become sick. Thus, poverty and unequal access to education, decent work, social protection and basic services for the Afrodescendent population undermine the population's health status (Abramo, Cecchini and Ullmann, 2020; PAHO, 2019).

¹⁴ For the purposes of comparing countries, mobile Internet access has not been used to construct this indicator, as not all the countries under review include this information in their household surveys. If Internet access via mobile phone were to be considered, the figures would undoubtedly be significantly higher.

Other less tangible factors, such as residential segregation, institutional racism and discrimination, also influence the health inequalities observed in the Afrodescendent population. Finally, in line with the social inequality matrix concept (ECLAC, 2016a), the multiple and simultaneous forms of discrimination and exclusion associated with the axes that structure social inequality (gender, age, place of residence and ethno-racial status) interact and magnify one another, giving rise to health inequalities that must be addressed in a comprehensive and holistic way.

From the human development standpoint, childhood, especially early childhood, is a particularly important stage, as this is when the foundations are laid for people's future cognitive, affective and social development (ECLAC, 2017c and 2017d). Unfortunately, in Latin America, in cases where infant mortality levels can be assessed in light of race/ethnicity, the incidence of mortality is found to be higher among the Afrodescendent population than among the non-indigenous, non-Afrodescendent population (see table 2). This confirms that the equality established in various normative instruments must be accompanied by well-defined public policies that make it possible to assess the specific risk faced by populations having suffered processes of exclusion and systematic subordination, as in the case of Afrodescendants.

Table 2

Latin America (8 countries): estimates of infant mortality by ethno-racial status and international comparison, 2010 and 2015

(Number of deaths per 1,000 live births)

Country	Estimates of infant mortality among the Afrodescendent population, 2010	Estimates of infant mortality among the non-Afrodescendent population, 2010	Estimates of infant mortality among the total population, 2015
Colombia	26.3	16.0	15
Ecuador	25.0	20.5	17
Brazil	24.2	18.7	19
Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of)	18.4	14.3	18
Uruguay	16.9	11.8	9
Panama	13.8	10.4	13
Argentina	12.5	14.0	10
Costa Rica	10.1	9.0	8

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), "Situación de las personas afrodescendientes en América Latina y desafíos de políticas para la garantía de sus derechos", *Project Documents* (LC/TS.2017/121), Santiago, 2017, and United States Census Bureau, International Data Base (IDB), 2015.

Aside from infant mortality, children of African descent are exposed to other health problems. In some countries in the region, Afrodescendent children under the age of five experience higher rates of recent diarrhoea (during the two weeks preceding the survey), which can affect their growth and development and are associated with such factors as limited access to safe water and sanitation. Frequent episodes of diarrhoea not only restrict the growth and development of the children experiencing them, they are also the second leading cause of child mortality (UNICEF, 2016).

In Latin America, Afrodescendent adolescents and young people are a diverse group in demographic, territorial, social and cultural terms. Nonetheless, they are one of the groups that faces the greatest challenges associated with structural processes of poverty, inequality and exclusion. As this has repercussions on health, action must be taken to ensure their participation, respect for their human rights, interculturality, gender equality and ethnic and racial equality (PAHO, 2017a). The health issues of special concern to young Afrodescendants include mental health, teenage pregnancy and violence.

Pregnancy has profound and generally negative consequences for the life chances of adolescent girls. Available data indicate that adolescent childbearing is more widespread among Afrodescendants than among non-Afrodescendants. These different levels of adolescent childbearing arise from differentiated behaviours in the proximate determinants of fertility, such as the age of sexual initiation and contraceptive use (Ullmann, 2015). As teen pregnancy is a complex, multidimensional social phenomenon, public policies aimed at reducing it should adopt a holistic vision encompassing multiple sectors of social policy and should address comprehensively the structural factors underlying teenage pregnancy, such as poverty, exclusion and limited opportunities for social mobility.

Another priority issue is the sexual and reproductive health of people of African descent. Maternal mortality, which is largely preventable, is an important indicator of women's sexual and reproductive health, as its intensity is a reflection of the care and assistance that women received during conception, delivery and the post-partum period. It also reflects social inequalities and vulnerabilities. In countries where it is possible to estimate this indicator by ethno-racial status, there is a high maternal mortality rate among Afrodescendent women, associated with the effects of structural racism, a higher incidence of poverty and other deprivations.

Prenatal care reduces maternal and perinatal morbidity and mortality both directly, by detecting and treating pregnancy-related complications, and indirectly, by facilitating the identification of women and adolescents at higher risk of developing complications (PAHO/WHO, 2018). In the four Latin American countries for which information is available through demographic and health surveys (DHS), there is a high level of non-compliance with the World Health Organization (WHO) recommendation of a minimum of eight prenatal visits (PAHO/WHO, 2018), in the case of both Afrodescendent and non-Afrodescendent women.

According to the scant and scattered information available concerning gaps in the prevalence and incidence of the human immunodeficiency virus (HIV) among the region's Afrodescendent population, this population is at greater risk of contracting HIV, particularly in certain countries of the region (World Bank, 2004; OEA, 2012). It also shows higher prevalence of HIV-related infections, such as tuberculosis (García Pinto, 2014; Paixão and others, 2010).

Countries in the region are experiencing changes in their epidemiological profile, with major shifts in morbidity and mortality patterns, characterized by a decrease in the prevalence of communicable diseases and an increase in non-communicable diseases (PAHO, 2017b). As Afrodescendent populations are not immune to these changes, the incidence of non-communicable diseases among Afrodescendants gives further cause for concern, particularly the lack of access to early diagnosis and prompt treatment services, which can aggravate the course and impact of the disease. For example, ethnic and racial disparities have been found in the prevalence of systemic arterial hypertension (Paixão and others, 2010), cerebrovascular accidents (Martínez Martín and others, 2018) and certain types of cancer (Andahur, Mercado and Sánchez, 2019; Paixão and others, 2010).

There are various initiatives to promote the health of the Afrodescendent population, in particular those promoted by the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) at the regional level. In September 2017, the PAHO member states adopted unanimously a Policy on Ethnicity and Health. More recently, two PAHO special commissions have addressed the issue of the health of the Afrodescendent population: the PAHO Commission on Equity and Health Inequalities in the Americas (PAHO/WHO, 2018) and the High-Level Commission "Universal Health in the 21st Century: 40 Years of Alma-Ata" (PAHO, 2019). In addition, the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development contains a specific chapter on the Afrodescendent population, and the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development provides for two specific lines of action for this population, including its access to health services.

These advances at the international and regional level are mirrored by those at the national level, such as incorporation of the knowledge and practices of Afrodescendent communities into health care, or programmes that take into account the health situation of Afrodescendants, with a focus on non-discrimination. In addition to respect for Afrodescendent culture in health systems, there are initiatives that consider the vulnerabilities and specific circumstances of the Afrodescendent population.

In short, there needs to be a move towards universal health policies to guarantee access for all to quality services for preventing, detecting and treating health problems. At the same time, this universalist approach needs to be sensitive to differences, meaning that it should address the specific barriers faced by the Afrodescendent population (ECLAC, 2017d, 2018a and 2020a). Targeted actions are therefore required to rectify not only the health inequalities affecting the Afrodescendent population in the various dimensions mentioned earlier but also any gaps that may arise from emerging health challenges, such as the current COVID-19 pandemic. For all this to be achieved, there is a clear need for the systematic production and dissemination of health data disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

H. Inequalities in education

The universal right to education, recognized in various international agreements, including the 2030 Agenda in Sustainable Development Goal 4, is essential to achieve equality and build more democratic societies. It is a key means for social and labour market inclusion and access to decent work, and a prerequisite for production development and the ability of companies, the economy and society to innovate. Higher education levels also lead to better chances of overcoming poverty, improved health indicators, the prevention and eradication of child labour, upward social mobility and wider opportunities for exercising citizenship. Guaranteeing the right to education therefore helps to open up access to other rights (ECLAC, 2017b, 2018a and 2019a).

Over the past three decades, Latin America has made significant progress in extending the guarantee of the right to education. Illiteracy has decreased, access to primary education is now practically universal and secondary school attendance has risen significantly (ECLAC, 2017b, 2019a and 2019c). However, severe deficits persist in terms of completion of secondary education and access to and completion of tertiary education, as well as in terms of the quality of education throughout the schooling cycle. In addition, the situation varies widely from one country to another and within individual countries, highlighting wide equality gaps in the exercise of this right, related to people's income stratum, ethno-racial status and the territory where they live. In particular, severe inequalities persist in guaranteeing Afrodescendants the right to education.

The efforts of Latin American countries to extend the coverage of their education systems have helped to ensure that, in terms of national totals, there are practically no gaps in access to primary education between the Afrodescendent population and the non-indigenous, non-Afrodescendent population, as measured by school attendance rates. However, inequality deepens as age increases. This process has also resulted in a narrowing of the gap in average years of schooling between Afrodescendants and non-Afrodescendants, mainly among young people aged 15–29, coupled with an intergenerational reduction in ethnic and racial gaps in this regard. There has also been an intergenerational reversal of gender gaps: while among older persons, women have lower levels of education than their male peers, in most cases, the reverse is true among young people and among adults aged 30–64.

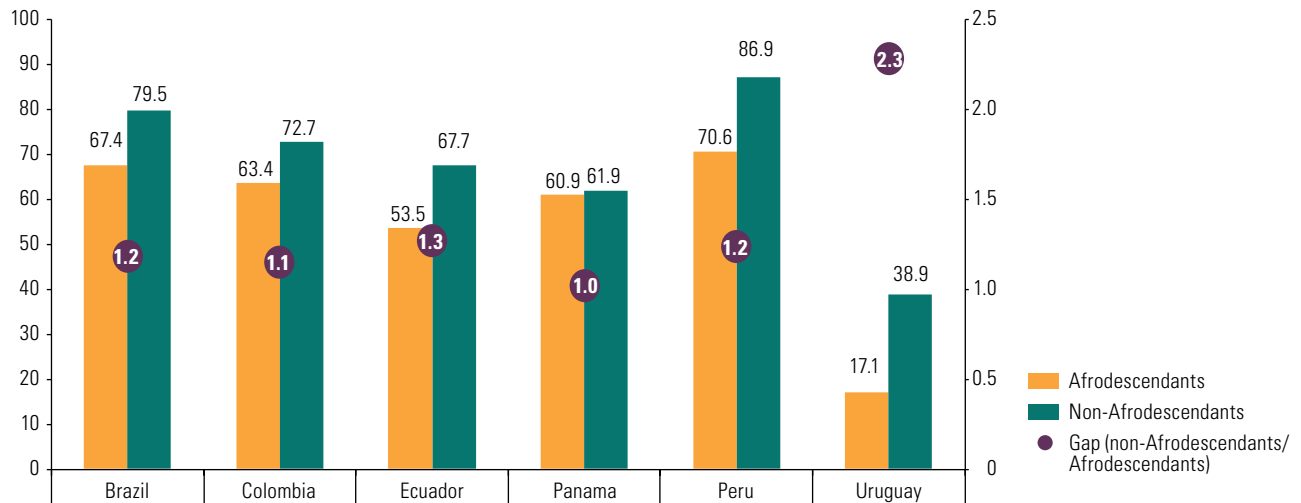
There are also ethnic and racial inequalities in the rates of students falling behind in education and early school leaving. This is a relevant indicator of various aspects of the educational experience and is often an expression of multiple inequalities throughout the life cycle, which are also associated with the socioeconomic level of households and the territory where they live. The factors leading to such situations include pressure to leave school to start work early, which is exacerbated in times of falling household incomes owing to the unemployment or job insecurity of adult family members, less availability of schools and longer distances from places of residence (especially in rural areas), problems of education quality, and school curricula and teaching methods at variance with people's reality. Adolescent girls and young women are also required to undertake domestic tasks within the family, especially the care of children (their own or younger siblings) and older persons, in the case of pregnancy or when mothers work full time.

Completion of secondary education is a basic minimum to break the intergenerational transmission of poverty and ensure access to decent work. It is crucial for acquiring the basic skills and competencies required in a fast-changing, globalized world (Trucco, 2014). Although the level of access, grade progression and completion of secondary education in Latin America has increased in recent decades, it is much lower than in primary education, varies more widely from country to country and is marked by significant socioeconomic segmentation. People who fail to complete this crucial stage of education tend to experience multiple forms of exclusion and, in particular, greater difficulties in building pathways to decent work. Inequalities between the Afrodescendent population and the non-Afrodescendent population begin to become more pronounced at this level of education.

There are clear gaps to the detriment of Afrodescendants in five of the six countries under review (the exception being Panama) (see figure 4). In relative terms, Uruguay has the biggest gap, with 2.3 times more young non-Afrodescendants completing secondary education than their Afrodescendent peers. An analysis of the intersection between gender inequalities and ethno-racial status shows that secondary school completion rates are higher among women, in the case of both young Afrodescendants and non-Afrodescendants (with the exception of young Afrodescendants in Peru).

Figure 4

Latin America (6 countries): proportion of young people aged 20–24 having completed secondary education, by ethno-racial status, around 2018^a
(Percentages)



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

Note: The non-Afrodescendent population does not include those who self-identify as indigenous or those whose ethno-racial status is unknown.

^a Data for Brazil, Colombia, Panama, Peru and Uruguay refer to 2018, while data for Ecuador refer to 2017.

In the case of Brazil, Ecuador, Peru and Uruguay it is possible to analyse the evolution of this indicator between 2012 and 2018.¹⁵ There are gaps to the detriment of Afrodescendants in all countries, which remain quite high at the end of this period. However, in Brazil and Uruguay, there has been a significant increase in the percentage of young Afrodescendants who manage to complete this stage of education, leading to a reduction in ethnic and racial gaps. In Brazil, the gap shrank from 23.3 percentage points in 2002 to 12.1 percentage points in 2018 and, in Uruguay, from 25.6 percentage points in 2012 to 21.8 percentage points in 2018. In Ecuador and Peru, the percentage of young Afrodescendants having completed secondary education increased only slightly in the period under review and the gaps widened.

Progress in tertiary education has been much more modest.¹⁶ Furthermore, both access to and completion of this level of education—which Afrodescendent organizations consider to be key factors for achieving social inclusion, access to decent work and racial equality—vary widely from one country to another and depending on the socioeconomic characteristics of students and the households to which they belong, as well as on their ethno-racial status.

Around 2018, data on completion of tertiary education, disaggregated by ethno-racial status, among young people aged 25–29 in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Peru showed that completion was low, even among non-Afrodescendants. However, it was very much lower among Afrodescendants, ranging from 10.5% in Colombia to 23.35% in Peru (see figure 5). The biggest gap was found in Brazil, a country where the proportion of Afrodescendants having completed tertiary education was less than half that of non-Afrodescendants. When disaggregating data by sex, the trend in Brazil, Colombia and Peru is the same as for secondary school completion: completion rates are higher among women, in the case of both Afrodescendants and non-Afrodescendants.

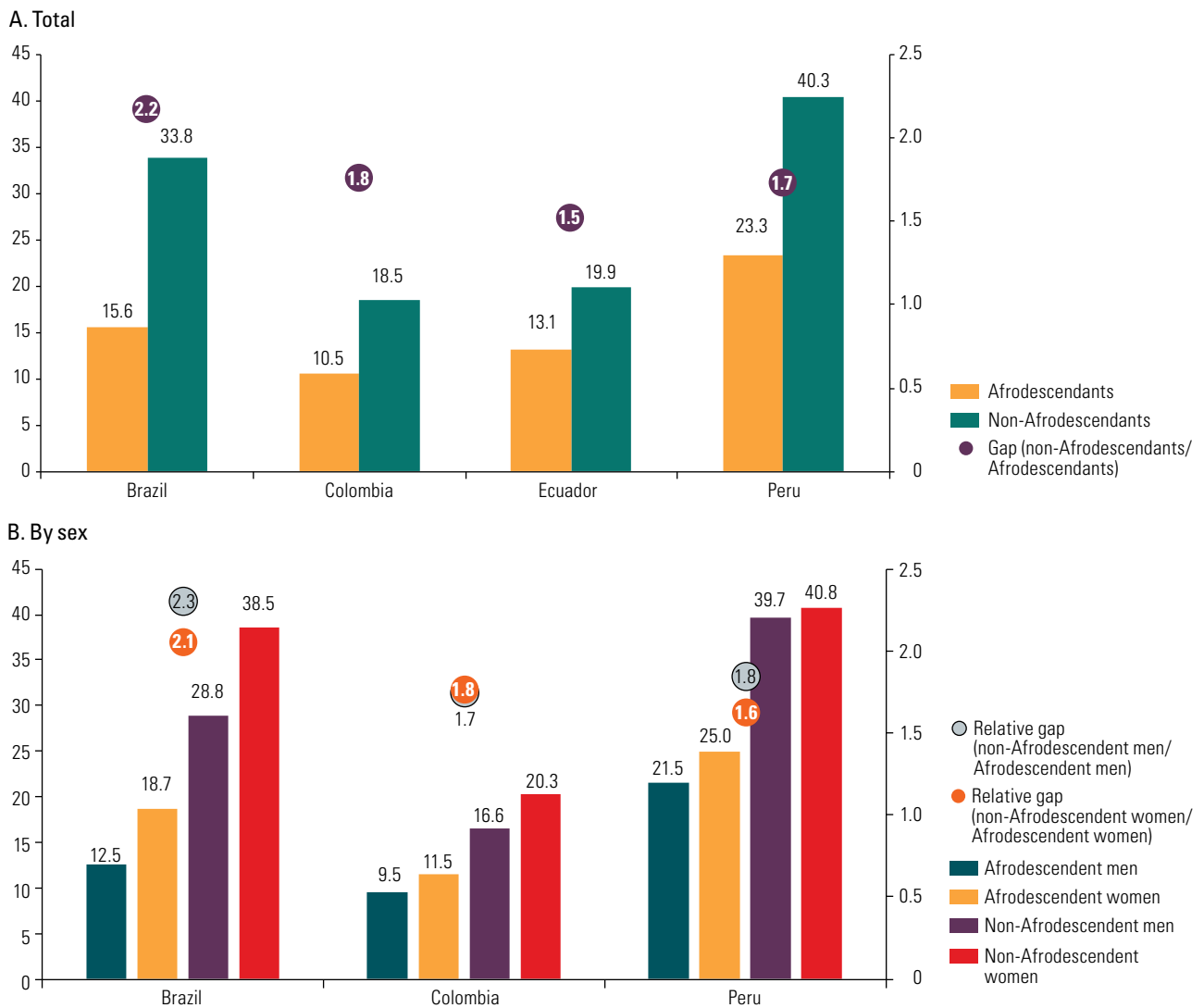
In the two countries for which it is possible to analyse the evolution of this indicator, the trends diverge. In Brazil, between 2002 and 2018, the tertiary education completion rate increased significantly among both Afrodescendants and non-Afrodescendants. However, while the percentage of non-Afrodescendants completing tertiary education increased by a factor of 2.3, that of Afrodescendants nearly quadrupled, narrowing the

¹⁵ Data for Brazil cover the period 2002–2018, while those for Ecuador cover the period 2012–2017.

¹⁶ The concept of tertiary education used herein refers to both university education and non-university education, which includes higher-level technical courses.

ethnic and racial gap significantly. This stemmed from both an increase in enrolment in tertiary education over that period and the implementation of affirmative action policies targeted at the low-income population from public secondary education and of African descent. In Peru, even though tertiary education completion rates are higher than in Brazil and the gaps are smaller, the gaps increased between 2014 and 2018.

Figure 5
Latin America (4 countries): proportion of young people aged 25–29 having completed tertiary education (four years), by ethno-racial status and sex, around 2018^a
(Percentages)



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

Note: The non-Afrodescendent population does not include those who self-identify as indigenous or those whose ethno-racial status is unknown.

^a Data for Brazil, Colombia and Peru refer to 2018, while those for Ecuador refer to 2017.

The development and implementation of an agenda to guarantee the right to quality education for Afrodescendants is a challenge central to progress in combating racism and promoting racial equality. In response to this challenge, a series of initiatives and experiences have been developed, which are being conducted by Afrodescendent organizations and movements and governments, including the introduction of intercultural education and affirmative action policies into secondary and tertiary education and the establishment of community colleges.

Intercultural education experiences¹⁷ include: implementation of the right to education in the mother tongue; institutionalization of intercultural and multilingual education in the education system, with regionalized curricula developed by means of participatory processes; compulsory education in schools concerning the legacy and contributions of Afrodescendent communities in shaping nations (art, philosophy, religion, knowledge, traditions and values), as well as their history of stigmatization; and the promotion of non-discriminatory education.

Affirmative action policies are targeted primarily at access to tertiary education (although in some cases they also include secondary education and technical and vocational education). In recent years, several Latin American countries have promoted affirmative action measures (ECLAC, 2017b),¹⁸ with Brazil the country that has made the most progress.¹⁹ One of the main results of introducing affirmative action policies into the education sector has been to increase young Afrodescendants' attendance in and access to post-secondary education, especially university education. In at least four countries (Brazil, Colombia, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia), the attendance of indigenous and Afrodescendent young people has risen steadily in recent years. In Brazil, according to data from the Higher Education Census (CES), consolidated by the National Institute for Educational Studies and Research Anísio Teixeira (INEP), the percentage of Afrodescendent students out of the total number of people who entered public universities increased from 15% in 2009 to 40.1% in 2016 (Oliveira, Viana and Lima, 2019).

In summary, significant progress has been made in some aspects of the fulfilment of the Afrodescendent population's right to education, especially in terms of access to the education system (particularly up to the age of 17), increased years of schooling and completion of secondary education. However, significant deficits persist in the fulfilment of this right, along with wide ethnic and racial disparities in the rates of students falling behind in education and early school leaving, as well as in access to and completion of secondary and tertiary education. In cases where it is possible to analyse the evolution of these indicators throughout the 2010s, these gaps have been narrowing, associated largely with the implementation of public policies in various Latin American countries, both to promote intercultural and bilingual education and to introduce affirmative action into secondary and tertiary education.

I. Afrodescendants with disabilities

Latin America's population with disabilities is diverse and the interaction between disability and factors such as socioeconomic level, gender, place of residence and ethno-racial status can place certain subgroups of this population in a special situation of disadvantage and exclusion. This calls for public policies that actively seek to combat discrimination in all its expressions to guarantee the rights of all.

Like its Afrodescendent population, until recently, Latin America's population with disabilities suffered from near-total statistical invisibility, which made it difficult to quantify and understand its living conditions fully. Recognition of the rights of persons with disabilities in the public agenda, which became more urgent following the adoption by the United Nations General Assembly of the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities in 2006, has led to the gradual expansion of information sources that investigate disability. The Convention expresses concern about "the difficult conditions faced by persons with disabilities who are subject to multiple or aggravated forms of discrimination on the basis of race, colour, sex, language, religion, political or other opinion, national, ethnic, indigenous or social origin, property, birth, age or other status"; recognizing the intersection of inequalities associated with disability, race and other factors (United Nations, 2006).

¹⁷ Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay have developed experiences in this area.

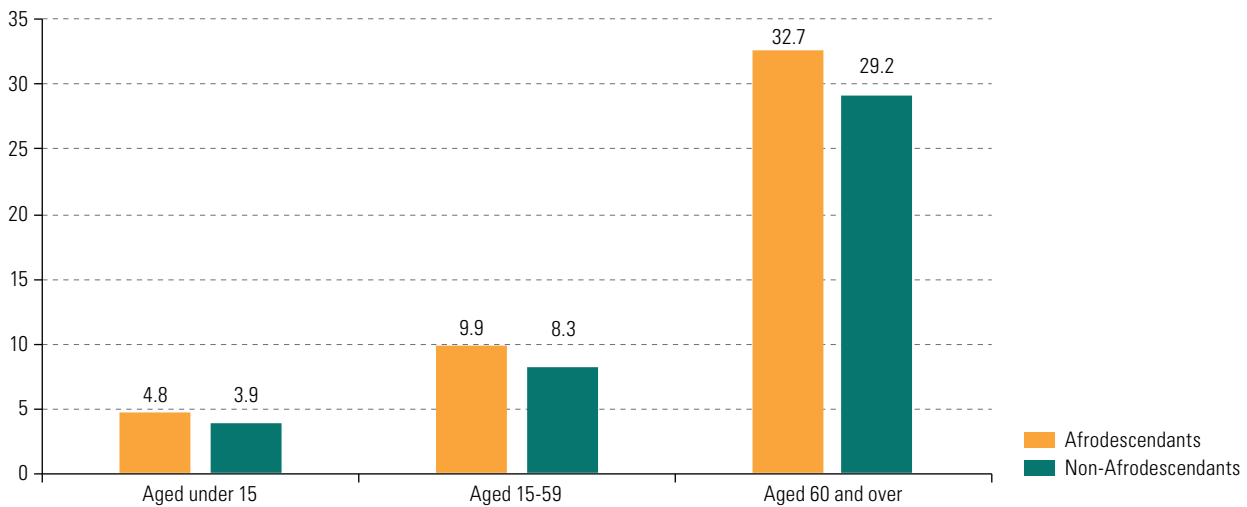
¹⁸ They include the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Honduras, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay (Rangel, 2019).

¹⁹ Since the early 2000s, affirmative action policies have been implemented in federal universities and institutions of secondary technical education, by establishing quotas for people of African descent. The policy of social and racial quotas, which was originally an initiative introduced by a few public universities of their own accord, was gradually extended countrywide and became law in 2012 (Law No. 12711). In 2014, the Federal Government issued a guideline suggesting that federal public universities should also adopt this practice in postgraduate courses (masters and doctorates). In 2005, Law No. 11096 established the University for All Programme (ProUni) to provide scholarships at private universities to students from low-income, Afrodescendent and indigenous families.

Information from the latest censuses available for 11 countries in the region shows that, as a simple average for the region, people of African descent have a higher prevalence of disability than the non-Afrodescendent population in the three age groups under review and that gaps between the Afrodescendent population and the non-Afrodescendent population in the prevalence of disability are particularly pronounced in the older age groups (see figure 6).

Figure 6

Latin America (11 countries):^a persons with at least one disability, by age group and ethno-racial status, around 2010 (Percentages)



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

^a The countries included are: Argentina, Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Ecuador, Honduras, Panama, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

The data also reveal that Afrodescendent women have a higher prevalence of disability than Afrodescendent men and non-Afrodescendent women. The data from Peru’s national household survey also shed light on the severe disparities and dual exclusion faced by Afrodescendants with disabilities in what is considered a key dimension of social and economic inclusion: the secondary school completion rate of Afrodescendants with disabilities is half that of non-Afrodescendants with disabilities (24.9% compared with 50.8%) and less than a third that of non-Afrodescendants without disabilities (24.9% compared with 81.7%).

Although it is recognized that disability involves a physical, cognitive, psychosocial or sensory impairment, it is the interaction between persons with impairments and environmental factors, including attitudinal barriers and discrimination, which hinders their full participation in society on an equal basis with others (United Nations, 2006). In this sense, inequalities affecting Afrodescendants from the day they are born—higher poverty rates, difficulties in accessing health services, exposure to violence and insecure jobs with little access to social protection—coupled with discrimination and institutional racism, increases their likelihood of living with a disability throughout their lives.

To reverse this situation of dual or multiple exclusion, at least three lines of action are required. First, quantitative data is needed to analyse in more depth the intersecting gaps and simultaneous experience of discrimination based on disability and ethno-racial status and other axes of the social inequality matrix, such as gender and place of residence, which calls for reinforcement of the information sources that could be used for such an analysis. Second, policies designed to break down barriers to access to such areas of rights as education, decent work and health, experienced by both persons with disabilities and Afrodescendants, should include measures to address the specific needs of subgroups of these groups that are particularly excluded and disadvantaged. In addition, policies must address the causes that underlie the exclusion of persons

with disabilities and Afrodescendants: racism, discrimination, stereotypes and prejudice and, fundamentally, a failure to value human diversity. Finally, power asymmetries related to class, gender, ethno-racial status and disability intersect and result in the invisibility of Afrodescendants with disabilities in social and political movements seeking to advance collective rights and inclusion. To promote the leadership development of Afrodescendants with disabilities and expand this group's participation in both the Afrodescendent movement and the movement of persons with disabilities, it is essential for these movements to promote rights from a more pluralistic and inclusive perspective.

J. Inequalities in the world of work

Longstanding concern about structural inequalities and discriminatory practices in the world of work, and the need to prevent them, has been enshrined in various international regulations and United Nations instruments. The general instruments that condemn discrimination and promote racial equality and the rights of the Afrodescendent population also apply to the world of work. However, there is a powerful set of international regulations aimed at non-discrimination and promoting equality in this field, in particular those of ILO.²⁰

ECLAC regards work as the key to unlocking equality and a vital route to inclusion. However, Latin America's labour markets are characterized by severe structural inequalities of a socioeconomic, gender, ethno-racial, territorial and age nature, which impact on people's career paths. Furthermore, to understand the structure and dynamics of labour markets it is essential to consider the issue of unpaid domestic and care work, which is still carried out mainly by women. Women's heavy burden of unpaid domestic and care work reduces their labour force participation (and hence their economic autonomy), while also limiting the quality of the jobs and occupations where they are concentrated, which are seen as a projection of traditional caregiving tasks into the market. This affects their career advancement and employment opportunities, which not only reduces their income and their prospects for accessing social security (as it is still linked closely to formal wage labour) but also limits their participation in decision-making. These gender inequalities intersect and are reinforced by racial inequalities and discrimination, producing structures of exclusion that impact heavily on Afrodescendent women's patterns of employment.

Structural inequalities, which tend to deepen in situations of economic and social crisis, are also reflected in the accentuated patterns of segregation and segmentation that typify Latin American labour markets as a consequence of marked structural heterogeneity. The structure of occupations is a core factor in the characterization of labour markets, and the position of those employed within this structure is a key determinant of their income, as well as of the quality of their jobs and their chances of developing more protected and stable career paths (ECLAC, 2019c). This structure is characterized not only by profound ethnic, racial and gender inequalities, which make access to employment more difficult for women and Afrodescendants, especially Afrodescendent women, but also by their higher concentration in low-skilled, informal occupations with greater job insecurity and instability, leading to wide gaps in access to and quality of employment, working conditions, pay, labour rights and social protection (ECLAC, 2016b, 2017d, 2018a and 2019a). The simultaneous experience of ethnic, racial, gender and age inequalities, coupled with the persistence of racism and various forms of racial discrimination in the workplace, means that women and young people of African descent are those worst affected.

In the countries for which information is available from household surveys,²¹ around 2018, the average proportion of Afrodescendent women engaged in paid domestic work (17.3%), an occupation characterized by low wages, high levels of informality and lack of protection, was double that of non-Afrodescendent women (8.5%). Furthermore, the proportion of Afrodescendent women among unpaid contributing family workers is significantly higher, equivalent to 1.5 times that of non-Afrodescendent women working as unpaid contributing

²⁰ They include the: Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111); Equal Remuneration Convention, 1951 (No. 100); Workers with Family Responsibilities Convention, 1981 (No. 156); Maternity Protection Convention (Revised), 1952 (No. 103) and Maternity Protection Convention, 2000 (No. 183); Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189); and Violence and Harassment Convention, 2019 (No. 190).

²¹ Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Uruguay.

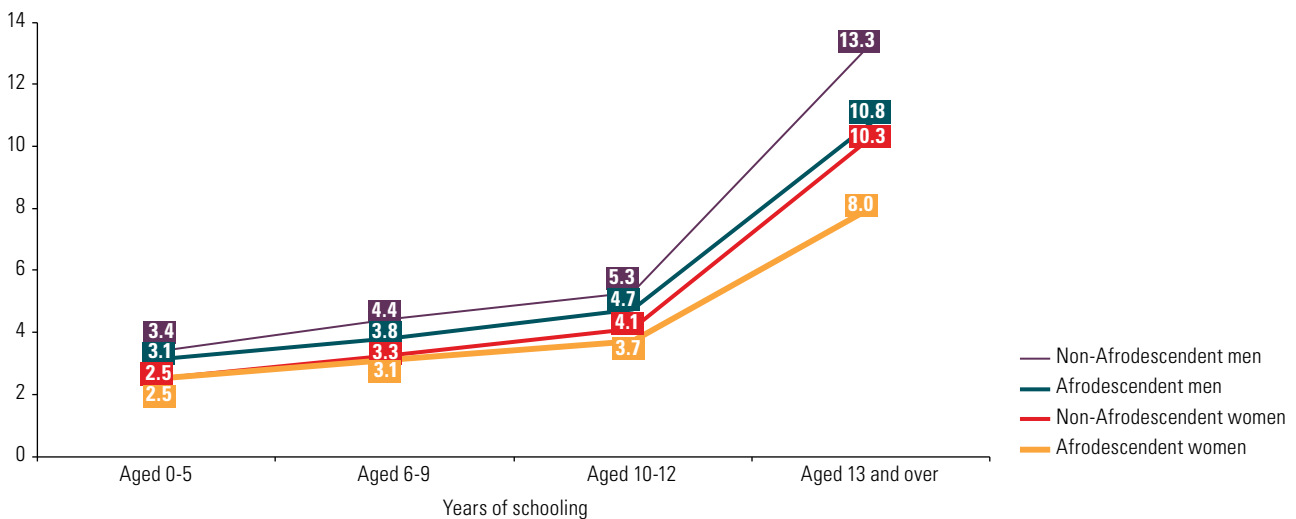
family workers, 2.7 times that of Afrodescendent men and 3.5 times that of non-Afrodescendent men. The proportion of Afrodescendent employers is approximately half that of non-Afrodescendent employers, in the case of both men and women. In addition, 57.7% of employed Afrodescendent women are classed as service workers, shop assistants or unskilled workers, compared with 46.6% of non-Afrodescendent women, and the percentage of the Afrodescendent population in professional jobs is much lower than that of the non-Afrodescendent population.

The higher educational attainment of both Afrodescendent and non-Afrodescendent women compared with their male peers, as analysed earlier, becomes all the more striking when it comes to the educational level of the employed population. Women's higher educational attainment is not reflected in the labour market, with women continuing to experience much greater difficulties in accessing decent work (ECLAC, 2016a, 2017b, 2017c, 2018b and 2018c). Indeed, in the six countries mentioned earlier, women have much lower participation and employment rates than men, while the reverse is true for unemployment. The gap is even wider in the case of women of African descent, who have higher unemployment rates and lower employment rates than non-Afrodescendent women (except in Panama), with a more than 5 percentage-point gap in Ecuador and Brazil.

The same applies to employment income, a very important indicator of employment quality. Despite having higher levels of education than their male peers, both Afrodescendent and non-Afrodescendent women earn less employment income than men, even when controlling for level of education and number of hours worked (ECLAC, 2016b, 2017b and 2018c). Whatever the measure adopted (monthly or hourly employment income, controlling for level of education or not), the same hierarchy of employment income is repeated, with non-Afrodescendent men at one extreme and Afrodescendent women at the other. The higher the level of education, the wider the gap (see figure 7).

Figure 7

Latin America (6 countries):^a weighted average hourly earnings of the employed population aged 15 years or older, by ethno-racial status, sex and years of schooling, around 2018 (International dollars)^b



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG); International Monetary Fund (IMF), "Implied PPP conversion rate" [online] <https://www.imf.org/external/datamapper/PPPEX@WE0/OEMDC/ADVEC/WEOWORLD>.

Note: The non-Afrodescendent population does not include those who self-identify as indigenous or those whose ethno-racial status is unknown.

^a The countries considered are Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Uruguay.

^b The calculations were made on the basis of the International Monetary Fund's indicator "implied purchasing power parity conversion rate" (national currency per international dollar), published in 2019.

This makes it imperative to ascertain which factors and patterns of inequality and gender, ethnic and racial discrimination in the labour market explain the persistence and reproduction of such inequalities, as it is increasingly clear that these gaps bear little relation to levels of education. On the contrary, the explanation has much more to do with the unequal division of unpaid domestic and care work, coupled with the persistence of historical patterns of discrimination and gender images which, erroneously, still attribute the role of “secondary workers” to women (Abramo, 2007). These barriers are exacerbated in the case of women of African descent, owing to intersecting gender inequalities and ethnic and racial inequalities (ECLAC, 2018b).

Access to social security and affiliation to pension systems are also permeated by structural racism and gender inequality. Even though the percentage of the population with social security coverage has increased in recent years, there are still coverage gaps and inadequacies in pension systems (ECLAC, 2018d). The Afrodescendent employed population has lower rates of affiliation to pension systems than the non-Afrodescendent population, receives a higher proportion of non-contributory pensions and a lower proportion of contributory pensions than the non-Afrodescendent population and, on average, their pension amounts are lower.

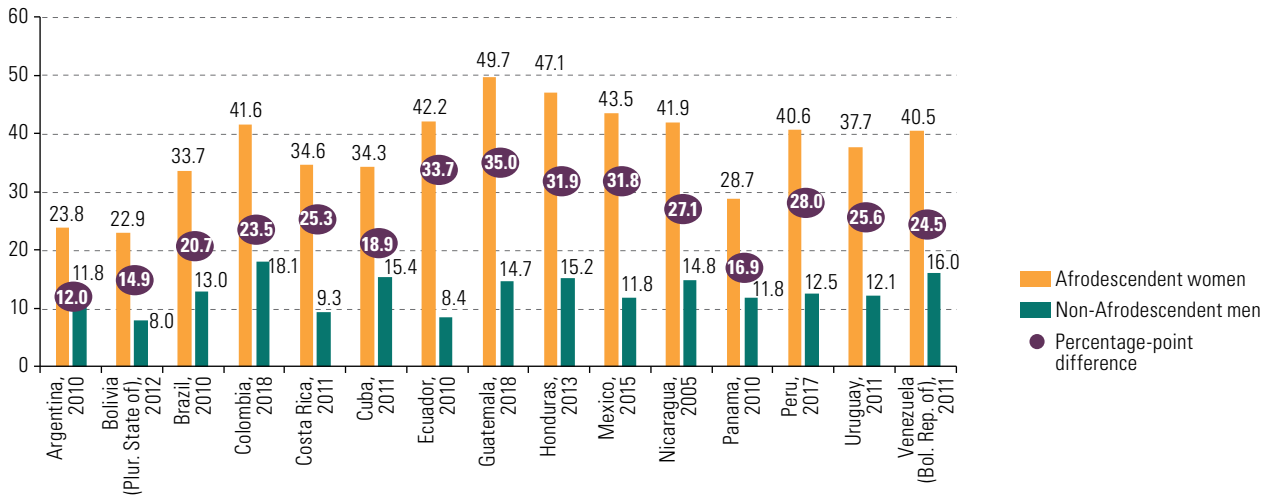
Finally, the intersection of ethnic and racial inequalities with gender and age inequalities is manifested acutely in the situation of young Afrodescendants. Their unemployment rates are higher and their employment levels are lower than those of both the average Afrodescendent economically active population and young non-Afrodescendants. Within the group of young Afrodescendants, there are also big gaps to the detriment of young women of African descent: their unemployment rates are close to or higher than 30% in Brazil, Colombia and Uruguay, more than double those of young Afrodescendent men in Colombia, Ecuador and Panama and nearly double in Uruguay. However, the widest gap is between young Afrodescendent women and young non-Afrodescendent men. While the two groups have a similar level of education, unemployment among young Afrodescendent women is approximately double that of young non-Afrodescendent men in four countries (Brazil, Colombia, Panama and Uruguay) and 3.5 times higher in Ecuador.

These inequalities are also manifested in the situation of young people who are neither in school nor employed in the labour market, a major issue of debate in the region. Approximately 70% of young people in this situation are women who had to abandon (or interrupt) their school career and have been unable to join the labour market (or have had to withdraw from it, at least temporarily) precisely because they are engaged in unpaid domestic and care work (ECLAC, 2019d). This problem is related closely to shortcomings in Latin American care systems and policies for balancing study, work and personal and family life. The situation is much more acute among the Afrodescendent population. Census data reveal that, in 10 of the 15 countries for which information is available, the percentage of young Afrodescendants who are neither studying nor employed in the labour market is higher than that of young non-Afrodescendants in the same situation, ranging from 14.2% in the Plurinational State of Bolivia to 36.0% in Nicaragua. It is also above 30% in Colombia, Honduras and Guatemala. However, the clearest intersection of gender, ethno-racial and age inequalities can be seen when comparing the situation of young Afrodescendent women with that of young non-Afrodescendent men (see figure 8). The percentage of young women of African descent who are neither studying nor employed in the labour market is close to 50% in Guatemala and Honduras, between 38% and 44% in the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Colombia, Ecuador, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru and Uruguay, between 30% and 35% in Brazil, Costa Rica and Cuba and between 20% and 30% only in Argentina, Panama and the Plurinational State of Bolivia. The percentage of young Afrodescendent women who are neither studying nor employed in the labour market ranges from double that of young non-Afrodescendent men in Argentina to five times higher in Ecuador.

In response to these phenomena and the challenges they pose, all Latin American countries have implemented laws to combat discrimination in the workplace and some have made progress in implementing active policies to tackle racism. All Latin American countries ratified the Discrimination (Employment and Occupation) Convention, 1958 (No. 111). In addition, several countries stipulate equal treatment in labour relations, through their constitutions, labour or other ordinary laws, or penal codes. However, deep racial inequalities continue to mark Latin American labour markets and have worsened during the COVID-19 pandemic.

Figure 8

Latin America (15 countries): proportion of Afrodescendent women and non-Afrodescendent men aged 15–29 who are neither studying nor employed in the labour market, latest census available in each country (Percentages)



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

Note: The non-Afrodescendent population does not include those who self-identify as indigenous.

K. Violence

Violence is a complex, multidimensional and multi-causal phenomenon, associated with dynamics of power and hierarchy embedded in the various mechanisms of domination in the public and the private spheres. This makes it difficult to measure and assess the situation of violence against Latin America's Afrodescendent population using a limited set of indicators. In everyday life, this violence is experienced in different forms and different spaces and is perpetrated by different agents.

Violence has existed in Latin America since the very beginning, with the establishment of colonial systems and slavery based on the transatlantic trafficking of African people and the genocide of indigenous peoples (ECLAC, 2017b and 2019a). Civil war, armed conflict, dictatorships and territorial disputes have also helped to embed violence in the region, by instigating it as a legitimate means for resolving conflict, as well as by promoting the movement and availability of weapons. Violence restricts the freedom and capacity of all those who experience it, limiting their opportunities for personal development and full participation in the economic, social, community, political and cultural spheres, which in turn undermines their ability to realize their potential and exercise their human rights.

Expressions of violence are also shaped by the sociocultural patterns underpinning the region's social inequality matrix, in particular the culture of privilege, which is based on denial of the other as a subject of rights and naturalizes inequality and asymmetries of power, and their various expressions, including racism, sexism, homophobia, transphobia and xenophobia. These expressions of violence have affected certain population groups disproportionately, including Afrodescendants, women and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people, denying them the full enjoyment of their rights, including in extreme cases the most fundamental one of all: the right to life itself.

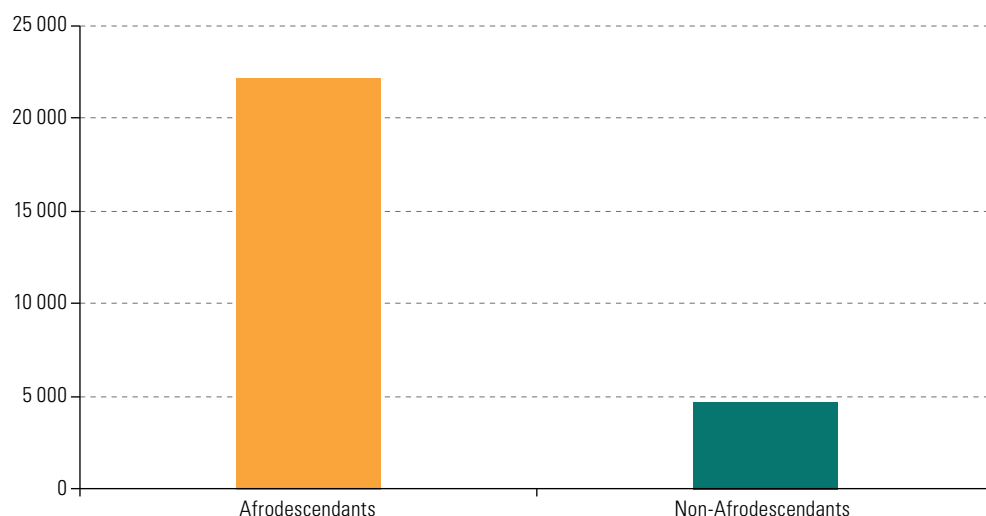
Violent deaths are avoidable and their high incidence is related closely to the axes of the social inequality matrix. The worst-affected population is young Afrodescendent men living in poverty in urban areas. So, apart from being a serious public health and security problem, violent death is a distinctly social issue and should be addressed based on the social determinants of health, including ethno-racial status, age, gender, socioeconomic

status and place of residence, which determine the likelihood of its occurrence. Both the analysis of this problem and strategies for preventing it should therefore consider and incorporate these factors to generate more suitable and effective responses.

Although few Latin American countries have violence statistics disaggregated by ethno-racial status, where they do exist, they confirm a higher incidence of violence among the Afrodescendent population. In Brazil in 2018, the percentage of Afrodescendent men aged 15–49 who were victims of homicide was more than triple that of non-Afrodescendent men. Homicide is also concentrated among young men: over four times more young Afrodescendent men aged 15–29 are victims of homicide than young non-Afrodescendent men (see figure 9). This equates to the violent death of 61 young Brazilian men of African descent every day, or more than two deaths per hour.

Figure 9

Brazil: homicide deaths among young men (aged 15–29) by ethno-racial status, 2018
(Number of deaths)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of Brazil Mortality Information System (SIM), Ministry of Health of Brazil.

In Colombia, there is also a higher concentration of homicides among young Afro-Colombian men. Indeed, homicide rates in the region are a telling and alarming indicator of intersecting racial, age and gender inequalities. The high rates of violence against Afrodescendants in some countries in the region are a clear expression of racism. Also, the concentration of some manifestations of violence among young men reflects prejudice and stereotypes characterizing them as violent subjects. Moreover, young men of African descent are at higher risk of dying and suffering other acts of violence at the hands of the security forces. They are also at higher risk of being stopped and searched in the street because of racially biased police controls, and they are arrested and imprisoned more frequently and handed more severe sentences.

Afrodescendent women are subject to specific patterns of victimization, which take the form of acts involving both racism and patriarchy, with particular and more acute manifestations in certain territories (ECLAC, 2017b and 2018b). However, ingrained racism and misogyny in the region's institutional architecture, combined with cumbersome proceedings, has made it extremely difficult for Afrodescendent women to resort to the law and justice.

The most extreme manifestation of violence against women is femicide, which is the final link in a chain of combined forms of violence, progressing from insults, intimidation and threats to sexual harassment, domestic violence and rape, prior to the woman being murdered based on her gender. In the case of Afrodescendent women, femicide takes on other nuances linked to racism and conditions of poverty and vulnerability (ECLAC, 2018b). According to the data analysed on Brazil, the percentage of Afrodescendent women victims of homicide aged 15–49 is more than double that of non-Afrodescendent women.

Apart from high homicide rates among the Afrodescendent population, there are other types of violence that undermine this population's rights and well-being (ECLAC, 2019a). Information on these other manifestations of violence is difficult to obtain owing to severe underreporting (with few women lodging a complaint amid a context of widespread impunity). In the case of domestic violence—one of the most insidious and invisible forms of violence—in the few countries for which there is statistical information disaggregated by ethno-racial status, higher rates of domestic violence are seen among women of African descent. Another dramatic manifestation of violence is rape, which has a severe and lasting physical and emotional impact on victims. In Brazil, a higher prevalence of rape can be found among Afrodescendent women. Considering the significant underreporting of this type of violence in general, coupled with the greater difficulty for Afrodescendent women to have rape reported by Brazilian police, this concentration among Afrodescendent women is likely to be even higher (IPEA, 2013).

Ending the various forms of violence that hinder the full development of Afrodescendent individuals and communities is a complex yet urgent task. An important step in that direction has been the agreements and progress at a regulatory level to recognize and make visible the violence against the Afrodescendent population and to demand action to tackle it. The Durban Declaration and Programme of Action contain clear messages about the link between racial discrimination and violence, including gender violence, and the need to take urgent measures to end these scourges. At the regional level, ECLAC subsidiary bodies (the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean) have addressed the issue of violence against the Afrodescendent population, including gender violence, both in the documents presented at these conferences and in the agreements and resolutions stemming from them, aimed at providing guidelines for action. Various actions are also being conducted at the national level. For example, since 2017, the United Nations system has been promoting the national “Black Lives” campaign in Brazil, which is designed to raise the visibility of violence against young Afrodescendants.

Hard-line responses, which take a repressive approach and tackle violence from a purely security perspective in specific territories, have failed and have served only to increase the violence against the Afrodescendent population and to exacerbate the public security situation. The complex picture of violence against the region's Afrodescendent population calls for action in a range of areas, including eradicating racism and discrimination and, importantly, opening up spaces for inclusion, particularly in the areas of education, employment and social protection, as well as in the arts, culture and participation in various community spaces. In the current context of violence, it is also essential to implement mitigation and control strategies in parallel with prevention strategies, targeted at both groups at risk of experiencing violence and groups at risk of perpetrating it, as well as those who have already been victims or perpetrators. The participation of Afrodescendent individuals and communities is vital in developing all these strategies. In order to eradicate the multiple manifestations of violence against Latin America's Afrodescendent population, such violence must be made visible and cultural change should be fostered through education and communication against discrimination, racism and misogyny and in favour of an appreciation for diversity. Discrimination and violence against Afrodescendent women must also be addressed structurally, in all sectors. Lastly, it is necessary and urgent to make the issue of violence and its ethnic and racial components visible in national statistical systems.

L. Racism and migration: intersectionality within a common issue

Migration movements form an integral part of Latin America's history and, in recent times, they have changed markedly in terms of the numbers, direction of flow and characteristics of migrants. In a regional context of deep asymmetries between countries, the vulnerabilities and forms of discrimination and exclusion suffered by migrants from less developed countries may be exacerbated by the interaction between their foreign status and stigmatization against their ethno-racial status, which was already present in their societies of origin.

Migrant and Afrodescendent populations are among those hardest hit by the socioeconomic impact of the COVID-19 pandemic (ECLAC, 2020c). The vulnerability of Afrodescendent migrants stems from situations of poverty, unemployment, precarious employment and lack of savings to tide them over in a crisis. This vulnerability has increased during the pandemic, owing to the closure of borders, travel difficulties, increased unemployment and a reduction in remittances.

Various international rights instruments that emphasize the equality of all human beings have expressed concern for migrants, stating that any type of discrimination based on nationality is inadmissible. Some countries in the region have established legislation to cover the diverse situations of migrants, while others also provide for specific instruments relating to their emigrant population. The constitutions of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Haiti, Mexico, Panama and the Plurinational State of Bolivia refer to migrants or foreigners as persons with the same social rights as nationals. The gender perspective has also been mainstreamed into the migration legislation of over a dozen countries, progress is being made in developing a specific institutional framework and legal changes have been introduced for the cross-sector coordination of the main agencies responsible for migration. Furthermore, many countries in the region have developed an institutional framework for combating human trafficking and assisting victims. These advances show that the concept of migrants as subjects of rights is gaining ground. However, much of this legislation disregards the rights of irregular migrants (ECLAC, 2019c).²²

Although consideration of the ethno-racial perspective in migration studies is key to reducing inequalities and promoting inclusion, it is difficult to obtain reliable, timely, up-to-date statistical information that allows for country-to-country comparisons. Nevertheless, a review of the existing literature made it possible to identify various situations of discrimination and exclusion suffered by migrants as a result of their ethno-racial status. It revealed that, in Argentina, starting in the 1990s, intraregional migrants have been subjected to discrimination (mainly those from Paraguay, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia) for embodying little-valued characteristics, such as “rurality” or “blackness”. In the Dominican Republic, while the race/ethnicity dimension is associated closely with the issue of nationality owing to the country’s proximity to Haiti, it tends to be invisible in both countries. This has undermined the fight to end discrimination not only against Haitians but also against darker-skinned Dominicans, who are constantly mistaken for Haitians (Martínez and Wooding, 2017). In Chile, the large inflow of Afrodescendants in recent years has highlighted processes that were already present in Chilean society and are part of the colonial matrix of racial discrimination to which Colombian, Dominican, Haitian, Peruvian and other migrant populations are currently subjected. Certain groups continue to be ranked and subordinated on the basis of skin colour, associated with national origin, which serves to reproduce the axes of inequality and discrimination that are inherent in the nationalist rhetoric for the construction of a nation state based on a white-European view (Tijoux, 2011 and 2016; Tijoux and Palominos, 2015). According to Castillo and others (2016), the increased presence of migrants in the school system failed to elicit a comprehensive institutional effort to understand the characteristics and difficulties of the new students and their families, even though the school environment was perceived by migrant children to be aggressive and violent. Studies show that, in the workplace, Haitian immigrants tend to work in wage jobs for longer than the legally permitted hours or in unskilled jobs for which they are overqualified (Rojas, Amodé and Vásquez, 2015).

In summary, it is essential to recognize the rights of migrants: both their fundamental civil rights and freedoms and their political, economic, social and cultural rights (ECLAC, 2019c). Furthermore, regulatory frameworks should be applied effectively and translated into policies and programmes that impact the well-being and rights of migrants. It is also urgent to eradicate racist and xenophobic practices and to promote ethnic and racial equality by closing gaps in the implementation of rights. To achieve these goals and end structural racism, progress needs to be made in two ways: by performing a gap analysis and by designing and implementing policies specifically to further the defence of equal rights for Afrodescendent migrants. This is a regional agenda issue that calls for continuous progress towards a culture of equality in the migration process, from a rights perspective.

²² Ecuador’s constitution is one of the exceptions, as it establishes the rights of migrants irrespective of their immigration status.

M. Institutional framework and policies for promoting racial equality

In recent years, Latin America has seen an increase and diversification of the institutions responsible for social issues, reflecting the progressive institutionalization of social policy (especially in the areas of social protection and poverty reduction) and of the government mechanisms responsible for specific areas (Martínez, 2019). More than a dozen countries now have some form of government mechanism to coordinate policies relating to the Afrodescendent population and have expanded policies to combat racism and promote racial equality. This is the product of longstanding advocacy work by Afrodescendent social movements, civil society organizations, governments and international agencies. However, the crises experienced by the region in recent years, especially the health crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, with its severe economic and social effects, pose new challenges to social institutions, which should be strong enough not only to tackle such crises but also to prevent or mitigate potential setbacks.

Many of the mechanisms for promoting racial equality were established after 2000, in connection with preparations for the 2001 World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance and, later, to fulfil governments' commitments at the conference. Most of these mechanisms were established through laws or presidential decrees and take the form of legal entities (such as a ministry, commission, directorate, secretariat, council or institute). Many are linked to, or institutionally dependent on, the Office of the President of the Republic. In other cases, they depend on line ministries (justice, education, culture or foreign affairs) or ministries of development and social inclusion (ECLAC, 2017b and 2017c).

The main objectives of such mechanisms include coordinating ethnic and racial matters and developing policies against racism and promoting racial equality. Their functions include mainstreaming ethnic and racial issues into public policies, interministerial coordination or the direct implementation of programmes targeted at the Afrodescendent population. The functions each mechanism performs depend on its size and some have a very small staff and budget. In view of the scale of inequalities, stemming from intersectionality between gender and ethno-racial status, specific policies and coordination bodies have been created for Afrodescendent women, some with a customized institutional design.

In some cases, the mechanisms are almost purely symbolic and do not function effectively or, where they do, they lack the minimum requirements to play a coordinating and influential role. The legal form taken by such mechanisms determines their power to propose and influence public policies, as well as their scope of action and the volume of economic and human resources they manage. This, in turn, determines their ability to contribute effectively to reducing inequality and racial discrimination in individual countries.

The wide diversity of mechanisms is also a reflection of the populations they serve and the issues on which they focus. Some mechanisms focus on combating ethnic and racial discrimination generally, while others focus on Afrodescendant-related issues. Some mechanisms are dedicated to indigenous peoples, Afrodescendent populations or other population groups simultaneously. There are also mechanisms which are not only national in nature, but also subnational and local.

With regard to policies for promoting racial equality, various Latin American countries have included Afrodescendent populations in their development plans and have implemented policies to prevent racism, institute affirmative action, strengthen traditional communities and involve Afrodescendent individuals and communities in decision-making processes.

Colombia and Brazil have included Afrodescendent populations in their development plans since 1994 and 2004, respectively,²³ and countries such as Costa Rica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay have done so gradually. Moreover, at least 16 countries in the region have adopted some form of legislation prohibiting racial discrimination and classing it as a crime that may even be punishable by imprisonment. In addition, 13 countries have included provisions against ethnic and racial discrimination in their constitutions (ECLAC, 2017c).

²³ Regrettably, Brazil has not done so in its 2020–2023 multi-year investment plan.

Affirmative action policies have been introduced mainly in higher education, with significant advances in Brazil, where the presence of young Afrodescendants in tertiary education, especially university education, has increased significantly over the past decade. In both Uruguay and Brazil, competitive examinations for entry to public office establish quotas for people who declare themselves to be of African descent. In addition, countries such as Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador and Honduras have implemented policies for land titling and strengthening traditional communities comprising the descendants of people who were enslaved during the colonial period.

Another important area in combating racism and promoting racial equality is the participation of Afrodescendent individuals and communities in decision-making. Participation is key to overcoming inequalities, as it not only raises the visibility of Afrodescendent populations and shows concern for their well-being but, first and foremost, it increases the likelihood that policies will be more effective and meet their needs more closely. In Brazil, several National Conferences for the Promotion of Racial Equality have been held, bringing together thousands of delegates elected successively in municipal and subnational conferences, which developed proposals for discussion and adoption at the ensuing national conference. Colombia established the Office of the Deputy Minister for Participation and Equal Rights one of whose areas of competence is ethnic issues. In the Colombian parliament, there is a Special National Constituency for Black Communities and another to ensure participation in the House of Representatives of ethnic groups, political minorities and Colombians living abroad. Ecuador has National Equality Councils with an equal number of representatives from civil society and the State, while its Secretariat for Peoples, Social Movements and Citizen Participation guarantees the right to citizen participation and promotes actions that consolidate the participation of peoples, social movements and citizens in the key decisions affecting them. In Peru, intercultural dialogues have been developed with the participation of Afro-Peruvian leaders, and meetings have been held to gather information on what the State should include in intercultural health policies (Rangel, 2016; ECLAC, 2017c).

Lastly, mention should be made of: intervention policies in sectors and territories where there is a greater presence of Afrodescendants and where there are high rates of violence; the establishment of observatories and platforms against discrimination; online training courses, workshops and discussions on recognition, justice and the development of Afrodescendants; racism reporting, victim support and legal support provided by racial equality promotion mechanisms; and the establishment of local regulations to eliminate racial discrimination (ECLAC, 2017b).

N. Conclusions and recommendations

The recognition, visibility and guarantee of the rights of Afrodescendent populations are key issues for social justice, equality, democracy and sustainable development. The legacy of exclusion left behind by slavery which, for centuries, radically shaped Latin America's historical development, is still in evidence today, also masking the contributions of Afrodescendent populations to the independence process and to nation-building. Breaking with this legacy calls for: the explicit inclusion of Afrodescendants in the development agendas of countries and the international community; decisive action to guarantee their civil, political, economic, social, environmental and cultural rights; the eradication of structural and institutional racism; and the elimination of all forms of racial discrimination. Information and analysis on the living conditions of Afrodescendants contribute to the design, monitoring and evaluation of public policies that facilitate progress in these processes.

Ethnic and racial inequalities are one of the axes that structure Latin America's social inequality matrix (ECLAC, 2016a) and racism is a key element of the culture of privilege (ECLAC, 2018c). This is the analytical perspective adopted in the current study, in conjunction with the human rights perspective, which takes due consideration of the intersection of ethnic and racial inequalities with socioeconomic, gender, territorial and age inequalities, and their knock-on effect throughout a person's life. It also highlights the main international and regional agreements that have provided a key roadmap for developing national actions.²⁴

²⁴ The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and its Sustainable Development Goals, the Programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent, the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development and the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030.

The information and analysis presented in the study illustrate how the current development model, structural racism and an enduring culture of privilege reproduce the structural inequalities, deprivations and rights violations that continue to affect Latin America's Afrodescendent populations and keep them from achieving well-being. They are populations that suffer much more severely from the effects of poverty and extreme poverty, as well as various forms of violence, inadequate basic infrastructure services and lack of access to quality education and health. They also experience worse deficits of decent work and social protection. However, Afrodescendent populations have shown great resilience, as their culture, ways of life and values have, to a large extent, not only survived the enslavement process and repeated attempts to render them invisible, they have also been recreated and strengthened in Latin America. Through resistance and an intensive process of social and political organization, the Afrodescendent population has succeeded in positioning its demands on national, regional and international agendas.

The action of Afrodescendent movements and organizations, together with other civil society organizations, has also been key to the creation of institutions and policies aimed at guaranteeing the rights of the Afrodescendent population. More than a dozen Latin American countries now have some form of government mechanism dedicated to Afrodescendent issues. While this has been a major step forward, multiple challenges remain to securing the recognition and exercise of Afrodescendants' rights. Efforts need to be redoubled to meet these challenges, in order to achieve greater equality in less time by strengthening these institutions and implementing affirmative policies and actions in a wide range of areas.

The document "Afrodescendientes y la matriz de la desigualdad social en América Latina: retos para la inclusión" also highlights significant improvements in statistical visibility, with the progressive inclusion of Afrodescendent self-identification questions, mainly in population and housing censuses over the past decade. The demands of the Afrodescendent movement for inclusion in censuses are an important part of its recognition agenda and have led to intensive technical and political discussions between Afrodescendent organizations, national statistical offices, international agencies and academia, with significant—but still insufficient—results. The crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic has demonstrated the inability of statistical systems to clarify the morbidity and mortality status of Afrodescendent populations and has highlighted a clear need to redouble efforts to include ethno-racial identification in administrative records and to improve the quality of this information in the few countries that have included it to date. Further advances can be seen in household surveys, not only in those conducted periodically to measure poverty and employment but also in population, health and other surveys. This provided the figures on a number of key issues, including monetary poverty and various health and labour market indicators relating to the Afrodescendent population, which are presented in the aforementioned document and in this summary. Nonetheless, this was possible only in the currently small number of countries that have such information.

Challenges relating to statistical visibility persist and urgent action is required. The round of censuses in the 2020s therefore provides an opportunity to reinstate the discussions more powerfully and to mobilize this agenda vigorously. It is essential to learn from the regional experience described in this study in order to avoid repeating past mistakes and prevent setbacks. Proper measurement is linked not only to the design of self-identification questions but also to aspects relating to the statistical production process, in which the participation of people of African descent is crucial. The pandemic situation may interfere with the proper functioning of participatory mechanisms in preparing and conducting censuses and in post-census activities, all of which require special attention. A further challenge lies in the democratization of information, in the sense of facilitating information access and accessibility for advocacy, which calls for national capacity-building (including the capacity of organizations in the Afrodescendent movement and civil society at large) to use and analyse information.

Despite continuing estimation constraints, Latin America's Afrodescendent population is thought to number at least 134 million people. There is wide demographic heterogeneity among countries in the region, which poses challenges and calls for differentiated policy strategies, in view of the fact that, in some countries, Afrodescendants are the majority population while, in others, they are a minority population in terms of size. One common denominator is that Afrodescendants are predominantly urban dwellers, with the resultant challenges arising from the problems of cities. Nonetheless, Afrodescendent communities living in rural areas and in historical settlements should not be overlooked, as the region's characteristic territorial development

asymmetries make such communities extremely vulnerable. The study also shows that Afrodescendent populations are advancing in the demographic transition process and population ageing brings with it a series of social, economic and cultural changes that merit more in-depth examination.

The information available reveals that ethnic and racial inequality is a structural feature of Latin American societies and an expression of racism and various forms of discrimination. These inequalities are a core obstacle to achieving the goals of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, including the primary goal of ending poverty in all its forms everywhere and ensuring that no one is left behind. In five of the six countries for which information is available, poverty and extreme poverty are significantly higher among the Afrodescendent population. Inequalities persist even in Uruguay, the Latin American country with the lowest poverty rates, demonstrating that poverty reduction is not enough in itself to achieve equality if it is not accompanied by other measures and strategies designed specifically to achieve that goal. The data also confirm the importance of ensuring that the analysis of inequalities identifies not only ethnic and racial gaps but also their intersection with other axes structuring the social inequality matrix, such as gender, territorial and age inequalities. This confirms the higher incidence of poverty and other deprivations experienced by Afrodescendent women and Afrodescendants living in rural areas.

The trends analysed indicate that deprivation of basic infrastructure services, such as lack of access to adequate housing, safe water, sanitation, electricity and the Internet (problems that tend to be associated with and are expressions of poverty, quite apart from the monetary aspect), is usually more acute among the Afrodescendent population, especially in rural areas. The trends also confirm that overcoming poverty does not necessarily ensure access to well-being. Despite an increase in the percentage of the Afrodescendent population that has managed to lift itself out of poverty and enter the middle-income strata, a high proportion of Afrodescendants who are in these strata (more than non-Afrodescendants) are acutely vulnerable and at high risk of falling back into poverty when faced with such events as job loss, catastrophic illness, disaster or crisis (such as that caused by the COVID-19 pandemic). Furthermore, Afrodescendants in middle-income strata continue to be at significant disadvantage, in terms of both education (such as secondary school completion) and access to pension systems.

The data show how important it is for poverty eradication strategies to include actions targeted at the Afrodescendent population and the different groups within it, including women, children, adolescents, young people and people living in rural areas. It is necessary to ensure that all Afrodescendants are able to secure and maintain adequate housing and to live in a community in peace and dignity. This makes it essential to provide housing that affords shelter, security and access to basic services, by implementing programmes to resolve overcrowding problems and provide adequate housing conditions, in addition to universal access to water, sanitation and adequate energy sources, as well as, increasingly, access to information and communication technologies.

In other areas crucial to social inclusion, such as health and education, where Latin American countries have made major progress in recent decades (including in terms of longer life expectancy, reduced infant mortality, reduced illiteracy, increased years of schooling and near-universal access to primary education), there are also wide gaps and inequalities affecting the Afrodescendent population.

In the area of health, there are significant inequalities in key indicators of quality of life and sexual and reproductive health, which, in turn, are driven largely by the social determinants of health. They include a higher incidence among Afrodescendent populations of infant mortality, diarrhoea in children under age 5, adolescent childbearing and maternal mortality. In the countries for which this information is available, it is also possible to confirm that people of African descent are at higher risk of becoming ill from HIV and HIV-related infections. In addition, they have less access to early diagnosis and prompt treatment services for certain non-communicable diseases, such as high blood pressure and cardiovascular events, which can aggravate the course of such diseases.

The trends observed confirm the importance of analysing the social determinants of health in the light of the axes structuring Latin America's matrix of social inequality. This becomes all the more important in the context of the pandemic, in which the pre-existing socioeconomic conditions of the Afrodescendent population (with many living with poverty, overcrowding, unemployment and informal and precarious work)

limit their ability to comply with the recommended isolation and physical distancing measures. In addition, the high prevalence of certain health conditions, such as high blood pressure and diabetes, means that the Afrodescendent population has been heavily impacted by the COVID-19 crisis.

It is also necessary to: improve the access of Afrodescendent individuals and communities to quality health services without any form of discrimination; guarantee good nutrition, with sufficient, healthy food; promote an intercultural approach, by including traditional medicine and health practices, intercultural dialogue, and the worldview and health concepts of Afrodescendent communities and individuals; establish and strengthen mechanisms for enforcing and assessing compliance with health policies and regulations; and enhance knowledge about the morbidity and mortality profiles of Afrodescendent women and men, in order to define health objectives and be able to assess the impact of policies and programmes. Lastly, sexual and reproductive health services should take into account the cultural specificities of people of African descent and the processes of discrimination to which they are subjected, especially young women. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, it is also recommended to guarantee continued access to all non-COVID-related health services, including sexual and reproductive health and mental health, and to ensure that the Afrodescendent population has access to information about the virus and how to prevent infection, as well as access to diagnostic tests and treatments without discrimination, in addition to ensuring their food and nutrition security and proper care of pre-existing health conditions.

Despite progress in recent decades in fulfilling the right to education in Latin America—especially in respect of increased years of schooling, access to and completion of primary education, and access to secondary education—significant deficits endure. Educational attainment differs greatly from one country to another and ethnic and racial gaps persist, becoming wider as the successive stages of the schooling cycle unfold. Rates of early school leaving and falling behind in education are much higher among Afrodescendants, and levels of secondary school completion and access to and completion of tertiary education are significantly lower. In all the indicators considered, both Afrodescendent and non-Afrodescendent women outperform men in their group. However, this fails to translate into the kind of labour market improvements that might be expected, given this educational advantage, such as reducing or eliminating gaps in labour force participation, unemployment, income or access to higher-paid senior positions with greater responsibility in companies and institutions.

In some countries, ethnic and racial gaps have narrowed in several educational indicators. This is true of Brazil, where both the expansion of the public system of technical and vocational secondary education and tertiary education and the implementation of affirmative action policies have helped to increase the access of young Afrodescendants to these levels of education and to reduce gaps between them and non-Afrodescendants in a relatively short time frame. A number of countries have also made progress in promoting intercultural and bilingual education. While the data reveal the persistence of various vectors of exclusion, discrimination and structural racism in the education system affecting the Afrodescendent population, they also point to possible ways of helping to remedy this situation, by designing and implementing universal, inclusive, affirmative action policies.

To keep moving in this direction, it is necessary to: incorporate non-discriminatory practices that value diversity, recognizing in school curricula the contribution of Afrodescendent culture to development and combating stigma and stereotypes of Afrodescendants; increase the number of Afrodescendent teachers in educational institutions and train all teaching staff in non-discrimination and tolerance; guarantee Afrodescendants' access to free, good-quality education, tackling the causes that deter young people of African descent from completing secondary education and entering higher education; implement affirmative action policies, especially in higher education, and help to retain Afrodescendent students in tertiary education through financial incentives and mentoring programmes; consider sociocultural relevance at all levels of education; and support community processes of Afrodescendent cultural revitalization and initiatives to protect and develop traditional knowledge.

The analysis made of the world of work is based on the principle that, to characterize the structure and dynamics of labour markets, as well as the ethnic, racial and gender inequalities typifying them, it is essential to consider the area of unpaid domestic and care work, which continues to be performed mainly by women. Understanding the dynamics between these two areas is key to explaining structural characteristics, such as women's lower labour force participation and employment rates and their overrepresentation among young people

who are neither studying nor employed in the labour market. It is also vital to understanding the persistence of gender segregation in the workplace and income gaps between men and women. The data reveal continuing deep inequalities between Afrodescendants and non-Afrodescendants in all the dimensions of employment and decent work analysed. People of African descent face greater difficulties in accessing employment and more severe exclusion from the labour market, which is expressed as higher unemployment and lower employment rates. They also experience more problems in securing quality employment, as evidenced by the fact that they are overrepresented in low-skilled, informal occupations with greater job insecurity and instability. Owing to their simultaneous experience of ethnic, racial, gender and age inequalities, in addition to persistent racism and various forms of racial discrimination in the world of work, Afrodescendent women and young people are the worst affected. In the countries for which information is available, the proportion of Afrodescendent women engaged in paid domestic work is, on average, twice that of non-Afrodescendent women. Among young people, the proportion of Afrodescendent women who are neither studying nor employed in the labour market also exceeds that of non-Afrodescendent women and men in the same situation. The incidence of child labour among Afrodescendent children and adolescents is also higher.

To address this situation, it is essential to: develop active policies aimed at eliminating racism and ensuring full equality for all in the workplace and in labour legislation, in line with international standards; promote the participation of Afrodescendants in technical and vocational training and job training; promote their participation in collective bargaining and in trade union organizations, including in leadership positions, and strengthen the agenda for combating racism and promoting racial equality in these areas; reinforce corporate social responsibility strategies and actions to eliminate discrimination and promote the entry of Afrodescendants into quality jobs and senior corporate positions with greater responsibility; prioritize support for women of African descent to access quality training and employment opportunities and professional and managerial positions; implement measures to promote good-quality employment for young Afrodescendants, with guaranteed rights and access to social protection; facilitate the access of Afrodescendants to judicial and administrative courts to file work-related grievances; guarantee paid domestic workers the same rights as all wage workers, in accordance with the ILO Domestic Workers Convention, 2011 (No. 189), eliminating the exclusion and discrimination provisions that persist in some countries' labour legislation and also guaranteeing their access to social security; promote measures to balance work, education and family and personal life for company workers in order to tackle barriers to access to employment faced by Afrodescendent women and to further responsibility-sharing measures, in particular by creating and consolidating care systems as the bedrock of social protection systems. During the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery period, it is recommended to: implement special loans for Afrodescendant-owned micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (in addition to general measures, such as guaranteeing sufficient income to at least rise above the poverty line, particularly for informal workers); develop labour market inclusion and job-creation strategies that prioritize the groups hardest hit by the pandemic, such as paid domestic workers and young Afrodescendants; and redouble efforts to prevent and eradicate child labour, in a context of increased unemployment and job insecurity among adult family members.

Despite the continuing dire lack of information about the various forms of violence against the Afrodescendent population, the study also shows that violence is an area where severe structural and institutional racism is at work. In the scarce information available, it is documented that the number of Afrodescendent victims of homicide —both men and women— outstrips that of their non-Afrodescendent peers, with a huge gap in the case of young men. The latter are also victims of various forms of violence by the security forces. Other expressions of violence, such as domestic violence and sexual violence, affect Afrodescendent women to a greater extent. Clearly, then, the intersection of the axes of the social inequality matrix (gender, stage in the life cycle and socioeconomic status) exposes people of African descent to different manifestations of violence. Afrodescendent lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people are also particularly at risk of falling victim to violence.

To tackle the high levels of violence that threaten the lives and undermine the development potential of young men of African descent, it is essential to broaden the spaces for social and labour market inclusion. It is also vital to eliminate racial profiling practices by the security forces and the courts and to develop extension and education in the human rights perspective for State agents. In the current context of violence, mitigation and control strategies must be implemented alongside prevention strategies.

To address gender-based violence against adult women, young women and girls of African descent, there needs to be: guaranteed production of information to clarify the scale of the problem; a multidisciplinary and comprehensive approach to improve prevention and victim care and enhance the system of complaints and penalties against abusers, avoiding the revictimization of women; an expanded and strengthened care network to improve victim follow-up; and enhanced prevention by integrating the health and criminal justice systems. It is also necessary to implement public policies capable of tackling the multiple manifestations of violence, including those linked to political violence and environmental and territorial conflict, paying special attention to women migrants, who are often exposed to violence and abuse, and to create spaces for reflection from the perspective of adult and young women and girls, to ascertain how they perceive and experience violence and to ensure that this process contributes to their empowerment.

As analysed throughout the document “Afrodescendientes y la matriz de la desigualdad social en América Latina: retos para la inclusión,” the World Conference against Racism, Racial Discrimination, Xenophobia and Related Intolerance has provided a fundamental framework not only for the recognition, visibility and organization of people of African descent and their movements but also for achieving progress on regulatory frameworks, institutions and policy recommendations. These policy recommendations were included in such instruments as the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the Programme of activities for the implementation of the International Decade for People of African Descent, as well as in regional agreements, including the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development, the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 and the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development. In addition to the sectoral recommendations already put forward, below are a number of general recommendations arising from the aforementioned agreements and from other documents prepared by ECLAC and UNFPA.²⁵

The recommendations affirm the importance of ensuring the active participation of Afrodescendent individuals, organizations and communities in preparing and designing policies to reduce ethnic and racial inequalities in all the aforementioned sectors. They also state that this needs to be accompanied by the implementation of policies for combating structural and institutional racism and discriminatory practices, which should promote equality, diversity and tolerance.

They reinforce the need to put into practice the principle established in international, regional and national regulatory frameworks that everyone has the right to equality and non-discrimination. This makes it imperative to remove the obstacles preventing people of African descent from enjoying all their rights on equal terms, by promoting the application of these regulatory frameworks and developing new ones where necessary, in line with international standards.

A further key recommendation is that all actions should provide for the active participation and decision-making power of Afrodescendent civil society organizations (including community, women’s, youth and religious organizations and social movements). It is also important to boost the participation of people of African descent and the agenda for combating racism and promoting racial equality in other institutions, such as trade unions, political parties and business, women’s, youth and human rights organizations. This is critical, especially in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic and recovery period, as participation not only lends legitimacy to policies but also increases their effectiveness. It is necessary to promote the participation of Afrodescendants in electoral processes, by establishing quotas or special electoral districts, or by promoting the incorporation of their movements and platforms into political parties and, where appropriate, by establishing consultation mechanisms in accordance with the standards set in ILO Convention No. 169 of 1989 concerning Indigenous and Tribal Peoples, safeguarding the collective, territorial and cultural rights of Afrodescendent individuals and communities.

It is imperative to restructure institutions in accordance with multi-ethnic and multiracial realities and to establish government mechanisms at all levels (national, subnational and local), which are responsible for formulating, coordinating and monitoring policies for promoting racial equality and are endowed with resources, autonomy and legitimacy. It is necessary to establish and strengthen independent national human rights

²⁵ In particular, ECLAC (2017b) and ECLAC/UNFPA (2020). The latter document makes recommendations concerning the Afrodescendent population in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic.

institutions that pay special attention to Afrodescendants facing multiple and concomitant forms of discrimination, including women, young people, persons with disabilities and lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex people. Progress must also be made in combating institutional racism and racial violence, including when it is perpetrated by security forces or manifested through new information and communication technologies. Finally, it is necessary to guarantee the rights of Afrodescendent migrants, especially the integrity of Afrodescendent women and children.

In the area of information, it is essential to make Afrodescendent individuals and communities visible in official statistics, by including ethno-racial identification in all national data sources and promoting the development of information systems with culturally relevant statistical instruments and procedures. It is also crucial to: disaggregate the conventional indicators for Afrodescendants systematically in accordance with variables relating to the other axes of the social inequality matrix, such as sex, age, area of residence and socioeconomic level; generate information on Afrodescendent communities and territories and carry out periodic evaluations to redirect policies targeted at them; and build national capacity for using and analysing information from both State institutions and Afrodescendent organizations. The COVID-19 pandemic makes it essential to collect and publish data on hospitalized, infected and deceased persons, disaggregated by ethno-racial status, in order to focus responses more effectively and ensure that they are delivered to the most affected and neediest populations faster and in a more targeted way. It is important to include Afrodescendent self-identification in records relating to access to income transfer programmes, employment protection, extension of credit and other measures designed to alleviate the impact of the crisis, as a prerequisite for evaluating the way in which such actions are delivered to Afrodescendants. Efforts should be stepped up to ensure that access to new information and communication technologies is available to all Afrodescendent individuals, organizations and communities in the shortest possible time frame.

Lastly, in the context of the pandemic, it is vital to generate emergency responses in the area of social protection, from a rights and well-being perspective, by implementing policies that are universal, redistributive, solidarity-based and sensitive to differences, especially with regard to the Afrodescendent population. These policies must pay special attention to the most vulnerable subgroups of that population: older persons, paid and unpaid care workers, people living in risk areas (ancestral lands home to traditional communities and urban informal settlements), people with comorbidities (such as high blood pressure, diabetes, respiratory disease or sickle cell anaemia) and homeless people.

Responses include: strengthening existing income transfer programmes or creating emergency cash transfer schemes with enough coverage and sufficient funding to extend to all people living in poverty for the duration of the pandemic; maintaining these programmes during the recovery period, until people are able to recuperate sources of employment and own income, while strengthening labour and productive inclusion programmes; raising the minimum wage and creating or improving unemployment insurance systems to reach the population affected by the crisis during the pandemic and post-pandemic period. The crisis has demonstrated the importance of care to sustaining life, which is why it is necessary to enhance care policies and systems, guaranteeing the right to care for those in need throughout the life cycle, as well as the rights of those delivering such care, whether they are paid or unpaid.

In conclusion, it is vital to reconsider the exclusive model of development that prevails in Latin America, based on a highly heterogeneous, non-diversified and environmentally unfriendly production structure and on the persistence and reproduction of a culture of privilege. The responses to the pandemic-related crisis and the future recovery measures that countries in the region will adopt should be seen as an opportunity to implement structural changes that chart the path to an inclusive, sustainable, racism-free model that will bring the region closer to the goal of equality.

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Recognizing Afrodescendent populations, safeguarding their rights and making them visible are fundamental to social justice, equality, democracy and sustainable development. The exclusionary legacy of slavery, which shaped the fabric of Latin America immeasurably for centuries, is still present, and conceals the contribution of Afrodescendants to the development of nations. To break with this legacy, Afrodescendants must be specifically included in development agendas and decisive action must be taken to safeguard their civil, political, economic, social, environmental and cultural rights and to eliminate all forms of racial discrimination.

This document, a summary of the study “Afrodescendientes y la matriz de la desigualdad social en América Latina: retos para la inclusión”, provides new and updated information on the living conditions of Afrodescendants. Progress has been made in various areas of development, but not enough to overcome the racism and deep structural inequalities that still exist. These findings highlight the urgent challenges facing States and society at large. Accordingly, a set of policy recommendations is offered for consideration in the necessary processes of transformation and deepening of democracy in the region.