

Reducing Inequality and Pursuing Inclusive Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

Challenges, Priorities and Key Messages in preparation for the Second World Summit for Social Development



UNITED NATIONS

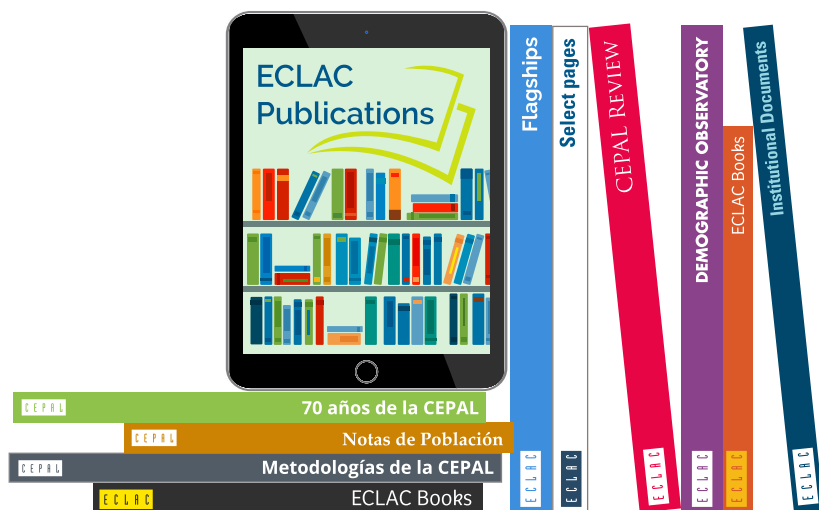
ECLAC



Sixth meeting of the Presiding Officers
of the Regional Conference
on Social Development
in Latin America and the Caribbean

Bridgetown, 31 October 2024

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Sixth meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

Bridgetown, 31 October 2024

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Foreword

For the past 75 years, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean has been contributing to the development of Latin America and the Caribbean, working together with the countries of the region and various regional and subregional organizations.

In recent decades, reducing inequalities and achieving inclusive social development have been priority areas on the ECLAC work agenda. There have been many milestones in these areas, and several initiatives to ensure social inclusion and minimum welfare levels for all have been implemented. These milestones include the establishment of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, a subsidiary body of ECLAC mandated to provide a space for dialogue, thinking and sharing of experiences on the commitments, difficulties and advances in social development for the countries of the region.

In recent years, the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have also made strides in consolidating a regional social agenda in line with the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and many international human rights instruments related to sustainable development. In that process, the adoption of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development at the third session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2019 represents the commitment of the countries of the region to make progress towards inclusive social development and the reduction of inequality, pursuant to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It thus establishes a framework of principles, strategic axes and lines of action to support the implementation of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda in key areas of the work of the ministries of social development and equivalent entities in countries, taking into account the gains, opportunities and critical obstacles with regard to inclusive social development in the region.

The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development offers tangible proposals on how to advance the social dimension of the development model in the future, centred around four axes: (i) universal and comprehensive social protection systems; (ii) policies to promote social and labour inclusion; (iii) a strengthened social institutional framework; and (iv) regional cooperation and integration.

Notwithstanding these efforts, the current context risks undermining progress towards inclusive social development and the fulfilment of the relevant commitments. The three development traps affecting the countries of the region—low capacity for growth, high inequality with low social mobility and cohesion, and low institutional capacity and ineffective governance—are compounded by shocks stemming from the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, rising interest rates and financing costs, climate change and the emergence of new geopolitical tensions and conflict. This is why ECLAC has posited that the region is in a real development crisis, and the challenge primarily entails overcoming the three traps mentioned above and avoiding a third “lost decade.”

Recent trends in poverty levels in the region indicate that the region’s prospects for meeting Goal 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere) are not encouraging. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 70 million people still live in extreme poverty and entrenched inequalities continue to affect many population groups, among them Indigenous Peoples; people of African descent; women, children and adolescents; migrants; LGBTQI+ persons; and persons with disabilities.

This development crisis poses significant challenges in a number of areas, making it necessary to rethink the region’s current development model and shift towards one that is more productive, inclusive and sustainable. In the special issue of the *CEPAL Review* commemorating the seventy-fifth anniversary of ECLAC, we identified 11 great transformations which are mutually reinforcing and deemed vital for correcting the course of the region’s development strategies. These transformations include, in particular: (i) reducing inequality and increasing social mobility and cohesion; (ii) expansion of social protection and the welfare state; (iii) strengthening of the technical, operational, political and prospective (TOPP) capabilities of State institutions; (iv) quality education for all and wide access to vocational education; and (v) progress towards gender equality and the care society.¹ In addition to the aforementioned transformations—those most directly related to social policies—there is a need for a great productive transformation for higher, sustained and inclusive growth, as well as a great transformation towards environmental sustainability.

¹ Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *CEPAL Review*, No. 141 (LC/PUB.2023/29-P), Santiago, 2024.

Bringing about these transformations also requires moving forward with the implementation of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development. This document presents a number of milestones in the context of the global and regional inclusive social development agendas and an overview of the critical obstacles to inclusive social development, as well as proposals regarding the challenges, priorities and key messages from Latin America and the Caribbean for the Second World Summit for Social Development, to be held in 2025. We hope that these insights will help to form a unified voice for the region in the lead up to this landmark meeting and, at the same time, contribute to defining the “whats” and the “hows” for moving towards inclusive social development, transforming the development model for a more productive, inclusive and sustainable future.

José Manuel Salazar-Xirinachs

Executive Secretary

Economic Commission for Latin America
and the Caribbean (ECLAC)



Introduction

At the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995, 14,000 participants, including 117 Heads of State and Government and 186 national delegations identified poverty eradication, the promotion of full and productive employment and the pursuit of social inclusion as priority commitments of the social development agenda, thereby achieving a new consensus that placed people at the centre of development (United Nations, 1995).

That landmark occasion marked a turning point in multilateral social development efforts, which have been guided ever since by the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development. Its significance has been reaffirmed many times over as related international commitments have broadened, culminating in the 2015 adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Social Development and its 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). The 2030 Agenda is the most ambitious international instrument to date in establishing social policy as a pillar of sustainable development, and has led to deeper analysis and a range of policy proposals on poverty eradication, education, health, gender equality and stronger institutions, among other subjects.

While the importance of inclusive social development is unmistakable, multilateral and regional initiatives in that regard are in need of increased coordination—in particular in Latin America and the Caribbean— ahead of the Second World Summit for Social Development, to be held in 2025. Indeed, in the Pact for the Future, adopted by the General Assembly in September 2024, Heads of State and Government express concern at persistent inequalities within and between countries and decide to secure an ambitious outcome at the World Summit (United Nations, 2024a).

The concept of inclusive social development has come to embody the social dimension of sustainable development. This social dimension is focused on social well-being, with freedom and dignity, and it entails the full exercise of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights, from a universalist approach that is sensitive to differences and prioritizes the most marginalized sectors. The importance of inclusive social development is clear to all, but poverty, hunger and inequality persist. This should serve as a wakeup call and a warning to governments that greater efforts are needed to achieve inclusive social development for all women and men. Data indicate that inclusive social development comes with significant economic benefits for society as a whole; thus, strengthening commitments in this area is both a necessity and an obligation for the entire world.

Since the first session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean was held in 2015, the countries have worked together to address inclusive social development challenges, including the eradication of poverty and the reduction of inequality. At the second session, held in Montevideo in 2017, the member States gave the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) a mandate to establish a social development observatory—later named the Observatory on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean—and the Conference committed to building an agenda for inclusive social development in the region. The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development was adopted in 2019 with the aim of closing structural gaps and advancing social justice to directly contribute to the achievement of the social targets of the 2030 Agenda. Its 4 axes and 56 lines of action offer concrete guidelines concerning the public policies that should be implemented to accelerate progress towards the SDGs in the region and how they should be implemented. Other regional and subregional forums have carried out similar initiatives, including the Pacific Alliance, the Andean Community, the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the Central American Integration System.

In recent years, the region has faced critical social development challenges, from the social impact of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic to a series of crises and disasters made more frequent by climate change and disproportionately affecting the lowest socioeconomic strata. Poverty and extreme poverty remain at unacceptable levels, and persistently high inequality is an indication that structural gaps are impeding inclusive social development. As measured by the Gini index, income inequality in the region is the highest in the world, and there are significant gaps in the exercise of social rights and capacity-building, with the most vulnerable groups lagging furthest behind.

Meanwhile, Latin America and the Caribbean is undergoing multiple transformations. First, demographic, epidemiological and nutritional transitions are under way, as reflected in population ageing, falling fertility rates, rising prevalence of non-communicable diseases, and undernutrition coexisting with overweight and obesity. Second, migration, driven by economic crises, violence and disasters, continues to increase,

intensifying pressure on public services. Lastly, as persistent organized crime and violence in all its forms continue to rise, threats—in particular of homicide and gender-based violence—rise with it, fraying the region's social fabric and trust in institutions.

These are just some examples of the social inclusion challenges facing Latin America and the Caribbean. There are also labour inclusion challenges. The undersupply of decent work fuels labour informality, affecting nearly half of workers, and perpetuates gender and age gaps and the unequal distribution of domestic and care work, which disproportionately falls to women. Meanwhile, the technological changes transforming the labour market are creating significant opportunities to increase productivity, but they also pose risks, such as increased labour insecurity. Automation and telework present challenges: not only do continuing education and training systems need to adapt for there to be effective labour inclusion, but indeed the entire institutional framework for social policy will have to adapt in order to guarantee social rights in the digital era (Robles, Tenenbaum and Jacas, 2023).

ECLAC has consistently underscored the need for quality, inclusive and sustainable public policies in order to reduce inequality gaps. The social inequality matrix, an analytical document produced in the framework of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, shines a light on the axes (e.g. socioeconomic level, gender, ethnicity or race, and territory) that perpetuate inequality and the dimensions in which this occurs (e.g. income, exercise of social rights and participation in decision-making). Tackling these inequalities requires progress on measuring the multiple dimensions of inequality and the adoption of comprehensive public policies that take them into account—an increasingly high priority on the social agenda (ECLAC, 2016b).

The expansion of non-contributory social protection, in particular in the form of income transfers and non-contributory pension systems, has helped to partially mitigate the effects of the aforementioned changes (Arenas de Mesa and Robles, 2024). Still, this area continues to present major challenges related to strengthening institutional frameworks for social policy in their various dimensions. There is a need for more robust legal and regulatory frameworks to ensure more effective intervention; organization with clear authority and an enabling structure for implementation; technical and operational processes for effective, efficient and transparent management; and sufficient financial resources. Ministries of social development have identified sufficient and sustainable financial resources as key to creating universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient social protection systems.

To overcome these challenges and leverage the potential of technological changes, the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development proposes social and labour inclusion policies, with an emphasis on closing the digital divide. In addition, ECLAC has recently proposed strengthening institutional frameworks and governance for public policy by building technical, operational, political and prospective capabilities, which are essential for managing vital transformations (Salazar-Xirinachs, 2023).

Coordination among multilateral and regional initiatives should also be enhanced, in particular in Latin America and the Caribbean, in preparation for the Second World Summit for Social Development. To enrich proposals ahead of that meeting, it is essential that discussions include civil society, the private sector, local governments and regional organizations.

This document provides a brief history of the global and regional social development agendas over the past 30 years, highlighting the gradual progression of inclusive social development policies, both analytically and technically, and the current challenges posed by the region's social inequality matrix. It also provides an analysis of priority issues for the region and proposals to meet present and future needs.

The views and proposals presented in the document are intended to enrich discussions between countries at the sixth meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean regarding the preparation of key regional messages ahead of the Second World Summit for Social Development. These discussions must take into account the specific characteristics of the region and the particularities of its individual countries in order to achieve the SDGs while leaving no one behind. Closing existing gaps and achieving universal well-being is not only possible but necessary for the people of Latin America and the Caribbean to pursue personal development and the exercise of human rights; however, it will require the sharing of views and experiences in order to identify common pathways. This document is an invitation to take up that vital responsibility.

CHAPTER

I

Evolution of the social agenda since the World Summit for Social Development in 1995

- A. Inclusive social development: the social dimension of sustainable development
- B. Milestones in the evolution of the global social development agenda over the past 30 years
- C. Latin American and Caribbean contributions to the conversation on inclusive social development and social inequality

This chapter provides a brief overview of the growing importance of inclusive social development, now a central component of the international social development agenda, over the last 30 years. Following a brief definition of the concept, the chapter examines its growing prominence in discussions, both at global summits and in regional and subregional forums in Latin America and the Caribbean.

A. Inclusive social development: the social dimension of sustainable development

Since the First World Summit for Social Development, held in Copenhagen in 1995, the concept of social inclusion, with its particular focus on placing people at the centre, has gained prominence in both social analysis and public policy proposals. Over the past three decades, it has become increasingly evident that not only economic growth but also environmental sustainability and social inclusion play a key role in development objectives and strategies for society as a whole. A growing understanding of the interdependence of these three dimensions has reinforced the emerging emphasis on the critical role of intersectoral coordination and multilateralism in public policy.

The relationship between economic growth, environmental protection and social inclusion is central to the holistic development vision of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and guides the objectives of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2020).

According to documents arising from the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2016a, 2018a, 2019 and 2020), inclusive social development may be understood as a condition in which all people live free from poverty and achieve a level of well-being that aligns with economic growth and enables the development of skills in a context of freedom and dignity, with full enjoyment of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights and opportunities for recognition and participation. To achieve this, the gaps in access to basic areas of well-being must first be addressed, along with social inequalities and the structures that perpetuate them, from a universalist perspective that is sensitive to differences.

Social and labour inclusion are fundamental and complementary dimensions of inclusive social development (ECLAC, 2016a) (see diagram I.1). Social inclusion comprises the exercise of rights, full participation and recognition in society, reduced inequalities, and access to social policies aimed at achieving these objectives. The aim of labour inclusion is to ensure that all labour force participants have access to decent jobs and that labour rights are safeguarded. It therefore encompasses both labour market participation and decent working conditions (ECLAC, 2023d).

Diagram I.1
Dimensions of inclusive social development



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of ECLAC, *Inclusive social development: the next generation of policies for overcoming poverty and reducing inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean* (LC.L/4056/Rev.1), Santiago, 2016; *Towards a regional agenda for inclusive social development: bases and initial proposal* (LC/MDS.2/2), Santiago, 2018; and *Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development* (LC/CDS.3/5), Santiago, 2020.

According to the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, advancing inclusive social development requires public policies that enable all people to exercise their social and labour rights, in keeping with the principle of difference-sensitive universalism (ECLAC, 2020). To implement these holistic public policies, efforts must be made to strengthen the dimensions that support the progress needed in social and labour inclusion. The first is civic and political inclusion, to enable all persons to fully participate in society by being officially recognized as public policy stakeholders and users, taking into consideration characteristics such as socioeconomic status, gender, ethnicity and race, age, culture, and territory of origin or nationality. The second is digital inclusion, which can be fostered by measures to ensure that all people have access to emerging technologies and are able to use them to meaningfully participate in society as digital citizens. This is essential to boost the various opportunities for development, participation and access offered by the digital environment while also protecting rights and mitigating the potential risks of participation (Palma Guajardo, 2024). The third dimension is financial inclusion, so that both people and the productive units where they work are able to participate in the financial system and gain access to its resources and services, with the required knowledge to make their life and business plans feasible and to acquire goods and services, whether supplied by the State or the market.

In designing comprehensive public policies and providing public goods and services, the following should be borne in mind: (i) all segments of the population should be recognized as rights holders and their rights safeguarded, placing particular emphasis on the most marginalized sectors; (ii) quality social policies that foster well-being should be implemented; and (iii) inclusive, resilient and sustainable social institutional frameworks should be established, that foster accountability, transparency and the participation of all societal stakeholders.

From the perspective of sustainable development, achieving inclusive social development will require States to foster intersectoral coordination to bring together the social, economic and environmental dimensions and identify the critical obstacles that hinder its achievement, as will be examined in chapter II (ECLAC, 2018a).

Reducing inequality gaps is essential to achieve inclusive social development in the region. The social inequality matrix (ECLAC, 2016b), with its axes and areas of disparity, shows how these inequality gaps have been exacerbated and perpetuated through history. Undergirded by a heterogenous and poorly diversified productive structure and by inequalities that have long been normalized, the axes of inequality —socioeconomic status, gender, stage of the life cycle, territory, ethnicity, race, disability and migration status, and sexual orientation and gender identity, among others— are intertwined and engender vast gaps in access, the enjoyment of rights, and well-being throughout many areas of social development, in particular income, education, health, the labour market, social protection, housing and participation in decision-making. These features intersect across different domains, constraining autonomy, comprehensive well-being and opportunity.

Reducing inequality to close these gaps is essential for progress towards inclusive social development, meaning that these axes must be considered when designing and implementing comprehensive public policies. All have gained prominence on the social development agenda over the past three decades.

B. Milestones in the evolution of the global social development agenda over the past 30 years

The social development agenda has evolved constantly in recent decades. The end of the cold war, and the World Summit for Children in 1990, marked the beginning of an era of innovation in which the global human rights agenda and development in general flourished.¹ The concept of sustainable development, introduced at the Earth Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, in 1992, comprises three interdependent dimensions: social, economic and environmental. Shortly thereafter, at the World Summit for Social Development in 1995, it was

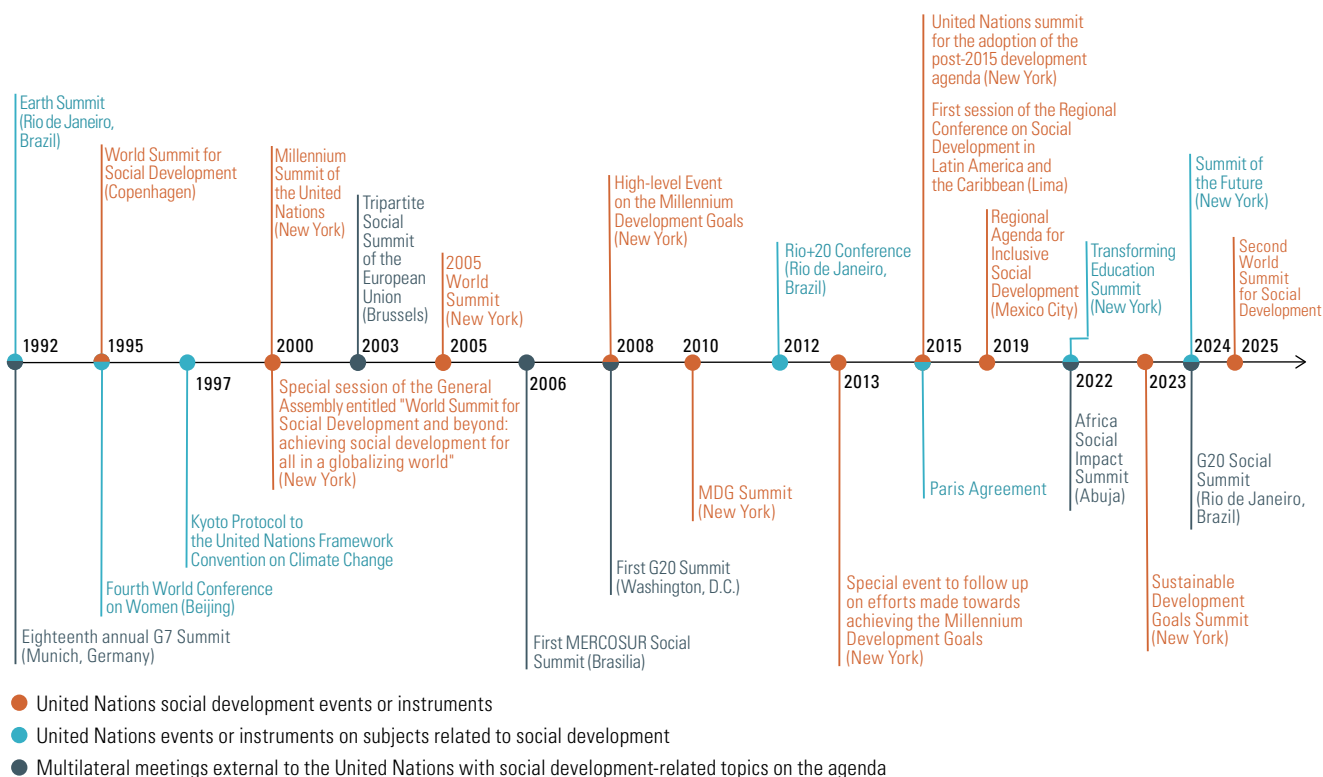
¹ Other conferences held and instruments adopted around the same time that have contributed to the discussion on social development include the World Conference on Human Rights (1993), the International Conference on Population and Development (1994), the Fourth World Conference on Women (1995) and the United Nations Conference on Human Settlements (Habitat II) (1996).

argued that the achievement of social development goals would require a broad-based approach that included all sectors (United Nations, 1995). In 2000, that agenda was furthered by the establishment of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), with specific and measurable —although not necessarily more ambitious— targets. Fifteen years later, in 2015, the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development went even further, establishing a long list of goals, targets, indicators, means of implementation and deadlines to spur progress towards sustainable development, leaving no one behind. In this new Agenda, the social dimension is essential, reflecting the evolution of the international debate towards a more complex and holistic understanding of development, in which the three dimensions of sustainable development interact dynamically, in conjunction with institutional factors and a variety of national, regional and global implementation mechanisms.

In addition to being the subject of many United Nations system summits and debates, social development has been a key topic, or at least an important one, on the agenda of other regional integration processes and multilateral meetings (see diagram I.2). The European Union, the Group of 20 (G20) and the Group of Seven (G7), and regional bodies such as the Community of Latin American and Caribbean States (CELAC), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) and the Central American Integration System (SICA) are just some of the organizations and forums at which governments meet periodically to discuss and build a rich, dynamic social agenda.

Diagram I.2

Main social development agenda milestones, 1992–2025



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

In 2017, the European Union adopted the European Pillar of Social Rights, which sets out 20 guiding principles classified under three main objectives (equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion), with a deadline for compliance of 2030. In addition, the European Union has been convening an annual Tripartite Social Summit since 2003, focused mainly on

employment and growth (European Council, 2024). Some groups of countries, whose members include the world's largest economies, have also been holding annual high-level meetings to discuss economic and financial matters. Among them are the G20 and G7 summits, at which other topics have been discussed, such as education, health, social protection, food security, gender equality and access to drinking water and sanitation (Global Governance Program, 2024). In November 2024, Brazil will host the G20 Social summit, which will provide a forum for discussing social issues such as poverty, hunger and climate change, and encourage civil society participation in social policymaking (G20, 2024a). At that meeting, the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty will also be officially launched, to consolidate financial investments to reverse setbacks and move towards the attainment of Sustainable Development Goal 1 (no poverty) and Goal 2 (zero hunger) (G20, 2024b).

In the region, CELAC, which was founded in 2011, aims to advance regional social integration, focusing on areas such as social development, education, culture and the environment (CELAC, n.d.). As discussed below, there are other subregional integration organizations with explicit social objectives, such as the Central American Social Integration Secretariat (SISCA) and the MERCOSUR Social Institute. The social dimension has also been gaining ground in other regions of the world. The first Africa Social Impact Summit was held in 2022, while in Asia, the Annual Meeting of the Board of Governors of the Asian Development Bank, first convened in 1966, has become an important forum for discussing social and economic development in the Asia-Pacific region. Its participants include not only experts from the economic and financial sector, but also representatives of governments and non-governmental organizations (ADB, 2024).

A brief overview of major milestones in international discussions on the social development agenda is presented below.

1. World Summit for Social Development (1995)

The World Summit for Social Development, convened in Copenhagen in 1995, was a watershed as the decisions adopted there have shaped subsequent international social development initiatives. In the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development and the Programme of Action of the World Summit for Social Development, governments agreed to place people at the centre of development. The Programme states that “the ultimate goal of social development is to improve and enhance the quality of life of all people”. Achieving this entails the establishment of an enabling environment, which requires democratic institutions, respect for all human rights and fundamental freedoms, equal opportunity, the rule of law, respect for cultural diversity and minorities, and the involvement of civil society (United Nations, 1995). The Programme of Action also holds that social development “is central to the needs and aspirations of people throughout the world and to the responsibilities of Governments and all sectors of civil society” and that it “is inseparable from the cultural, ecological, economic, political and spiritual environment in which it takes place”, meaning that multisectoral strategies are required for its achievement (United Nations, 1995).

States established 10 commitments for action in the Copenhagen Declaration (see table I.1), which included eradicating poverty, promoting full and productive employment and fostering social integration. Participating countries agreed that meeting those commitments was essential for achieving sustainable development (United Nations, 1995). The Programme of Action of the World Summit also establishes national and international objectives and initiatives, which are grouped into five chapters: I. An enabling environment for social development; II. Eradication of poverty; III. Expansion of productive employment and reduction of unemployment; IV. Social integration; and V. Implementation and follow-up (United Nations, 1995).

Table I.1

Commitments of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, 1995

1	Create an economic, political, social, cultural and legal environment that will foster social development.
2	Eradicate poverty in the world.
3	Promote the goal of full employment.
4	Promote social integration.
5	Achieve equality and equity between women and men.
6	Attain universal and equitable access to quality education and primary healthcare.
7	Accelerate the development of Africa and the least developed countries.
8	Ensure that structural adjustment programmes include social development goals.
9	Increase significantly and/or utilize more efficiently the resources allocated to social development.
10	Improve and strengthen the framework for international, regional and subregional cooperation for social development.

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of United Nations, *Report of the World Summit for Social Development* (A/CONF.166/9), New York, 1995.

2. The Millennium Summit of the United Nations and the Millennium Development Goals (2000)

In September 2000, country representatives met in New York and set a 15-year deadline to fight poverty, hunger, disease and war. They also pledged to strive to transform the United Nations into a more effective instrument for achieving these objectives (United Nations, 2000a). While globalization had brought exceptional economic benefits to some countries, in others it had contributed to inequality, instability and insecurity, especially in the developing world. Latin America and the Caribbean suffered a succession of economic crises, many of them triggered by external shocks, while the hopes for Africa were not fulfilled (ILO, 2005). Moreover, the 1997 financial crisis demonstrated the vulnerability of seemingly robust growth models, such as that of countries in South-East Asia (Furusawa, 2017).

These imbalances exacerbated social problems in certain regions, making it difficult to achieve the objectives of the 1995 World Summit for Social Development. For example, in Copenhagen a goal had been set to achieve universal access to basic education and completion of primary education by at least 80% of school-age children by 2000, but the school enrolment rate remained below 50% in 29 countries in that year (United Nations, 2000b). Against that backdrop, following a decade in which commitments were reaffirmed in several areas of sustainable development, a social agenda was established in 2000 at the Millennium Summit, with specific goals and targets to achieve social development nationally and internationally.

With the adoption of the Millennium Declaration, international leaders pledged to fight disease, poverty, illiteracy, discrimination against women and environmental degradation (MDG Monitor, 2017), establishing the eight MDGs, with their respective targets and indicators (see diagram I.3), to be achieved by 2015. These Goals ranged from halving the number of people living in extreme poverty to halting the spread of HIV/AIDS and promoting universal access to primary education, and constituted a broader agenda of priorities in terms of the standards for their fulfilment.

It was agreed at the Millennium Summit that implementation of the MDGs would begin on 1 January 2001 and that a summit would be convened every five years to assess progress. The first of these summits, the 2005 World Summit, was followed by the 2010 MDG Summit. Accordingly, from 2000 to 2015, the MDGs served as the framework used by the international community to measure development and steered efforts at various levels (local, national, regional and global) to improve the lives of millions of people worldwide, through a combination of public policy, economic resources and political will. However, uneven progress across countries led to a consensus that more must be done, in particular for the most vulnerable individuals and groups (United Nations, 2015a).

Diagram I.3
Millennium Development Goals



Source: United Nations, "Millennium Development Goals and beyond 2015" [online] <https://www.un.org/millenniumgoals/>.

3. The United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda and the 2030 Agenda (2015)

At the Rio+20 Conference (2012), governments agreed to establish an open-ended working group to identify a set of sustainable development goals based on the MDGs. The group's deliberations lasted more than a year and culminated in a proposal that came to fruition with the adoption of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development at the United Nations summit for the adoption of the post-2015 development agenda (2015). The 2030 Agenda, which contains 17 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs), is a launchpad for the international community's quest for shared prosperity and well-being for the period 2015–2030. An action plan that recognizes that eradicating poverty (Goal 1) is the greatest challenge for the achievement of sustainable development, the 2030 Agenda also explicitly mentions reducing inequalities (Goal 10), an issue not accorded the same prominence in previous frameworks. One of the fundamental commitments it reiterates is to "leave no one behind". Notably, at least 8 of the 17 SDGs focus on the social dimension, a key pillar for the achievement of sustainable development (United Nations, 2015b).

The scope and importance of the 2030 Agenda, which all Member States of the United Nations have adopted and undertaken to implement, is unprecedented. Compared with the MDGs, the SDGs place a stronger emphasis on the social dimension, giving more comprehensive coverage to subjects such as social protection, health, education, gender gaps in all areas and migration. Moreover, the 2030 Agenda explicitly states that inequality is a cross-cutting challenge for sustainable development and emphasizes that establishing a robust institutional framework is key for the achievement of sustainable development, which is reflected in particular in Goal 5 (achieve gender equality and empower all women and girls), Goal 10 (reduce inequality within and among countries) and Goal 16 (promote peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development, provide access to justice for all, and build effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels) (United Nations, 2015b).

The purpose of the 17 SDGs and their 169 targets is to build upon the provisions of the MDGs (see diagram I.4). They are part of a holistic and indivisible system comprised of the three interdependent dimensions of sustainable development: economic, social and environmental (United Nations, 2015b). They also include a comprehensive set of indicators that harmonize interpretation and facilitate monitoring of progress and assessment of remaining gaps (United Nations, 2015b).

Diagram I.4
Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs)



Source: United Nations [online] <https://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/news/communications-material/>.

Each Goal has its own targets, for both results and the means of implementation to achieve them. The means of implementation are a set of interdependent enabling factors required to implement this new sustainable development agenda, such as financial resources, technology development and transfer, capacity-building, inclusive and equitable globalization and trade, regional integration, and the establishment of an enabling national environment to that end, especially in developing countries (ECLAC, 2016c). Many are directly related to the social agenda. They range from mobilizing resources and establishing poverty reduction policy frameworks to enhancing local capacity to promote opportunities for sustainable livelihoods, fostering the use of technology, improving water and sanitation management, and enhancing employment prospects for young people, for example (see annex A1). This diversity of topics reflects the breadth and multidimensional nature of social development.

For example, the means of implementation mentioned in Goal 17 are critical for achieving social development objectives through the social institutional framework, understood as the set of rules, operational, financial, human and technological resources, and organizational structures that support and manage social development policies, from the diagnostic study and prioritization of objectives to the implementation and evaluation of their results (Martínez and Maldonado, 2019; ECLAC, 2023b). Analysis of this Goal shows that all its targets relate to at least one of the four dimensions of the institutional framework for social policy: legal and regulatory, organizational, technical and operational, and financial (Martínez and Maldonado, 2019; ECLAC, 2022a and 2023b) (see annex A2). It is worth noting that Goals 16 and 17 are related, since the means of implementation for the former relate to establishing and fostering policies aimed at strengthening countries' institutions at all levels to support sustainable development, of which social development is a key pillar. In fact, the link between the two Goals is crucial in light of countries' need to build solid, financially sustainable institutions with long-term stability to be able to implement and achieve the Goals of the 2030 Agenda.

To sum up, in the nearly 30 years that have elapsed since the World Summit for Social Development, the somewhat generic social development commitments once made by countries have evolved to encompass

an increasingly wide range of specific social development issues. The Goals and targets of the 2030 Agenda are the most ambitious and diverse to date, firmly establishing social development policies as pivotal for the sustainable development model, both hinging on and undergirding it.

The social development agenda has clearly stood the test of time, becoming more diverse and expanding since the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen. Subjects such as poverty eradication, access to education and health, gender equality, and the strengthening of international institutional frameworks have remained relevant, while there is a broader range of targets and indicators and they are also more specialized. This has brought to light subjects previously overshadowed by other challenges, revealing their importance and the urgent need for public policy responses and targeted measures.

The growing importance and expansion of the social development agenda in recent decades is also revealed in various multilateral and integration forums external to the United Nations system. Against this backdrop, continuing to boost cooperation among the various multilateral, regional and subregional initiatives is a must, from the design phase through to effective implementation. At the regional level, work must continue to support the countries of Latin America and the Caribbean in establishing a shared, coherent, coordinated vision of inclusive social development, in order to give a regional voice to their proposals—especially in the lead-up to the Second World Summit for Social Development, to be held in 2025—expressing, for instance, the need to strengthen institutional capacity for progress towards sustainable development, and the critical importance of reducing social inequality to achieve it.

Stakeholders with subject matter expertise who can enrich discussions on social issues, such as representatives of civil society organizations, the private sector, local governments and financial institutions, must also be included. The role of civil society, especially organizations from the global South, is particularly important, since their vision and knowledge will be essential in setting the agenda of the Second World Summit for Social Development. Regional organizations must also be present in these discussions. Their familiarity with the major problems faced by their member countries can ensure that proposals are more effective and help States to commit to the social agenda.

C. Latin American and Caribbean contributions to the conversation on inclusive social development and social inequality

1. Contributions of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean

Since the first session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean in 2015, the challenges of inclusive social development and institutional frameworks for social policy—in particular those related to high social inequality, which have hindered progress on the SDGs and the journey towards inclusive social development—have been central to government discussions on social development (ECLAC, 2016a). Authorities have since highlighted the need to focus on the multiple dimensions of social inequality, poverty and vulnerability, deepening their knowledge, seeking alternative responses and designing relevant public policies.

(a) Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development

At the second session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Montevideo in 2017, countries gave ECLAC a mandate to establish the Observatory on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, to gather and systematize up-to-date information on social development from the region's countries. At that Conference, a commitment was also made to:

foster the building of a regional agenda for inclusive social development based on public policies that address the region's structural inequalities and the new challenges arising from technological change and the necessary transition to an environmentally sustainable economy, with a focus based on rights, gender equality and the life cycle and an approach of universalism that is sensitive to differences, within the general framework of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (ECLAC, 2018b).

The proposal for the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, adopted in Mexico City in 2019 at the third session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, was based on an in-depth analysis of seven critical structural obstacles for inclusive social development (ECLAC, 2019): (i) deeply rooted poverty and vulnerability to poverty; (ii) structural inequalities; (iii) gaps in human capacity development; (iv) challenges in the world of work; (v) partial and unequal access to social protection; (vi) a social institutional framework that is still under construction; and (vii) insufficient social investment. These longstanding problems are compounded by five emerging critical obstacles: (i) multiple forms of violence; (ii) disasters and climate change; (iii) the demographic, epidemiological and nutritional transitions; (iv) migration; and (v) technological changes.

In that regard, the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development is a technical and political instrument for progress towards inclusive social development in the region, supporting efforts to close gaps and address structural inequalities rooted in the social inequality matrix and the critical obstacles to inclusive social development, in order to enhance well-being and social justice, in particular for historically marginalized groups (ECLAC, 2020). It is largely grounded in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and the social development agreements adopted at the many intergovernmental events, forums and meetings convened between 2010 and 2018 by regional and subregional organizations,² the many international and regional instruments focusing on social development and human rights, and the mandates of the region's social development institutions. Important international precedents include the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (United Nations, 1966), the Declaration on the Right to Development (United Nations, 1986) and the Additional Protocol to the American Convention on Human Rights in the Area of Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (Protocol of San Salvador) (OAS, 1988).

In short, the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development is an instrument focused on implementation of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, centred around the following four strategic axes (ECLAC, 2020):

- 1) Universal and comprehensive social protection systems, to end poverty and significantly reduce inequalities.
- 2) Policies to promote social and labour inclusion, to foster dual inclusion and leave no one behind.
- 3) A strengthened social institutional framework, to implement high-quality social policies.
- 4) Regional cooperation and integration, to progress towards inclusive social development and achieve sustainable development.

These axes are operationalized through 56 lines of action that serve as a road map for progress on the social dimension of the SDGs in the region and for establishing high-quality, human rights-based social policies.

(b) The pivotal role of social protection and its institutional architecture for inclusive and sustainable social development

The first strategic axis of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development reflects the importance of having universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient social protection systems to eradicate poverty, reduce inequalities and advance inclusive social development. The public policy function of social protection

² The various agreements considered in the preparation of the Agenda are available at [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/compromisos/>.

is critical, as it aims to guarantee levels of income that allow the population to escape from poverty and provide protection from income-related shocks, enhance well-being, determine the demand for services that support the exercise of rights and ensure access in areas such as health, education and housing, and support the creation of decent work by linking people with social and labour inclusion policies (Cecchini and Martínez, 2012).

The programmatic and organizational diversity of the components of social protection (whether contributory, non-contributory, or serving to regulate labour and care markets) imposes a need for robust institutional frameworks with the capacity to coordinate the work of a panoply of stakeholders at various levels of government. However, social policies and programmes in the region, in particular for non-contributory social protection, often rely on a fragile institutional architecture that is subject to abrupt and arbitrary changes, with little horizontal and vertical coordination and limited capacity and funding. For this reason, strengthening social institutions is another of the strategic axes of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, one that is critical for the implementation of inclusive, high-quality social development policies; in other words, policies that are effective, efficient, sustainable and transparent (ECLAC, 2020).

All of this also entails work on the four dimensions of institutional frameworks for social policy (ECLAC, 2023b and 2023d; Martínez and Maldonado, 2019). The legal and regulatory dimension establishes the legal grounds for policy design and implementation and that govern stakeholder participation. It is composed of regulations, both national (constitutional frameworks, laws and regulations) and international (treaties and agreements signed or ratified). The organizational dimension relates to hierarchical structure, the roles of authorities, human resources, and the mandates for the general organization of each State, with its formal structure and models for decision-making, communication and coordination among the various stakeholders that participate in policy implementation at different levels of government. The technical and operational dimension includes the instruments required for effective and efficient policy implementation, including strategic planning processes, information systems for conducting studies and implementing monitoring and evaluation processes, and transparency and accountability tools. Lastly, the financial dimension considers the scope, sufficiency and origin of the resources for financing social policies (Martínez and Maldonado, 2019; ECLAC, 2022a and 2023b).

ECLAC has also issued guidelines for strengthening the region's institutional frameworks for social policy. In that context, to overcome the trap of low institutional capacity and ineffective governance, institutional capacity must be strengthened, as an essential component of the strategy for spurring great transformations in the development model and policy governance. For this to be achieved, technical, operational, political and prospective (TOPP) capabilities must be strengthened in the area of social policy. These institutional capabilities are among the requirements for the great transformations needed to implement effective public policies and a more productive, inclusive and sustainable development model that can overcome the traps of weak growth, high inequality and low social mobility and cohesion that are hallmarks of the region (Salazar-Xirinachs, 2023).

Progress in the development of TOPP capabilities and in strengthening the four dimensions of the institutional framework for social policy is directly related to the attainment of Goal 16, as regards “build[ing] effective, accountable and inclusive institutions at all levels” (United Nations, 2015b).

(c) Fifth session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean and its working groups

At the fifth session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, countries agreed to establish thematic working groups to promote experience-sharing, the construction of common agendas and the participation of many stakeholders in order to address the challenges of the institutional frameworks for social policy and advance towards achieving the SDGs and inclusive social development (ECLAC, 2023c). In this context, the Commission was requested, in resolution 5(V) of the Regional Conference (ECLAC, 2023c), to undertake a more in-depth analysis of and identify policy alternatives and financing standards, and to support countries' ministries of social development and equivalent entities to strengthen South-South and triangular cooperation mechanisms in the areas of social development, inclusion and protection. Pursuant to resolution 5(V), four working groups were established, focusing on the

following subjects : (i) international cooperation, to strengthen South-South and triangular cooperation mechanisms for social development, inclusion and protection; (ii) social information systems and registers, to facilitate the sharing of good practices regarding levels of coverage, interoperability and data governance; (iii) spending standards for non-contributory social protection, to ensure the financial sustainability of inclusive social development policies; and (iv) disasters and resilient social protection in the Caribbean, to strengthen institutional capacities and cooperation in the context of the social repercussions of climate change.

All working groups set an objective of advancing towards a transformative recovery, stepping up action for the achievement of the SDGs, localizing them and implementing continuous monitoring. Doing so involves promoting experience-sharing, the construction of common agendas and participatory dialogue with civil society organizations, including those of women, young people, older persons, Indigenous Peoples, the Afrodescendent population, and persons with disabilities, as well as the private sector, trade union organizations and academia (ECLAC, 2023c). The role of ECLAC as technical secretariat is to support the working groups in establishing a network of public officials focusing on each of the specific policy areas they deal with and in fostering the exchange of information and good practices and the preparation of proposals and messages to be presented at the Second World Summit for Social Development, in 2025.

2. Other regional contributions to the global social development agenda

(a) Contributions to the social development agenda in the areas of education, health and labour inclusion

The social development agenda has expanded in many different areas. Following are the main milestones in the areas of education, health and labour inclusion.

In addition to being a social right, education is one of the main tools for reducing inequality, preventing intergenerational poverty, fostering social and job mobility and building capacity to boost individual and aggregate productivity (ECLAC, 2016a). In that regard, the first Regional Meeting of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean was convened in 2017, under the theme “E2030: Education and Skills for the 21st Century”, aligning with Goal 4 of the 2030 Agenda, which aims to “ensure inclusive and equitable quality education and promote lifelong learning opportunities for all.” In that context, the Buenos Aires Declaration was published, which highlights the challenges that remain in the region with regard to guaranteeing quality education in all dimensions and at all levels (UNESCO, 2017). At the second such meeting, convened in Cochabamba, Plurinational State of Bolivia, in 2018, the adoption of a road map was agreed, with coordination mechanisms for the implementation of Goal 4 in Latin America and the Caribbean. Subsequently, in the declaration of the third Regional Meeting of Ministers of Education of Latin America and the Caribbean, held in Buenos Aires in 2022, it was agreed to take urgent action to renew and transform education systems, taking into account the impact of school closures during the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. In the Declaration of Santiago 2024, adopted at the Extraordinary Meeting of Ministers of Education from Latin America and the Caribbean, the message of the Transforming Education Summit convened by the Secretary-General of the United Nations in 2022 was reaffirmed, acknowledging that reactivation, recovery, transformation and funding are the priority axes for accelerating the Goal 4 targets —with education financing being one of the essential enabling elements— and that the achievement of the Goal 4 targets is more urgent than ever, including in the context of promoting education as a necessary condition for sustainable development (UNESCO, 2024; Huepe, 2024).

Health is also a fundamental dimension of inclusive social development and thus of sustainable development. The pandemic conclusively demonstrated that health-related problems trigger repercussions for the potential of populations and for progress towards inclusive economic and social development (Marinho, Dahuabe and Arenas de Mesa, 2023). In 2018, the Pan American Health Organization (PAHO) published the Sustainable Health Agenda for the Americas 2018–2030, a strategic policy and planning framework to achieve the highest levels of health and well-being across the region, in keeping with the provisions of the

2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (PAHO, 2017). In the Declaration of Astana, endorsed in 2018 at the Global Conference on Primary Health Care, countries reaffirmed the conviction that strengthening primary healthcare is the most inclusive, efficient and effective approach to enhance people's physical and mental health as well as social well-being, and essential for achieving the SDGs (WHO, 2018; WHO/UNICEF, 2018). The region's countries have reaffirmed the need to transform health systems for progress towards universal access and coverage, in alignment with Goal 3, to "ensure healthy lives and promote well-being for all at all ages"; from a human rights-based approach, through the implementation of strengthened primary healthcare (PAHO, 2019).³ This strategy is focused on people's needs and preferences and is related to the social determinants of health defined by the World Health Organization.⁴ Moreover, in the context of COVID-19, ECLAC and PAHO affirmed the critical importance of ensuring access to health, adopting an intersectional approach that takes into consideration the structural factors that underpin inequality and their interaction with the social determinants of health (ECLAC, 2021a; ECLAC/PAHO, 2021).

Work directly affects the reproduction or mitigation of income distribution inequalities and access to job opportunities and social protection (ECLAC, 2016a). Narrowing the gaps in these areas involves improving labour inclusion, combining labour market access with decent working conditions (ECLAC, 2016a and 2023d). The concept of "decent work", which took centre stage in discussions at the 87th session of the International Labour Conference of the International Labour Organization (ILO) in 1999, refers to work that is productive and that delivers a fair income, security in the workplace and social protection, better prospects for personal development and social integration, freedom, and equality of opportunity and treatment for all women and men (ECLAC/ILO, 2013). Progress in those areas is evidenced by the institutional framework comprised of the conventions and agreements of ILO, including the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), which acknowledges the importance of these floors in providing basic social security guarantees to prevent poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion (Schwarzer, Casali and Bertranou, 2014), and the Indigenous and Tribal Peoples Convention, 1989 (No. 169), ratified by 15 countries in the region,⁵ which guarantees the rights of these population groups to labour, land, territory, health and education (ILO, 1989).

The recent World of Work Summit, held in 2023 during the 111th session of the International Labour Conference under the overarching theme "Social justice for all", underscored that access to and availability of decent work was essential for advancing social justice (ILO, 2023). In that context, the Brazilian Cooperation Agency and ILO launched a new South-South partnership programme for the period 2023–2027, Social Justice for the Global South, to support the promotion of decent work and social justice in developing countries in Latin America, Africa and the Asia-Pacific region. Moreover, a special meeting of the Economic and Social Council was held at ECLAC in early 2024, focused on the future of work. The subjects addressed included the rapid progress of digitalization in the world of work, which could widen existing inequalities in the absence of renewed and innovative regulation and social protection that is resilient to these changes, as well as equality in terms of access and skills development (ECOSOC, 2024). At the 112th session of the International Labour Conference, in June 2024, the Director-General of ILO was requested to prepare a plan of action on decent work and the care economy. It was emphasized in *Record* No. 8A that care work, whether paid or unpaid, is essential to all other work, and that progress must therefore be made in establishing a common understanding of the care economy (ILO, 2024a).

The contributions described in this document are essential milestones on the path towards the full exercise of social and economic rights for all, and for access to sufficient income and universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient social protection systems for the achievement of inclusive social development (ECLAC, 2023d).

³ The concept of primary healthcare, which has been redefined several times since 1978, may be understood as a whole-of-society approach to health that aims to ensure the highest possible level of health and well-being and their equitable distribution (WHO/UNICEF, 2018, p. 2).

⁴ The World Health Organization defines the social determinants of health as the conditions in which people are born, grow, work, live and age, including the wider set of forces and systems shaping the conditions of daily life. These forces and systems include economic policies and systems, development agendas, social norms, social policies and political systems (Solar and Irwin, 2010).

⁵ Argentina, the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominica, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Paraguay, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

(b) Regional agendas in the subsidiary bodies of ECLAC

The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development has also been enriched by the outcomes of other intergovernmental forums that are subsidiary bodies of ECLAC, such as the Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean and the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, which aim to facilitate cooperation, experience-sharing and peer learning among countries, establish a shared vision, and implement joint action in their respective areas of competence.

The Regional Conference on Women in Latin America and the Caribbean, established in 1977 and organized since 2020 in cooperation with the United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women (UN-Women), is the region's main intergovernmental forum on women's rights and gender equality. Its long history is a testament to the region's historic commitment to addressing women's issues and gender equality (ECLAC, 2017). The Conference has spurred significant social policy innovation, particularly with regard to social protection. At the thirteenth session of the Regional Conference on Women in 2016, countries adopted the Montevideo Strategy for Implementation of the Regional Gender Agenda within the Sustainable Development Framework by 2030 (ECLAC, 2017), which aims to guide the full implementation of the agreements of the Regional Gender Agenda and ensure that they serve as a road map for the achievement of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development in the region, from the perspective of gender equality and women's autonomy and human rights. In the context of the COVID-19 pandemic, the Regional Conference on Women underscored the importance of building a care society to achieve a gender-equal and sustainable recovery. The right to give and receive care and the need to centre the sustainability of life in public debates have become priority objectives in the formulation of successful sustainable development strategies (ECLAC, 2022b).

The Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, established in 2012, has continued to address topics of great importance, including reproductive rights, international migration, the situation of Indigenous Peoples and Afrodescendants and ageing. In that context, countries adopted the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development (ECLAC, 2013) in 2013, in order to strengthen the implementation of the Cairo Programme of Action (United Nations, 1994). The Montevideo Consensus establishes nine areas of action to address specific population and development issues in different communities and populations, adopting a human rights-based, gender-sensitive and intercultural approach. In addition, the Montevideo Consensus reaffirms the importance of strengthening South-South cooperation. A decade after its adoption, a special session⁶ was held in 2023, highlighting the progress made in the implementation of this mechanism and calling for more efforts to address the pending challenges for its full implementation.

There are also two forums that enable ECLAC to work on migration and ageing, through the Latin American and Caribbean Demographic Centre (CELADE)-Population Division. One is the Regional Conference on Migration,⁷ a multilateral forum—established in 1996—for non-binding regional consultation to enable countries to discuss and make decisions on regional and international migration. At the fourth plenary meeting of the Regional Conference on Migration and the South American Conference on Migration, countries agreed to continue building a positive narrative on the contribution of migration to countries' social, cultural and economic development (RCM/SACM, 2023). ECLAC also serves as the secretariat of the Regional Intergovernmental Conference on Ageing and the Rights of Older Persons in Latin America and the Caribbean, the purpose of which is to implement the mandate of the Madrid International Plan of Action on Ageing, 2002, and establish action plans in the region. In the Santiago Declaration, adopted in 2022 at the fifth session of that Conference, country representatives emphasized the importance of adopting effective measures to combat age-based discrimination and of eliminating the remaining difficulties and obstacles in the region that undermine older persons' participation in social, political, economic and cultural life as well as their human rights (ECLAC, 2022c).

⁶ Special session "10 years of the Montevideo Consensus on Population and Development", held during the fifth meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Population and Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The agreements of this session, adopted on 15 November 2023, are available at [online] <https://crpd.cepal.org/5m/en/documents/agreements>.

⁷ There are 11 member countries of the Regional Conference on Migration from the Americas. Nine of the member countries (Belize, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua and Panama) and five of the observer countries (Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, Jamaica and Peru) are from Latin America and the Caribbean.

In addition to the conferences mentioned, other bodies, whose objectives align with those of the social development agenda, have supported the development of institutions in the region.

The Regional Council for Planning, established in 1974 as the Technical Committee of the Latin American and Caribbean Institute for Economic and Social Planning (ILPES), brings together ministers or directors of planning from the member States of ILPES. At the most recent meeting of the Regional Council, held in Santo Domingo in 2023, member countries adopted the proposal to begin the negotiation of a regional agenda on governance of planning and public management for sustainable development. They also requested that ILPES place particular emphasis on deepening and systematizing regional and extraregional experiences in planning and public management and building institutions that are more resilient to crises, and on broadening the Regional Observatory on Planning for Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2023h).

The Forum of Ministers and High-Level Authorities on Housing and Urbanism in Latin America and the Caribbean (MINURVI), established in 1992, is a regional forum for cooperation and intergovernmental collaboration on the sustainable development of human settlements. MINURVI works with ECLAC and the United Nations Human Settlements Programme (UN-Habitat) to coordinate the Urban and Cities Platform of Latin America and the Caribbean. In the declaration adopted at the MINURVI General Assembly in Buenos Aires, countries reaffirmed their commitment to climate change adaptation and mitigation, underscoring the need to mobilize resources to finance climate change adaptation programmes and initiatives in cities, and addressing other topics that are highly relevant for inclusive social development, such as inclusion and citizen participation (MINURVI, 2023).

The Statistical Conference of the Americas of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, established pursuant to Economic and Social Council resolution 2000/7 (ECLAC, 2001), contributes significantly to the measurement of poverty and inequality, the development of the related statistics and their international comparability. It also monitors regional trends in progress towards the SDGs, through the Statistical Coordination Group for the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2024a).

The Regional Agreement on Access to Information, Public Participation and Justice in Environmental Matters in Latin America and the Caribbean (Escazú Agreement) (ECLAC, 2018c) is a pioneering treaty that aims to promote governance and climate action with a human rights-based approach, ensuring access to information, public participation and justice in environmental matters. It is innovative in being the first treaty in the world to include specific provisions to protect the human rights of environmental defenders, and in promoting access to environmental information as a principle of public institutional frameworks. The Agreement seeks to include historically marginalized populations in environmental decision-making, fostering open, inclusive participation, which is essential for inclusive social development. It also promotes cooperation and capacity-building to safeguard the intergenerational right to a healthy environment and to sustainable development (ECLAC, 2023e). The Escazú Agreement advances the achievement of Goal 16 through its focus on strengthening several aspects of institutional frameworks, including the generation of data by public entities, access to information to support openness and transparency in decision-making, and building trust in institutions.

The Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, established in 2021,⁸ aims to strengthen national mechanisms for South-South, triangular and multilateral cooperation between regional and extraregional stakeholders, and their linkages with North-South and multilateral cooperation, to facilitate the transfer of technology and knowledge and joint cooperation activities. At the first session of the Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation, a document was presented on regional progress and challenges in the context of the 2030 Agenda (ECLAC, 2023a), which reaffirmed the need for a regional cooperation architecture that effectively brings countries and stakeholders together and aligns with the entire United Nations system at the national, regional and global levels. In 2020, the United Nations system-wide strategy on South-South and triangular cooperation for sustainable development was adopted (United Nations, 2023), which emphasizes that the United Nations system should play an important role in supporting policymaking and promoting regional cooperation and knowledge-sharing.

⁸ The Committee on South-South Cooperation, founded in 1979, was renamed the Regional Conference on South-South Cooperation in Latin America and the Caribbean, pursuant to resolution 752(PLN.36), adopted at the thirty-sixth session of the Committee of the Whole of ECLAC.

In short, the various contributions of Latin America and the Caribbean to social rights, population groups and cooperation have established a regional institutional framework that enriches the debate on these issues and complements the work of all stakeholders to achieve inclusive social development, reduce inequality and promote sustainability, leaving no one behind.

(c) Agendas and contributions from regional and subregional forums

Regional and subregional forums have played an important role in discussions and reflections on inclusive and sustainable social development.

The contributions of CELAC, which was established in 2010, have been significant in that regard. At the Eighth Summit of Heads of State and Government of CELAC, held in 2024, key messages on specific social issues were set out in the Declaration of Kingstown (CELAC, 2024), including concern over setbacks in the pace of implementation of the 2030 Agenda, regarding which ECLAC is raising the alarm; a commitment to address the multiple and intersectional forms of discrimination faced by all women and girls in the region; and ratification of the commitment to promote, respect, guarantee and protect the rights of Afrodescendants and Indigenous Peoples, among other population groups.

These issues are also a priority in the context of the interregional discussions between CELAC and the European Union that began in 2013. The Declaration of the EU-CELAC Summit 2023 includes a commitment to further strengthening the biregional partnership and working together as sovereign partners to face current crises and challenges, including food insecurity, poverty, inequalities, supply chain disruptions and rising inflation, and to mitigate the adverse effects of climate change and environmental degradation. Both groups are also committed to strengthening cooperation for the full implementation of the 2030 Agenda (Council of the European Union, 2023).

Subregional cooperation and integration forums have also made important contributions to advancing inclusive social development. They include the following:

(i) *Andean Community*

The objectives of the Andean Community, established in 1969 under the Cartagena Agreement, include fostering development and improving the quality of life of the citizens of the subregion; accelerating growth and the generation of productive employment; facilitating regional integration; strengthening subregional solidarity and narrowing the development gaps between its member countries; and achieving a sustained improvement in the standard of living of its inhabitants.

The subsidiary bodies of the Andean Community include the Andean Council of Ministers of Social Development, established in 2004, which has developed a social agenda to drive social development in the subregion and constantly improve the standard of living of its inhabitants (Andean Community, 2004). In a pioneering initiative, the Andean Social Development Goals were adopted at the seventh meeting of the Council, convened in Lima in 2011, complementing the MDGs with specific targets for the subregion, to be met by 2019. Eleven goals were grouped into the following six thematic areas: overcoming poverty and inequalities, enshrining and safeguarding rights, identity and belonging, overcoming territory-based inequalities, ensuring social investment, and the social impact of climate change and natural disasters (CADS, 2011).

(ii) *Caribbean Community*

The main objectives of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), which was established in 1973 in the Treaty of Chaguaramas, are to improve standards of living and work for Caribbean citizens, promote full employment and economic development, and promote greater understanding among its peoples for the advancement of their social, cultural and technological development (CARICOM, 2001).

The Council for Human and Social Development is the branch of CARICOM that specializes in human and social development. It seeks to develop coordinated policies to improve living and working conditions and to take measures to facilitate the organization and development of harmonious labour and industrial relations in

the Community. The Council for Human and Social Development engages in a variety of initiatives; one example is the establishment of the Human Resource Development Commission in 2014 to develop a strategic plan for human resources in the region. The CARICOM Human Resource Development 2030 Strategy was published in 2018. Its contents align with the 2030 Agenda, as Goals 4 and 8 are cited as pillars of the development programmes of its member States (CARICOM, 2018).

At the Council's 2023 meeting, which focused on gender issues, a strategy was launched to coordinate and accelerate efforts to achieve gender equality and women's empowerment,⁹ which declares that gender equality is a driver of economic growth and sustainable development.

(iii) The Southern Common Market

The Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR) was established in 1991 through the Treaty of Asunción. The Meeting of Social Development Ministers and Authorities of MERCOSUR stands out among its forums to address social issues. It aims to address "the social dimension" of integration (MERCOSUR, 2007, p. 3). At its most recent meeting, convened in 2023, participants reflected on social protection systems, care, food sovereignty, and the adoption of a joint, inter-agency approach to countries' common issues.

The MERCOSUR Social Institute, a social policy technical research body, was established in 2007 to deepen social policy analysis. Among its most important contributions was the launch of the Strategic Plan for Social Action in 2012, which comprises 10 lines of action for the implementation of concrete measures to address social issues in all their complexity (ISM, 2012).

Since 2006, the MERCOSUR Social Summit has also brought together a range of stakeholders from organizations, social movements and States parties to establish positions on many subjects on international and regional agendas and to debate, seek consensus and issue recommendations on social issues (Albuquerque Silva and Vieira Martins, 2016). At its 2023 meeting, effective civil society participation was emphasized, as was the development of an agenda that included the rights of women, Indigenous Peoples and Afrodescendent populations, as well as campesino movements. The importance of combating political disinformation to strengthen democracies was also stressed (IPPDH, 2023). At the 2024 meeting of the MERCOSUR Social Summit, discussion focused on four key topics for social development in the region: poverty reduction, inclusive economic growth, Indigenous Peoples and human rights (MERCOSUR, 2024).

(iv) Central American Integration System

The Central American Integration System (SICA) was established in 1991 under the Tegucigalpa Protocol to the Charter of the Organization of Central American States. In 1995, States signed the Treaty on Central American Social Integration to position the social dimension at the heart of integration efforts, establishing the Council for Central American Social Integration and the Central American Social Integration Secretariat, cornerstones of the subregional institutional frameworks for joint action on social issues.

In order to underscore the importance of social protection and of achieving the SDGs, the member countries of SICA adopted the Regional Intersectoral Agenda on Social Protection and Productive Inclusion with Equity in 2018, in the Declaration of Santo Domingo. The Agenda recognizes that social protection plays an important role in reducing social exclusion, safeguarding access to economic, social and cultural rights, and taking proactive steps to protect people from a range of contemporary risks, especially among the most vulnerable segments of the population. In that regard, four strategic lines of action are proposed, with a time horizon of 2030, to strengthen social protection on various fronts, such as employment, local production and migration (SICA, 2018).

(v) Pacific Alliance

The Pacific Alliance was established in 2011 by Chile, Colombia, Mexico and Peru to improve coordination on political, economic, cooperation and integration matters, with a view to boosting growth and competitiveness. The Development and Social Inclusion Technical Group was created under the Lima Declaration, adopted

⁹ The strategy is called "Stepping it up: A Strategy to Achieve Gender Equality in the Caribbean Community".

in 2019 at the fourteenth Summit of the Pacific Alliance. It aims to reduce poverty and inequality gaps that hinder the economic growth of the Alliance's countries. The priority topics of the Group are multidimensional poverty, innovation and social cohesion, and the 2030 Agenda, in particular Goal 1 (Pacific Alliance, 2019). In that context and in cooperation with ECLAC, the Observatory of Social Development of the Pacific Alliance was established, to provide up-to-date social information to support the design and strengthening of public policies. This forum brings together governments, the academic sector, the private sector and civil society to broaden access to information and for member countries to work together to generate knowledge on social development (Pacific Alliance, 2024).

To sum up, there are many integration and cooperation bodies in the region that bring together various groups of countries. Each has specific mechanisms to foster social development through a variety of initiatives, action plans, strategies, councils, charters, treaties and observatories, among other instruments, reflecting the progress made in achieving the objectives of regional and subregional institutional frameworks for social policy. In that context, continuing to strengthen cooperation among ministries of social development (or equivalent public institutions) and building their capacities is essential, in order to leverage these initiatives to meet the challenge of achieving inclusive social development, a vital dimension of sustainable development in the region.

CHAPTER

II

Structural and emerging challenges arising from the analysis of the critical obstacles to inclusive social development

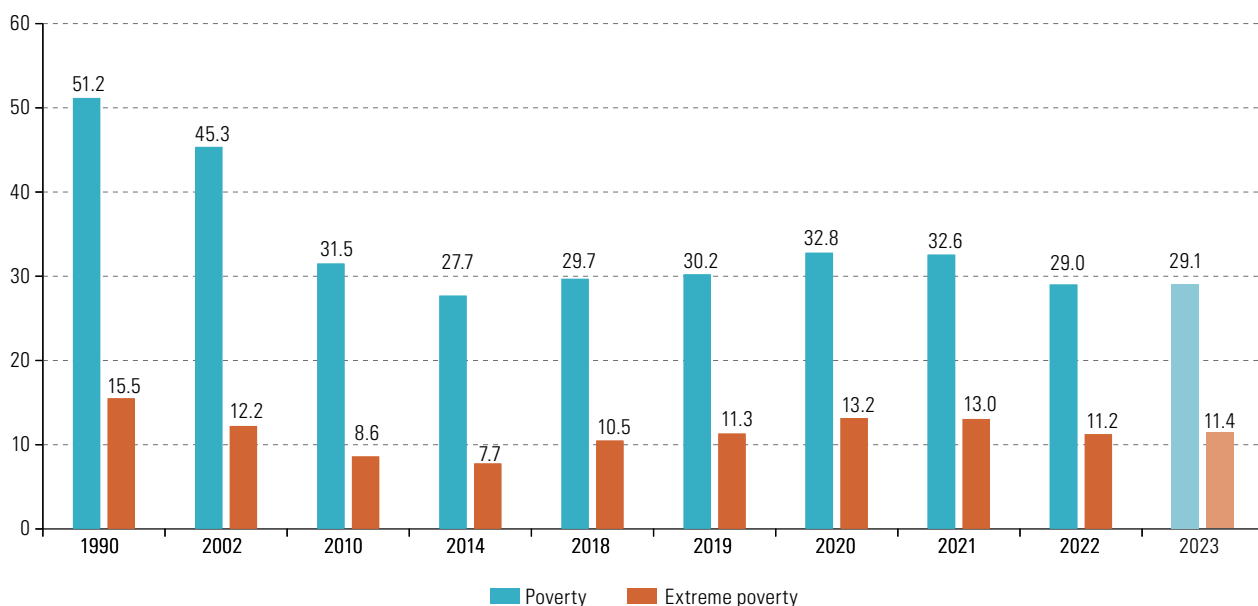
- A. Persistent poverty and vulnerability
- B. Income inequalities: structural, unjust and inefficient
- C. Gaps in capacity-building and access to basic services
- D. Deficits in labour inclusion and uncertainties linked to technological changes in the world of work
- E. Technological change: opportunities and risks
- F. Demographic, epidemiological and nutritional transitions
- G. Migration at the crossroads of inclusive social development
- H. Disasters and climate change
- I. Different forms of violence
- J. Major challenges of non-contributory social protection

The global and regional events of the past five years have created a social and economic scenario where the deepening and reconfiguration of structural factors, such as poverty and vulnerability, economic and social inequalities, is compounded by the emergence of new factors, such as demographic, epidemiological and nutritional transitions and the impacts of migration, technological changes and climate change. These factors must be examined with a view to guiding public policies to address current social challenges, as well as those that will arise in the coming decades. This chapter revisits the analysis of the critical obstacles to inclusive social development, originally prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) for the third session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2019), in light of ongoing changes and the cascading crises that emerged in the wake of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic.

A. Persistent poverty and vulnerability

Poverty and extreme poverty remain widespread in the region and recent trends do not appear to align with the targets of Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 1 (End poverty in all its forms everywhere). Although the region made some progress in recent decades —the poverty rate decreased from 51.2% in 1990 to 29.0% in 2022 (ECLAC, 2023d)—, the situation since 2014 has not been very encouraging. Recent years have been marked by setbacks stemming from the COVID-19 pandemic and the recovery process remains insufficient to achieve the Goal 1 targets (see figure II.1).

Figure II.1
Latin America (18 countries):^a poverty and extreme poverty rates, 1990–2022 and projections for 2023
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2023* (LC/PUB.2023/18-P/Rev.1), Santiago, 2023; and Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

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

In the region, the improvement in poverty indicators following various economic crises reflects institutional learning in terms of countries' response capacity. The 1982 crisis took such a heavy toll on Latin America that it took 14 years to return to the previous level of per capita GDP and 24 years for the poverty rate to return to pre-crisis levels. Given that the 2008 crisis differed in its causes and geographic origin, and given the

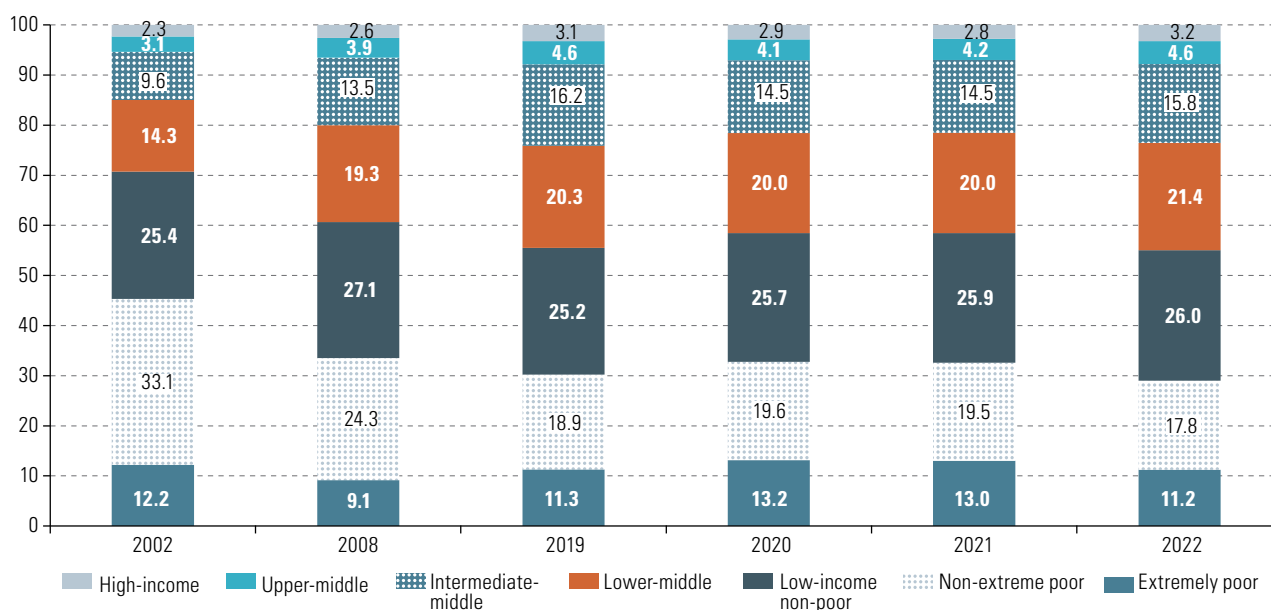
institutional lessons learned by countries, it was possible to limit its impact on poverty levels. Before the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, poverty indicators in the region were deteriorating, after several decades of progress (ECLAC, 2020b). The crisis led to a 2.5 percentage point increase in the poverty rate, which fell only three years later. Compared with the aftermath of the 1982 crisis, recent experiences show that social protection systems are more resilient and have better institutional capacities.

However, despite these institutional advances in public policy and improved resilience to crises, the extreme poverty rate climbed 3.7 percentage points between 2014 and 2022.¹ More than 70 million people were living in extreme poverty in 2023 (ECLAC, 2023d).

As indicated by ECLAC (2019), a large part of the region's population earns incomes that are only slightly above the poverty line, and thus is living in vulnerable conditions. Between 2002 and 2022, there were changes in income distribution that are reflected in the composition of socioeconomic strata, especially in the lower-middle and intermediate-middle income strata, which increased by 7.1 and 6.2 percentage points, respectively (see figure II.2). A common trait in these strata is that they are highly dependent on labour income and the impact of the pandemic highlighted their vulnerability (Martínez and others, 2022). However, the data indicate an improvement in the composition of the middle strata, as regional income distribution returned in 2022 to levels similar to those seen in 2019.

Figure II.2

Latin America (18 countries):^a population distribution in socioeconomic strata by per capita income,^b 2002, 2008, 2019, 2020, 2021 and 2022
(Percentages)



Source: R. Martínez and others, "Estratificación y clases sociales en América Latina: dinámicas y características en las dos primeras décadas del siglo XXI", *Project Documents* (LC/TS.2022/214), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2022.

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

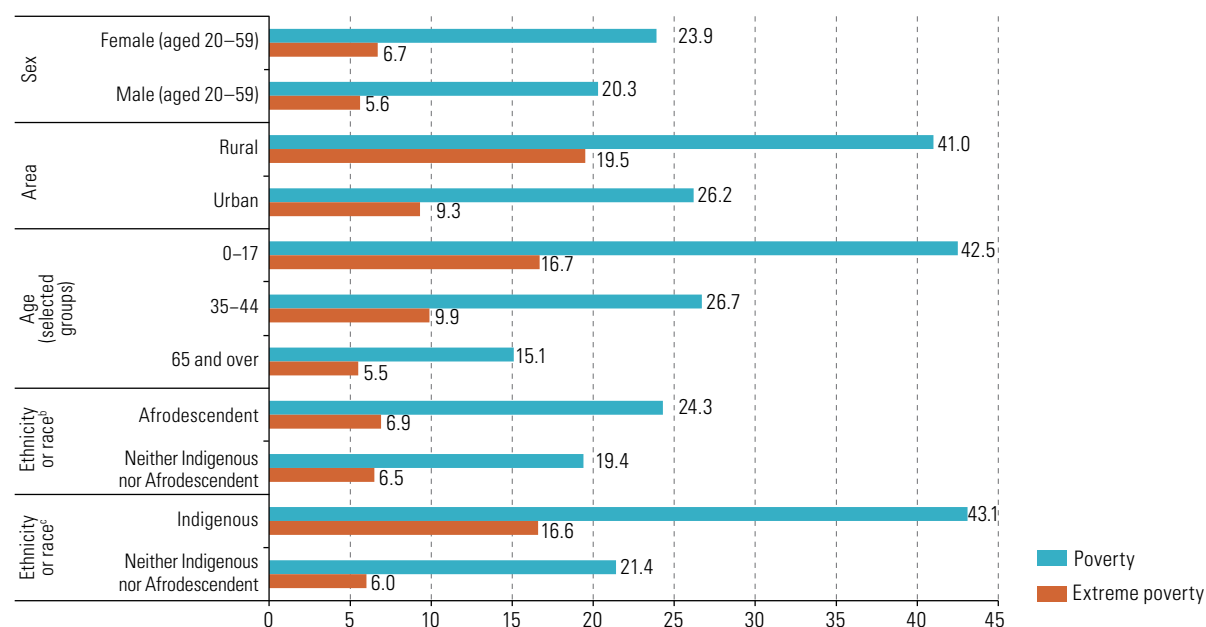
^b ECLAC estimates the stratum based on a classification of per capita income expressed as multiples of the poverty line, which is defined as the level of income needed for a household to meet the basic needs and well-being of all its members. The lower-middle stratum refers to households with incomes from 1.8 to 3 times the poverty line, the intermediate-middle stratum to households with incomes more than 3 times the poverty line and up to 6 times the poverty line and the upper-middle to households with incomes up to 10 times the poverty line (Martínez and others, 2022).

¹ The concept of extreme poverty refers to a lack of sufficient income to cover basic needs or purchase a basic food basket.

An analysis of the composition of the population living in poverty and extreme poverty in relation to the axes of the social inequality matrix (ECLAC, 2016b) shows that the incidence continues to be significantly higher among women, children and adolescents, Indigenous and Afrodescendent populations, persons with disabilities and rural populations (see figure II.3). In 2022, the proportion of Indigenous Peoples living in poverty (43.1%) was double that of the non-Indigenous and non-Afrodescendent population (21.4%). The situation is similar when comparing children and adolescents (42.5%) with adults (26.7%), and people living in rural areas (41%) with those in urban areas (26.2%). The lowest levels of both indicators are observed among men aged 65 and over who are neither Indigenous nor Afrodescendent (ECLAC, 2023d).

Figure II.3

Latin America (18 countries):^a people living in poverty and extreme poverty, by sex, area of residence, age and ethnicity or race, weighted averages, 2022
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2023* (LC/PUB.2023/18-P/Rev.1), Santiago, 2023; and Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

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

^b Refers to the following 8 countries: Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru and Uruguay.

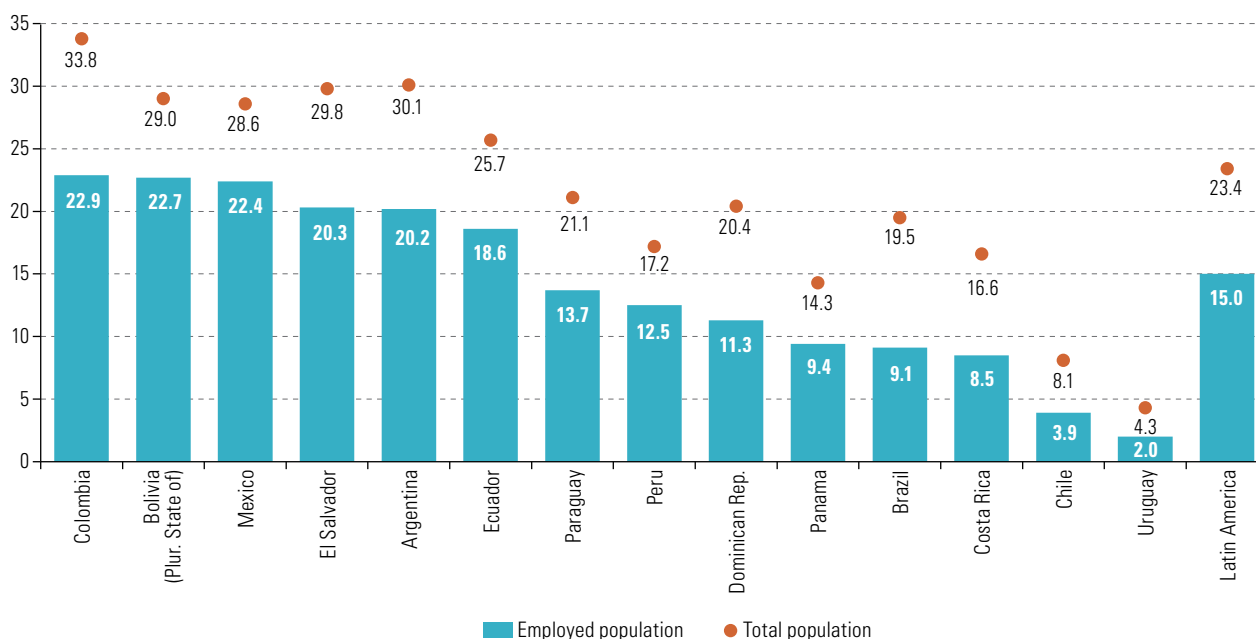
^c Refers to the following 11 countries: Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Guatemala, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

The COVID-19 pandemic led to significant setbacks in gender equality indicators. In the absence of comprehensive care systems in the region, the burden of caring for dependents and domestic work fell mainly on women, which further limited their opportunities to participate in the labour market and earn income (ECLAC, 2021b). In short, between 2014 and 2022 the femininity index of poverty increased in nine countries of the region (ECLAC, 2023d).

An analysis of poverty by employment status shows that, although rates are lower among the employed, being employed is no guarantee of earning sufficient income to rise above the poverty line (see figure II.4). On average, the probability of employed persons living in households with per capita incomes below the poverty line decreases by just over one third compared with the general population. In some countries, such as Mexico and the Plurinational State of Bolivia, it decreases by just over one fifth, while in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica and Uruguay, it drops by half.

Figure II.4

Latin America (14 countries):^a employed population and total population living in poverty, around 2022
(Percentages)



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

^a Weighted average. The data for Colombia and the Plurinational State of Bolivia refer to 2021.

To address these challenges, the strategic axes of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development concerning social protection and the social institutional framework include significant lines of action: income protection and access to mechanisms for social and labour inclusion, together with the establishment of integrated social information systems and the monitoring and evaluation of social entitlements to better identify and protect the populations most vulnerable to poverty. Another line of action is to incorporate care into social protection systems, from a perspective of gender equality and rights, promoting joint responsibility and the accessibility of care policies (ECLAC, 2020).

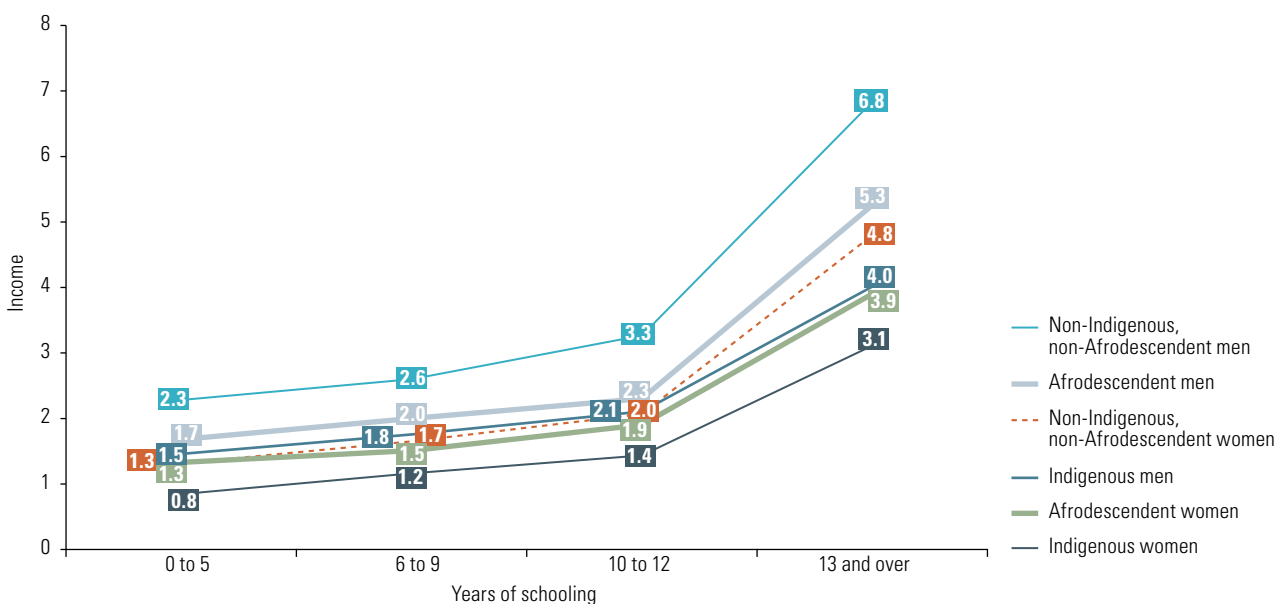
B. Income inequalities: structural, unjust and inefficient

According to ECLAC, inequality in income distribution in the region, as measured by the Gini index, declined from 0.534 to 0.466 between 2002 and 2017 (ECLAC, 2019). The post-pandemic economic recovery led to this decline in the estimated Gini index, of 1.1% per year between 2019 and 2022 (ECLAC, 2023d). Compared to 2019, income increased 0.8% above inflation in the lowest quintile, while in the highest quintile, it decreased by 1.8%, resulting in the aforementioned reduction in income inequality (ECLAC, 2023d).

Despite these trends, considerable gaps remain in the region, not only in terms of total income, but particularly with regard to labour income. ECLAC data indicate that, in 2023, the region's highest income decile (tenth decile) received an income equivalent to more than 20 times that of the lowest income decile (first decile) (ECLAC, 2024c). Moreover, this income inequality is exacerbated when analysing regional data according to the axes of the social inequality matrix (ECLAC, 2016b). As shown in figure II.5, the average hourly income earned by men who are neither Indigenous nor Afrodescendent with post-secondary education is US\$ 6.8, which contrasts sharply with that of Indigenous men and women with the same level of education (US\$ 4.0 and US\$ 3.1, respectively).

Figure II.5

Latin America (6 countries):^a hourly income of the employed population aged 15 and older, by sex, education level and ethnicity or race, around 2022
(Dollars at 2018 prices)



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

^a Weighted average for the following countries: Brazil, Colombia (2021 data), Ecuador, Panama, Peru and Uruguay.

In summary, although progress has been made, the remaining gaps represent a permanent challenge for inclusive social development policies. The importance of reducing income inequality is reflected in the first axis of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, “Universal and comprehensive social protection systems, to end poverty and significantly reduce inequalities,” whose lines of action include gradually and progressively incorporating a universal transfer for children and citizen’s basic income as active policies of social protection systems in the region. Under the second axis, “Policies to promote social and labour inclusion, to foster dual inclusion and leave no one behind,” one line of action is to deepen the analysis and dissemination of information on the inequalities that affect different populations and how these interact and exacerbate each other (ECLAC, 2020).

To measure the distribution of a society’s social well-being, it is not enough to consider income alone; other dimensions that contribute to well-being must also be analysed. Inequalities arising from social class, gender, life-cycle stage, ethnicity and race, and territory intersect and are mutually reinforcing, creating additional barriers that hinder access to opportunities and the exercise of rights (ECLAC, 2016b). Therefore, there is a need to measure these various manifestations of inequality and how they interact to better understand how they are produced, reproduced and amplified (or reduced) and implement more effective policies to address them. Data on structural inequalities in other areas, unlike income inequalities, are limited, of lower quality or insufficient to adequately reflect the reality or serve as a basis for robust measurements.

The multidimensional measurement of inequality must be taken into account to incorporate the different spheres of rights and capabilities in which inequality is expressed—not only the economic sphere—into the analysis. This would help to shed light on the impact of the axes of inequality on deprivations and gaps (income, wealth, education, health and housing, among others). In this sense, the inequality matrix is a useful frame of reference to operationalize the measurement of inequality in different dimensions in a coordinated manner, since many of them, such as the exercise of rights, capacity-building and the distribution of power and decision-making, are not made visible when analysing income alone.

C. Gaps in capacity-building and access to basic services

Together with income inequality, the persistence of gaps in the development of human capacity reflects the various dimensions in which inequality is expressed and hinders progress towards inclusive social development, preventing the full and healthy development of people and the exercise of their rights (ECLAC, 2019). Education, health and access to water and sanitation are not only social rights and determinants of people's well-being and opportunities, but also core areas for social investment to achieve productive economic development and inclusive social development.

Health is crucial to poverty reduction, as good health increases people's overall well-being, labour productivity and level of educational attainment and income (ECLAC, 2019). The region's health systems have made significant gains in recent decades: child mortality decreased from an average of 180,000 deaths of children under 5 in the mid-twentieth century to less than 20,000 in 2020, and life expectancy increased considerably, from an average of 50 years in 1950 to 75 years in 2019 (Marinho, Dahuabe and Arenas de Mesa, 2023). However, because of the COVID-19 pandemic, life expectancy at birth fell by 2.9 years between 2019 and 2021, with a more pronounced drop in Central America, illustrating the need to better coordinate health policies with social protection policies (Cid and Marinho, 2022) and education policies (ECLAC, 2022a).

The social determinants of health have a notable impact on the persistence of these gaps, as evidenced in the case of maternal mortality. The worst health conditions are not randomly distributed among the population, but rather are concentrated among groups living in poverty and extreme poverty, with lower incomes, worse working conditions, lower levels of education and greater difficulties in accessing health services, housing and basic services (Marinho, Dahuabe and Arenas de Mesa, 2023). In 2020, the region's highest maternal mortality rates were among women living in extreme poverty. One of the region's major challenges, which has not yet been adequately addressed, is to reduce adolescent pregnancy and motherhood (ECLAC, 2019). On average, 10% of adolescents in the region were mothers in 2020 (ECLAC, 2024e). Together with sub-Saharan Africa, Latin America and the Caribbean has one of the world's highest rates of births to adolescent mothers, estimated at 51.4 births per 1,000 women in 2022, 10 percentage points higher than the global average (United Nations, 2022).

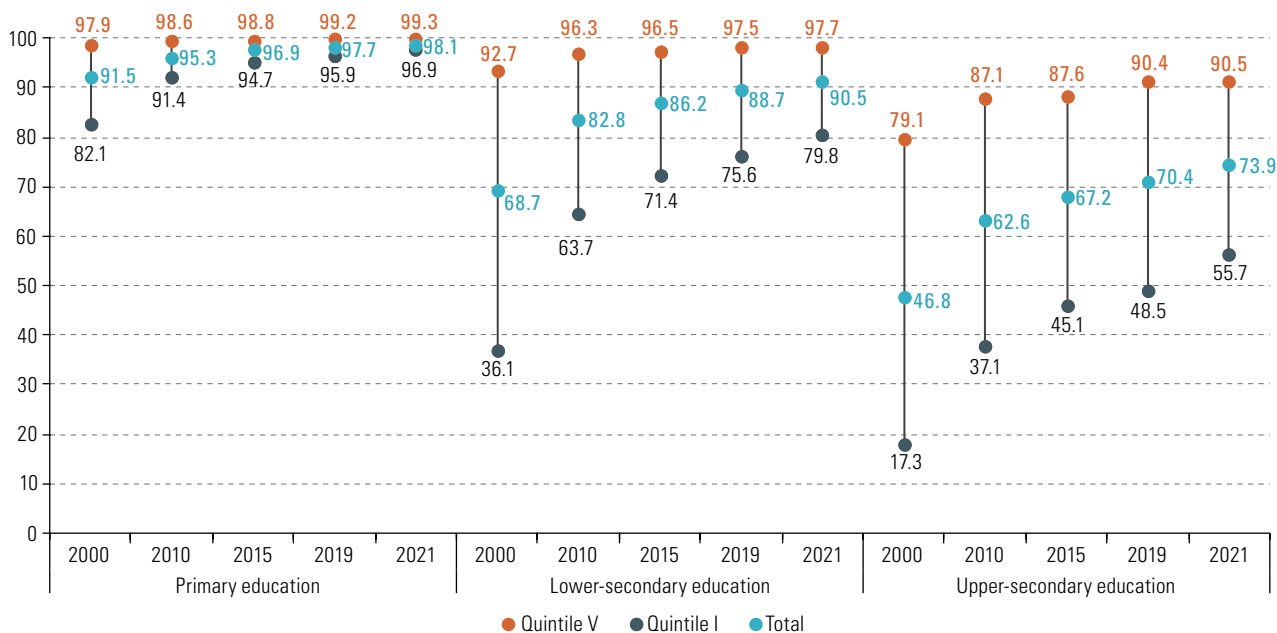
Technical and vocational education and training throughout the life cycle are closely linked to present and future opportunities to access better social conditions (ECLAC, 2019) and to the possibility of increasing productivity in a sustainable manner (ECLAC, 2023d). In this sense, access to quality education—a prerequisite for progress in areas linked to productivity and international competitiveness in sustainable development policies (ECLAC, 2022d)—remains a public policy challenge.

As shown in figure II.6, the percentage of the population that has completed compulsory schooling has increased in recent decades. Despite the narrowing of the gap between income quintile extremes, a significant gap remains in upper-secondary education, which could widen as a result of the crisis caused by the pandemic and its impact on the education system (Trucco, 2023a). The school attendance rate among the population aged 13–19 in the lowest income quintile improved after the interruption of school attendance during the pandemic—increasing by almost 17% between 2000 and 2022—but the levels of attendance in early childhood education had still not recovered by 2022 (ECLAC, 2024c).

Learning gaps also persist. The pandemic brought to light the vulnerability of the region's education system, especially the difficulty of ensuring access to education in adverse contexts, which affects the quality of learning (ECLAC, 2022a). The region already faced a learning crisis prior to the pandemic, as a large proportion of primary and secondary school students did not achieve the minimum levels of basic cognitive skills such as reading and mathematics (ECLAC, 2022a; Huepe, Palma and Trucco, 2023). The 2022 results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) for Latin America and the Caribbean show an average decline in test performance at regional level, although it varied considerably among countries (Trucco, 2023a). As noted by ECLAC, inequality is inefficient and in education it limits training capabilities and opportunities, which is detrimental both to students' personal pathways and countries' innovation and productivity growth (Trucco, 2023a).

Figure II.6

Latin America (14 countries):^a completion rate in primary, lower-secondary and upper-secondary education,^b by income quintile extremes, 2000, 2010, 2015, 2019 and 2021 (Percentages)



Source: D. Trucco, “Regional panorama of education”, presentation at the launch of PISA 2022 for Latin America and the Caribbean, Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of ECLAC, Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

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

^b Primary school completion among the population aged 15–19 and lower- and upper-secondary school completion among the population aged 20–24 were analysed.

Gaps in connectivity, access and digital skills add to the factors posing emerging challenges for social inclusion in several areas. The COVID-19 pandemic demonstrated the importance of household Internet connectivity and access to the technologies of the fourth industrial revolution.² Gaps remain between and within countries, which affect productivity and labour market entry in a highly digitalized world. In 2019, connectivity in urban households was six times higher than in rural households (ECLAC, 2019) and, in 2022, 74% of people in the lowest income quintile residing in rural areas did not have Internet access (ECLAC, 2024c).

Existing gaps in access to basic infrastructure and housing can be exacerbated in the event of disasters, including health crises (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) and economic shocks (such as inflation), which affect different population groups in different ways. Thus, in addition to the lack of Internet access in rural areas, challenges remain in terms of access to sanitation services, with coverage levels of 60.8% compared with 85.0% in urban areas (ECLAC, 2024c). In addition, overcrowding affects the most vulnerable populations, particularly in rural areas. According to 2022 data, 54.7% of lower-income households were overcrowded, compared to 19.2% of higher-income households (ECLAC, 2024c).

The current climate emergency and global geopolitical instability stemming from ongoing wars in other regions has had a significant impact on the region’s food systems —owing to increased food prices— and on food security levels, complicating the fight against hunger and intensifying the double burden of malnutrition. Between 2021 and 2023, Haiti had the highest level of undernourishment in Latin America and the Caribbean (50.4%), followed by the Plurinational State of Bolivia (23.0%) and Honduras (20.4%) (FAO and others, 2024).

² The term “fourth industrial revolution” is “used to frame and analyze the impact of emerging technologies on nearly the entire gamut of human development in the early 21st century, from evolving social norms and national political attitudes to economic development and international relations” (Philbeck and Davis, 2018, p. 17).

ECLAC stresses that inequality is inefficient and represents a major obstacle to growth, development and sustainability in the region (Arenas de Mesa, 2023; ECLAC, 2018d), which restricts countries' potential productive capacity. Studies carried out by ECLAC and the World Food Programme (WFP) in the region (Martínez, Mejía and Espindola, 2024) illustrate this with empirical data; for example, the costs associated with the impact of the double burden of malnutrition amount to more than 16% of GDP (see section II.6).

Furthermore, the multiple and persistent expressions of inequality, briefly outlined above, have a negative impact on social cohesion³ as they are linked to high levels of interpersonal and institutional distrust and hinder the development of a sense of belonging based on mutual recognition and the effective enjoyment of rights (Maldonado and others, 2022).

The lines of action proposed in the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development on these issues are even more relevant today. The Agenda stresses the need to advance in the development of policies and programmes enabling young people to build paths with greater inclusion and develop skills, as well as to prioritize actions aimed at ensuring more equal opportunities in early childhood and guaranteed access to education, health and housing. In the area of education and connectivity, the Agenda calls for taking advantage of the changes resulting from the current technological revolution and closing the digital divide in terms of access, knowledge and skills. It also calls for promoting access to housing policies and programmes, working to improve the living conditions of populations in informal settlements. The Agenda underscores the need to increase the response capacity of public institutions and the resilience of populations affected by humanitarian crises and disasters, during and after these crises, especially those with greater vulnerability and limited response capacity, such as children, women, older persons and persons with disabilities (ECLAC, 2020).

D. Deficits in labour inclusion and uncertainties linked to technological changes in the world of work

Work is central to the achievement of inclusive social development, in addition to being a fundamental mechanism for building autonomy and personal dignity and for the exercise of citizenship (ECLAC, 2019). In Latin America and the Caribbean, 70% of household income comes from work (ECLAC, 2023d), in a labour market characterized by gender and age gaps. Expanding labour inclusion—that is, labour market access under decent working conditions—remains a challenge in the region, as without it, opportunities to escape poverty and achieve upward socioeconomic mobility are severely limited.

As highlighted in the *Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2023*, the region's labour market has been undergoing a crisis since 2010, which is reflected in various labour indicators, and the COVID-19 pandemic "accentuated this trend and triggered the deepest crisis in Latin American and Caribbean labour markets since 1950. In 2020, job creation actually declined for the first time in 70 years" (ECLAC, 2023d, p. 14). The labour participation rate for 2023 is expected to remain, on average, slightly below pre-pandemic levels (63.0% in 2023 compared to 63.3% in 2019). Moreover, the data show the unemployment rate dropping below pre-pandemic levels, from 8.0% in 2019 to 6.8% in 2023, reflecting a more moderate pace of decline that year than that observed through 2022, when the rate reached 7.0%. However, the recovery of labour markets has not been accompanied by a narrowing of the longstanding gaps between men and women (ECLAC, 2022d, 2022c and 2023d).

The gender gap in the labour participation rate has persisted over recent decades. According to household survey data from 15 countries of the region, in 2022 the average participation rate was lowest among young women aged 15–29 (less than 40%), some 20 percentage points lower than adult women and young men (60.9% and 58.7%, respectively) and almost 50 percentage points below adult men, who have the highest participation rate (87.9%) (ECLAC, 2024c).

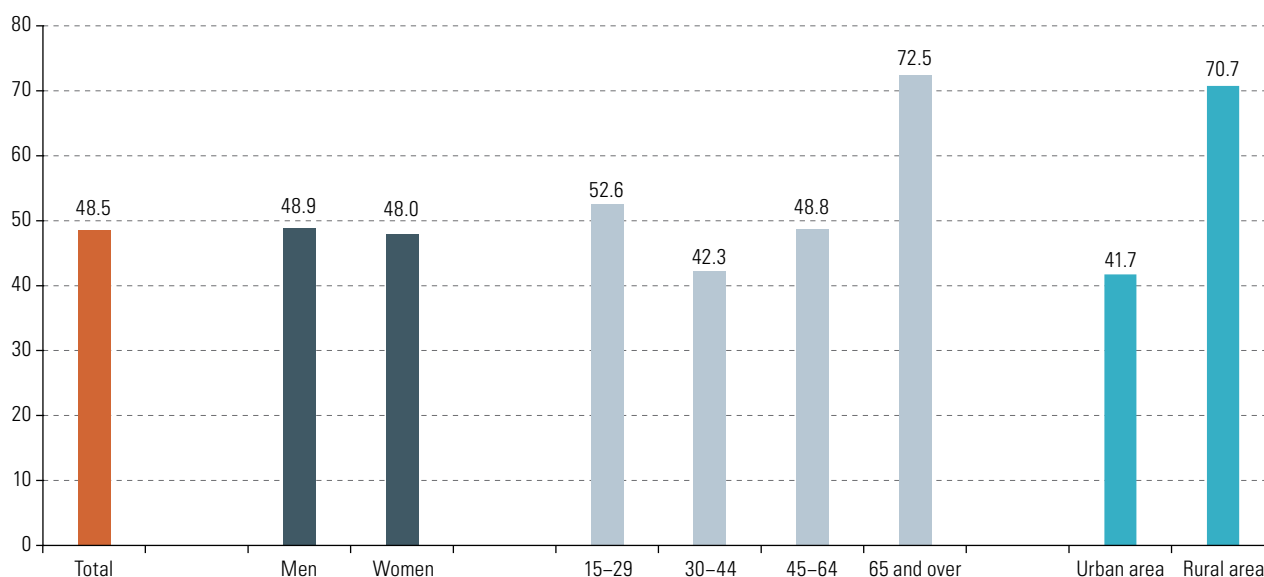
³ Understood as the links that unite and identify people as part of society and that motivate them to participate voluntarily in moving forward together towards a shared, legitimized understanding of the common good (Maldonado and others, 2022).

At the same time, it is important to highlight the unequal distribution of domestic and care work. Women's employment paths continue to be affected by this barrier to entering the labour market under decent working conditions, given the large amount of time, energy and resources they devote to these tasks. As mentioned above, during the pandemic, the lack of comprehensive care systems brought to light and exacerbated this situation.

In a reversal of the strong trend towards greater formalization of employment recorded in the 2000s in the region, job creation and quality fell between 2014 and 2023, increasing labour informality, which rose from 48.1% in 2014 to 50.4% in 2020 (ECLAC, 2023d). Employment survey data from 10 countries of the region show that, on average, the informality rate improved slightly across different population groups in 2023. As shown in figure II.7, informality in the region reached 48.5% in 2023. The highest rates of informality were among persons aged 65 and over and those living in rural areas registered (more than 70% in both cases), followed by persons aged 15–29 (52.6%). The fact that young people have higher rates of informality may be related to intermittent work arrangements, instability and high turnover, which may affect their future career paths and lead them towards informal, precarious and low-skilled activities (ILO, 2023). These gaps highlight the labour inclusion challenges that exist in different age groups, particularly young people, and between men and women.

Figure II.7

Latin America (10 countries):^a informal employment rate,^b by sex, age group and geographic area, 2023
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of processing of employment surveys from the region.

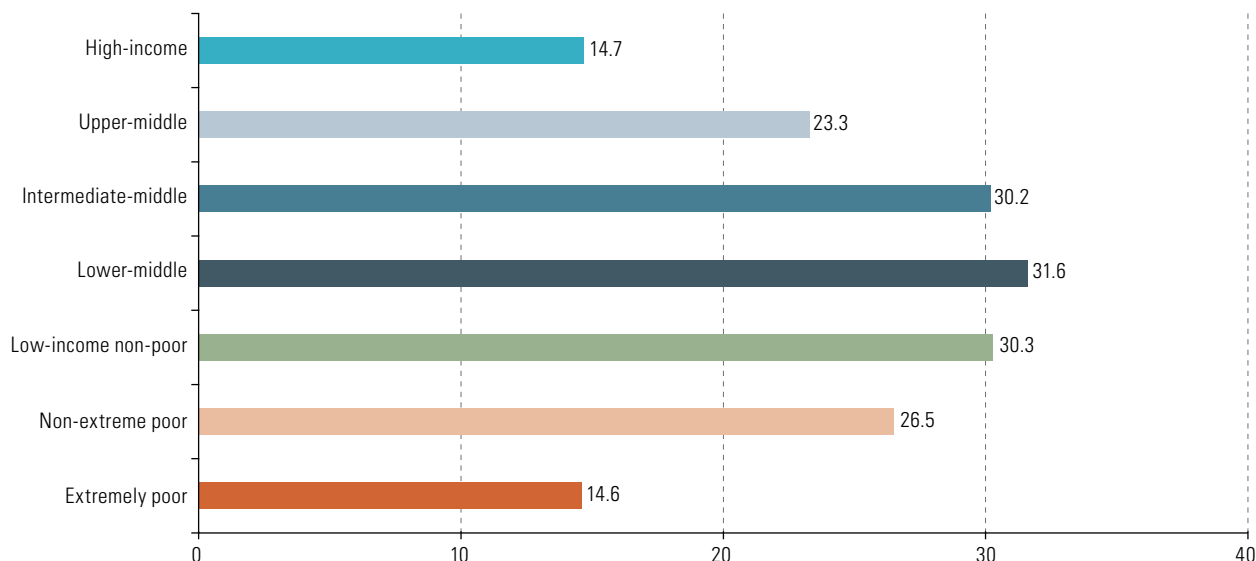
^a Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and the Plurinational State of Bolivia.

^b Weighted average.

An emerging labour inclusion challenge concerns changes in the world of work owing to automation. While emerging work arrangements are more flexible, they also carry a greater risk of casualization, as exemplified by work on digital platforms. This poses challenges for social protection systems, which must adapt to prevent unemployment and protect workers in a context where many tasks and occupations could be replaced or significantly transformed through automation (Espíndola and Suárez, 2023b). The probability that the work performed by skilled manual workers will be affected by automation is over 70% (Martínez, 2023). As shown in figure II.8, workers in the middle, lower-middle and low-income non-poor strata are in occupations that are at greater risk of automation, which can generate uncertainty, greater social unrest and job insecurity in previously stable sectors of economic activity (Espíndola and Suárez, 2023b). The lower risk of automation in the lower income strata of the labour market is not a positive reflection, rather it results from the limited investment in technology in these sectors and their structurally precarious working conditions.

Figure II.8

Latin America (14 countries):^a workers in occupations with a high probability of automation, by socioeconomic group, around 2019
(Percentages)



Source: E. Espíndola and J. I. Suárez, “Labour automation and challenges in labour inclusion in Latin America: regionally adjusted risk estimates based on machine learning”, *Social Policy series*, No. 245 (LC/TS.2023/121), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2023.

^a Weighted average of the following countries: Argentina (urban areas), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Peru, the Plurinational State of Bolivia and Uruguay.

Against this backdrop, ECLAC has highlighted the importance of promoting active labour market policies, which consist of interventions focused on reducing the effects of various labour market shortcomings. By emphasizing different areas (training, indirect and direct job creation, support for self-employment and labour intermediation), such policies are aimed at improving the efficiency of labour market integration, reducing unemployment rates and enhancing the quality of workers’ training (Espejo and others, 2023).

The second axis of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, “Policies to promote social and labour inclusion, to foster dual inclusion and leave no one behind”; aims to promote action focused on access to productive and quality employment and decent work for all, as well as to support the social and solidarity economy as a viable mechanism to address the deficit of decent work and labour market integration, in order to facilitate access to financing and employment in other modalities, such as cooperatives, mutual societies or associations. It also seeks to promote labour and productive inclusion policies and programmes that are focused on women by strengthening policies and care systems, training and the implementation of measures for the formalization of employment (ECLAC, 2020).

E. Technological change: opportunities and risks

The rapid development and rise of new technologies, digitalization and artificial intelligence are profoundly transforming how societies and economies function. This process presents opportunities as well as risks, making it one of the emerging critical obstacles to inclusive social development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The fourth industrial revolution brings changes in the demand for certain human skills and affects all areas of human endeavour, such as work, health, education, access to social services, citizen participation and access to information (ECLAC, 2019).

In terms of inclusive social development, digital inclusion becomes an increasingly critical factor as more and more activities take place in the digital sphere. The consequences of access to and use of the Internet can affect the exercise of people's rights, both in the real and virtual worlds, while also representing an opportunity to close gaps in different areas of well-being. This is why, in a highly digitalized and rapidly changing context, digital inclusion is crucial for closing gaps and overcoming structural inequalities in the region (Palma Guajardo, 2024).

As mentioned above, new technologies have enormous potential for improving productivity and well-being, but they also raise questions about job security in many sectors. The impact of new technologies in the world of work also requires rethinking education systems and the skills that children and young people should develop to facilitate their access to the labour market (ECLAC, 2019; ECLAC/OEI, 2020). To this end, vocational training and training systems in areas related to digital technologies should be promoted, with the aim of encouraging the development of "digital ecosystems" and improving employability (ECLAC, 2022d). At the same time, this new scenario calls for a culture of continuous learning throughout working life, as well as upskilling through vocational training and developing anticipatory policies that enable early adaptation (Espíndola and Suárez, 2023a). In addition, particularly in the case of girls, it requires working to eliminate gender segmentation in participation and learning outcomes in science, technology, engineering and mathematics disciplines (ECLAC, 2019; Sevilla, 2021; ECLAC, 2022a).

Digitalization has also had an impact on health systems, opening up opportunities to promote telemedicine, electronic health records and the transition from curative to preventive medicine, favouring more efficient, safe and timely healthcare management and delivery (Martínez, Palma and Velásquez, 2020). With regard to social institutions, new technologies can lead to greater availability of data and transparency in decision-making and strengthen the capacity of social protection systems to provide more effective and efficient responses to ensure economic, social and cultural rights. As public and social interaction also moves into the digital sphere, new linkages are forged with the State and the notion of digital citizenship arises, which refers to the ability (or inability) to exercise social rights through access to public services provided in digital format. This requires the implementation of concrete measures aimed at reducing existing gaps in access to and use of technologies, which affect many population groups (Martínez, Palma and Velásquez, 2020; Claro and others, 2021).

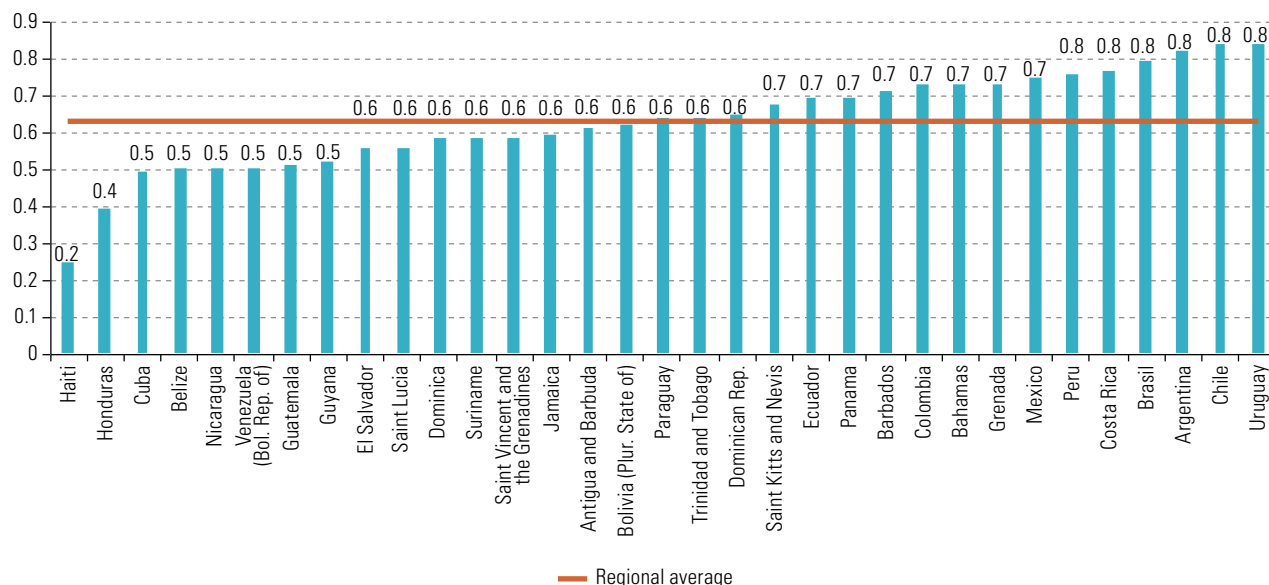
Such efforts require measuring the progress made in the use of digital technologies, not only at the citizen level, but also at the political level. A useful tool to this end is the e-Government Development Index, developed by the United Nations, which measures how each country uses new technologies to promote access and inclusion of its citizens. The index is composed of three dimensions (online service delivery, telecommunications connectivity and human capacity). Rather than providing an absolute measure of e-Government development, it serves as a means of cross-country comparison (see figure II.9) (United Nations, 2024b).

The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development offers several proposals to address technological changes from the perspective of inclusive social development, such as consideration of the challenges arising from the technological revolution in the world of work and other areas of society, and the development of policies and programmes that facilitate the acquisition of technological and digital skills, particularly for young people and women. It also raises the need to close the digital divide so that everyone can participate fully in the information society and harness the potential of technological tools to achieve greater social and labour inclusion. The Agenda also emphasizes the importance of considering the specific social protection challenges faced by informal workers, taking into account the new forms of informality that are emerging given the changes in the world of work (ECLAC, 2020).

Figure II.9

Latin America and the Caribbean: e-Government Development Index, 2022

(Index from 0 to 1)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Digital Development Observatory, on the basis of United Nations, “E-Government Development Index (EGDI)”, UN E-Government Knowledgebase [online database] <https://publicadministration.un.org/egovkb/en-us/About/Overview/E-Government-Development-Index>.

F. Demographic, epidemiological and nutritional transitions

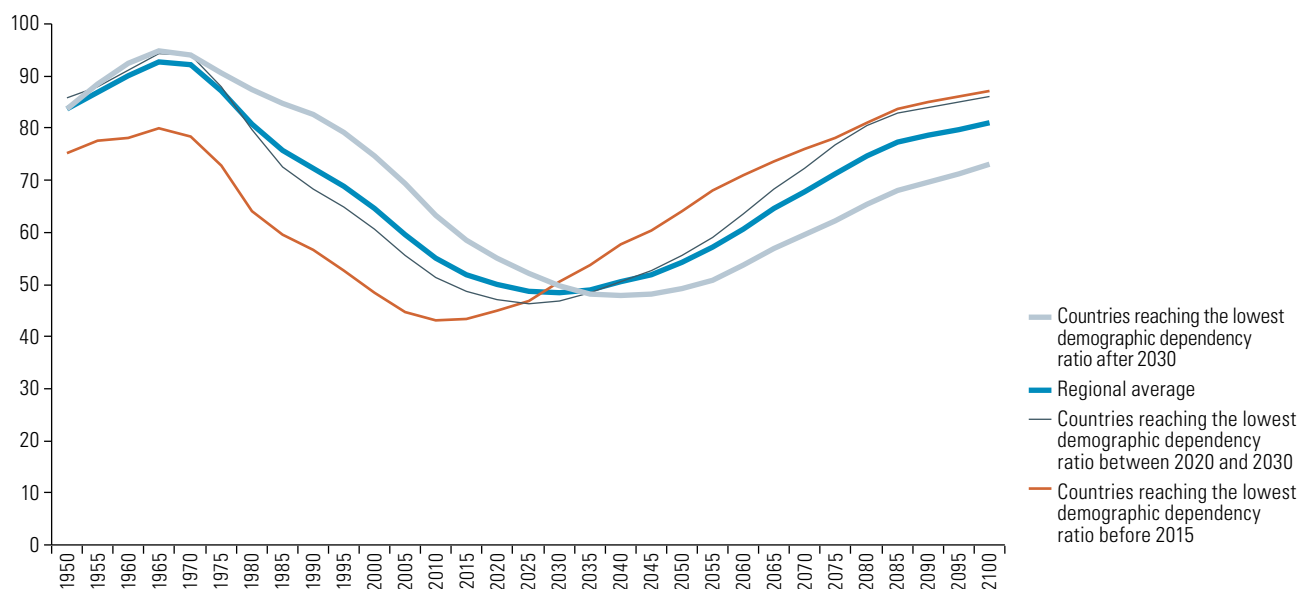
In recent decades, the region has undergone a series of demographic, epidemiological and nutritional transformations, marked by progressive population ageing, a decline in fertility and a higher prevalence of non-communicable diseases, overweight and obesity, without having succeeded in eradicating hunger and malnutrition in the vast majority of countries. Between 1960 and 2023, the total fertility rate fell from 5.9 to 1.9 children per woman, life expectancy at birth rose from 54.7 years to 75.8 years and population aged 65 and over in the region increased from 7.3 million to 57 million. In 2020, this age group represented 8.8% of the regional population and it is expected to represent 18.9% by 2050 (ECLAC, 2024c).

Today, most countries of the region are experiencing a demographic dividend as dependency ratios fall owing to lower fertility and mortality rates. This lower dependency ratio, coupled with the greater participation of women in the labour market, can increase household income and, consequently, help to reduce poverty, labour opportunities permitting. Figure II.10 shows that the demographic dependency ratio reached its lowest point—and therefore the peak of its demographic dividend—around 2015 or earlier in four countries of the region (Barbados, Brazil, Cuba and Trinidad and Tobago), and is expected to do so between 2020 and 2030 in 15 countries, including 7 of the 13 English- and Dutch-speaking Caribbean countries (Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Grenada, Jamaica, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Suriname). Twelve countries will reach the peak of the demographic dividend after 2030, including five of the seven Central American countries (Belize, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras and Nicaragua).

Looking to the future, a progressive increase in the region’s dependency ratios is expected in the coming decades, hand in hand with a decrease in the size of the labour force and an increase in the rate of population ageing. This will generate pressures on pension and health systems, and will hike up the demand for care (ECLAC, 2019), which could result in the progressive growth of the demographic tax. Failure to implement public policies that take advantage of the demographic dividend will lead to greater financial sustainability challenges in the short term related to the demand for resources in the area of social protection.

Figure II.10Latin America and the Caribbean (31 countries):^a demographic dependency ratio, 1950–2100

(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT [online database] <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/dashboard.html?lang=es>, on the basis of population and housing censuses of the countries.

^a Does not include Dominica and Saint Kitts and Nevis.

At the same time, the region is experiencing changes at the epidemiological level, characterized by an increase in non-communicable diseases, which in 2019 was the leading cause of death, accounting for 76% of deaths (PAHO, 2024a). Improvements in health systems, expansion in coverage, access to health services and basic services, and vaccination have been central to this epidemiological transition (ECLAC, 2019).

In parallel, a transformation of dietary patterns is taking place in Latin America and the Caribbean, resulting in the double burden of malnutrition mentioned above, that is, undernutrition combined with overweight and obesity (ECLAC, 2019). In 2023, hunger affected 41 million people in the region. In 2022, 27.7% of the regional population (182.9 million people) could not afford a healthy diet. The effects of the resulting malnutrition are particularly detrimental in childhood and adolescence. The prevalence of moderate or severe food insecurity in the region stood at 28.2% in 2023; in other words, that year, 187.6 million people had difficulties accessing sufficient food (110.4 million in South America, 51 million in Central America and 26.3 million in the Caribbean) (FAO and others, 2024).

Among children under 5 in the region, in 2022, the prevalence of stunting was 11.5% and the prevalence of overweight was 8.6%, 3 percentage points above the world average (FAO and others, 2024). Meanwhile, 29.9% of the adult population in Latin America and the Caribbean suffered from obesity, equivalent to 141.4 million people, which also exceeded the global estimate of 15.8% (FAO and others, 2024). These rates are owed in part to increasing levels of urbanization, which are linked to sedentary lifestyles and new eating habits. According to FAO and others (2023b), poor urban populations tend to consume unhealthy foods, since those of better nutritional quality are more expensive or unavailable. In addition, given their economic constraints, these populations prioritize their dietary energy needs over nutritional quality, thus they tend to purchase hypercaloric foods with minimal nutritional value.

Nevertheless, significant progress has also been made. Between 2000 and 2023, the prevalence of undernourishment decreased from 10.4% to 6.2% in Latin America and the Caribbean (FAO and others, 2024; FAO, 2024). Likewise, on average, the countries of the region have partially achieved Goal 2, specifically target 2.2, which was to achieve the internationally agreed targets on stunting and wasting in children under

5 years of age by 2025 —that is, to reduce the number of stunted children in this age group by 40% and attain a prevalence of childhood wasting of less than 5%. By 2022, the number of children with chronic undernutrition (low height for age) was down 43.6% compared to 2000, and the prevalence of global undernutrition (low weight for age) in children under 5 fell from 4.3% in 1990 to 1.7% in 2020 (ECLAC, 2024b and 2024c). Despite these positive trends, the targets for Goal 2 are not expected to be met on time and much remains to be done in this regard, while the double burden of malnutrition continues to affect children in particular.

The double burden of malnutrition affects several dimensions, such as health, productivity and education. According to ECLAC and WFP (Martínez, Mejía and Espíndola, 2024),⁴ the under-five mortality rate linked to undernutrition is estimated at almost 100,000 cases in the countries studied, in addition to almost 80,000 cases of acute respiratory infection and over 37,000 cases of acute diarrheal disease. In the sphere of education, estimates indicate that child malnutrition resulted in a schooling gap averaging two years of schooling. In turn, absenteeism from work resulting from the disease burden associated with overweight and obesity —primarily the effects related to arterial hypertension and type 2 diabetes mellitus— in the countries studied is estimated at more than 100 million working days lost during the year under analysis. In short, the impact of the double burden of malnutrition has amounted to a net loss ranging from 0.2% of GDP in Chile in 2014 to 16.3% of GDP in Guatemala in 2018 (Martínez, Mejía and Espíndola, 2024).

The multiple crises that have hit the region in recent years have placed social protection at the centre of public policy responses, with special priority given to those who are least able to absorb rising costs of food and other basic necessities. Considering the effect of malnutrition on children, coverage of households in which they live, as well as other groups such as pregnant women, older persons or persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples and migrants, is crucial (ECLAC/FAO/WFP, 2022).

The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development addresses this challenge through its axes and lines of action. Axis 1 raises the need to ensure a basic level of income for all, considering appropriate coverage and amounts of income transfers, —including non-contributory pensions for older persons and persons with disabilities in coordination with social security entitlements—, as well as entitlements and transfers aimed at children and their families. It also highlights the importance of moving towards greater interlinkage between the components of social protection systems, broadening their coverage, the adequacy of their entitlements and their sustainability, eliminating discriminatory mechanisms that may persist in the design of their instruments and drawing attention to the challenges faced by older persons and other groups in accessing these systems. The Agenda also establishes the need to incorporate care into social protection systems, ensuring that policies in this area are accessible to those in situations of dependency, including children, older persons and persons with disabilities, as well as their caregivers. It also points to the importance of incorporating a child-sensitive perspective in social protection entitlements. Axis 2 promotes actions that enhance the autonomy and dignity of older persons and full respect for their rights, including the right to live a life free of violence and the right to participation, with a focus on economic security and access to health and long-term care (ECLAC, 2020).

G. Migration at the crossroads of inclusive social development

Over the past five years, migration flows within Latin America and the Caribbean have doubled. In 2020, the region's migrant population amounted to 43 million people, of which 11.3 million were intraregional migrants (ECLAC, 2024d). The main push factors of these migratory processes include economic crises, political conflicts, vulnerability to situations of violence, disasters and family reunification, as well as the search for better opportunities in more developed regions (Maldonado, Martínez and Martínez, 2018).

⁴ Studies on the social and economic impacts of the double burden of malnutrition were conducted in eight countries: Chile (2014), Dominican Republic (2017), Ecuador (2014), El Salvador (2017), Guatemala (2018), Honduras (2017), Mexico (2014) and Peru (2019).

In general, young people are the age group most likely to assume the costs and risks of migration in search of better horizons and are more willing to join the labour force, even under precarious working conditions. In addition, the unemployment rate among migrants tends to be lower than that of non-migrants. In many cases, this goes hand in hand with greater job insecurity and lack of access to social protection, given the urgency of finding paid work (ECLAC, 2023d).

While migration boosts productivity, innovation and multiculturalism, massive and sudden flows of migrants create heavy burdens on public services, straining countries' capacities to provide adequate coverage of basic services and increasing poverty rates (ECLAC, 2019). In many cases, this is compounded by a perception that migrants compete with the local population for jobs, which fosters xenophobia, violence and exclusion. However, such views are not consistent with reality and often arise even when migrants have a positive economic impact in destination countries (Cruces and others, 2023). For example, according to ECLAC (2023d), the contribution of migrants in Chile increased from 1.8% of GDP in 2009 to 11.5% in 2022, while in the Dominican Republic this figure rose from 5.5% in 2010 to 8.7% in 2022, and in Colombia from 0.4% in 2010 to 4.8% in 2022. Migrants also contribute through the remittances they send to meet their families' basic needs in their countries of origin. Over the past decade, remittances have increased steadily, especially during the pandemic, growing 26% year-on-year in 2021 and 9.3% in 2022 (ECLAC, 2023d). In 2022, remittances accounted for about one fifth of GDP in Central American and Caribbean countries, such as El Salvador (23.8%), Haiti (22.5%), Jamaica (21.2%), Nicaragua (19.9%) and Guatemala (19.8%) (ECLAC, 2023d).

The vulnerability of migrants in destination countries is of particular concern, especially in the initial period of settlement, when the risks of labour inclusion under precarious working conditions are highest. This vulnerability can even lead to isolation in the absence of pre-existing networks, which can limit their opportunities to enter the formal labour market or prompt them to obtain jobs for which they are overqualified. During the pandemic, migrants were particularly vulnerable. Added to the fact that it was no longer possible to migrate again or to return to their countries of origin, the health situation reduced their job prospects and their ability to generate income (ECLAC, 2023d). Solving these problems requires national-level policies and regional agreements that target social protection challenges and consider the needs of migrants at different phases of the migration cycle (ECLAC, 2019).

Axis 1 of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development puts forward the need to include migrants in social protection systems, drawing attention to the specific challenges they face in accessing these systems, and to guarantee access to social protection at all stages of the migration cycle, contributing to the construction and strengthening of agreements on the portability of social security rights. Furthermore, line of action 2.13 highlights the need to promote actions to recognize and value migrants' positive contributions in destination and origin countries, establishing public instruments to address migratory phenomena and undertaking actions to facilitate the inclusion of migrants in education and health and their access to decent work (ECLAC, 2020).

H. Disasters and climate change

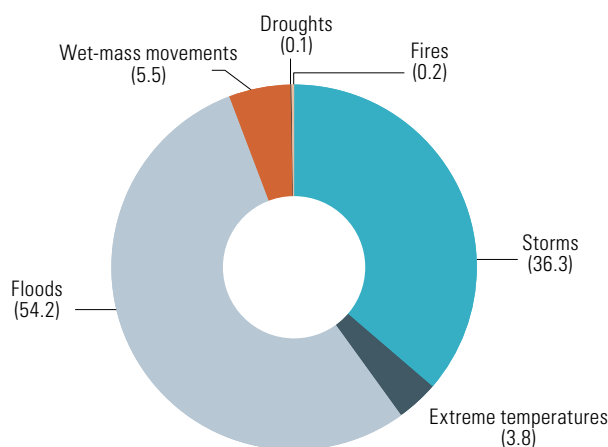
Latin America and the Caribbean is the second most disaster-prone region in the world, with people from lower socioeconomic strata being the most affected, which deepens existing inequalities.

Climate change has transformed some hydrometeorological events into a permanent and growing problem. Between 2000 and 2022, 190 million people were affected by more than 1,500 disasters in the region (OCHA/UNDRR, 2023), especially in the Caribbean, which is more vulnerable to such events. The human factor is also central, both in terms of the causes of disasters and the magnitude of their consequences, the COVID-19 pandemic being the most representative example of this. The repercussions of the pandemic were particularly strong in Latin America and the Caribbean. While the region's population accounts for only 9% of the global population (ECLAC, 2024b), at least 175 million people were infected and 2.8 million deaths were recorded, representing 15% of infections and 30% of deaths worldwide (OCHA/UNDRR, 2023).

Storms have increased in number and intensity in recent years, and the 2020 hurricane season was the most active on record in terms of the number of storms, which took a significant toll on the entire Caribbean basin. In addition, almost two thirds of the earthquakes with a magnitude of 8 or higher on the Richter scale have occurred in the region. For example, the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, which caused more than 222,500 fatalities, was one of the 10 deadliest in history. Floods are the most recurrent events, causing over US\$ 1 billion in damage in the period 2000–2022 (OCHA/UNDRR, 2023). As shown in figure II.11, floods are the hydrometeorological events that have caused the highest number of disaster deaths in the region between 1990 and 2022 (54.2%), followed by storms (36.3%) and wet mass movements (5.5%).

Figure II.11

Latin America and the Caribbean: deaths by type of disaster, 1990–2022
(Percentages of total deaths)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *The Challenge of Accelerating the 2030 Agenda in Latin America and the Caribbean: Transitions towards Sustainability* (LC/FDS.7/3), Santiago, 2024.

Disasters and climate change represent a significant challenge for the economies of small island developing States like those in the Caribbean, which have very high levels of exposure and vulnerability to disasters and which frequently bear enormous costs in terms of human lives and physical infrastructure. For example, the losses generated by Hurricane Maria in 2017 amounted to 226% of the GDP of Dominica (UNDRR/CRED, 2020). In addition, these countries' public coffers depend on tourism and agriculture, sectors that are particularly affected by natural disasters (ECLAC, 2021a). Therefore, social protection systems must adopt an approach that allows them to act before, during and after disasters, to respond to emergencies while strengthening the resilience of the most vulnerable populations, as established in target 1.5 of Goal 1 (ECLAC, 2021a and 2024b). It is essential to adopt a comprehensive approach—incorporating social protection into climate change and disaster management—to ensure a dual resilience (institutional and social). This requires greater institutional coordination between social protection and disaster risk management in order to effectively prevent disasters and guarantee universal access to basic services (ECLAC, 2021a and 2024b).

Axis 1 of the Regional Agenda on Inclusive Social Development highlights the importance of incorporating mechanisms to address these challenges in social protection systems. It also aims to increase the response capacity of public institutions and the resilience of disaster-affected populations, particularly those in living in the most vulnerable situations. The rationale for Axis 2 underscores the urgency of giving priority to populations affected by disasters and climate change and translating this attention into social and labour inclusion policies (ECLAC, 2020). Likewise, the position document of the fourth session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2021a) offers a series of proposals for dealing with disasters in a comprehensive manner, where non-contributory social protection and the information and registration systems managed by ministries of social development play a vital role.

I. Different forms of violence

Violence, in its various manifestations, threatens people's present and future, restricts their life choices, weakens the social fabric and democracy and corrodes interpersonal trust and trust in institutions, all of which affect social cohesion (ECLAC, 2019; Maldonado and others, 2021). The levels of violence in Latin America and the Caribbean, in terms of the number of homicides, are the highest in the world for a region without conventional armed conflicts, accounting for almost one third of intentional deaths globally. In 2021, the region registered 19.9 homicides per 100,000 inhabitants (UNODC, n. d.). The difference with other regions is particularly striking: that same year, the average homicide rate was 2.2 in Europe; 2.3 in Asia; 2.9 in Oceania; 6.3 in North America; and 12.7 in Africa (UNODC, 2023).

Organized crime, where it is most prevalent, poses a challenge to State authority as it competes with the State and, in certain sectors, takes over its functions, thereby eroding trust in public institutions (ECLAC, 2019). The gradual expansion of drug cartels and criminal groups to new territories in recent years is a warning sign that public policies are needed not only to respond to crime but also to prevent it, based on social inclusion and equal rights. Given the difficulty of combating organized crime once it is established in a territory, it is crucial to implement strategies to prevent it from taking root, in compliance with Goal 16 of the 2030 Agenda, on the promotion of peaceful and inclusive societies for sustainable development (ECLAC, 2024b).

Violence also has a clear gender dimension. In 2022, there were at least 4,050 women victims of femicide in the region (4,004 in Latin America and 46 in the Caribbean), according to data provided by official agencies (ECLAC, 2023g). Children are also particularly vulnerable: more than half of all children aged 1–14 experience violence, with prevalence levels exceeding 40% in all countries for which data are available, and the percentage is higher for girls and in urban areas (ECLAC, 2024b).

The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development addresses problems related to violence in two of its axes. Axis 1 mentions the inclusion in social protection systems of the challenges arising from the region's various emerging risks, including the impact of the various manifestations of violence, by designing instruments that are relevant to national and subregional realities. Axis 2 includes several lines of action that support the right to live a life free of violence, to combat violence against Indigenous Peoples, Afrodescendants and LGTBI persons, and to analyse the impact of violence on social and labour inclusion, governance, social cohesion and the enjoyment of rights (ECLAC, 2020).

J. Major challenges of non-contributory social protection

The countries of the region have segmented social protection systems with insufficient levels of coverage. According to data from the International Labour Organization (ILO, 2024b), around 2020, only 56.3% of the region's total population was covered by at least one social protection measure. This is compounded by growing fiscal pressure and challenges related to social protection access through more conventional mechanisms linked to employment and social security in a context of high labour informality (ECLAC, 2019; Robles and Holz, 2024).

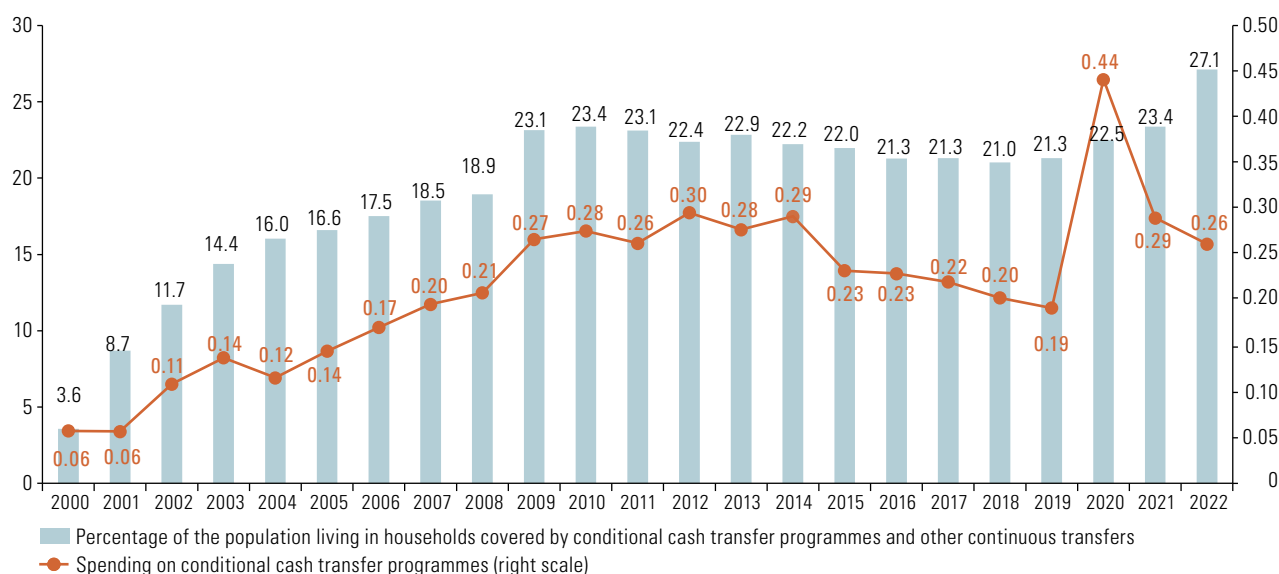
The COVID-19 pandemic led to a significant increase in social spending in the region, which reached a record high of 13.7% of GDP in 2020, before contracting to 12.7% in 2021 and to 11.5% in 2022, when it returned to pre-pandemic levels (ECLAC, 2023d). Against this backdrop, as shown in figure II.12, spending on conditional cash transfer programmes increased steadily from 2000 until 2012, when it stood at an average of 0.3% of GDP, then began to decline in 2014. In 2020, however, countries activated an unprecedented set of emergency non-contributory social protection measures in response to the pandemic (ECLAC, 2021a).

Consistent with these variations in spending, there was also a significant increase in coverage of conditional cash transfer programmes and other continuous transfers⁵ as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. From 2009 to 2019, the level of coverage held at between 21% and 23.1% of the region's total population, rising to 23.4% in 2021 and then to 27.1% in 2022.

⁵ Continuous transfers encompass conditional cash transfer programmes and other stable income transfers. In-kind transfers are not included (ECLAC, 2021b).

Figure II.12

Latin America and the Caribbean (20 countries): population trends in recipient households^a and spending^b of conditional cash transfer programmes and other continuous transfers, 2000–2022^c
(Percentages of population and GDP)



Source: N. Figueroa and J. Vila, “Programas de protección social no contributiva en América Latina y el Caribe: revisión metodológica de la estimación de tendencias de cobertura e inversión”, *Project Documents*, Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2024, forthcoming, on the basis of ECLAC, Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database - Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/home>.

^a Weighted average based on information on conditional transfer programmes and other continuous cash transfers from the following countries: Argentina, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay. For Brazil, data for 2020 refer to the coverage and expenditure of the *Bolsa Família* programme, and for 2021 and 2022 data refer to the *Auxílio Brasil* programme. This indicator includes conditional transfer programmes as well as other permanent income transfers, and excludes in-kind transfers and subsidies.

^b Simple average based on information on conditional transfer programmes and other continuous cash transfers from the following countries: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay.

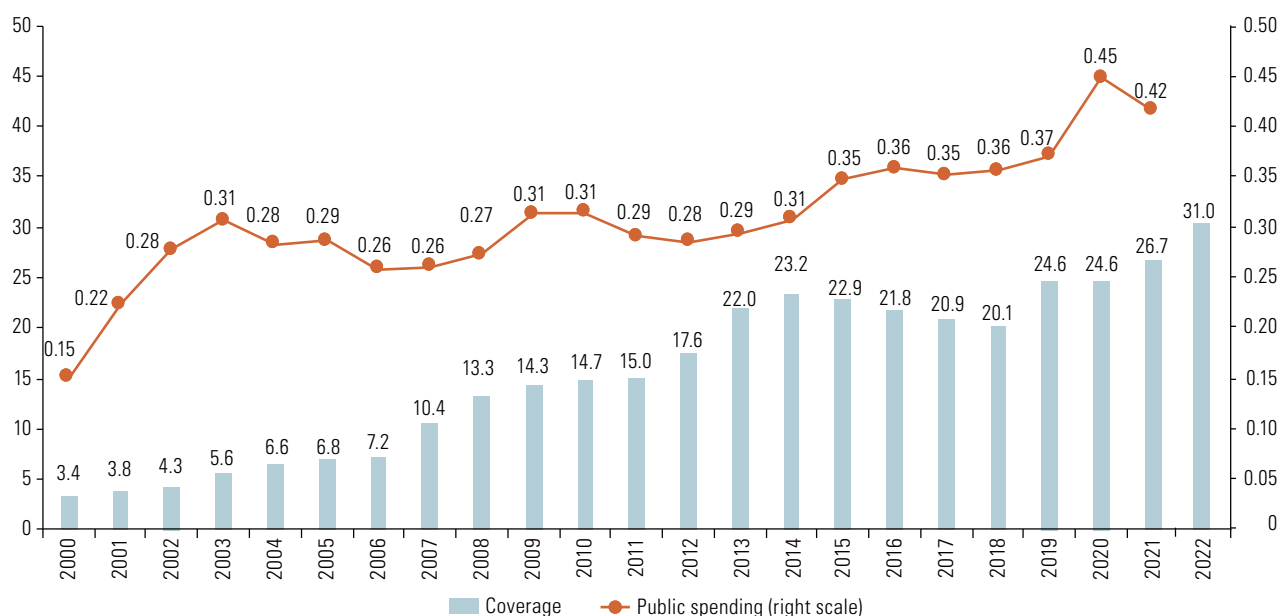
^c The method of Figueroa and Vila (2024) was used for the estimation of the complete series. The imputation of missing data by programme is done using the available data, assuming equivalence with the last available data or a linear relationship between the two closest available data.

The role played in the region by the expansion of public spending on non-contributory pensions and the increase in coverage is also noteworthy. This component of the pension system is aimed at providing income protection and a guarantee of financial security in old age, thus helping to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities at this stage of life. These are stable entitlements that are part of countries’ social protection systems, unrelated to individuals’ employment history and the contributions they make during their working years. Non-contributory pension coverage in Latin America and the Caribbean grew from 3.4% of the population in the early 2000s to 31% in 2022. During this period, public spending tripled to an all-time high 0.45% of regional GDP in 2020 on the back of increased disbursement during the COVID-19 pandemic, before dropping to 0.42% in 2021 (see figure II.13) (Arenas de Mesa, Espíndola and Vila, 2024).

Non-contributory pension systems have played a major role in reducing poverty and extreme poverty in old age, and expanding coverage in those countries where it is limited or non-existent will amplify this effect. However, given the aforementioned regional demographic trends and the low levels of coverage of contributory social protection systems, there will be increasing fiscal pressure to meet the growing demand with adequate levels of coverage and sufficiency, which, in turn, will require progress towards an robust and financially sustainable institutional framework for social policy (Arenas de Mesa and Robles, 2024). For reference, by 2060, the number of people aged 65 and over in the region is projected to be approximately 2.5 times the 2024 figure (United Nations, 2024). According to estimates by Arenas de Mesa, Espíndola and Vila (2024), gradually increasing the coverage of these systems to 40% of older persons by 2035 with a pension equivalent to the extreme poverty line would represent a total cost of 0.8% of GDP in 2035, representing additional spending of 0.4 percentage points over current investment in these entitlements. Meanwhile, increasing the adequacy of these benefits to meet the poverty line and coverage to 60% of older persons by 2035, would require a total public expenditure of 1.5% of GDP in 2035, implying a greater financial burden.

Figure II.13

Latin America and the Caribbean (24 countries): trends in coverage^a and public spending^b of non-contributory pension systems for persons aged 65 and over, 2000–2022
(Percentages of GDP and of the population aged 65 and over)



Source: J. I. Vila, C. Robles and A. Arenas de Mesa, Overview of non-contributory pension systems in Latin America and the Caribbean: analysis of their evolution and their role in old-age economic security”, *Non-contributory pension systems in Latin America and the Caribbean: towards solidarity with sustainability*, ECLAC Books, No. 164 (LC/PUB.2024/6-P/-*), A. Arenas de Mesa and C. Robles (eds.), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2024; and A. Arenas de Mesa, E. Espíndola and J. I. Vila, “Financial sustainability for the expansion of non-contributory pension systems and the eradication of old-age poverty”, *Non-contributory pension systems in Latin America and the Caribbean: towards solidarity with sustainability*, ECLAC Books, No. 164 (LC/PUB.2024/6-P/-*), A. Arenas de Mesa y C. Robles (eds.), Santiago, ECLAC, 2024.

^a Weighted average for: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay.

^b Simple average for: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Plurinational State of Bolivia, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago and Uruguay.

One way to ensure the financial sustainability of social protection is to improve tax collection. Although Latin America and the Caribbean is the region where the tax burden has increased the most in GDP terms since the 1990s—rising from 15.3% in 1991 to 22.7% in 2019 (ECLAC, 2023f)—, the resources allocated to social investment remain insufficient when compared to those of other more developed regions, and their continuity depends to a large extent on economic cycles. Likewise, tax evasion and avoidance erode the fiscal spending capacity of countries in the region, restricting the availability of resources to finance their development processes and implement social policies (ECLAC, 2019).

As demonstrated during the pandemic, political will is central to strengthening and expanding access to social protection with existing instruments, as well as incorporating new interventions that contribute to fulfilling social protection functions. A solid institutional framework that is stable over time and resilient enough to face changes and crises is also required. The existence of ministries of social development or equivalent entities, as the authorities responsible for non-contributory social protection policies, is a clear expression of the will to ensure social rights. These ministries have only been established relatively recently in the region and their number has been increasing since the 1990s. Today, 31 of the 33 countries of Latin America and the Caribbean have ministries of social development or similar entities (ECLAC, 2023b). Despite this progress, the region’s institutional framework for social policy remains vulnerable to fluctuations in the political environment, which in turn affects the continuity and financial sustainability of social policies. Strengthening this framework is essential to establishing effective governance capable of responding to the social problems of the population (Martínez and Maldonado, 2019).

A strengthened institutional framework for social policy also helps to overcome development traps linked to high inequality and low institutional and governance capacity in the region. There is thus a need to foster capacity-building to enable the transformation of circumstances in the various spheres of social policy. In particular, ECLAC has highlighted the importance of strengthening technical, operational, political and prospective (TOPP) capabilities to enhance the quality of public policies (Salazar-Xirinachs, 2023). These capabilities are clearly aligned with emerging challenges and needs imposed by the achievement of sustainable development and, more specifically, inclusive social development, and without them, effective and efficient governance of public institutions would be elusive.

As mentioned above, this goes hand in hand with the need to achieve financial sufficiency and sustainability, an area in which Latin America and the Caribbean still lags significantly behind developed countries. In 2020, while the countries of the region reached their highest level of public social spending, with an average of 13.7% of GDP, European Union countries spent the equivalent of 33.3% of GDP (ECLAC, 2023b and 2023d). Reaching adequate levels of spending for inclusive social development is therefore critical, especially for the achievement of Goal 1 (no poverty). Public spending by ministries of social development or equivalent entities averaged only 0.9% of GDP in 2021, equivalent to 3.5% of total public spending and 7.0% of public social spending that same year (ECLAC, 2023b). To make progress in closing the income gap of the poor population, ECLAC (2023b) indicates that an average annual increase of 0.1% of GDP would be required in public spending on non-contributory social protection income transfers for households. At the fifth session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, the countries of the region agreed to request that ECLAC, in its capacity as secretariat of the Conference, “undertake a more in-depth analysis of and identify policy alternatives and financing standards to develop a strong institutional framework for social policy and effective governance of decision-making in social policies, and to strengthen social protection systems by making progress regarding the universality, comprehensiveness, sustainability and resilience thereof in the region” (ECLAC, 2023c).

The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development addresses these challenges through its axes and lines of action. The first axis, focused on social protection systems, proposes the rationale of an integrated system with comprehensive goals, universal coverage and pertinent entitlements, that is integrative towards participants and adaptive to the particularities of populations and territories. A strengthened social institutional framework is the third axis of the Agenda and stands out as a fundamental means of implementation of the 2030 Agenda (ECLAC, 2020). One of its lines of actions is to promote the sustainability of social protection entitlements, maintaining the investment levels achieved, at least at their present value and avoiding cuts.

The elements presented in this chapter highlight the persistence and, in some cases, the worsening of the critical obstacles to inclusive social development in the region in recent years. Although countries have made breakthroughs in many aspects of social public policy and its associated institutional framework, more needs to be done to attain the goal of inclusive social development. At the root of existing critical are the characteristics of the current development model and the social inequality matrix. Progress has been made in the initial step of identifying these characteristics, but significant work remains to achieve sustainable development, leaving no one behind. These actions include the characterization and multidimensional measurement of inequality, as well as investment in quality policies (effective, efficient, sustainable and transparent) and the establishment of an institutional framework in line with current needs, while strengthening TOPP capabilities, in order to break from the inequality trap and make a quantum leap towards the desired goal of achieving inclusive, productive and environmentally sustainable development.



Priorities and key messages of Latin America and the Caribbean in preparation for the Second World Summit for Social Development

1. Inclusive social development contributes to economic and productive development and environmental protection, and vice versa
2. The social inequality development trap inhibits the exercise of rights
3. Inequality reduces social cohesion, fractures social compacts and erodes democratic governance
4. Social inequality is multidimensional and should be measured accordingly
5. Inclusive social development requires strengthening institutional capacities and social policy governance
6. Social protection systems must be universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient
7. Labour inclusion is the linchpin of inequality reduction
8. A minimum investment standard in non-contributory social protection is necessary to end poverty
9. Social dialogue and fiscal covenants are essential to achieve and sustainably finance inclusive social development
10. The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development is a renewed framework for multilateral cooperation

Chapter I presented the main social agenda milestones achieved at the international and regional levels since the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen in 1995, recounting the history of that agenda—including its numerous components and stakeholders—and the main contributions of Latin America and the Caribbean to the global discussion on inclusive social development. Chapter II offered an analysis of key challenges, both emerging and structural, for inclusive social development in the region, and provided an overview of progress achieved and work to be done to address the major challenges of the future.

On that basis, regional priorities can be identified to move towards social development with greater inclusion, reduced inequality and improved social mobility and cohesion. These are unstable and uncertain times, characterized by major structural transformations in the environment, technology, geopolitics and social issues and the emergence of globalization redefined. In the light of the region's history and current outlook, this chapter advances some key regional messages on inclusive social development, as inputs for the discussions to be held at the Second World Summit for Social Development.

1. Inclusive social development contributes to economic and productive development and environmental protection, and vice versa

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development proposes a vision and framework for action coordinated across the three dimensions of sustainable development—economic, environmental and social—and sets integrated and indivisible global goals and targets (United Nations, 2015b). Accordingly, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has proposed that synergy between economic, environmental and social development policies is needed to make progress towards societies that are increasingly adaptable to a changing environment and that foster and enable a just transition to sustainable development (ECLAC, 2022d, p. 266), recognizing that inclusive social development contributes to economic and productive development and environmental sustainability, just as sustainable economic development and environmental protection are necessary for the achievement of social and labour inclusion.

The region has long been trapped in a period of low economic growth owing to a vicious circle of structural heterogeneity, insufficient productivity, segmented and highly informal labour markets and limited human capacities relating to access to and quality of education, food, health and technology. Comprehensive public measures are needed to coordinate policies, in particular in the areas of productive development, labour inclusion, education and training, supported by social protection systems that are resilient to adverse circumstances in emerging situations (ECLAC, 2023b).

Inclusive social development is fundamental to the social dimension of sustainable development and, by extension, to economic growth. This relationship underscores the need to pursue social and labour inclusion and the greatest well-being possible, which includes the full exercise of economic, social, cultural and environmental rights for all under a universalist approach that is sensitive to differences (ECLAC, 2016b and 2018a). This requires comprehensive, transformative and high-quality policies to address inequality, and a productive transformation to achieve inclusive economic growth compatible with environmental protection (ECLAC, 2020).

The aim of stimulating inclusive social development through comprehensive and high-quality policies is to increase well-being, guarantee rights, build capacities, develop resilience, reduce inequality gaps and improve social mobility and cohesion. This, in turn, will help the region to break free of its three development traps: (i) low capacity for growth; (ii) high inequality and low social mobility and cohesion; and (iii) weak institutional capacities and ineffective governance (ECLAC, 2024f).

Inclusive social development is vital, both in terms of its crucial role in development strategies and its interdependence with economic and productive development and environmental sustainability. Accordingly, Latin America and the Caribbean calls for a redoubling of efforts to adopt inclusive social development measures focused on advancing social and labour inclusion and determining public policy priorities on the basis of methodologies, procedures and information systems that enable effective monitoring of progress.

2. The social inequality development trap inhibits the exercise of rights

In line with Sustainable Development Goal 10, ECLAC has repeatedly described high levels of inequality in Latin America as a development trap, attributable to at least six factors: (i) low economic growth, which generates sluggish labour markets with high levels of informality; (ii) regressive tax systems; (iii) weak social policies and social protection policies that do little to reduce the effects of production-based inequality; (iv) education and vocational training systems that present serious deficiencies; (v) gender inequality; and (vi) large inequalities and spatial segregation in urban areas, where 80% of the region's total population lives.

Overcoming this development trap requires an integrated approach that simultaneously addresses the above-mentioned factors; acting on only one or two of these fronts will not significantly reduce inequality. This may partially explain why inequality is one of the region's most characteristic and difficult-to-resolve challenges (ECLAC, 2024f).

Inequality limits the exercise of rights, and reducing it generates direct synergies in well-being across a range of areas and positive effects extending well beyond the social dimension. Inclusive social development policies must focus on remedying equality gaps and ensuring the effective enjoyment of rights, taking into account the factors that structure and perpetuate those gaps. They must also take a comprehensive and differentiated approach to facilitate the inclusion of the most marginalized populations, through initiatives to promote their rights and build their capacities. As recognized in the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, adopting a focus that is sensitive to differences helps to develop an approach to sustainable development that is systemic, redistributive and rooted in solidarity and financial sustainability (ECLAC, 2020).

Redressing social inequality is a socially effective and economically efficient objective, so it makes sense to pool the efforts of different stakeholders to that end. In a globalized and highly interconnected world, this involves multiple sectors of each of the region's countries and the international community as a whole. In recognition of the importance of this objective, efforts must be made to establish a shared institutional framework of regulations, standards and procedures to achieve the desired outcome.

3. Inequality reduces social cohesion, fractures social compacts and erodes democratic governance

Social inequality takes many forms, including societal fractures that result in low levels of social cohesion. Low social cohesion, in turn, is reflected in high levels of interpersonal and institutional distrust, with adverse effects on governance and efficiency; widespread vulnerability, helplessness and injustice among the population; low expectations for social mobility; a diminished sense of belonging; and weakened faith in democracy as the best form of government. Social cohesion is the invisible force that holds societies together, providing a sense of identity and motivating people to coexist and cooperate of their own free will, without the need for permanent external coercion or specific incentives, but it is difficult to achieve in deeply unequal societies. Sustainable development requires building a more cohesive social model, based not on rigid, inherited hierarchies but on the societal and institutional capacity to promote solidarity in social relations, with a focus on rights, and to create an atmosphere of security, trust and belonging in pursuit of a common good that is legitimate in the eyes of society's members.

Social unrest and violence in the region are symptomatic of the obstacles impeding greater social cohesion. The series of social upheavals that have occurred since 2019 in countries such as Chile, Haiti, Ecuador and Colombia are indicative of growing unrest associated with perceived social injustice, lack of access to basic services, and social and labour exclusion, among other factors, which lead to fractured social compacts and shaky democratic coexistence. Beneath this unrest lies a deep dissatisfaction with the way that social relations play out and the way that political power is distributed and exercised, as well as intense objections to inequalities (Maldonado and others, 2021).

Rising organized crime, illegal production and violence are linked to the development traps of low capacity for economic growth and job creation, high inequality, and States' weak institutional capacities to deliver quality social services, uphold the law and guarantee the exercise of rights in the public and private spheres. Rising organized crime stokes fear among the population, leads to the recruitment of young people into illicit activity, increases levels of violence and disproportionately impacts groups that have historically been vulnerable and suffered discrimination. This state of affairs damages social cohesion, breaking down interpersonal trust and public trust in institutions and the State, and contributing to democratic erosion (Maldonado and others, 2022). It is important, therefore, to strengthen countries' institutional frameworks and democratic governance, which largely determine the value that citizens place on democracy (Maldonado and others, 2021).

The situation described is linked to the empowerment and autonomy principle of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, which is key to genuine social integration at the individual, family and community levels, to self-determination and to freedom from all forms of violence and discrimination. Thus, public policy must take a comprehensive approach, linking efforts to create more opportunities and reduce inequality and discrimination with strategies to build the State's institutional capacities, accountability and ability to meet the unmet needs fuelling social unrest and undermining public trust and democratic legitimacy. This challenge concerns both individual countries and the international community as a whole. The security policies needed to address this challenge must include initiatives aimed at inclusive social development as well as productive development in order for crime prevention measures to be effective.

4. Social inequality is multidimensional and should be measured accordingly

Ending poverty in all its forms everywhere is the first Sustainable Development Goal of the 2030 Agenda, which recognizes that the issue of poverty is not purely monetary but encompasses a range of factors affecting social inequality (Espíndola and others, 2017). This has created an urgent need for multidimensional indices that complement monetary measurements to enable both the quantification and qualification of poverty and deprivation among various population groups, as well as the design of instruments to address poverty more effectively and efficiently. Indeed, the measurement of poverty in all its dimensions is one of the main objectives guiding the work of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2016a).

Accordingly, and given the characteristics of income distribution and well-being in the region as discussed in this document, inequality should be measured in a multidimensional manner. As reflected in the social inequality matrix (ECLAC, 2016b), this challenge is multidimensional, rooted both in the structural heterogeneity of the region's economies and in the cultural norms that have historically legitimized social inequality. Key differentiating factors, including socioeconomic status, gender, stage of life and territory, have a direct impact on gaps in well-being and the exercise of rights in many areas of people's lives. However, as discussed in chapter II, social inequality has traditionally been measured by income and consumption, while gaps in the exercise of social rights, power and participation—which are substantial in the region—are analysed in isolation, if at all.

Multidimensional approaches present challenges for Latin America and the Caribbean; they require the development of information sources for more complete and accurate measurement and qualification of inequality. Measurements for poverty have been developed over a long period of time, but integrating the multidimensional measurement of social inequality into institutional frameworks requires methodological consensus before the relevant dimensions, indicators and procedures for effective and reliable analysis in the region can be determined.

However, these challenges should not prevent decisive action to develop the analytical and empirical capacities to measure multidimensional inequality; indeed, the 2030 Agenda explicitly refers to the negative effects of inequality and recognizes the need to reduce it in Sustainable Development Goal 10. New developments in information technology and the increasing expansion of data sources in various fields constitute a major

opportunity for progress on the multidimensional measurement of social inequality and the strengthening of institutional capacities to implement comprehensive and effective public policies to reduce inequality. However, harnessing this opportunity requires a willingness to share experiences, information, knowledge and capacities among the public and private sectors, and international cooperation to strengthen national measurement capacities while ensuring that all countries have access to the needed digital technologies for use and adaptation.

5. Inclusive social development requires strengthening institutional capacities and social policy governance

Social institutions and social policy governance are interconnected owing to their complementary and mutually reinforcing relationship. A solid and well-designed social policy framework provides the necessary framework for effective governance, streamlining the decision-making process and harmonizing the various factors involved, such as regulated negotiation spaces, citizen participation, accountability, transparency and financial sustainability (ECLAC, 2023b). Proposals to strengthen institutions within ministries of social development include: (i) regarding the legal dimension, consolidating laws and regulations in line with the rights-based approach and strengthening coherence between objectives and legal mandates and the capacity of social policy institutions; (ii) regarding the organizational dimension, investing in human resources, capacities and technology to ensure positive outcomes, and advancing efficiency and sustainability objectives through coordination, decentralization and participation; (iii) regarding the technical and operational management dimension, investing in information systems for decision-making, strengthening systems for monitoring and evaluation of social policy and expanding the metrics for decision-making to take into account the three dimensions of sustainable development; and (iv) regarding the financial dimension, allocating sufficient and sustainable resources to address challenges and conduct more studies on the socioeconomic costs of existing social gaps. From a cross-cutting perspective, strategic and foresight planning are also proposed (ECLAC, 2023b).

At the fifth session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, countries emphasized the strengthening of social information systems and social registers (ECLAC, 2023b) as a priority issue in advancing institutional frameworks for social policy and as key instruments for identifying gaps and inequalities in access to services. Information is vital to the strengthening of social protection systems, in particular amid the recurring crises and profound changes of the present moment, in which up-to-date, quality information is essential to endow these systems with the resilience and adaptability they need to enable timely responses and reduce social vulnerability. Better management requires the use of technology, but the processing and use of data to achieve better management must be people-centred and respectful of rights, in line with democratic standards of transparency.

Effective governance helps to strengthen institutional frameworks by adequately taking into account relevant factors, aligning with the wishes of incumbent stakeholders and designing strategies to those ends. In this context, capacity-building becomes a key strategy for strengthening institutional frameworks and enabling governance of public administration. Decisive investment is needed to enhance institutions' technical, operational, political and prospective (TOPP) capabilities, which are essential for more effective and transformative policies (Salazar-Xirinachs, 2023).

The third axis of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development is a strengthened institutional framework for social policy, and a number of areas are identified for progress in that regard. These include encouraging the adaptation of national legal frameworks to align with the mandates of the main international legal instruments on economic, social and cultural rights, and strengthening the regulatory frameworks of national entities responsible for social development policies and mechanisms for vertical coordination among levels of government. In addition, the Regional Agenda places special emphasis on a number of vulnerable population groups and highlights the need to incorporate and strengthen the statistical identification and visibility of young people, women, older persons, persons with disabilities, Indigenous Peoples, Afrodescendent populations, the LGBTI community and the homeless (ECLAC, 2020).

Another principle of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development relates to high-quality social development policies focused on a more effective pursuit of objectives, more efficient implementation and more sustainable outcomes, with a solid institutional framework that is sufficiently resourced (in human, financial and technical terms) and accountable and that facilitates the active participation of society and the public (ECLAC, 2020). In the current context, greater efforts should be made to strengthen social institutions with a view to improving the technical design and implementation of comprehensive inclusive social development policies. Strengthening national institutions and cooperation among countries and regions are two crucial areas in which the region has key lessons to share and gaps to close.

6. Social protection systems must be universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient

According to the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Sustainable Development, social protection systems play a crucial role in inclusive social development, as they aim to directly help people to exercise their social rights by guaranteeing universal access to an income that provides an adequate level of well-being, as well as universal access to social services (such as health, education, water and sanitation, and housing), and by supporting labour and social inclusion, as well as decent work (ECLAC, 2020). As the countries emphasized in the framework of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, for these systems to fulfil their role and contribute to the full realization of the population's economic and social rights, they must be universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient (ECLAC, 2022e and 2022a).

One of the enduring lessons of the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic is that social policy must not limit its focus to the poor; rather, it should aim towards universality, expanding income protection mechanisms, where needed, to encompass the entire population, in particular the low- and middle-income strata, in which people are highly wage-dependent and can be pushed into poverty by adverse shocks. Thus, to ensure a timely and effective response to the needs of the population, as well as social and labour inclusion and the exercise of human rights, programmes must become more innovative and flexible, both in terms of accessibility and capacities to respond, in order to identify and include recipients, in particular for informal and migrant workers and other historically marginalized groups, with a view to combating and preventing poverty (ECLAC, 2021a).

To be universal, social protection must take all people into account from a perspective of universalism that is sensitive to differences, prioritizing entitlements and instruments adapted to distinct populations according to the types of exclusion and vulnerability that they face, in order to address the various forms of inequality (ECLAC, 2020; Arenas de Mesa, 2023). To be comprehensive, systems must provide a joined-up supply of services that encompasses the multiple dimensions of poverty and inequality through horizontal coordination (among sectors of public administration) and vertical coordination (among levels of government), and take a differentiated approach to demand, distinguishing between the needs of individuals, families and communities according to stage of life and population characteristics (e.g. gender, socioeconomic status, ethnicity, culture) (Cecchini and Martínez, 2011).

To be sustainable, social protection systems must ensure the continuity of their constituent policies over time to fulfil coverage, sufficiency and financial sustainability commitments to current and future generations (Arenas de Mesa, 2019 and 2023; Cecchini and Martínez, 2011). To be resilient, social protection must strengthen individual and community response capacities to reduce vulnerability to economic, social and environmental disasters, taking into account the particular risk matrix of each population, and it must ensure that its institutions have the capacity to address emerging needs without diverting attention from permanent social services (ECLAC, 2020 and 2021a).

The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development highlights the need for measures with the characteristics described above to be taken within the framework of social protection systems in order to improve the well-being of the population in general and of vulnerable groups in particular (ECLAC, 2020). In this area, non-contributory social protection instruments are especially important, in particular income transfers

(conditional and non-conditional), financial assistance in the form of subsidies and cash transfers, and the provision of services, as well as non-contributory pension systems, all of which have expanded considerably in the region but face challenges of sufficiency and financial sustainability looking towards the future.

Priority measures for regional progress include consolidating the guarantee of a basic level of income, prioritizing people living in poverty and extreme poverty; a possible gradual implementation of a universal transfer for children; and a basic citizenship income as an active policy under social protection systems (ECLAC, 2020). These measures should take into consideration the considerable expansion seen in non-contributory pension systems and the lessons that can be distilled from that institutional consolidation in order to make progress at the opposite end of the life cycle (i.e. income protection for households with children and adolescents). Likewise, care systems should be viewed as a right that is central to social protection, and they should be expanded and linked to the other components of the social protection system (contributory, non-contributory and labour market regulation) (ECLAC, 2020). Another increasingly important objective is to link social protection systems with disaster risk management systems for improved prevention and resilience (ECLAC, 2021a).

Social protection systems should be considered a cornerstone of countries' development agendas. To achieve Sustainable Development Goal 1 and progress towards inclusive sustainable development that leaves no one behind, universality, sufficiency and financial sustainability are crucial challenges to address in social protection systems, in particular their non-contributory components. This would facilitate the achievement of the social protection levels needed to protect living conditions and facilitate the full development of personal capacities amid the growing challenges presented by the reconfiguration of risk structures and the multiple transformations currently under way. A broader commitment is needed from both the public and private sectors to identify technical, policy and financial alternatives that enable the consolidation of universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient social protection systems as quickly as possible to accelerate progress towards the eradication of poverty and hunger and the reduction of inequalities in the region.

7. Labour inclusion is the linchpin of inequality reduction

ECLAC has proposed that employment is the key to reducing inequalities (ECLAC, 2010). Labour inclusion must be strengthened to ensure that all members of the labour force have access to decent work that provides adequate pay and social protection coverage (ECLAC, 2023d). In that regard, labour inclusion is a critical dimension of inclusive social development and a prerequisite for social inclusion and the exercise of individual rights. To progress towards that objective, an institutional framework and set of regulations for labour policy must be consolidated. In view of the significant labour informality in the region and the structural transformations to meet labour market demands, the development of solid social protection systems, together with active labour market and productive development policies that stimulate labour markets and boost decent job creation, is critical to robust labour inclusion and improved job quality (in line with Sustainable Development Goal 8).

A number of strategic policies can be implemented in this area. Contributory policies include those that expand coverage for informal and independent workers and ensure that pension contributions are portable. Regulatory policies include vital progress towards strengthening labour inspections and regulating new forms of employment. Non-contributory policies —overwhelmingly the domain of ministries for social development (or their equivalents)— include the range of policies that address income protection for workers in transition and skills-building, in particular in coordination with active labour market policies, as well as improved complementarity between such policies and comprehensive care policies (Huepe, 2023; Espejo and others, 2023; Robles and others, 2024).

The importance of labour inclusion is emphasized throughout the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, in particular axis 1, which calls for developing social protection systems that incorporate the full range of functions relating to income protection, closing gaps in access to social services and to policies for labour inclusion and promotion of decent work (ECLAC, 2020, p. 21). In addition, axis 2 underscores the importance of fostering dual inclusion —in social policy and labour markets.

Given the substantial nature of the transformations under way in the world of work and the essential role of labour inclusion in inclusive social development, a renewed call is warranted to strengthen labour inclusion policies in designing social protection systems and to foster synergies with the set of active labour market and inspection policies. In that regard, there is great need of difference-sensitive universalism to remove access barriers to decent jobs for vulnerable populations and eliminate gender and other inequalities in the labour market.

8. A minimum investment standard in non-contributory social protection is necessary to end poverty

Strengthening institutional frameworks for social policy includes ensuring the financial sustainability of social investments. Axis 3 of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development (a strengthened social institutional framework) refers to the need to safeguard and consolidate social policy funding, which requires resource protection and guarantees, in particular for the well-being of the most vulnerable groups (e.g. children and adolescents). It also emphasizes support for the stability of social protection entitlements, safeguarding entitlement levels and advocating for fiscal covenants that ensure financial sustainability. In addition, it calls for a renewed conception of social policy funding as an investment and for support for analysing its impact on poverty and inequality (ECLAC, 2020).

One way to raise awareness about the positive impact of social policies is to produce and disseminate studies on the socioeconomic cost of existing social gaps, as these testify to the importance of investing in social policy, and in social protection systems more broadly (ECLAC, 2023b).

The COVID-19 pandemic showed that increasing social spending and enhancing capacities to implement social policies is feasible. As discussed in chapter II, ECLAC has proposed gradually increasing the resources allocated to non-contributory social protection transfers to close income gaps for people experiencing poverty or extreme poverty (ECLAC, 2023b). The aim is for the countries of the region, through their ministries of social development or equivalent entities, to increase spending on non-contributory social protection policies to a target of at least 1.5%–2.5% of GDP or 5%–10% of annual public spending, with a view to ending poverty.

Taking into account the existing poverty gaps and institutional capacities of each country, the proposed target offers an achievable and sustainable path for financing the needed transfer amounts and administrative expenditures. Moreover, it definitively addresses the challenges of inequality and poverty in the region and directly contributes to countries' inclusive social development and economic development.

9. Social dialogue and fiscal covenants are essential to achieve and sustainably finance inclusive social development

Broad agreements and social dialogue will be fundamental in implementing the measures needed to achieve inclusive social development objectives in a politically and financially sustainable manner. Measures to shore up legitimacy and build confidence are critical for ministries of social development or equivalent entities to effectively and efficiently fulfil their mandates and missions in pursuit of inclusive social development.

Citizen participation and social dialogue in the planning, design and implementation of social policies are key to strengthening the nexus between society and government authorities. Social dialogue facilitates progress towards inclusive social development by including various social stakeholders in consultative, informative and decision-making processes. Establishing permanent forums for dialogue, recognition and conflict resolution leads to a deeper relationship based on decisions that attend to the needs and interests of different sectors. This enables the prevention and management of tensions that tend to arise among populations, communities and private stakeholders and strengthens social cohesion (Maldonado and others, 2021).

Social dialogue includes mechanisms for political negotiation among different social stakeholders to reach agreements that consider the costs and benefits of social policy. Crucial agreements for ensuring the sustainability of inclusive social development include fiscal agreements to allocate sufficient and sustainable resources to inclusive social development initiatives and measures (ECLAC, 2023b).

To be sufficient and sustainable over time, dialogue and consensus-building processes should engage all stakeholders. Networks should comprise representatives of the public sector, civil society, academia, the production sector and international cooperation bodies, to create the fiscal space to safeguard the financial sustainability of social protection (ECLAC, 2023b,). This represents a challenge for all countries in the region, in particular Caribbean small island developing States, which are regularly impacted by natural disasters with catastrophic consequences that drive up their debt levels. Consequently, the developed world, major corporations and international financial institutions must all engage in dialogue and facilitate agreements to ensure the financial viability of policies to end poverty and hunger, guarantee universal access to basic social protection and reduce inequality.

10. The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development is a renewed framework for multilateral cooperation

The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, adopted by the member States at the third session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, offers a framework of principles and strategic guidelines to advance the implementation of the 2030 Agenda in the region. It reaffirms the value of multilateralism and collaboration among countries which, in the light of emerging challenges and multiple international crises, are more important than ever—if not indispensable.

The fourth axis of the Regional Agenda recognizes regional cooperation and integration as essential mechanisms for the exchange of experiences and solutions to shared problems. Indeed, as noted by the working group on regional cooperation and integration of the Regional Conference on Social Development, Latin America and the Caribbean faces many shared challenges despite the highly diverse experiences of its countries. To that end, bilateral and multilateral cooperation capacities should be strengthened, and opportunities for collaboration should be systematized and widely disseminated to take experiences and shared solutions to a broader audience.

International cooperation offers a path to improving public policies and escaping the aforementioned development traps. In view of the crises and uncertainty dominating the current landscape, these types of experiences help to reduce inequalities among countries, both within and beyond the region.

Thus, there is a need to come together and share experiences with agreements such as the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, and to work harder on their implementation. Such exchanges between countries and regions will convert multilateralism into actual public policies for inclusive social development—a key component of sustainable development— while leaving no one behind.

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Annexes

Annex A1

Means of implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals related to the social agenda

Goal	Means of implementation	Mechanism
1	1.a	Mobilization of resources to combat poverty
	1.b	Creation of policy frameworks to combat poverty
3	3.b	Support for research and development of vaccines and medicines
4	4.a	Access to adequate learning environments
	4.b	Expansion of scholarships for developing countries
5	5.a	Access to economic resources (e.g. land ownership, financial resources, natural resources)
	5.b	Enhanced use of technology
6	6.b	Increased participation of local communities in improving water and sanitation management
8	8.b	Improvement of youth employment opportunities through a global strategy and the implementation of the Global Jobs Pact of the International Labour Organization
10	10.c	Reduction of transaction costs of migrant remittances and elimination of more costly remittance corridors
12	12.b	Creation of tourism sector jobs and promotion of local culture and products
13	13.b	Raised capacity for climate change-related planning and management in developing countries
14	14.b	Provision of access for small-scale artisanal fishers to marine resources and markets
15	15.c	Increased capacity of local communities to pursue sustainable livelihood opportunities with a view to combating poaching and trafficking of protected species
16	16.b	Promotion and enforcement of non-discriminatory laws and policies for sustainable development
17	17.1	Domestic resource mobilization to improve national capacity for tax collection
	17.2	Fulfilment by developed countries of all existing official development assistance-related commitments
	17.18	Increased availability of demographic data

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of United Nations, *The 2030 Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals: an opportunity for Latin America and the Caribbean* (LC/G.2681-P/Rev.3), Santiago, 2018.

Annex A2

Relevant dimensions of institutional frameworks for social policy in the targets of Sustainable Development Goal 17

Category	Target	Relevant dimensions
Finance	17.1 Strengthen domestic resource mobilization, including through international support to developing countries, to improve domestic capacity for tax and other revenue collection	F
	17.2 Developed countries to implement fully their official development assistance commitments, including the commitment by many developed countries to achieve the target of 0.7 per cent of gross national income for official development assistance (ODA/GNI) to developing countries and 0.15 to 0.20 per cent of ODA/GNI to least developed countries; ODA providers are encouraged to consider setting a target to provide at least 0.20 per cent of ODA/GNI to least developed countries	F
	17.3 Mobilize additional financial resources for developing countries from multiple sources	F
	17.4 Assist developing countries in attaining long-term debt sustainability through coordinated policies aimed at fostering debt financing, debt relief and debt restructuring, as appropriate, and address the external debt of highly indebted poor countries to reduce debt distress	O/F
	17.5 Adopt and implement investment promotion regimes for least developed countries	F
Technology	17.6 Enhance North-South, South-South and triangular regional and international cooperation on and access to science, technology and innovation and enhance knowledge-sharing on mutually agreed terms, including through improved coordination among existing mechanisms, in particular at the United Nations level, and through a global technology facilitation mechanism	O/T
	17.7 Promote the development, transfer, dissemination and diffusion of environmentally sound technologies to developing countries on favourable terms, including on concessional and preferential terms, as mutually agreed	O/T
	17.8 Fully operationalize the technology bank and science, technology and innovation capacity-building mechanism for least developed countries by 2017 and enhance the use of enabling technology, in particular information and communications technology	O/T
Capacities	17.9 Enhance international support for implementing effective and targeted capacity-building in developing countries to support national plans to implement all the Sustainable Development Goals, including through North-South, South-South and triangular cooperation	O/T
Trade	17.10 Promote a universal, rules-based, open, non-discriminatory and equitable multilateral trading system under the World Trade Organization, including through the conclusion of negotiations under its Doha Development Agenda	L
	17.11 Significantly increase the exports of developing countries, in particular with a view to doubling the least developed countries' share of global exports by 2020	F
	17.12 Realize timely implementation of duty-free and quota-free market access on a lasting basis for all least developed countries, consistent with World Trade Organization decisions, including by ensuring that preferential rules of origin applicable to imports from least developed countries are transparent and simple, and contribute to facilitating market access	L/O
Systemic issues: policy and institutional coherence	17.13 Enhance global macroeconomic stability, including through policy coordination and policy coherence	L/O
	17.14 Enhance policy coherence for sustainable development	L/O
	17.15 Respect each country's policy space and leadership to establish and implement policies for poverty eradication and sustainable development	L/O
Systemic issues: multi-stakeholder partnerships	17.16 Enhance the Global Partnership for Sustainable Development, complemented by multi-stakeholder partnerships that mobilize and share knowledge, expertise, technology and financial resources, to support the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals in all countries, in particular developing countries	O/T/F
	17.17 Encourage and promote effective public, public-private and civil society partnerships, building on the experience and resourcing strategies of partnerships	O/F
Systemic issues: data, monitoring and accountability	17.18 By 2020, enhance capacity-building support to developing countries, including for least developed countries and small island developing States, to increase significantly the availability of high-quality, timely and reliable data disaggregated by income, gender, age, race, ethnicity, migratory status, disability, geographic location and other characteristics relevant in national contexts	T
	17.19 By 2030, build on existing initiatives to develop measurements of progress on sustainable development that complement gross domestic product, and support statistical capacity-building in developing countries	T

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Note: L = legal/regulatory; O = organizational; T = technical/operational; F = financial.

In the 30 years since the World Summit for Social Development held in Copenhagen, inclusive social development has played an increasingly central role in the region's policies, institutions and performance. However, big challenges remain as new risks are emerging, and these must be addressed with new agreements and better policies to achieve inclusion and ensure the exercise of social rights, as recommended in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development.

Amid the major changes, various crises and new conflicts under way, the Second World Summit for Social Development, to be held in 2025, represents a critical moment for reviewing progress thus far, analysing the current context and adopting decisions for a future with more equality and greater social mobility and inclusion. It will give the region an opportunity to set forth its needs, priorities and recommendations. This document presents a brief history of the social development agenda over the past 30 years, along with progress and challenges relating to the social inequality matrix at present and messages for ministers of social development in Latin America and the Caribbean to consider in the lead-up to the Summit, to advance towards inclusive social development.