Sustainable Development Goal

Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Progress in Latin America and the Caribbean up to 2026

7 AFFORDABLE AND CLEAN ENERGY

Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 7 and human rights

The human rights focus of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development stems from an explicit grounding in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights and international human rights treaties, in addition to other instruments, such as the Declaration on the Right to Development (art. 10).

The SDGs are universal in scope, seeking to "realize the human rights of all" in developed and developing countries alike. The recognition of the need to fight poverty and inequalities in the 2030 Agenda is evident in its focus on reaching the furthest behind first and ensuring that no one is left behind —a principle which underpins the central, transformative promise of the 2030 Agenda and its 17 SDGs.

Although the SDGs are not specifically framed in human rights terms, many of their targets align with international standards. Goal 7 (Affordable and clean energy)[1] is directly related to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights with regard to the rights to health and to an adequate standard of living. It also has links to other human rights instruments, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women, the Convention on the Rights of Persons with Disabilities and the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.[2]

Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all Targets include ensuring universal access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services; increasing the use of renewable energy; improving energy efficiency; enhancing international cooperation in research and the use of clean and renewable technologies, as well as in improving energy efficiency; and expanding infrastructure and upgrading technology to supply modern and sustainable energy services.	• **The right to an adequate standard of living**: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 25) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 11). • **The right to enjoy the benefits of scientific progress and its applications**: Universal Declaration of Human Rights (art. 27) and International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights (art. 15, para. 1.b).

The mechanisms that comprise the universal human rights protection system, namely the universal periodic review, human rights treaty bodies and special procedures, make recommendations to each Member State (see Universal Human Rights Index https://uhri.ohchr.org/en).

Source: Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights.

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1 The transition to sustainable energy envisaged under Goal 7 entails respecting, protecting and guaranteeing the right to a clean, healthy and sustainable environment, while minimizing the adverse impacts of energy projects on human rights. This requires ensuring access to information and participation: empowering people to take part in decision-making on energy policies, particularly with regard to renewable energy projects, is essential to guarantee the exercise of human rights.

2 See https://www.humanrights.dk/files/media/migrated/sdg-goal-7.pdf.

Regional overview

In recent years, Latin America and the Caribbean has made progress towards the achievement of Goal 7. Four of the five targets under this Goal are advancing at an adequate pace and are likely to be met by 2030 (7.2, 7.3, 7.a and 7.b). The region has reached near-universal access to electricity and the sustained increase in the share of renewable energy in final energy consumption has positioned Latin America and the Caribbean among the regions with the cleanest energy mix. However, the share of fossil fuels in final energy consumption remains significant, particularly in transport, industrial processes and heating. Progress on improving energy efficiency has slowed in recent years, which may jeopardize the achievement of this target. Meanwhile, progress on improving access to affordable, reliable and modern energy services has been moderate and efforts must be accelerated to meet the target, particularly in rural and hard-to-reach areas. Another challenge is the high level of electricity losses in transmission and distribution systems, which reduces overall system efficiency, increases supply costs and limits the effective impact of energy efficiency policies.

Key facts on the region

- The regional electrification rate increased from 91.7% in 2000 to 98.5% in 2023. That same year, access to electricity stood at 99.7% in urban areas and 92.9% in rural areas.
- In the lowest income quintile, 3.6% of the region's population lacked access to electricity in 2024; this figure rose to 10.2% in rural areas.
- The share of the population relying primarily on clean cooking options increased from 79.9% in 2000 to 88.8% in 2023. In urban areas, 94.2% of the population uses clean cooking technologies, while in rural areas this figure drops to 64.7%.
- While around 89% of households in the region use gas, in rural areas, more than one third of households continue to rely on firewood, charcoal or kerosene for cooking.
- In 2024, non-combustible renewable sources (hydropower, wind, solar and geothermal) accounted for 64.5% of regional electricity generation, compared with 29.5% generated from fossil fuel-based thermal sources and 2.0% from nuclear energy. Hydropower alone accounted for 44.7% of total generation.
- In 2024, fossil fuels accounted for 66.9% of primary energy in the region, while renewable sources represented 33.1%.
- The share of renewable energy within total final energy consumption has remained between 28% and 31% over the past two decades, although it rose to 32.6% in 2022.
- Regional energy intensity[3] declined from around 1.52 megajoules per dollar to 1.25 megajoules per dollar between 2004 and 2023, representing a cumulative improvement of nearly 18% over two decades.

[3] Energy intensity is measured as the total energy supply in megajoules per unit of GDP expressed in constant purchasing power parity dollars at 2021 prices.

Good practices in the region

- In Colombia, the Energy Communities programme enables rural communities to organize to generate their own electricity from renewable sources (solar energy and small hydropower plants), thereby fostering energy autonomy.
- In El Salvador, a targeted subsidy for liquefied petroleum gas, granted on the basis of socioeconomic criteria and to households with low electricity consumption, contributed to increasing coverage of clean fuels and technologies from 58.4% in 2000 to 94.4% in 2023.
- Through public budget resources, investments by private operators and green loans from multilateral banks, Santiago has become one of the cities with the largest fleets of electric buses for public transport, with the incorporation of 308 units in 2025. According to estimates, 7 out of every 10 buses in the local public transport network were electric in March 2026.
- The Energy Efficiency Programme in Brazil, the regulation on energy management for large energy consumers and public sector organizations in Chile and the official standards for non-residential buildings in Mexico have shifted consumption patterns and achieved energy savings.
- In Central America, with the support of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), and in close collaboration with the Central American Integration System and national energy authorities, five energy compacts have been established to align positions on issues such as the effects of climate change, food security, transport and biodiversity.
- The Regional Forum of Energy Planners, supported by ECLAC, serves as a permanent platform for technical cooperation to promote capacity-building and knowledge-sharing among government entities responsible for energy planning.
- ECLAC has developed a methodology to measure energy poverty in the region, which encompasses the dimensions of access, quality and affordability.

ECLAC recommendations

- It is recommended to expand energy access in Latin America and the Caribbean by prioritizing decentralized renewable energy systems for last-mile and off-grid areas; implementing pay-as-you-go systems; applying cross-subsidies and targeted subsidies where feasible; and undertaking strategic investments in electricity grids to enhance stability, reduce outages and improve overall service quality and reliability.
- Advancing the expansion of modern renewable energy beyond the electricity sector requires accelerating the electrification of transport, replacing fossil fuels in industrial processes, incorporating renewable solutions for heating and cooling, and developing emerging energy carriers, such as low-emissions hydrogen, for specific applications.
- The transition to a cleaner energy mix will need to be accompanied by stronger electricity networks, storage, operational flexibility and regional electricity integration, together with policies that maximize the economic and employment benefits of renewable energy while integrating social inclusion and productive development criteria.

Key regional statistics

Goal 7 of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development

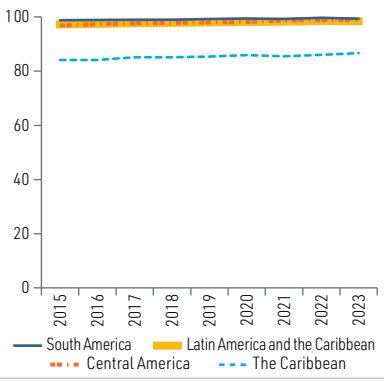
Ensure access to affordable, reliable, sustainable and modern energy for all

Progress in Latin America and the Caribbean

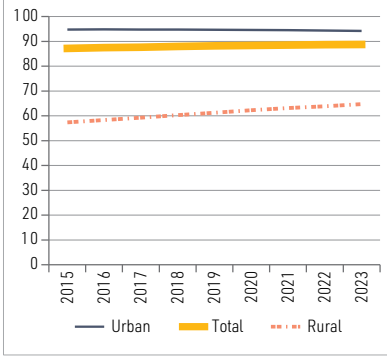
Target 7.1 Universal access to energy services

7.1

Indicator 7.1.1 Proportion of population with access to electricity, 2015–2023
(Percentages)



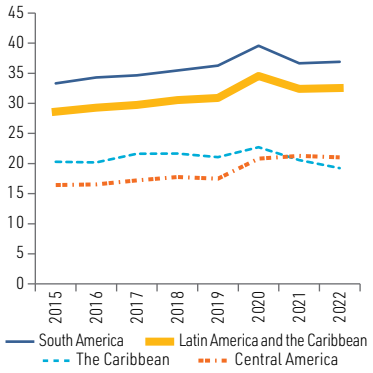
Indicator 7.1.2 Latin America and the Caribbean: proportion of population with primary reliance on clean fuels and technology, by area of residence (urban/rural), 2015–2023
(Percentages)



Target 7.2 Renewable energy share

7.2

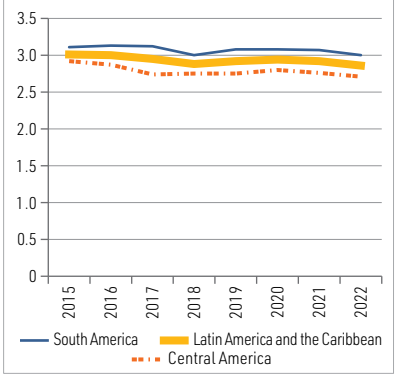
Indicator 7.2.1 Renewable energy share in the total final energy consumption, 2015–2022
(Percentages)



Target 7.3 Energy efficiency

7.3

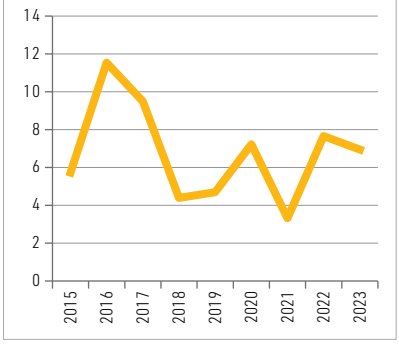
Indicator 7.3.1 Energy intensity measured in terms of primary energy and GDP, 2015–2022
(Megajoules per unit of GDP in dollars at constant 2021 prices)



Target 7.a International cooperation on energy

7.a

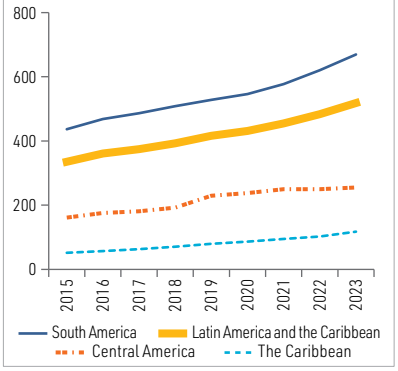
Indicator 7.a.1 Latin America and the Caribbean: international financial flows in support of clean energy research and development and renewable energy production, including in hybrid systems, 2015–2023
(Billions of dollars at constant 2022 prices)



Target 7.b Investment in energy infrastructure

7.b

Indicator 7.b.1 Installed renewable energy-generating capacity, 2015–2023
(Watts per capita)



7.1	7.2	7.3	7.a	7.b

- The trend has stalled or is moving away from the target
- The trend is in the right direction, but progress is too slow for the target to be met
- Target already reached or likely to be reached on the current trend
- Insufficient data

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean, on the basis of United Nations. (n.d.). *SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean: statistical knowledge management hub*. Regional Knowledge Management Platform for the Sustainable Development Goals in Latin America and the Caribbean. https://agenda2030lac.org/estadisticas/index.html.

Note: Each indicator comprises one or more statistical series, which partially or fully cover the corresponding indicator. In the figures presented here, one or more statistical series were used for the respective indicator.

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