



Special meeting
of the Presiding Officers
of the Regional Conference
on Social Development
in Latin America and the Caribbean
24 March 2025

Distr.
LIMITED
LC/MDS.E-2025/3
14 March 2025
ENGLISH
ORIGINAL: SPANISH
2500031[E]

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

Virtual meeting, 24 March 2025

**LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN LOOKING AHEAD TO THE SECOND WORLD
SUMMIT FOR SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT**

PROPOSALS FOR INCLUSIVE SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT

**Draft document prepared by the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference
on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean
for the Second World Summit for Social Development**



UNITED NATIONS



This document was prepared by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in coordination with the current and incoming Chairs of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean —Chile and Brazil, respectively— for the special meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, to be held on 24 March 2025.

CONTENTS

	<i>Page</i>
INTRODUCTION.....	5
I. BACKGROUND.....	7
1. The critical importance and strategic opportunity of the second World Summit for Social Development.....	7
2. Evolution of the social agenda over the past 30 years.....	8
3. Barriers to inclusive social development and the urgent need to address them	9
4. Three decades of progress in social protection systems: a brief overview	11
II. MESSAGES FROM MINISTRIES OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN.....	13
1. Combating inequality, poverty and hunger: a priority for the region and the world.....	14
2. Social protection systems: comprehensive care policies and quality public policies to leave no one behind	15
3. Action for inclusive social development in Latin America and the Caribbean.....	16
4. Towards a global pact for inclusive social development.....	18
III. CONCLUDING REMARKS	21
BIBLIOGRAPHY	23

INTRODUCTION

The overarching objectives of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development—ending poverty and hunger and reducing inequality—are long-held priorities of the region and particularly salient in the work of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean. The region’s countries have cooperated to achieve these objectives since the establishment of the Regional Conference as a subsidiary body of the Economic and Social Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) in 2014. The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, adopted by the Regional Conference in 2019 at its third session, clearly reflects this commitment. The Regional Agenda’s four axes, which include proposed lines of action for coordinated policies to leave no one behind, are: (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.

The Second World Summit for Social Development presents a singular opportunity to reflect on these axes, strengthen policy implementation and develop complementary instruments to tackle structural and emerging challenges in the coming decades, against a backdrop of profound transformations.

Notwithstanding the efforts made in Latin America and the Caribbean, inclusive social development progress and the fulfilment of the relevant commitments are currently under threat. The countries of the region face three development traps—low capacity for economic growth, high inequality and low social mobility and cohesion, and weak institutional capacities and ineffective governance (ECLAC, 2024a; Salazar-Xirinachs, 2023)—, which are compounded by shocks due to the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic, rising interest rates and financing costs, climate change, and the emergence of new geopolitical tensions and conflict. According to ECLAC, the region is in a serious development crisis and must break free of the three traps as a matter of priority to forestall a third “lost decade”.

In view of recent regional trends in poverty levels, prospects for achieving Sustainable Development Goal 1 (No poverty) are not encouraging. In Latin America and the Caribbean, 66 million people still live in extreme poverty (ECLAC, 2024b), and entrenched inequalities continue to affect many population groups, including Indigenous Peoples, Afrodescendants, women, children and adolescents, older persons, migrants, LGBTIQ+ communities and persons with disabilities.

This development crisis poses a range of significant challenges, which call for a rethinking of the region’s current development model in favour of one that is more productive, inclusive and sustainable. The special seventy-fifth anniversary issue of the *CEPAL Review*¹ outlined 11 mutually reinforcing transformations deemed vital for reorienting the region’s development strategies (Salazar-Xirinachs, 2023). The transformations of particular relevance for social policy are: (i) reduced 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) effective education for all and wide access to vocational training; and (v) progress towards gender equality and the care society. Rapid, sustained and inclusive growth and environmental sustainability are also essential transformations. Bringing these transformations to fruition requires progress in the implementation of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development.

¹ See *CEPAL Review*, No. 141, “Towards a more productive, inclusive and sustainable development model” (LC/PUB.2023/29-P), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2023.

This document presents key milestones in the recent history of social development and the main challenges and specific proposals submitted by the ministries of social development and equivalent entities of the region, in the framework of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, for consideration during the work and discussions of the Second World Summit for Social Development. The aim of these inputs is to help the region to speak as one at this landmark meeting and contribute to defining the “whats” and the “hows” of inclusive social development progress, with a view to transforming the development model and building a more productive, inclusive and sustainable future.

I. BACKGROUND

An examination of the shifting social landscape, the evolving understanding of social concepts and attendant policy changes of the past 30 years offers insight into current challenges and future alternatives and highlights the opportunity for the Second World Summit for Social Development to determine priorities for the coming decades.

1. The critical importance and strategic opportunity of the second World Summit for Social Development

The 1995 World Summit for Social Development, convened at the highest level in Copenhagen, placed special emphasis on people-centred development, decent work and social integration. In terms of promoting social development and inclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean, the timing of the Summit proved opportune, as the countries were recovering economically and socially from the severe debt crisis of the 1980s and the ensuing structural adjustment policies, which had led to a 5.9% drop in per capita GDP over the decade and a 20% spike in the number of people living in poverty, reaching 51% of the population (ECLAC, 2024b).

In the 30 years since the adoption of the Copenhagen Declaration on Social Development, the world has undergone significant changes. Countries have made notable progress in the provision of social services like health and education, and income poverty —estimated at 26.8% in 2024— is at a historical low in the region, reflecting a significant drop between 1990 and 2014 and a substantial improvement following a period of stagnation exacerbated by the coronavirus disease (COVID-19) pandemic. However, persistent inequality, both in income distribution (in 2023, the Gini index for the region was 0.452) and in the exercise of social rights, poses major challenges in the region. The lowest-income population, women, people living in rural areas, children and adolescents, Indigenous Peoples and Afrodescendants are the most affected, mirroring the areas and axes of the social inequality matrix (ECLAC, 2024b).

The region's social reality is unfolding against a backdrop of momentous change, in which the structural obstacles that have historically constrained inclusive social development in the region are compounded by a range of concurrent crises (geopolitical, social, health-related, environmental and economic), along with climate change, the technological transformation, migration, population ageing and the emergence of different forms of violence, as well as the global transformations that these engender, which present opportunities but also major challenges. Meanwhile, the region's social policies and institutions changed significantly in terms of priorities, approaches and capacities to address structural needs and shocks.

The Second World Summit for Social Development, to be held in November 2025, represents a unique opportunity for Latin America and the Caribbean to underscore the importance of people-centred development with a universalist approach that is sensitive to differences to leave no one behind; to address the inequalities and gaps between regions, countries, territories and populations; to share progress and discuss limitations; and to identify opportunities and potential areas for cooperation agreements. Ultimately, the Summit offers a chance to discuss urgent needs, define priorities, and make decisions and commitments to address the persistent and emerging challenges that hinder inclusive social development.

2. Evolution of the social agenda over the past 30 years

Since the World Summit for Social Development proposed placing people at the centre of development and emphasized eradicating poverty, enhancing productive employment and reducing unemployment, and fostering social integration (United Nations, 1995), societal and public policy shifts have reshaped and reoriented social development in Latin America and the Caribbean.

These processes have been strengthened by successive global milestones. In the United Nations Millennium Declaration in 2000, global leaders set a social agenda with specific goals and targets, pledging to fight disease, poverty, illiteracy, discrimination against women and environmental degradation (MDG Monitor, 2017). In 2015, the Declaration was succeeded by the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development (United Nations, 2015), which places the eradication of poverty and hunger uppermost among its 17 Sustainable Development Goals, only 5 of which are not specifically linked with the social dimension of sustainable development. In addition, the 2030 Agenda prioritizes the fight against inequality with a commitment to leave no one behind, underscoring that social inclusion is at the heart of sustainable development.

Inclusive social development is 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 (ECLAC, 2024c). This concept has continued to gain prominence in Latin America and the Caribbean. Over the past decade, increasing emphasis has been placed on recognizing diversity, fostering social participation and ensuring that no one is left behind in development processes, increased economic well-being and the exercise of rights. This has been expressed in various documents of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2016a, 2018, 2019 and 2020), most notably in the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, adopted in 2019 as a technical and policy instrument to support the region's progress towards the SDGs linked to the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda (ECLAC, 2020). The Regional Agenda includes 56 action lines, grouped along four axes of implementation: (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.

The Regional Conference, which convenes all ministries of social development and equivalent entities, reflects the incremental prioritization of public policies and institutional frameworks for inclusion and non-contributory social protection in the region and provides a space in which to deliberate on how to advance inclusive social development, share experiences related to priority policies and further the discussion on the capacities of the relevant national and regional institutions (ECLAC, 2024c).

Subregional bodies such as the Central American Integration System (SICA), the Southern Common Market (MERCOSUR), the Pacific Alliance and the Caribbean Community (CARICOM) have also made significant advances, with analysis, policy coordination and experience-sharing initiatives related to inclusive social development (ECLAC, 2024c).

The region has also witnessed a shift in social protection and inclusion policies over the last 30 years. In the 1990s, there was a big push to expand social infrastructure through social investment funds for projects in areas like health, education, drinking water and sanitation services, with a particular focus on the lower-income population. This was followed by income transfers with conditionalities to encourage the use of food, health and education services. In the last decade, the focus has broadened to the development of social protection systems that are increasingly universal, to leave no one behind;

comprehensive, to cover several dimensions through intersectoral approaches; financially sustainable; and resilient, to enable institutions and individuals to respond to new risks and challenges. This has gone hand in hand with the emergence of comprehensive care policies and their integration as a strategic component of social protection systems, along with institutional strengthening of the ministries of social development and at equivalent entities tasked with non-contributory social protection in the region.

In line with these national processes, regional experiences and current challenges, there is broad consensus that progress on the social dimension of development is inextricably linked with economic growth and environmental stewardship. As the experience of more developed countries shows, investing in inclusive social development goes beyond the social sphere and yields significant economic returns. Failure to do so, however, incurs greater social and economic costs and losses.

3. Barriers to inclusive social development and the urgent need to address them

Persistent poverty and vulnerability are a characteristic of the region. Extreme poverty is estimated to have fallen less than 4 percentage points between 1994 and 2024, from 14.3% to 10.4%, meaning that around 66 million people still lack the resources to cover their food needs. Total poverty, however, has declined significantly over the past 30 years. It fell from 48.4% in 1994 to 27.7% in 2014 and, following a period of stagnation and a pandemic-induced rise to 32.8%, fell again in 2024 to 26.8%, bringing the number of people who lacked sufficient income to meet their basic needs to 170 million. Moreover, the most vulnerable population, who in 2022 had incomes between 1 and 1.8 times the poverty line (low-income non-poor stratum), accounted for 26% of the region's population, while the population with incomes between 1.8 and 3 times the poverty line (the lower-middle-income stratum) stood at 21.4%. In short, three quarters of the population lives in poverty or in a situation of high vulnerability (ECLAC, 2024b).

An important factor in this regard is the region's high inequality, measured by the Gini index of income distribution at 0.452 in 2023, with 52.8% of income concentrated in the lowest decile and 18.9% in the highest percentile. Wealth distribution inequality is even starker, with a concentration of 65.9% and 33.1% in the wealthiest decile and percentile, respectively (ECLAC, 2024b).

Hunger and malnutrition are indicators of this inequality. While the region is the largest net exporter of food in the world (OECD/FAO, 2024), 187.6 million people (28.2%) experienced moderate or severe food insecurity in 2023, mainly owing to lack of access (FAO and others, 2024). The region is also marked by the nutritional transition, in which undernutrition coexists with overweight and obesity: 5.7 million children under the age of 5 (11.5%) show stunting (low height for age) and 4.2 million are overweight or obese (8.6%), while 29.9% of adults are obese. This represents an aggregate cost of more than 10% of GDP in at least three countries of the region (Martínez, Mejía and Espíndola, 2024).

As noted in the position document of the sixth meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean, held in 2024 (ECLAC, 2024c), the persistence of gaps in the development of human capacity reflects the various dimensions of inequality in the region, which hinders progress towards inclusive social development, preventing the full and healthy development of people and the exercise of their rights. The worst health conditions are concentrated in groups living in poverty and extreme poverty, who have poorer working conditions, lower levels of education and greater difficulties in accessing health services, housing and basic services, a reflection of the social determinants of health (Marinho, Dahuabe and Arenas de Mesa, 2023). For example, in 2020, the highest maternal mortality rates in the region were among women living in extreme poverty, and on average, 10% of adolescents were mothers (ECLAC, 2024d); in 2022 the rate of births

to adolescent mothers was 51.4 per 1,000 women, 10 percentage points higher than the global average (United Nations, 2022).

Access to quality education—a prerequisite in sustainable development policies for progress in productivity and international competitiveness (ECLAC, 2022)—remains a major challenge. In recent decades, the percentage of the population that has completed compulsory schooling has increased, but the gap between income quintile extremes is still significant in lower-secondary education (97.7% in the fifth quintile compared to 79.8% in the first quintile) and in upper-secondary education (90.5% and 55.7%, respectively) (Trucco, 2023). An analysis of the results of the Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) 2022 shows that the gap is wider, as in the 13 countries of the region that participated in the study, an average of 55% of 15-year-old students in the highest quartile of the index of economic, social and cultural status (ESCS) scored below the minimum expected proficiency level in mathematics (level 2), while 88% of students in the lowest quartile performed similarly (OECD, 2023).

Already-wide gaps in basic infrastructure and housing are exacerbated by disasters. Sanitation service coverage is 60.8% in rural areas, compared with 85.0% in urban areas (ECLAC, 2024e). As the most urbanized region in the developing world, spatial segregation in urban areas reflects deep inequalities in economic, educational, sanitation and cultural opportunities and in overall well-being (ECLAC, 2024c). In 2022, 54.7% of lower-income households were overcrowded compared to 19.2% of higher-income households (ECLAC, 2024e).

Amid the ongoing digital revolution and technological transformation, the region is also marked by inequality that limits opportunities and heightens risks. For example, the connectivity gap between urban and rural households was 43 percentage points in 2021 (ECLAC, 2025a), and in 2022, 74% of people in the lowest-income quintile residing in rural areas did not have Internet access (ECLAC, 2024e).

In the area of labour inclusion, the region is in a slow-motion crisis, with minimal employment growth (1.26% on average between 2014 and 2023), low rates of labour participation (63% in 2023) and high levels of informality (49% in 2022), compounded by the fact that in 2022, 17% of the employed were living in poverty and 36.8% had incomes below the minimum wage (ECLAC, 2023a). Socioeconomic and gender gaps are also a major factor in this situation.

Gender inequalities are at the core of the obstacles to inclusive social development. The many areas in which these inequalities are manifested include gaps in labour inclusion, in unpaid work and care and in access to higher education and science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) careers, as well as in multiple forms of violence. For example, around 2023, in 20 of the region's countries, the average labour force participation rate among women was 52.1% compared with 74.6% among men, and women's unemployment was almost 50% higher than the corresponding figure for men (8.3% compared with 5.7% for men); around 2022, in 14 countries, the percentage of women earning below the minimum wage was 44.1%, compared with 31.4% for men (ECLAC, 2023a); and in 18 of the region's countries, the participation rate around 2018 for women graduates in STEM fields was just 37.6% (UN-Women, 2020).

Turning to violence, according to a 2024 United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) publication, 18% of the region's girls and women have been raped or sexually abused (UNICEF, 2024).

The abovementioned labour inclusion and social protection problems are compounded by emerging issues rooted in demographic and epidemiological changes and in new forms of violence and organized crime. Inequality in the region is also shaped by climate change and the increasing frequency of disasters of varying scope. The impact of disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean significantly outweighs the

region's contribution to emissions and is amplified in the most vulnerable households, which earn lower incomes, are also located in areas at higher risk and have less capacity to respond. As such, building the resilience of institutions and the population is also crucial for social protection systems (ECLAC, 2021).

In sum, although the region has made progress on inclusive social development, major challenges associated with poverty, inequality and emerging obstacles remain, and are reshaping its reality.

4. Three decades of progress in social protection systems: a brief overview

As noted in the *Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024*, in the twentieth century social protection systems had low levels of coverage and were highly stratified and exclusionary. Access to contributory social protection was confined to formal jobs, while social welfare institutions of limited scope targeted the large segments of the most vulnerable populations (Cecchini and Martínez, 2012; ECLAC, 2006; and Mesa-Lago, 2009; all cited in ECLAC, 2024b). The 2000s ushered in what was called the expansionary phase of social protection systems in Latin America (Abramo, Cecchini and Morales, 2019; Arza and others, 2022; Barrientos, 2024; all cited in ECLAC, 2024b), in which the non-contributory component was strengthened to close coverage and exclusion gaps (ECLAC, 2024b).

Despite the notable progress made in recent decades, the region continues to face major challenges. In 2023, just 61.2% of the population was covered by at least one social protection benefit (ILO, 2024). Similarly, while in 2022 76.5% of households in 14 Latin American countries were covered by contributory (through the pension system) or non-contributory social protection in 2022, 36.5% of households in the first quintile lacked access, double the proportion in the fifth quintile. Moreover, merely 10% of the unemployed population in the region had cash support for unemployment in 2023 (ILO, 2024). In 2022, the percentage of the economically active population making pension contributions rose from 35.0% in 2000 to 47.9% in Latin America, but with large inequalities between population groups (ECLAC, 2024b), while coverage for pensioners aged 65 and over increased from 52.4% to 75.5%, with non-contributory pensions growing by 28.1 percentage points and contributory pensions by only 3.3 points.

Over the last 30 years, the non-contributory component of social protection has grown significantly in the region. By 2022, roughly one in every four people in the region (27.1%) lived in households that received some type of cash transfer, and non-contributory pension systems covered 31% of people aged 65 and over. This expansion was key for addressing well-being deficits among the lowest-income population, an example being that non-contributory pensions lifted more than 5% of the population aged 65 and over out of poverty in 2021 in 10 countries of Latin America (ECLAC, 2024b). Major challenges nonetheless remain in coverage and sufficiency of benefits, in particular in the context of a risk structure that is in a process of reconfiguration driven by emerging issues for inclusive social development in the region.

Comprehensive care policies have also been expanded, with examples of varying scope in Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Mexico and Uruguay. However, there are major challenges for their consolidation throughout the region. The region is experiencing a care crisis characterized by the growing demand for care that cannot be met by the number of caregivers and the scope of existing public policies and exacerbated by population ageing. At present, people aged 65 and over number just under 68 million, equivalent to 9.9% of the total population, a figure that is projected to more than double by 2050, reaching 18.9%.

In recent decades, the approach to social protection policies has shifted from a focus on specific projects or programmes to a universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient system. At the same time, large strides have been made in the region's institutional framework, through the establishment of ministries of social development as authorities tasked with non-contributory social protection formalized through legislation and, more broadly, through the expansion of collegiate social development authorities. Likewise, institutional capacities have been strengthened, social information and registration systems have been expanded and social spending has been stepped up. However, there are also pending challenges, including the need to strengthen inter-institutional coordination, implement one-stop shop management solutions at local level, and ensure that information systems are interoperable and funding is sufficient to provide adequate levels of coverage and quality services.

In view of the above, moving towards inclusive social development requires expanding the coverage, sufficiency and quality of non-contributory social protection benefits, with income transfers, pension and comprehensive care systems, and enhanced coordination with contributory policies. An institutional framework that is equal to these challenges is also a must. The Second World Summit for Social Development presents an opportunity to drive these processes in a sustained and sustainable manner, following the lead of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and The Pact for the Future.

II. MESSAGES FROM MINISTRIES OF SOCIAL DEVELOPMENT IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

This section presents the key messages from the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean to be shared with the international community in the framework of the Second World Summit for Social Development (see table I.1). They are grouped into four sections: the first addresses priority issues for the present and future of the region and the world; the second highlights essential characteristics that should be considered for social protection systems in the region; the third contains public policy guidelines and commitments deemed strategic and feasible for advancing towards inclusive social development in Latin America and the Caribbean; and the fourth and final section includes contributions to global strategies for achieving a collective pact for inclusive social development to accelerate progress towards the social targets of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development and to face the challenges of the future.

Table I.1
**Key messages from the ministries of social development in Latin America and the Caribbean
for the Second World Summit for Social Development**

1	Combating inequality, poverty and hunger: a priority for the region and the world
a.	Poverty and hunger: persistent but surmountable scourges
b.	Social inequality: a development trap that inhibits the exercise of rights
c.	Emerging gaps and multidimensional inequality: why measuring them matters
d.	The Pact for the Future and the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty: commitments to be followed
2	Social protection systems: comprehensive care policies and quality public policies to leave no one behind
a.	Universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient social protection systems
b.	The cardinal role of care systems
c.	Labour inclusion: the master key to tackling inequality and fostering upward social mobility
d.	Social protection for dealing with disasters
e.	Policies to counter violence and foster social cohesion, recognition and participation
f.	Institutional frameworks for social policy: the cornerstone of inclusive social development
3	Action for inclusive social development in Latin America and the Caribbean
a.	The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development: a multilateral strategy for overcoming challenges
b.	Social investment: a spending standard and financing commitments for non-contributory social protection to advance poverty eradication
c.	Regional commitment to inclusive social development
4	Towards a global pact for inclusive social development
a.	A global pact for inclusive social development to leave no one behind
b.	Social investment: financing commitments for inclusive social development
c.	Institutional frameworks for social policy: a new metric for decision-making on investment and development policies
d.	Implementing the Global Digital Compact for progress towards inclusive social development
e.	Strengthening multilateralism and cooperation to further the sharing of experiences, technical knowledge and institutional learning

1. Combating inequality, poverty and hunger: a priority for the region and the world

The region's social landscape is one of poverty, hunger and inequality. Recent events show that tackling these issues is not only necessary but also critical for advancing towards inclusive social development and for sustainable development strategies.

(a) Poverty and hunger: persistent but surmountable scourges

Poverty and hunger are characteristic and persistent in Latin America and the Caribbean, where 75% of the population lives in poverty or situations of vulnerability and more than 25% experience food and nutritional insecurity, with significantly higher rates among women, children, adolescents, Indigenous Peoples and people of African descent, persons with disabilities and rural populations. Experiences in several countries nonetheless show that these problems can be tackled and that overcoming them requires political commitment, coordinated social and productive development policies, sufficient resource allocation and effective, efficient management. Although these problems are longstanding, the region remains committed to achieving the targets of Goals 1 and 2 on extreme poverty and hunger by 2030.

(b) Social inequality: a development trap that inhibits the exercise of rights

Inequality is also a historical characteristic of the region, visible in the well-being gaps that reflect wealth and income distribution; the gaps in the exercise of social rights such as education, health, social security and housing and the gaps in the exercise of political rights linked with participation and recognition. Moreover, not only does inequality hinder inclusive social development, but it is also a development trap that undermines social mobility, social cohesion and democracy. For all these reasons, the region is firmly committed to a comprehensive and coordinated policy approach that addresses the different dimensions of inequality for the universal exercise of social rights, the reduction of well-being gaps and progress towards inclusive social development.

(c) Emerging gaps and multidimensional inequality: why measuring them matters

Amid the major transformations under way, driven by climate change, population ageing and migration, new forms of violence and organized crime, and technological change, opportunities can be found for advancing towards inclusive social development. However, there is a risk that these transformations could widen equality gaps in various areas between and within regions, countries, communities and individuals. In this context, there is a pressing need to make progress in the multidimensional measurement of inequality and place inclusive social development at the centre of policies to address these challenges.

(d) The Pact for the Future and the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty: commitments to be followed

At regional and global level, there have been successful experiences in addressing the issues raised, and major cooperation commitments recently undertaken, such as The Pact for the Future, adopted by the General Assembly of the United Nations (2024), and the Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty, an initiative of the Group of 20 (G20) (2024), provide a glimmer of hope and point the way ahead to achieve specific targets in the fight against hunger, poverty and inequality, three key components of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. In line with those agreements, it is important to work towards a more socially sustainable future for current and future generations, with concrete social and labour

inclusion policies for the benefit of children and young people. This reaffirms the urgent need to strengthen major North-South and South-South cooperation agreements aimed at ensuring the exercise of social rights and reducing gaps between regions, countries and territories to leave no one behind.

2. Social protection systems: comprehensive care policies and quality public policies to leave no one behind

Building linkages between social inclusion and social protection policies and the core objective of addressing poverty, hunger and inequality is a key pillar for the achievement of inclusive social development in the region and the world.

(a) Universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient social protection systems

To address the major challenges for inclusive social development, the countries of the region have emphasized the need to advance in the design and implementation of high-quality social policies that are effective, efficient, sustainable, transparent and participatory. Linking the different components of social protection (contributory, non-contributory, labour market regulation and care) while adopting a strategic, universalist approach that is sensitive to differences can close gaps and foster social and labour inclusion. In line with the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development of 2019 (ECLAC, 2020), the expansion of social protection systems should be promoted with a view to ensuring universal access, comprehensive programmes, sustainable commitments to current and future generations and social and institutional resilience.

(b) The cardinal role of care systems

The current and future challenges posed by ongoing social and demographic transformations make it necessary to strengthen care systems to ensure the provision of care and reduce the gender inequality whereby a disproportionate burden of care and unpaid work is borne by women. Addressing this need and narrowing this historical gap is an ethical imperative, as everyone has a right to give and receive care. Investing in the care economy is also efficient, as it accounts for between 16% and 28% of countries' GDP and promotes well-being, personal development and productive processes. The COVID-19 pandemic made it clear that the region is in the midst of a care crisis that calls for concrete public policy action, which will help to reduce gender inequality and foster intergenerational cohesion and the care economy. Accordingly, the importance of care systems as a core component both of social protection systems and of the vision for productive development and the creation of quality jobs cannot be overlooked. States and international cooperation agencies should commit to their implementation.

(c) Labour inclusion: the master key to tackling inequality and fostering upward social mobility

Labour inclusion is essential for reducing inequalities and fostering social mobility and is a prerequisite for social inclusion and the exercise of individual rights. In view of the high levels of informality and the technological changes reshaping the labour market, investing in productive development policies and regulation is essential to shore up markets, drive economic growth, boost labour markets and support micro-, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) that provide decent jobs to address informality through adequate pay and social protection, in line with Goal 8. Importantly, a universalist approach that is sensitive to differences must be adopted to remove barriers to labour inclusion for the populations that are most vulnerable and most affected by inequality, such as women, young people and migrants.

(d) Social protection for dealing with disasters

The impact of environmental and anthropogenic disasters is uneven across populations and territories and is particularly severe for the most socially and economically vulnerable households in the region. Social protection has helped in meeting the needs of the population, with improvements in information dissemination and response capacities. The scope of the challenge and its many impacts nonetheless reaffirm the need to strengthen institutional and individual disaster resilience, adopting a preventative and forward-looking approach, coordinating social protection and disaster risk management systems and expanding spaces for regional cooperation.

(e) Policies to counter violence and foster social cohesion, recognition and participation

Social cohesion facilitates the interpersonal ties and interactions that reinforce a sense of belonging, enabling collective action in pursuit of shared societal objectives. Decisive action is therefore needed at all levels—from the international to the local—to consolidate agreements and public policies that encourage the recognition and participation of all members of society and communities, address the underlying causes of multiple forms of violence and organized crime, and fight disinformation, which will help to improve social cohesion, restore public trust in democratic institutions and advance inclusive social development. Furthermore, given the gravity of femicidal violence and the gender-related killing of women, inter-institutional coordination is essential to mainstream gender in all social inclusion policies.

(f) Institutional frameworks for social policy: the cornerstone of inclusive social development

To achieve social policy objectives, there is a need for strong institutional frameworks governed by laws and regulations, an organizational model with legitimate authority, and a structure that aligns with objectives. Also required are effective coordination and dialogue mechanisms, clear procedures, the requisite technical capabilities for implementation, and sufficient and sustainable financial resources to achieve the desired outcomes. A solid and well-designed social policy framework lays the foundation for effective governance and facilitates decision-making, the harmonization of the factors involved, accountability, transparency and financial sustainability. Investing in the technical, operational, political and prospective (TOPP) capabilities of the institutions in charge of social policy is a key strategy that strengthens institutional frameworks, making public administration governance feasible. Countries and international organizations should invest actively in strengthening social institutions, at all levels of government and of cooperation and integration bodies, as an essential tool for advancing inclusive social development.

3. Action for inclusive social development in Latin America and the Caribbean

The region can and must invest in concrete, effective and efficient action for decisive progress towards inclusive social development. To that end, three enablers are outlined below.

(a) The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development: a multilateral strategy for overcoming challenges

The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, adopted by the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean at its third session, in 2019, aims to support the region's achievement of the social objectives of the 2030 Agenda. It provides a useful frame of reference for progress along the lines of work proposed in this document. With its four axes for action, namely (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, the Regional Agenda represents countries' decisive commitment to the pursuit of inclusive social development. It also illustrates the potential of social dialogue to drive concerted efforts on issues of critical importance for the countries of the region.

In the light of emerging challenges and against a global backdrop of major transformations and multiple crises, the principles, axes and action lines of the Regional Agenda are more important than ever—if not indispensable. Countries and regions should therefore engage in a multilateral effort to share experiences and further the implementation of the Agenda through clear-cut public policies for inclusive social development, which is key to leaving no one behind on the path to sustainable development.

(b) Social investment: a spending standard and financing commitments for non-contributory social protection to advance poverty eradication

Axis 3 of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development—a strengthened social institutional framework—highlights the need to safeguard and consolidate the financing of social policy by guaranteeing resources, in particular for the well-being of the most vulnerable groups. It also calls for supporting the sustainability of social protection entitlements, maintaining entitlement levels and advocating for fiscal rules to that end; reaffirms the notion that social policy financing should be considered an investment; and encourages analysis of the impact of such financing in terms of reducing poverty and inequalities and increasing economic growth and environmental protection.

Progress in this area requires addressing the challenge of low growth capacity to increase and sustain financing for development. With most countries facing fiscal constraints, financial authorities are taking commendable measures to mobilize domestic and external resources as part of the efforts to reform the international financial system, including the initiatives to be presented at the upcoming Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development.

In that regard, and taking into account existing poverty gaps, the institutional capacities of each country and current levels of public spending, it is possible to gradually increase allocations for non-contributory social protection transfers in order to close income gaps for people living in poverty or extreme poverty. Countries of the region, through their ministries of social development or equivalent entities, are encouraged to consider increasing their spending on non-contributory social protection policies to at least 1.5%–2.5% of GDP or 5%–10% of annual public spending, with a view to advancing poverty eradication (ECLAC, 2024b and 2024c).

In light of current levels of public spending, the proposed target appears feasible and sustainable. Moreover, it specifically addresses the challenges of inequality and poverty in the region and directly supports countries' inclusive social development and productive and economic development.

(c) Regional commitment to inclusive social development

Inclusive social development is the social dimension of sustainable development and achieving it requires comprehensive, transformative and high-quality policies to address inequality, along with a productive transformation to boost the creation of formal, decent employment to achieve inclusive economic growth compatible with environmental protection (ECLAC, 2024c).

“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”, alongside “fiscal agreements to allocate sufficient and sustainable

resources to inclusive social development initiatives and measures” (ECLAC, 2024c, pp. 68 and 69). This entails a need to establish networks comprising representatives of the public sector, civil society, academia, the production sector and international cooperation bodies, which represents a challenge for all countries in the region that is even more pressing for those with greater needs and fewer available resources, “in particular Caribbean small island developing States, which are regularly impacted by natural disasters with catastrophic consequences that drive up their debt levels” (ECLAC, 2024c, p. 69).

Against this backdrop, considering the importance of the objectives and the intrinsic social and economic gains of inclusive social development and in line with the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development, it is both possible and necessary for the region, with government leadership and the participation of a wide range of public and private stakeholders, to actively commit to the implementation of the inclusion and social protection policies required to achieve, at the earliest, a minimum level of well-being and ensure dignity and the exercise of the social rights of all, making it a priority to achieve the targets of Goals 1, 2 and 10 on the eradication of extreme poverty and hunger and the reduction of inequalities by 2030.

4. Towards a global pact for inclusive social development

Current and future generations need new commitments from all countries to universalize economic well-being and the exercise of rights. The work of any one territory, country or region is not enough, since globalization in its different dimensions requires the work of all. Joint efforts are therefore needed and five elements for are proposed consideration.

(a) A global pact for inclusive social development to leave no one behind

In today’s highly interconnected world, the progress and setbacks of the three dimensions of sustainable development are interdependent, the outcome not only of developments in each territory, country or region but also the opportunities and constraints arising elsewhere. Poverty and inequality, for example, affect political stability and democracy and fuel international migration, the emergence of conflicts and the growth of international organized crime networks. Gaps in well-being and the exercise of rights that primarily affect developing countries are thus everyone’s responsibility, and as progress is made in overcoming them, positive impacts ensue (both public and private) for the population as a whole. Without inclusive social development, there is no democracy, social cohesion or enabling environment for sustainable economic growth.

To advance in this direction, developed countries, major corporations and international financial institutions must all engage in and facilitate agreements to ensure the financial viability and sustainability of policies to end poverty and hunger, expand social protection systems and reduce inequality.

The experience of the 2030 Agenda, international treaties and agreements, and the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development itself underscores the feasibility of forging broad consensus for the achievement of shared objectives for humanity. For that reason, and in keeping with the recent experience of the Pact for the Future, the international community, at the Second World Summit for Social Development, is encouraged to adopt a global pact for inclusive social development to realize the social commitments agreed in the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. It would be a pact that brings all countries, with a vision for strategic investment, cooperation and mutual benefit; one that takes up the cause of many different rights and prioritizes action with tangible pathways and has the resources to account for

the obstacles and gaps that limit their attainment; a pact with comprehensive public policies and a universalist approach that is sensitive to differences, and is financially sustainable and sufficiently resilient to address recurrent crises wheresoever they arise (ECLAC, 2025b).

(b) Social investment: financing commitments for inclusive social development

To implement such a global pact for inclusive social development, domestic resources must be mobilized, and progress must be made in reforming the international financial architecture, as proposed in the Pact for the Future and in the G20 Rio de Janeiro Leaders' Declaration. Consequently, the Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development, to be held in Seville, Spain, in July of 2025, is a key opportunity.

In this framework, international financial institutions and developed countries are encouraged to commit financial support for policies conducive to attaining the objectives of inclusive social development, to enable access to innovative financial instruments, particularly for lower-income countries and small island developing States, and to provide facilities through other financial instruments, ensuring that such an agreement translates into investments that support sustainable development strategies.

In turn, developing countries must commit to making their best efforts with respect to fiscal institutional frameworks and efficient management of public resources to ensure transparency and the sustainability of financial support. South-South, North-South and interregional cooperation agreements present opportunities for meaningful progress in this area and should be leveraged.

(c) Institutional frameworks for social policy: a new metric for decision-making on investment and development policies

Strengthening institutional frameworks for social policy remains a shared responsibility and is a fundamental prerequisite for public policymaking. This means adjusting the decision-making model to conform to criteria and metrics that align with sustainable development. Achieving outcomes that are consistent with the three pillars of sustainable development requires meeting criteria for efficiency (profit and productivity) and for distribution and measurement of the environmental footprint (carbon emissions and biodiversity) and the social footprint (social and labour inclusion and the exercise of rights).

Having models for decision-making based on multidimensional metrics that align with the basic principles of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development is not only methodologically possible, but also necessary to ensure that both public and private investments generate economic, environmental and social sustainability synergies, foster social cohesion and strengthen democracy.

Experiences from the financial world and private corporations in which decision criteria linked with environmental protection and fair trade were included provide examples that countries and the international community should analyse to address this challenge.

(d) Implementing the Global Digital Compact to advance towards inclusive social development

To achieve full social and labour inclusion and promote social cohesion, productive development and stable democracies, cultural relevance must be factored in when developing and disseminating new digital technologies and production models, and the most remote populations and territories must be given more opportunities to participate. As noted in the Global Digital Compact adopted in 2024 at the Summit of the Future, "digital technologies are dramatically transforming our world. They offer immense potential benefits for the well-being and advancement of people and societies and for our planet. They hold out the

promise of accelerating the achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals. We can only achieve this through strengthened international cooperation that closes all digital divides between and within countries. We recognize the challenges that these divides pose for many countries, in particular developing countries, which have pressing development needs and limited resources” (United Nations, 2024, annex I).

Among other notable elements, the Pact includes five key objectives for inclusive social development: 1. Close all digital divides and accelerate progress across the Sustainable Development Goals; 2. Expand inclusion in and benefits from the digital economy for all; 3. Foster an inclusive, open, safe and secure digital space that respects, protects and promote human rights; 4. Advance responsible, equitable and interoperable data governance approaches; 5. Enhance international governance of artificial intelligence for the benefit of humanity (United Nations, 2024, annex I).

The region endorses this Global Digital Compact, recognizing the critical role of new technologies as a tool for reducing inequalities and further ensuring the exercise of rights. The region is firmly committed to striving to close technological and digital inclusion gaps. The objectives and commitments of the Global Digital Compact must be incorporated into the global pact for inclusive social development.

(e) Strengthening multilateralism and cooperation to further the sharing of experiences, technical knowledge and institutional learning

The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development and the ministries of social development of Latin America and the Caribbean have reaffirmed the value of multilateralism and collaboration among countries for meeting structural and emerging challenges. International cooperation supports public policy improvements to escape development traps and address the impacts of the current landscape of crises and uncertainties, helping to reduce inequalities between and within countries and regions of the world. The call to strengthen international cooperation capacities and to translate multilateralism into public policy action for inclusive social development and leave no one behind is thus reaffirmed.

III. CONCLUDING REMARKS

Three decades on from the World Summit for Social Development in Copenhagen, high-level dignitaries and world leaders will convene at the Second World Summit for Social Development. The past thirty years have borne witness to major environmental, technological, economic, geopolitical and social changes that have unfolded at an unprecedented speed and scope. Against the backdrop of these far-reaching transformations, the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean has met every two years since 2014 to assess processes, share experiences and build consensus on a common path towards inclusive social development, reaffirming the importance of spaces for collaboration. In view of the central importance given to well-being and human rights around the world, and building on the foundations laid by treaties and agreements in other spheres, the ministries of social development and equivalent entities of the region underscore the importance of such meetings to deliberate on the present and future of global social development. To this end, the recommendation is to hold a Third World Summit, with broad government participation, no more than five years following the Second World Summit, to examine progress and setbacks, define priorities and alternatives, and reach agreement on a shared path forward.

BIBLIOGRAPHY

- Abramo, L., S. Cecchini and B. Morales (2019), *Social programmes, poverty eradication and labour inclusion: lessons from Latin America and the Caribbean*, ECLAC Books, No. 155 (LC/PUB.2019/5-P), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).
- Arza, C. and others (2022), *The Political Economy of Segmented Expansion: Latin American Social Policy in the 2000s*, Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Barrientos, A. (2024), *Social Protection in Latin America: Causality, Stratification and Outcomes*, Cham, Palgrave Macmillan.
- Cecchini, S. and R. Martínez (2012), *Inclusive social protection in Latin America: a comprehensive, rights-based approach*, ECLAC Books, No. 111 (LC/G.2488-P), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).
- ECLAC (Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) (2025a), Digital Development Observatory [online] <https://desarrollodigital.cepal.org/en>.
- _____ (2025b), *On the road to the Second World Summit for Social Development: towards a compact for inclusive social development*, Santiago, forthcoming.
- _____ (2024a), *Development Traps in Latin America and the Caribbean: Vital Transformations and How to Manage Them* (LC/SES.40/3-P/-*), Santiago.
- _____ (2024b), *Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2024* (LC/PUB.2024/21-P/Rev.1), Santiago.
- _____ (2024c), *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* (LC/MDS.6/3), Santiago.
- _____ (2024d), “Teenage maternity”, Gender Equality Observatory for Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://oig.cepal.org/en/indicators/teenage-maternity>.
- _____ (2024e), “Statistics and indicators”, CEPALSTAT [online database] <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/dashboard.html?theme=1&lang=en>.
- _____ (2023a), *Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2023* (LC/PUB.2023/18-P/Rev.1), Santiago.
- _____ (2023b), *Institutional Frameworks for Social Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean: a Central Element in Advancing towards Inclusive Social Development* (LC/CDS.5/3), Santiago.
- _____ (2023c), “Resolution 5(V)”, fifth session of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean [online] <https://crds.cepal.org/5/en/documents/resolution-5v>.
- _____ (2022), *Towards transformation of the development model in Latin America and the Caribbean: production, inclusion and sustainability* (LC/SES.39/3-P), Santiago.
- _____ (2021), *Disasters and inequality in a protracted crisis: towards universal, comprehensive, resilient and sustainable social protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean* (LC/CDS.4/3), Santiago.
- _____ (2020), *Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development* (LC/CDS.3/5), Santiago.
- _____ (2019), *Critical obstacles to inclusive social development in Latin America and the Caribbean: background for a regional agenda* (LC/CDS.3/3), Santiago.
- _____ (2018), *Towards a regional agenda for inclusive social development: bases and initial proposal* (LC/MDS.2/2), Santiago.
- _____ (2016a), *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.
- _____ (2016b), *The social inequality matrix in Latin America* (LC/G.2690(MDS.1/2)), Santiago.
- _____ (2006), *Shaping the Future of Social Protection: Access, Financing and Solidarity* (LC/G.2294(SES.31/3)), Santiago.

- FAO and others (Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations and others) (2024), *The State of Food Security and Nutrition in the World 2024: Financing to End Hunger, Food Insecurity and Malnutrition in All its Forms*, Rome.
- G20 (Group of 20) (2024), “Global Alliance against Hunger and Poverty – Inception Document” [online] <https://globalallianceagainsthungerandpoverty.org/global-alliance-against-hunger-and-poverty-inception-document/>.
- ILO (International Labour Organization) (2024), *World Social Protection Report 2024-26: universal social protection for climate action and a just transition*, Geneva.
- Marinho, M. L., A. Dahuabe and A. Arenas de Mesa (2023), “Salud y desigualdad en América Latina y el Caribe: la centralidad de la salud para el desarrollo social inclusivo y sostenible”, *Social Policy series*, No. 244 (LC/TS.2023/115), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).
- Martínez, R., C. Mejía and E. Espíndola (2024), “The cost of the double burden of malnutrition: main social and economic impacts in eight Latin American countries”, *Project Documents* (LC/TS.2024/96), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).
- MDG Monitor (2017), “Category: Millennium Development Goals” [online] <https://www.mdgmonitor.org/millennium-development-goals/>.
- Mesa-Lago, C. (2009), “Social insurance (pensions and health), labour markets and coverage in Latin America”, *Financing Social Policy: Mobilizing Resources for Social Development*, K. Hujo and S. McClanahan (eds.), New York, Palgrave Macmillan/United Nations Research Institute for Social Development (UNRISD).
- OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) (2023), *PISA 2022 Results: The State of Learning and Equity in Education. Volume I*, Paris, OECD Publishing.
- OECD/FAO (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development/Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations) (2024), *OECD-FAO Agricultural Outlook 2024-2033*, Paris and Rome.
- Salazar-Xirinachs, J. M. (2023), “Rethinking, reimagining and transforming: the ‘whats’ and the ‘hows’ for moving towards a more productive, inclusive and sustainable development model”, *CEPAL Review*, No. 141 (LC/PUB.2023/29-P/-*), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).
- Trucco, D. (2023), “Improving education is crucial for inclusive and sustainable economic and social development”, *CEPAL Review*, No. 141 (LC/PUB.2023/29-P/-*), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).
- UNESCO/UNICEF/ECLAC (United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization/United Nations Children’s Fund/Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean) (2022), *Education in Latin America at a crossroads: regional monitoring report SDG4 - Education 2030*, Paris.
- UNICEF (United Nations Children’s Fund) (2024), “Over 370 million girls and women globally subjected to rape or sexual assault as children – UNICEF”, 10 October [online] <https://www.unicef.org/eap/press-releases/over-370-million-girls-and-women-globally-subjected-rape-or-sexual-assault-children>.
- United Nations (2024), *The Pact for the Future* (A/RES/79/1), 22 September.
- _____ (2022), *World Population Prospects 2022*, New York.
- _____ (2000), *We the peoples: the role of the United Nations in the twenty-first century. Report of the Secretary-General* (A/54/2000), New York.
- _____ (2015), *Transforming our world: the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development* (A/RES/70/1), New York.
- _____ (1995), *Report of the World Summit for Social Development* (A/CONF.166/9), New York.
- UN-Women (United Nations Entity for Gender Equality and the Empowerment of Women) (2020), *Women in Science, Technology, Engineering and Mathematics (STEM) in the Latin America and the Caribbean Region*, Montevideo.