

# The future of social protection in the midst of a protracted social crisis in Latin America

Advancing towards universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient systems

Claudia Robles  
Raúl Holz  
Editors



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# **The future of social protection in the midst of a protracted social crisis in Latin America**

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This document was edited by Claudia Robles and Raúl Holz, Social Affairs Officers of the Social Development Division of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) as part of the project “Recover Better: Overcoming the COVID-19 Pandemic Consequences in Latin America and the Caribbean”. This project is part of the ECLAC-BMZ/GIZ cooperation programme and is managed by ECLAC in conjunction with Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) and funded by the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ). The chapters were designed by Claudia Robles and were prepared by Nincen Figueroa, Raúl Holz, María Luisa Marinho, Amalia Palma and Claudia Robles, staff members of the Social Development Division of ECLAC, and Bernardo Atuesta, Isabel Jacas and Tamara Van Hemelryck, consultants of the same division. Ernesto Espíndola was in charge of the statistical processing for chapter II of this document. Nathan Huanacune, Constantin Mengersen and Diego Olivares provided substantive contributions to various sections of the document.

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## Summary

Social protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean face multiple challenges to enhance their universality, comprehensiveness, sustainability and resilience. The region must tackle structural inequalities that are reflected in the coverage, sufficiency and financial sustainability of these systems. These issues are exacerbated by additional problems related to a highly complex context. A series of cascading crises, which includes the health, economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, has been compounded by a reconfigured social risk structure that conditions the future of social protection systems. The overall challenge is threefold and involves (i) closing the structural gaps in these systems that have existed in the region since before the pandemic, (ii) designing strategies to reverse the profound impacts of the pandemic on the population's well-being, and (iii) preparing for a more complex reality for the future of social protection. This requires bolstering specific instruments and the systemic, comprehensive and resilient approach to social protection systems.

In addition to identifying the main structural challenges of social protection systems and the social protection responses that countries implemented during the pandemic, this document seeks to characterise the current risk structure in the region. The argument is made that this risk structure conditions the future of social protection systems in terms of the design, content and institutional framework of the policies and instruments that are needed. These systems must prepare for a wider range of social risks that undermine rights and may result in the loss of welfare levels. In the current context, social protection must be strengthened to be able to transform the underlying conditions of vulnerability faced by persons, households and territories. To this end, this document lays out policy recommendations, cross-cutting priorities and guidelines for strengthening their institutional capacities.



## Introduction

# The future of social protection

Claudia Robles

### A. A region scarred by the pandemic facing structural deficits in social protection

On 5 May 2023, the World Health Organization declared the end of the international public health emergency set off by the COVID-19 pandemic (WHO, 2023). The pandemic caused more than 6.9 million deaths worldwide (PAHO, 2023) and profound social impacts on multiple dimensions of well-being.

Latin America and the Caribbean was one of the regions hardest hit by the pandemic. The health crisis was followed by a protracted economic and social crisis, the effects of which continue to this day. Between 2020 and 2022, the region accounted for 27% of all COVID-19 deaths, despite representing only 8.4% of the global population (ECLAC, 2022a). Some of the pandemic's impacts include a deterioration in various indicators of early childhood development, in life expectancy at birth between 2020 and 2021, in increased mortality and, in general, in various indicators that reflect the structural weaknesses of health systems in the region, despite significant differences between countries (Marinho, Dahuabe and Arenas de Mesa, 2023). As has been widely documented, the repercussions on economic growth and employment—closely tied to the health measures that were implemented by countries—did not take long to appear. As a result, poverty, extreme poverty and unemployment all rose, while labour participation fell sharply. A simultaneous care crisis also occurred. Together, these phenomena have created significant setbacks in the various dimensions of inclusive social development and in efforts to reduce inequalities in the region in a sustained way (ECLAC, 2021 and 2022c). More specifically, as ECLAC has noted, in 2020 extreme poverty experienced a two-decade reversal, returning to the levels of the early 2000s (ECLAC, 2022a).

Although key social indicators in employment and poverty have recovered somewhat (ECLAC, 2023a), setbacks in other areas, such as education and health, cast doubt on the sustainability of these improvements. They will likely have significant impacts on various dimensions of well-being while

also providing insights and creating new challenges for future crises. For example, the severe educational crisis of 2020 and 2021 will have a scarring effect on the educations of thousands of children, adolescents and young persons, which will be further deepened by multidimensional impacts on their well-being (ECLAC, 2022a).

The extent of this damage reflects the structural deficits of social protection systems in the region. Coverage has been significantly expanded since the 2000s, with innovative measures being implemented to reach the poorest and most vulnerable populations (Cecchini and Martínez, 2011). However, the pandemic exposed gaps in the coverage, sufficiency and financial sustainability in the various dimensions of these systems. Health systems faced numerous challenges and revealed the problems associated with underfunding, fragmentation and segmentation that make it difficult to have universal, comprehensive and sustainable systems (Cid and Marinho, 2022; Marinho, Dahuabe and Arenas de Mesa, 2023). As the labour market deteriorated, the region lost a decade of pension coverage (ECLAC, 2022c) and a significant share of households and persons were excluded from access to contributory and non-contributory social protection mechanisms. Unemployment insurance, which serves as an automatic stabiliser during a crisis (Bertranou, Casalí and Velasco, 2018), played an important but limited role due to its low legal and effective coverage in the region, given the high levels of labour informality. Additionally, non-contributory entitlements provide highly targeted coverage of the poor or extremely poor population. As a result, the countries responded with an unprecedented range of emergency non-contributory social protection measures, and by August 2022, according to ECLAC data, 506 measures had been implemented to contain the impacts of the pandemic.<sup>1</sup> With regard to cash transfers specifically, 77% were new measures. Despite the steps taken, the devastating impacts of the pandemic show the severe limitations and challenges of social protection systems in addressing crises.

The region should never again have to cope with such a large-scale disaster under the current conditions of its social protection systems. In a scenario in which a number of ongoing transformations are identified that will condition the social protection systems of the future, it is important to analyse how these systems responded to the impacts of the pandemic and the lessons learned from this process in order to close their structural gaps. This document focuses on the future of social protection. It presents information on the current gaps in social protection systems in the region, documents responses and innovations in non-contributory social protection during the pandemic, and identifies policy proposals to move towards universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient systems in the context of recurrent crises. Furthermore, in the midst of ongoing structural changes, the argument is made that these systems must prepare for an expanded and reconfigured social risk structure. Doing so entails rethinking the social protection architecture that is in place in the region and identifying strategic choices. Structural changes can challenge social protection systems in different ways as well as shape and condition their future to varying degrees. In addition to these changes, the region is facing a series of cascading crises (ECLAC, 2022b), which makes it even more urgent to strengthen social protection systems. Social protection has a key role to play in addressing these challenges in order to guarantee levels of well-being that make it possible for people to exercise their economic, social and cultural rights.

In this process, this document argues that it is essential to tackle a threefold challenge: (i) close the structural gaps in these systems that have existed in the region since before the pandemic, (ii) design strategies to reverse the profound impacts of the pandemic on the population's well-being, and (iii) prepare for a more complex reality for the future of social protection. This requires bolstering specific instruments and the systemic, comprehensive and resilient approach to social protection systems.

This introduction covers two issues that can help gauge the level of the challenge that social protection systems face. First, the concept of social protection must be reconsidered in light of the challenges of inclusive social development as well as those due to the unfinished task of building welfare

<sup>1</sup> On the basis of official information from the countries, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean Observatory [online database] <https://www.cepal.org/es/temas/covid-19> and "Social Protection Measures to Confront COVID-19", Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean [online database] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/listamedidas.php>. For more information, see chapter III of this document.

states in the region (ECLAC, 2010). Second, the implications of a reconfigured risk structure must be accounted for in order to better identify policy proposals that can help strengthen it. In the remainder of this introduction, these two issues are addressed in greater detail and an overview of the issues covered in this document is given.

## **B. Social protection systems are key to inclusive social development and a central axis of the welfare state**

At the World Summit for Social Development in Denmark in 1995, the objective of social protection was defined and closely tied to the reduction of poverty caused by various phenomena, including reasons related to care, natural disasters, civil unrest, war and forced displacement (United Nations, 1995). This definition foresaw the need for a broad understanding of the causes behind the key role of social protection systems and their need to adapt to phenomena related to change. In 2000, the United Nations, through its Commission for Social Development, pioneered a definition of social protection as “a set of public and private policies and programs undertaken by societies in response to various contingencies in order to offset the absence or substantial reduction of income from work; provide assistance for families with children; and provide people with health care and housing” (United Nations, 2000, p. 3). This definition recognises income protection and the provision of access to health care as two central functions of social protection insurance or protection against contingencies or risks. These functions were already enshrined in the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102). The nine branches of social security established in this Convention already set out key benefits of existing social protection systems and the risks to be covered by them: (i) medical care, (ii) sickness benefit, (iii) maternity benefit, (iv) old-age benefit, (v) invalidity benefit, (vi) survivors’ benefit, (vii) employment injury benefit, (viii) unemployment benefit, and (ix) family benefit. These branches combine contributory and non-contributory entitlements (Arenas de Mesa, 2019). This definition was broadened during the debates on social protection in the early 2000s to include both statutory and non-statutory systems (ILO, 2001).

The ILO considers social protection as “a human right [that] is defined as a set of policies and programmes designed to reduce and prevent poverty, vulnerability and social exclusion throughout the life cycle” (ILO, 2021, p. 244). In 2012, a key milestone was reached with the issuance of the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), which, among other things, provides guidance to countries on establishing social protection floors. According to the recommendation, these floors are nationally defined sets of basic social security guarantees in the areas covered by social protection: access to essential health care, including maternity care; basic income security for children and persons of active age who are unable to earn sufficient income, in particular in cases of sickness, unemployment, maternity and disability; and basic income security for older persons (paragraph 5).

In 2020, ECLAC noted the urgency of developing inclusive social development as part of the global challenges to achieve the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. Inclusive social development was understood as “the capacity of States to ensure the full exercise of their citizens’ social, economic and cultural rights, providing forums for participation and recognition, targeting gaps in access to key areas of well-being and addressing social inequalities and the axes around which they are structured from the perspective of a universalism sensitive to differences” (ECLAC, 2018, p. 77).<sup>2</sup>

From that point, strengthening social protection systems was seen as a key instrument for achieving inclusive social development and sustainable development in general, and more specifically, for eradicating poverty and significantly reducing inequalities to close gaps with regard to fully exercising persons’ economic, social and cultural rights. This was proposed as part of the four priority axes in the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development (ECLAC, 2020), a technical-political instrument that

<sup>2</sup> This definition was given in the preparatory document for the Second Meeting of the Presiding Officers of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2018).

has sought to accelerate the achievement of the social dimension of the 2030 Agenda in the region.<sup>3</sup> The agenda defines social protection as policies aimed at “guarantee[ing] universal access to income that permits an adequate level of well-being, as well as universal access social services (such as health, education, water and sanitation), housing, labour inclusion policies and decent work” (ECLAC, 2020, p. 5).

In line with this view, regional efforts in social protection should be aimed at “design[ing], consolidat[ing] and deepen[ing] national policies and social protection floors following the rationale of an integrated system: with comprehensive goals, universal coverage and pertinent entitlements, that is integrative towards participants, and adaptive to particularities of populations and territories” (ECLAC, 2020, p. 31) in accordance with the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This approach directly supports the implementation of target 1.3 (“Implement nationally appropriate social protection systems and measures for all, including floors, and by 2030 achieve substantial coverage of the poor and the vulnerable”) of SDG 1, target 10.4 (“Adopt policies, especially fiscal, wage and social protection policies, and progressively achieve greater equality”) of SDG 10, as well as target 10.3 (“Ensure equal opportunity and reduce inequalities of outcome, including by eliminating discriminatory laws, policies and practices and promoting appropriate legislation, policies and action in this regard”) and target 10.2 (“By 2030, empower and promote the social, economic and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion or economic or other status”) as well as the other interrelated targets in SDGs 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 8, 8, 11, 13, 16 and 17 (ECLAC, 2020).

In this regard, the concept of social protection is broadened to include not only risks linked to income protection and health care but also actions that seek to contribute to the development of human capacities with a transformative role in the basic structural conditions of societies. As a result, social protection encompasses contributory and non-contributory entitlements as well as policies linked to labour inclusion and care. Increasingly, the latter types of policies are beginning to be considered as a cross-cutting component of social protection systems. Doing so recognises the risks that the social organisation of caregiving creates for the well-being of households and their members due to persistent gender inequalities in paid and unpaid work in the region. Given the lack of quality caregiving services and their high market costs, such risks transcend those covered by family entitlements and include those for caregivers and people in need of care (Rico and Robles, 2019).

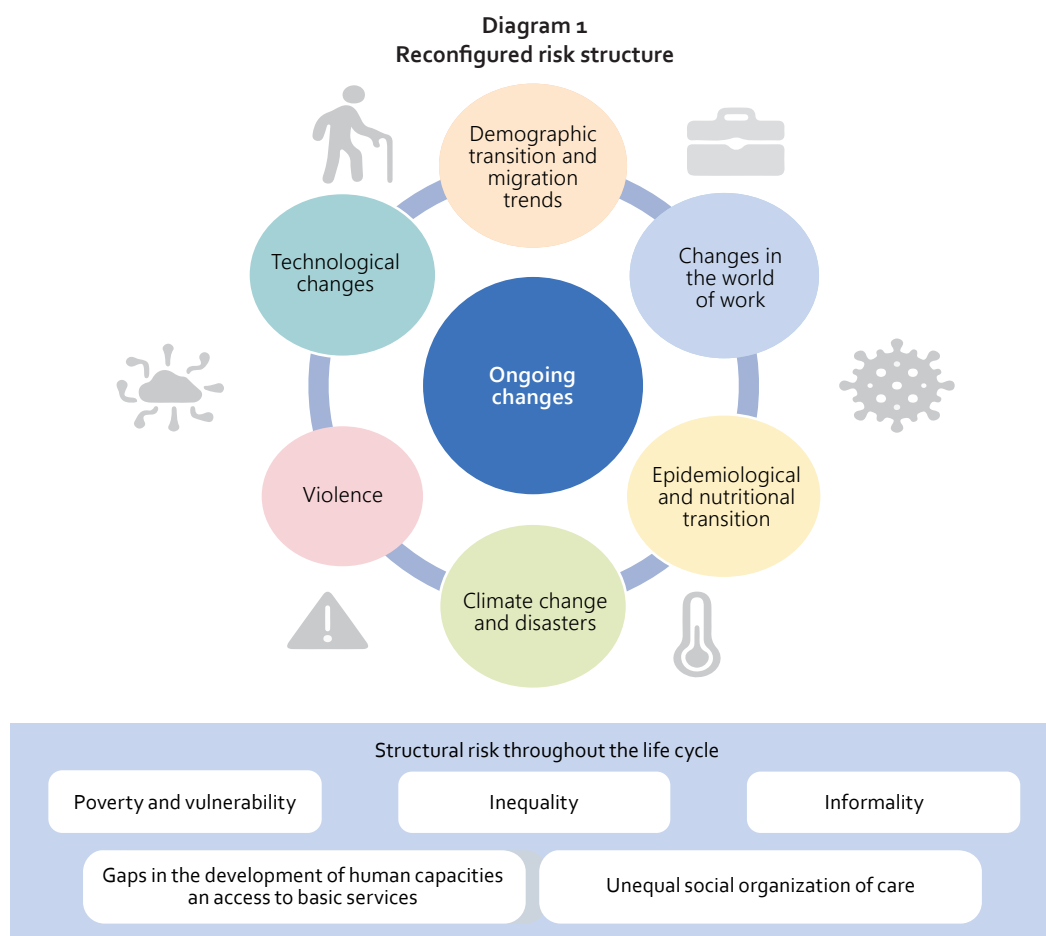
Similarly, based on this view, the social protection system constitutes the central axis of a welfare state, understood as a set of policies adopted by the State that seek to ensure a minimum level of well-being for citizens, protecting people from the risks of unemployment, illness, old age and maternity, as well as contributing to the development of human capacities through investment in health and education (Segura-Ubiergo, 2007 in ECLAC, 2010, p. 238). State action thus makes it possible to intervene in at least three substantive areas of welfare outside of market forces: guaranteed minimum income levels for all people, reduced insecurity through the coverage of certain social risks, and access to high-quality social services (Briggs, 1961). Such policies make it possible to decommodify access to welfare through the provision of goods, services and transfers and make it independent of family resources. They also help regulate key aspects of the labour market and the redistribution of resources, thereby reducing the resulting levels of stratification and inequality (ECLAC, 2010; Esping-Andersen, 1990, 1999 and 2002). The major pending challenge for the region—in addition to strengthening its social institutions (ECLAC, 2023b)—is to complete the unfinished task of building solid welfare states, with solidarity in the distribution of risks and which allows all people to fully exercise their rights and provide access to opportunities at a time of significant change. This document argues that this issue faces renewed challenges in the context of transformations that will shape the future of social protection.

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<sup>3</sup> The Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development was approved by the Ministers and High Authorities of Social Development at the Third Meeting of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean in Mexico City in 2019 (ECLAC, 2020).

## C. The social protection of the future in the face of challenges and changes

The region is undergoing accelerated changes and transformations stemming from some of the structural and emerging obstacles to inclusive social development, identified by ECLAC since the end of the last decade. These obstacles include, among others, various forms of violence, disasters and climate change, demographic, epidemiological and nutritional transitions, and changes in technology and the world of work (ECLAC, 2019). Given that these obstacles and their interaction with each other are an ongoing source of vulnerability for persons and households, this document argues that they have the potential to activate a reconfiguring structure of social risks and challenge the future of social protection systems (see diagram 1).



Source: Prepared by the authors.

As Kaztman and Filgueira (1999) point out, changes in the vulnerability status of households are understood in terms of their capacity to respond to risks. This capacity can be explained by variations in household resources (the capacities of household members, their social capital and family relationships, their physical capital or assets, and their income and employment), in their opportunity structures, or both. An opportunity structure establishes the probabilities of access to goods, services and activities; state institutions and policies play a dominant role in this structure. Thus, when social protection responses cannot adequately address the changes described above, persons and households can become more vulnerable.

This document discusses and proposes that the intensity with which the ongoing transformations are occurring, their acceleration in some cases, and their level of interconnectedness and interaction will result in a reconfigured risk structure that conditions social protection of the future. This reconfigured structure adds to the various structural risks that the region has historically faced and which have, until now, been at the centre of the responses of social protection systems. As suggested in this document, the simultaneous attention to this set of risks reinforces the need to broaden the design of social protection systems, their components and scope with a transformative perspective on the conditions that underpin people's vulnerability. Doing so involves considering highly resilient short-term actions to deal with emergencies—for example, in the case of disasters—as well as implementing policies that can lay the groundwork for further required transformations. This would be relevant, for example, when working to achieve the synergies required between an education system and comprehensive care, labour inclusion and transfer policies that equip workers with the necessary skills to cope with the just transition and the challenges of a changing labour market.

The potential impact of ongoing changes on people's well-being and their implications for the future of social protection systems has also been noted by the ILO (2021), the European Commission (2023) and the World Bank (2022). The ILO (2021) highlights the challenges that changes in the world of work pose for ensuring adequate social protection for workers. It also raises the importance of social protection to support a just transition to more sustainable, low-carbon economies in order to protect populations, persons and households most at risk of facing climate-related hardships and being affected by this transition.

Meanwhile, the European Commission (2023), in its report prepared by the High-Level Group on the future of social protection and the welfare state in the European Union (EU) examines the profound impact of four global megatrends on the social protection landscape in the EU: (i) demographic changes; (ii) changes in the labour market; (iii) digitalisation and technological developments; and (iv) climate change and the transition to a green economy. Based on these trends, the report emphasises the need to adapt social protection strategies with a focus on the full life cycle and underlines the indispensable role of the welfare state in maintaining inclusive social protection in this region.

The World Bank (2022) has also drawn attention to the global trends that are shaping economies and societies. These include climate change, technological innovation and its implications for the labour market as well as ageing and persistent gender inequalities and inequalities affecting various population groups, along with the challenges posed by situations of increased fragility and conflict.

The multifaceted challenges facing social protection policies in the region have also been discussed by Bertranou, Casali and Velasco (2018) and Schüring and Loewe (2021). The former highlights the gaps in dealing with accelerating demographic, labour market and technological changes and climate change issues as part of the challenges associated with the future of social protection. Schüring and Loewe (2021) point to demographic changes, globalisation, changes in the labour market due to automation and digitalisation, and economic and structural shifts due to climate change among these challenges. They also underscore the need to strengthen flexible and modern yet universal and comprehensive social protection systems to address the evolving challenges of the twenty-first century.

These analyses help identify the role that these transformations will play in the new architectures of social protection in the region, as well as their implications in terms of the management and design of entitlements. They also help contextualise the challenges that the systems face in terms of their universality, comprehensiveness, sustainability and resilience, at a time when stakeholders around the world are discussing how to achieve a socially, environmentally and economically just transition.

First, although ongoing changes are expected to have a greater impact on the most vulnerable and poorest people, their cross-cutting nature reflects the need to deepen efforts to move towards universal coverage. This can be understood as “[...] the combination of broad, adequate and quality coverage for the entire population” (Martínez and Sánchez-Ancochea, 2013, p. 94), to which can be added the

distributive capacity of entitlements (Martínez and Sánchez-Ancochea, 2013 and financial sustainability (Arenas de Mesa, 2019).

Second, social protection must be designed with a stronger systemic rationale, with increasing levels of comprehensiveness to simultaneously address diverse challenges through complementary policies, resilience and adaptation. Third, the magnitude of the challenges in the design and implementation of social protection systems must be fully understood. For example, it is important to note the role that debates on digital social protection will play in the context of accelerating technological transformations. This phenomenon will have implications not only for policies that seek to reduce digital divides but also for the operation of social protection policies, their social information systems, and the set of protocols that enable their operation (Palma, 2023). Finally, emerging transformations present a particular challenge to sustainability, especially those that will be strained by increasing fiscal pressure on policies for older adults and the possible decline in contributions due to labour-market changes. This phenomenon will require redoubling efforts to extend contributory social protection coverage alongside national strategies to reduce labour informality. Stronger social, fiscal and intergenerational pacts will also need to be forged that reflect broad agreements on the levels of social protection to be safeguarded in the countries and how to finance them.

Following this introduction, the first chapter explains the cascading crisis context and what can be called a social risk structure under reconfiguration and the challenges it poses for social protection systems. The second chapter addresses the structural challenges of social protection systems, including disaster responses, that predate the pandemic and that will have to be tackled in the current and future scenarios. The third chapter discusses the social protection response to the pandemic and identifies the main lessons learned. The fourth chapter puts forward strategic choices to strengthen social protection systems in the region, while the fifth chapter systematises various key challenges for the social institutional framework. Finally, the sixth chapter closes with reflections on the future of social protection.

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## I. The future of social protection: challenges posed by a reconfigured risk structure

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Isabel Jacas  
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The region is experiencing a cascading crisis that is reflected through all three dimensions of sustainable development: low economic growth, setbacks in inclusive social development, and increasing environmental degradation. In the economic dimension, the region showed in 2022 a major economic slowdown, rising financing costs, and showing high levels of indebtedness and inflation. Low growth is expected to continue in 2023 and 2024, resulting in a slowdown in employment growth and possibly lower quality jobs (ECLAC, 2023b). It should also be noted that the decade between 2014 and 2023 shows the lowest growth rate of the region's economies since 1951, reaching only 0.8%. Meanwhile, in the so-called "lost decade" between 1980 and 1989 (in the midst of structural adjustment), growth reached 2% (Salazar-Xirinachs, 2022).

Regarding the environmental crises, the United Nations has argued that we are facing a triple planetary crisis, which includes shifts in temperatures and weather patterns, pollution, and biodiversity loss. First, shifts in temperatures and weather patterns have been linked to human activities, the principal ecosystem disruptors, and have an impact on phenomena such as "[...] droughts, water scarcity, wildfires, rising sea levels, flooding, melting polar ice, catastrophic storms and declining biodiversity" (United Nations Climate Change, 2022). These problems are compounded by air pollution, which is a major cause of disease and premature death globally, as well as biodiversity loss, with implications for food and drinking water availability (United Nations Climate Change, 2022). These environmental crises erode the natural foundation of our existence with increased disasters and substantial impacts on the livelihoods of households and communities (ECLAC, 2021a).

These economic and environmental events significantly impact the social dimension, as these crises have major repercussions on people's well-being, and heighten their vulnerability. They further restrict the possibilities of the countries to make headway in eradicating poverty and extreme poverty and reducing inequalities, which exacerbates the deterioration of people's living conditions. In 2020,

poverty reached levels not seen in two decades in Latin America. While the incidence of poverty fell by 0.5 percentage points in 2021, poverty still affected 201 million people (32.3% of the population) in the region that year, including 80 million in extreme poverty (12.9%). Notwithstanding, the vulnerability of the population is even greater. In 2022, even after the acute phase of the pandemic had passed, 58.5% of the population fell within low-income strata (extreme poverty, poverty, and low-income). If those in the lower-middle income strata (i.e. with incomes of up to three poverty lines) are added in, the total is 78.4% of the population (ECLAC, 2022a). Furthermore, as the pandemic made clear, the risk of poverty and vulnerability of persons does not affect everyone equally. The data is compelling regarding the differentiated impacts of the pandemic and the social crisis among children and adolescents, young persons, women, persons with disabilities, Indigenous people, and people of African descent (ECLAC, 2020a; Robles and Rossel, 2021). Inequality is also a persistent structural characteristic of Latin American societies. Although income inequality dropped in the 2000s, its reduction slowed in the early 2010s and has stagnated at relatively high levels since 2017, even increasing in 2020 during the pandemic (ECLAC, 2022a).

The crises, reflected across the three dimensions of sustainable development, are intertwined in complex ways and combine specific aspects of the climate, health, employment, food security, and cost of living crises, among others. Taken together, phenomena such as these can make the lives and survival of millions of people more difficult and amplify phenomena such as migration, displacement, and food insecurity. This situation has direct implications for rethinking social policy and the determinants of inclusive social development.

The COVID-19 pandemic provided important lessons on the need to plan responses to ongoing and future crises that may impact the region. The pandemic, which began as a health crisis, became the worst economic and social crisis in Latin America and the Caribbean of the last century. It exposed the multiple structural gaps in the region's development model and has impacted various areas such as production, labour, transport, education, health and nutrition, housing, social protection, and caregiving. The pandemic also revealed more clearly the characteristics of the social inequality matrix in the region and has exacerbated differences in income, the exercise of rights, and well-being (ECLAC, 2020a, 2021a and 2021b). It also showed how, along with efforts to end poverty, reducing inequalities and paying closer attention to the middle-income strata must be made a priority in social and social-protection policies to deal with the many recurrent crises. Moreover, the pandemic underscored the urgency of developing universal and sustainable social protection systems, given the pervasive vulnerability of the population beyond the poor and extremely poor.

The multidimensional impacts of the pandemic showed the limited capacity of current social protection systems to protect income and consumption levels or safeguard the process of human capacity development when faced with events that threatened well-being. The series of critical events described above reflects a situation in which crises are becoming increasingly recurrent and can turn into shocks due to the disparate capacity of households to handle them.

The different simultaneous transformations currently underway add further complexity to this situation. These transformations involve demographic, labour-market, and revolutionary technological changes. Additional processes have also been taking root in recent years, such as the climate crisis and disasters, the epidemiological and nutritional transition, and the different expressions of violence. These changes represent critical obstacles to inclusive social development (ECLAC, 2019) because they come with new and varied challenges for policies. They also amplify the risk structure under reconfiguration that conditions the future of social protection systems.

Risk analysis is an essential part of reflecting upon and theorising about social protection systems. The debate has shifted from a purely risk-based approach, in which social protection is considered a safety net, towards transformative social protection (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004) and the extension of citizenship to guarantee the full exercise of people's social, economic, and cultural

rights. Additionally, from a rights-based approach, social protection policies and programmes have a fundamental role to play in guaranteeing rights in multiple areas (such as education, health, food, work, and pensions). From this perspective, social protection systems must act on the structural conditions of poverty and inequality by considering the risks specifically associated with the different stages of the life cycle. Social protection policies and programmes thus identify the population receiving entitlements as rights-holders, and States as duty bearers.<sup>4</sup>

In this chapter, a conceptual framework is proposed for analysing the challenges for the future of social protection systems in the region. The first section describes the main components of a reconfigured risk structure. This structure includes the various ongoing changes in addition to considering the structural risks that are traditionally addressed by social protection systems linked to the life cycle, unemployment, and health. As such, the argument is made that social protection systems in the region must be prepared to tackle both long-term changes and related cyclical events.

## A. The region faces a risk structure under reconfiguration

Social protection has traditionally focused on life-cycle risks<sup>5</sup> as well as those linked to the labour market, such as occupational accidents and unemployment. This model has been built primarily on the assumption that access to social protection is gained through formal employment. This model has had limited reach in the region (ECLAC, 2006), which is evident from the high levels of labour informality. As a result, social protection systems have been expanding their range of instruments, with a particularly sharp increase since the 2000s towards non-contributory social protection (Cecchini and Martínez, 2011). The task of building fully universal, comprehensive, sustainable, and resilient social protection systems, however, remains unfinished and will require all components to be simultaneously strengthened. Thus, social protection systems in the region continue to face a set of structural problems and risks, which include poverty and extreme poverty, inequality, informality, gaps in the development of human capacities and access to social services, and a social organisation of care based on the unequal distribution of paid and unpaid work. There are also cyclical risks that can deepen these structural problems, such as economic crises.

Today, social protection systems must provide levels of insurance against a reconfigured risk structure, which faces other challenges in addition to these structural problems. If social protection systems are unable to respond adequately, this risk structure could further worsen the well-being of the population.

It is possible to describe this risk structure based on the 12 critical obstacles to the achievement of inclusive social development that were identified by ECLAC in 2019. Inclusive social development is one of three foundational dimensions of sustainable development, according to the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. These obstacles include structural and emerging factors. The following structural obstacles were identified: the persistence of and vulnerability to poverty; structural, unfair, and inefficient inequalities and the culture of privilege; gaps in human capacity development (education, health, and nutrition) and access to basic services; a shortage of decent work and the uncertainties related to technological changes in the labour market; partial and unequal access to social protection; an

<sup>4</sup> This perspective moves away from the conception of individual social risks, sometimes referred to as idiosyncratic and considered uncorrelated, and of the so-called covariate risks, considered correlated and affecting many households at the same time (see for example Jørgensen and Holzmann, 2003). This view tends to remove risks from their structural social and economic context and considers, for example, illness, disability, domestic violence and unemployment as individual risks.

<sup>5</sup> In what follows, the term "risk" will be used rather than "uncertainty". Both terms are used in different ways and much debate has ensued regarding their different interpretations and the more methodological applications that are unrelated to the everyday use of these terms. For more details, see Barr (2003, 2020) and Kay and King (2020). The use of the term "risk" is also consistent with the three flagship agreements adopted by the United Nations in 2015: the Sustainable Development Goals for the 2030 Agenda, the Paris Agreement on climate change, and the Sendai Framework for Disaster Risk Reduction 2015–2030 (commonly known as the Sendai Framework) (IPCC, 2020; United Nations, 2015; UNDRR, 2021).

incomplete social institutional framework; and an insufficient level of social investment. Five emerging obstacles to inclusive social development were also identified: (i) various forms of violence; (ii) climate change and disasters; (iii) demographic, epidemiological and nutritional transitions; (iv) migration at the crossroads of inclusive social development; and (v) technological changes and capabilities (ECLAC, 2019).

The argument was made that closing the gaps and inequalities in access to well-being, reflected in these critical obstacles, would be essential for moving towards a regional commitment to achieving inclusive social development (and thus, the possibility for States to guarantee the full exercise of people's social, economic and cultural rights) (ECLAC, 2018a). Accordingly, social protection systems face many challenges in containing and overcoming the consequences of these obstacles.

In the current context, it is possible to argue that some of these critical obstacles are fostering a reconfigured risk structure and should therefore be increasingly accounted for and addressed by social protection policies. Although the risks include various phenomena that have been developing over recent decades (such as disasters and the epidemiological and nutritional transition), what is new and structure-altering is that these risks occur simultaneously in a context of multiple changes, with growing intensity and modifications that make them more complex to deal with. They therefore come with new and multidimensional difficulties, which may limit the effectiveness of future social protection given the level of challenges they impose on existing policies, the magnitude of their impacts on the well-being of the population, and, especially, their mutual interaction which amplifies repercussions.

In line with the emerging obstacles noted by ECLAC (2019), the risks that have emerged with increasing intensity in recent years and which will be detailed below are the following: (i) technological changes; (ii) changes in the world of work; (iii) climate change in the context of the triple planetary crisis and disasters; (iv) demographic change and migratory trends; (v) violence; and (vi) the challenges of the epidemiological and nutritional transition (see diagram 1 in the Introduction). Together, these ongoing, interrelated, and mutually reinforcing changes are reshaping a reconfigured risk structure that will require new instruments, mechanisms, and coordination for social protection systems, with a stronger social institutional framework that is prepared to respond simultaneously to structural risks and the occurrence of multiple and diverse interdependent shocks. Addressing the future of social protection will thus require a systemic view. The aim is to achieve social protection that covers crises and emergencies in the short term and is transformative in the medium and long term to ensure a continuous and sustained improvement of economic and social rights.

## **1. Technological changes: the impact of digital transformations**

While technology is constantly changing, these processes have occurred at varying intensities throughout history. The ongoing fourth industrial revolution builds on the digital revolution, which enabled production automation using information technologies and electronics (third revolution). It is characterised by the fusion of physical, digital, and biological technologies, thus blurring their boundaries, and is distinguished by the speed, scope, and systemic impacts of the changes. Perhaps one of the most visible phenomena has been the rapid adoption of digital technologies in many new areas of life. This digital transformation has influenced the way goods and services are consumed, how production is carried out, business structures and operations, as well as our social interactions and the way people interact with government entities. The COVID-19 pandemic clearly accelerated these changes. Given the need for physical distancing and reducing contact between people, daily activities shifted from being conducted face-to-face to the digital modality wherever possible. This transition to the digital sphere, which was previously underway but at a slower pace, became crucial to continuing many essential transactions and ensuring the viability of many economic and social activities.

The digital transformation has unleashed accelerated economic, political, social, and cultural changes. While these changes may bring benefits that must be recognised and harnessed, they can have a potentially negative effect on people's lives by widening gaps in key aspects of well-being. Social

protection policies can be critical to reap the benefits of technological change without harming the population. In addition to the ramifications of the digital transformation on the world of work (which are examined in detail in the following section), four interrelated themes will be touched on below, where the impact of technological advances reaches areas that involve social protection: (i) the digitalisation of the state's social offer; (ii) payment digitalisation; (iii) information systems and data privacy; and (iv) access to digital social services (Palma, 2024).

First, the digitalisation of the State's social offer for better integration involves implementing innovative digital tools to make the delivery of social services more effective and efficient as well as prioritising certain programmes and vulnerable populations. However, there is also a risk that technological advances can be a source of exclusion and rights violations if access to technology is not equitable—as seen during the pandemic—due to a lack of connectivity and access to devices, and technology coupled with insufficient digital skills.

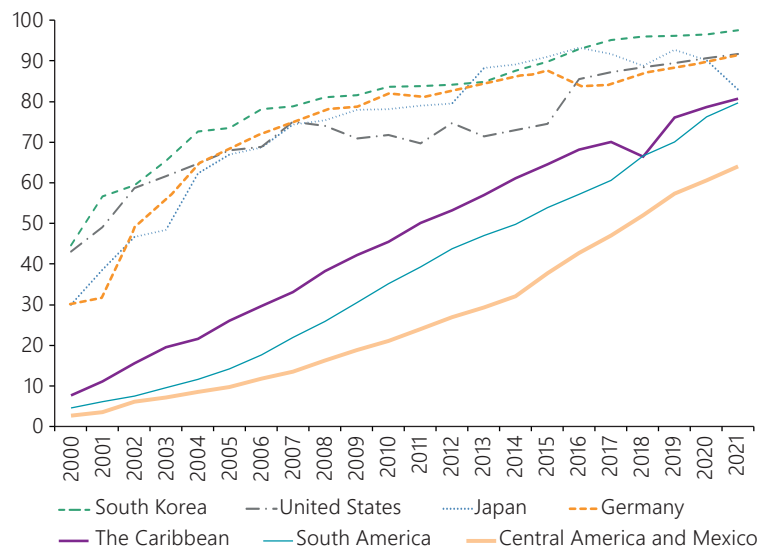
Second, a major change has been the digitisation of payments. While payment digitalisation facilitates the delivery and availability of resources to recipients, some people may be excluded from accessing transfer programme payments. This occurs if certain populations are not identified or if they are living in areas without financial institutions and where it is difficult or impossible to withdraw payments or make purchases with digital cards (Gupta, 2021; Lowe, 2022). In this context, there are populations with greater problems of access and familiarity with digital technologies, and so they face more difficulties in accessing services and exchanging information (older persons are one such example), which increases the risk of exclusion (Lowe, 2022). The opportunities offered by new technologies also depend on the cultural and geographical context, as shopping with cards or digital devices is highly urbanised, and not as extensive in rural areas.

Third, information systems and the increased availability of data create risks associated with information privacy. There are data privacy loopholes that expose the public to new threats, putting their information at risk and exposing them to electronic fraud or other abuses. Privacy issues are central to social protection programmes, and while significant advances have been made in data use, there is a lack of proposals regarding the right to privacy of information and its misuse (DCI, 2022; IPC-IG, 2022; Lowe, 2022; Valente, Neris and Frago, 2021). Among the consequences and challenges this poses for social protection are the potential discrimination of persons, decreased trust in programmes due to the divulgence of information, and irregularities in the functioning of social protection measures due to exclusion errors or coverage problems resulting from incorrect identification of recipients.

Fourth, regarding access to basic services, digital education and health undoubtedly continue to be a challenge in this transformation process. The risks of exclusion are high if the connectivity of the population is not significantly increased. Digital health, for example, can offer benefits, especially to people in remote areas where there are no specialists or infrastructure to ensure access to health services. As countries move towards digital government and digital modification of communication options, digital technologies can either make these services more available, or further widen the gaps between those who are excluded from the digital transformation (Palma, 2024).

One way of tackling the risk posed by the digitalisation of social policy and programmes for the guarantee of social rights is to examine Internet use, which is a necessary condition for its access. Figure 1 shows the change in the percentage of people using the Internet, demonstrating the progress over the last twenty years. Although levels in South America exceed 60% of the population, this is still low compared to developed countries, and is a wake-up call for the digitisation of social programmes. Moreover, these data obscure differences between countries; for example, in 2021 this indicator was just 38.9% in Haiti and 48% in Honduras, while in Antigua and Barbuda, Bahamas, Chile, and Uruguay, it was over 90%. Progress in the digitisation of state procedures must go hand in hand with digital inclusion in the region so as not to reinforce new sources of exclusion and widen gaps.

**Figure 1**  
**Selected regions and countries: people who use the Internet**  
 (Percentages)



Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of the International Telecommunication Union (ITU) with data as of July 2023.

The digital transformation will entail major changes in the world of work, including the dynamics of job destruction/creation, and new challenges arising from new forms of atypical employment which result in significant adaptation challenges for labour markets. These issues are highlighted in the following section.

## 2. Transformations in the world of work triggered by technological, environmental and demographic changes

Technological changes in the world of work can be both an opportunity in terms of productivity gains and economic growth, and a disruption to the organisation of labour which affects workers differently. The rapid and continuing adoption of advanced technologies, such as robots, artificial intelligence, and software in production, consumption, and distribution processes, includes impacts on the tasks traditionally performed by humans in their jobs and how the supply and demand of goods and services are connected. For example, in developed countries such as the United States or European countries, the number of digital workers has increased significantly in the last decade.<sup>6</sup> Meanwhile, in Latin America, the share of digital workers has remained low but growing (Charles, Xia, and Coutts, 2022).

In addition to creating new jobs, technological change transforms the dynamics of work, directly affecting the way workers do their jobs. The debate arising from the emergence of robotisation and artificial intelligence and their possible consequences in terms of job destruction has led various authors to highlight the disruptive potential that these new technologies can have on traditional jobs (Frey and Osborne, 2017). The need to reconfigure tasks and work dynamics to adapt and learn to work with new technologies has also become apparent (Lassébie and Quintini, 2022; Martínez, 2023; Weller and others, 2019). In this context, Espíndola and Suárez (2023) estimate that

<sup>6</sup> In this context, the concept of digital workers refers to a range of occupations and includes people working for digital platforms or on-demand logistics services (delivery, transportation), highly skilled software developers working remotely, and persons earning income through social media and livestreaming services (Charles, Xia, and Coutts, 2022).

jobs at high risk of automation in 14 Latin American countries will mainly affect men, and to a greater extent, those without university qualifications and in the intermediate quintiles. This would confirm that technological changes in the world of work entail risks of setbacks for different populations in terms of labour rights. It also means that social protection could anticipate the risks associated with this process and identify those most likely to be negatively impacted.

While these innovations can boost productivity and create new jobs, they also enable the proliferation of non-standard and informal work dynamics, a phenomenon that is strongly present in the region and which tends to be associated with more precarious working conditions and reduced access to social protection. A clear example of this situation is the exponential increase, especially since the COVID-19 pandemic, of work on digital platforms (ILO, 2021b). The creation of these new employment platforms poses a major challenge for social protection, as it requires strengthening the coverage of persons who work in these platforms as informal workers. More importantly, it also requires understanding and assessing the new (and still emerging) forms of employment in order to protect those working in these sectors and meet their specific needs (Robles, Tenenbaum, and Jacas, 2023).

There are at least three other changes in the world of work that, while not directly related to technological change, are strongly influenced by it: the reorganisation and globalisation of value chains and labour relations (ECLAC, 2017); the just transition to green economies; and demographic changes. The consolidation of global value chains has become increasingly important in the organisation of international trade and investment. By 2020, the worldwide share of global value chains reached 44.4% of international trade and 12.1% of production (ADB, 2021).<sup>7</sup> Although worldwide, the number of firms engaged in importing and exporting comprise just 15% of the total, they account for 80% of international trade (World Bank, 2020b). This level of concentration has changed production and employment relations at the global economic scale, increasing the risk that working conditions and wages will worsen and that the fundamental rights of workers in this chain might not be respected (ILO, 2016). In Latin America, integration into global value chains occurs mainly from the links that provide less added value. This has an impact on the labour market, since it would not only entail greater employment in low-skilled jobs in labour-intensive sectors, but also reduce employment in more skilled and modern sectors (ECLAC, 2017; ECLAC/ILO, 2016). Low-skilled employment brings with it a lower standard of working conditions and less incentive for training than high-skilled employment, which is a challenge for labour inclusion, productive development, and social protection policies.

A second point relates to the challenges of a just transition towards environmentally sustainable economies, a factor that conditions the labour market as well as policies for labour inclusion and social protection in their ability to meet the new needs of industries in reconfiguration. Given the lack of sustainability of current production systems, the need to migrate to more sustainable, low-carbon economies has become a priority. This transition implies the destruction of jobs in polluting sectors, although it should result in the creation of new jobs and the transformation of existing jobs (Weller, 2017). These processes will affect different groups of workers in different ways, which poses a major challenge for social protection and labour inclusion policies. Such policies must be able to support changes in the labour market and new needs by anticipating foreseeable changes in sectors that will be adversely affected. They must prepare workers for the transition of productive sectors and protect household incomes during these periods. This also requires considering social protection policies in areas beyond the labour market, such as those arising from the risk of energy poverty (Morales, 2023).

Finally, demographic dynamics are also changing the labour market. As will be detailed in section I.A.4, the demographic shift in Latin America is fundamentally characterised by accelerated ageing, linked to the gradual end of the demographic dividend in the region's countries. Migration

<sup>7</sup> These values correspond to two different ways of estimating the size of global value chains. The first estimates the share of exports whose underlying added value crosses two or more borders before final consumption. The second is calculated from the share of gross domestic product that goes to exports of intermediate products.

dynamics are also changing. All these shifts have particular impacts on labour markets. Population ageing not only stresses the pension system and the labour market itself, but also increases the demands on health and comprehensive care policies, among other areas (Arenas de Mesa, Robles, and Vila, 2023).

### 3. Climate change in the context of the triple planetary crisis and various disasters

As the triple planetary crisis —the combination of climate change, pollution, and biodiversity loss (United Nations Climate Change, 2022)— becomes an undeniable and growing reality, its impact on the lives of persons, communities, and societies is increasingly evident. While disasters resulting from environmental degradation are manifold, climate hazards alone threaten to reverse the development gains of recent decades and could push more than 720 million people back into poverty by 2050 (Agrawal and others, 2019). Although climate change represents a slow process that has been unfolding for years, today its consequences are becoming urgent, as they are advancing at a faster pace and are expected to intensify in the coming decades (IPCC, 2023). In this context, and especially considering that disasters disproportionately affect the most vulnerable populations, social protection plays a crucial role (Cecchini, Holz, and Robles, 2021; ECLAC, 2021a; IPCC, 2023).

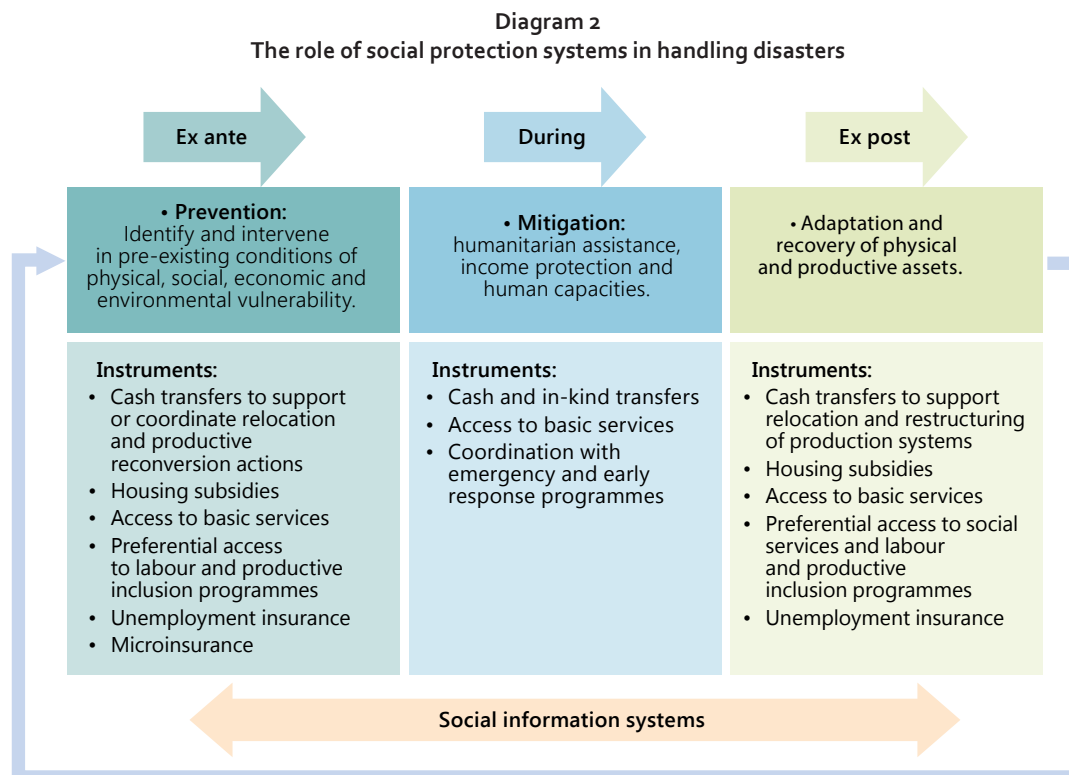
The COVID-19 pandemic—a biological disaster—has reinforced the urgency of social protection that deals with environmental, economic, and social risks in a comprehensive and transformative way (ECLAC, 2021a). In other words, social protection is needed that can be leveraged in case of shocks and adapt to the impacts of the triple planetary crisis and disasters as well as act on the underlying structural conditions that create vulnerability when these phenomena arise.<sup>8</sup> These issues are intertwined with social and economic vulnerabilities, and reflect the exposure and response capacity of persons, households, and communities to risk. They also show the structure of inequality and stratified access to guaranteed economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights.

Given such challenges, social protection has a key role to play at every stage of a disaster. Social protection instruments include interventions that can cushion the welfare-reducing effect of disasters by preventing (ex-ante), mitigating damage and losses (during) and facilitating recovery (ex-post). The preventive function of social protection addresses the existing conditions of physical, social, economic, and environmental vulnerability of persons, households, and communities prior to a disaster. During a disaster, social protection instruments are mainly targeted to humanitarian assistance, income and human capacity protection, as well as the coordination of different institutions, with particular efforts to safeguard the rights of the most vulnerable populations such as children and women. Finally, ex-post social protection instruments focus on the recovery of physical and productive assets. At each of these moments, and as demonstrated by the pandemic, social information systems are critical in identifying all vulnerable groups and improving the delivery of social entitlements to reduce harm and prioritise recovery (Cecchini, Holz, and Robles, 2021) (see diagram 2). Based on this temporal triad, the goal is to redefine the role of social protection in handling disasters according to a transformative framework, and in so doing, develop the social and institutional resilience required to reduce vulnerability to disasters and safeguard the exercise of economic, social, and cultural rights when disasters do occur (ECLAC, 2021a).

An example of the impacts of disasters and climate crises on key areas of social protection is reflected in how climate change is intertwined with other risks and poses a major threat to public health. For example, public health is affected by rising temperatures, which can lead to heat-related

<sup>8</sup> In this respect, there have been recognised conceptual advances in the literature on adaptive social protection. This document adopts a broader approach, which goes beyond the focus on climate change adaptation and seeks to include in the analysis the many different disasters affecting the region, including those of a hydrological, geological, meteorological, and biological nature (such as pandemics). It also emphasises the need to go beyond reactively changing social protection instruments, based on a concept of transformative social protection and a rights-based approach, which, in line with the 2030 Agenda and the premise of “leaving no one behind”, acts on the structural variables of vulnerability, poverty, and inequality. The aim is to integrate short-term responses within a time frame that consolidates the role of social protection systems in transforming the structural conditions that explain the unequal vulnerability of households and persons to risks.

illnesses and increased allergenicity as well as respiratory ailments caused by more frequent forest fires. The rising presence and distribution of disease-transmitting vectors, such as mosquitoes and ticks, is a particular concern in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC and others, 2021). In addition to affecting health, climate change also impacts the economy and finances of countries. Losses from extreme events, increased healthcare costs, and damage to infrastructure weigh heavily on resources, putting financial sustainability at risk and reducing the possibilities for public investment or for adequate funding of social protection programmes. Climate change also has important implications for labour issues and migration trends (see section I.A.4).



Source: S. Cecchini, R. Holz, and C. Robles (2022), "Social protection systems against disaster", in Cecchini, S., R. Holz, and H. Soto de la Rosa (coords.) (2022) *Toolkit. Institutional frameworks for social policies for equality in Latin America and the Caribbean* (LC/TS.2021/157), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

Accordingly, it is essential to recognise that the triple planetary crisis is an extensive challenge intertwined with the complexity of social and economic systems. Acknowledging its pervasiveness within a changing risk structure is essential to understanding its growing impact on social protection systems, and designing policies and strategies that are effective and sustainable over time. Doing so entails additional challenges to ensure that social protection systems are sufficiently flexible and resilient to cope with the unpredictable and changing impacts of environmental degradation (ECLAC, 2021a). In other words, as the environmental crisis puts pressure on social protection systems, they will need to coordinate with other governmental responses to provide a comprehensive offer in dealing with disasters. When social protection systems are well designed, they can make households more resilient and protect them against the negative effects of climate change and weather events. These systems could be integrated with risk management systems to provide a channel to quickly trigger early action measures, including cash transfers and expanded services. However, financial and institutional challenges have been noted, as well as those related to the efforts to establish concrete links between risk management and social protection (Agrawal and others, 2019; ECLAC, 2021a).

#### 4. Demographic transition and migration trends

The Latin American and Caribbean region is going through a stage of demographic transition, characterised by falling fertility and mortality levels as well as a significant increase in life expectancy (ECLAC, 2023a). Thus, the so-called demographic dividend<sup>9</sup> is being followed by a process of population ageing with a steady rise in the number of older people alongside the dependency ratio. This trend reflects major advances in public health, while also posing significant challenges for social protection systems in at least three ways.

First, there are those challenges linked to the design of policies that address the specific needs of older adults to protect their income and adequate living standards (ECLAC, 2022c; González, Sosa, and Reboiras, 2021). The tax burden is expected to increase due to higher demands on pension systems, health, and care policies. Labour markets will also need to be adapted to an ageing population with a longer life expectancy, where people may extend their working years beyond the established retirement age. This may include, for example, the need to incorporate actions and programmes to encourage formal work for older persons and to overcome age-based labour discrimination practices as well as extending the coverage of older persons in social protection systems (ECLAC, 2022c; González, Sosa, and Reboiras, 2021).

Second, and related to the above challenges, are issues regarding the financial sustainability of social protection systems when faced with the potential drop in social security contributions with the termination of the demographic dividend. Finally, it is worth noting that the region will have to address a faster process of population ageing than that experienced by European countries: Latin America and the Caribbean is expected to reach the current levels of Europe's ageing rate in half the time by approximately 2050 (Arenas de Mesa and Robles, 2023) (see figure 2). In 2023, the population aged 65 and over in Latin America and the Caribbean represented 9.5% of the total regional population; however, projections show that by 2065, this figure will rise to 25% (United Nations, 2022).

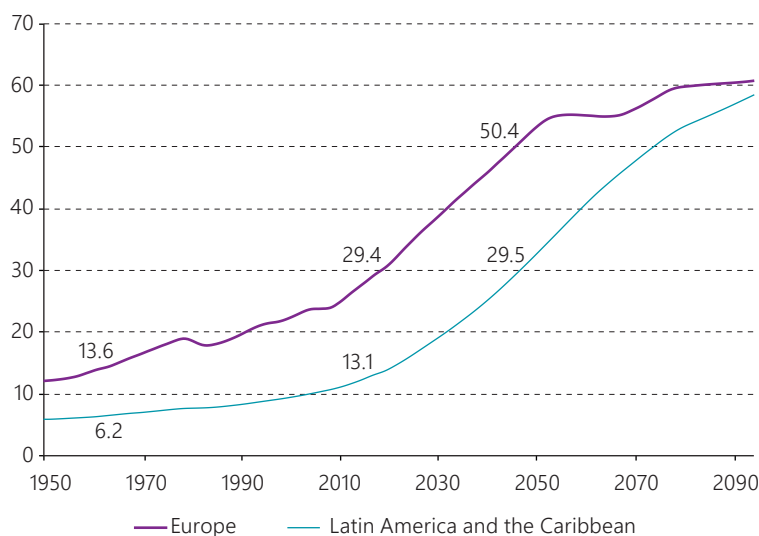
Migration is another intensifying trend impacting the make-up of the population. The International Organization for Migration (IOM) defines migration as "the movement of persons away from their place of usual residence, either across an international border or within a State" (IOM, 2019, p. 137). People migrate for many reasons, including work, education, and professional development, family or forced migration due to situations of conflict, and violence or disasters. Migrant populations, especially those forced to leave their country of origin, face high levels of vulnerability. This issue is a major challenge for host countries and the international community in terms of ensuring and protecting people's rights throughout the migration cycle, including their access to social protection systems.

The Latin American and the Caribbean region is facing a migration phase characterised by a significant change in the composition of countries and regions of origin. Historically, migration flows came mainly from Europe, while today intraregional migration has risen considerably (ECLAC, 2023c; Martínez Pizarro and Cano Christiny, 2022). Migration between countries in the region involves about 10.7 million people, including 4.4 million people who migrated from the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela (World Bank, 2023).

Migrants, and especially those in irregular situations, are often excluded from social protection mechanisms and do not have access to basic services such as health care or education, a situation exacerbated by the COVID-19 pandemic. Migrants are also more vulnerable to exploitation, abuse, trafficking, and environmental risks. They may also face territorial, sociocultural, and sociopolitical vulnerabilities, resulting in social and labour exclusion, and increased exposure to health and safety risks (FAO/UM, 2021). For example, low-skilled and irregular migrant workers tend to be employed in informal jobs with less social protection (FAO/UM, 2021; Avato, Koettl and Sabates-Wheeler, 2010; ECLAC, 2023a).

<sup>9</sup> The demographic dividend is a phenomenon that occurs over a limited period of time, during which the working-age population outnumbers the dependent population (potentially inactive in the labour market). The faster the demographic transition, the shorter its duration. During this process, a larger working-age population can have a positive impact on the country's productivity, if combined with public policies that promote skills development and labour market inclusion.

**Figure 2**  
**Europe and Latin America and the Caribbean: dependency ratio of the population aged 65 and over to those aged 15 and 64**  
*(Percentages)*



Source: Arenas de Mesa and Robles (eds.), *Sistemas de pensiones no contributivos en América Latina y el Caribe: avanzar hacia la sostenibilidad con solidaridad*, ECLAC Books, Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), in press, upon the base of United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). *World Population Prospects 2022*, Online Edition.

The main challenge posed by the intensification of migration flows for social protection systems is their inclusion and access in destination countries, which highlights the specific risks that this population faces in addition to those linked to their inclusion in the labour market (ECLAC, 2023a). Migrants, especially those who are undocumented, face significant hurdles in accessing social protection services due to their legal status in their new country, language barriers, unfamiliarity with the system, and fear of deportation, among other factors. Social protection systems must be able to adapt to the specific needs and risks these people face depending on the phase of the migration cycle in which they find themselves (Maldonado, Martínez Pizarro, and Martínez, 2018). A second challenge arises from the (non-)portability of social entitlements (e.g. contributions to contributory pension schemes), as this affects migrants when they leave their country of origin as well as when (and if) they return. Third, migration also creates challenges for information systems in host countries and the need for coordination with home country systems for data collection. A fourth challenge stems from issues of the sustainability of social protection systems, as a larger population requires greater investment in services and entitlements (Maldonado, Martínez Pizarro, and Martínez, 2018; ILO, 2021a; FAO/UM, 2021; Sabates-Wheeler, 2019).

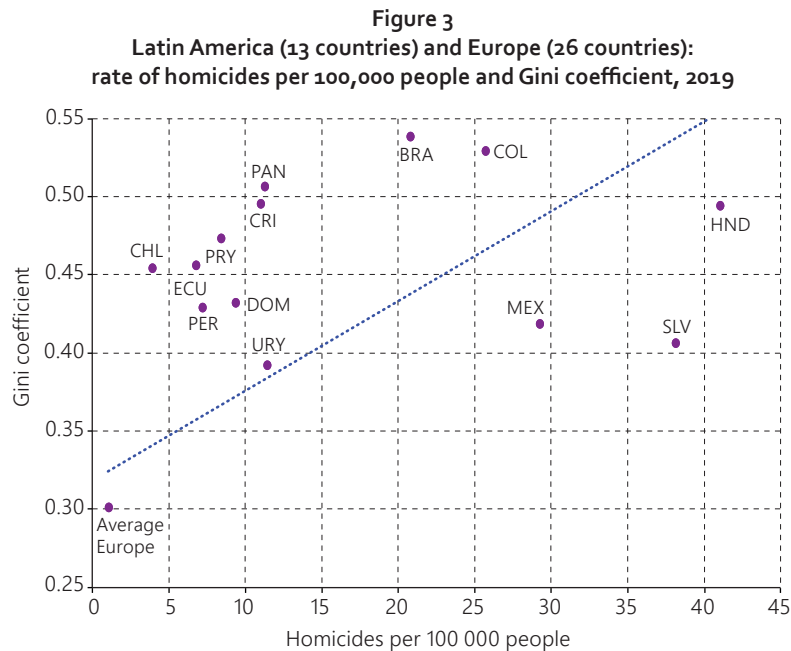
It should also be noted that the challenges of social protection with regard to migration are not only solely focused on those who migrate, but also must consider the situation of those who remain in the countries of origin. Families and communities who are dependent on migrants, especially in the case of economic migrants, receive remittances that are subject to risks and instability. As such, the risk of poverty and food insecurity of migrant families increases when, for example, migrant families are unable to send financial resources to their countries of origin (FAO/UM, 2021).

A new trend in terms of migration, and related to another risk detailed above, is the rising displacement due to disasters caused by environmental degradation. In 2022, about 2.6 million internal migrants were recorded due to storms and floods across the Americas, mainly affecting countries such as Brazil, Colombia, and the United States (Escribano, 2023). Although there is no specific convention for environmental migrants, in 2022 the Inter-American Commission on Human Rights and the Special

Rapporteur on Economic, Social, Cultural and Environmental Rights issued Resolution 3.21 on state obligations to protect the rights of people affected by climate change. This will undoubtedly be an area that will increasingly challenge social protection systems in the future.

## 5. The multiple manifestations of violence and rights violations

Latin America and the Caribbean is a region of stark contrasts, characterised as both the most unequal and the most violent in the world (in terms of homicide incidence, and excluding contexts of war and armed conflict). Despite the high correlation between these two phenomena (Pickett and Wilkinson, 2010; see figure 3), the level of violence in the region exceeds what would be expected according to its level of economic and social development (ECLAC, 2018b). Although there is a worldwide trend towards increasing conflict, in Europe, the increase has been more marked by armed and inter-state conflicts, while in Latin America, there is a greater level of internal violence due to high criminality and political instability in the countries (Gowan and Ungar, 2023). In this context, politically motivated insecurity and violence, organised crime, and delinquency are just some of the problems that threaten the economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights of the region's population, and impose additional challenges for social protection.



Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG), OECDStat [online database] <https://stats.oecd.org/>, and the World Bank World Development Indicators [online database] <https://databank.worldbank.org/source/world-development-indicators>.

Note: The information corresponds to the following Latin American and Caribbean countries: Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Honduras, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. European countries for the average value: Austria, Bulgaria, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Hungary, Ireland, Italy, Latvia, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Netherlands, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Romania, Slovakia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom.

Violence can manifest in various ways. Among the most pressing challenges for social protection systems are gender-based violence, violence against children, homicides, assaults, sexual violence, violence associated with drug trafficking, and conflicts in Indigenous territories. Each of these types of violence has its own characteristics, involves specific rights violations, and represents particular challenges for social protection systems. Furthermore, from a rights-based approach to social protection, it is important

to emphasise the greater risk experienced by people who are in situations of poverty and vulnerability. Although there is little documented evidence on this issue, the obstacles that violence can impose on the implementation of social protection policies, as well as the ways they can contribute to the development of a culture of peace, must also be considered. Today's conflicts occur in highly complex settings and are no longer solely a response to high levels of poverty. They also arise from factors such as a "lack of political and economic inclusion and equity as well as grievances and perceptions of injustice" (World Bank, 2020a). Considering strategies for implementation in territories with a higher incidence of violence is key in the design of social protection policies and certainly poses a risk to the effectiveness of their results.

As mentioned in section I.A.4., situations of violence also lead to forced migration in conflict zones or in contexts where it is more prevalent. According to the World Bank (2023), of the 184 million migrants in the world who account for 2.3% of the global population, an estimated 20%—around 37 million people—are refugees who have been forced to migrate due to situations of violence.

In this context, social protection systems play a crucial role in protecting incomes and reducing poverty, vulnerability, and social inequality. Furthermore, social protection entitlements can promote social mobility through access to educational services and coordination with labour inclusion policies; prevent social exclusion by protecting vulnerable groups; and foster social cohesion.

## 6. Challenges for the epidemiological and nutritional transition

The epidemiological and nutritional transition presents growing challenges for social protection systems and their connection to health and food systems. Coordination with other social sectors, especially health, is critical to provide comprehensive responses to epidemiological and nutritional challenges. The epidemiological transition is a concept that essentially refers to changing patterns of health and disease within a population over time.<sup>10</sup> In this transition, which in practice is not necessarily linear, countries and regions progress from a stage with a high incidence of communicable diseases in their population to a stage where this decreases, and the prevalence of non-communicable or chronic-degenerative diseases predominates, posing new health risks for the population of the country in question. According to the PAHO, chronic or non-communicable diseases represent the leading cause of death and disability in the world<sup>11</sup>, and curbing them is included in the Sustainable Development Goals (specifically, SDG target 3.4) of the 2030 Agenda. Prior to the COVID-19 pandemic, most countries in Latin America and the Caribbean showed relatively similar epidemiological profiles, with an increase in mortality from non-communicable diseases and a decrease in the incidence of communicable diseases.<sup>12</sup>

The pandemic posed a huge challenge to health systems, which were overwhelmed by the emergency care of people infected with the virus. This produced a displacement effect, where the need for care for diseases other than COVID-19 was interrupted and postponed due to the urgent health crisis (ECLAC/PAHO, 2021, 2020; ECLAC, 2022b). Non-communicable diseases also represented a risk factor during the COVID-19 pandemic by increasing severe illness and death, especially in older persons (Huenchuan, 2021). While the COVID-19 pandemic was an unprecedented phenomenon with profound consequences at all levels and in all countries, the emergence of new communicable diseases is not an isolated phenomenon and has been exacerbated by climate change.

The impact of climate change on infectious diseases is one example of the way different risks are compounded and multiplied, and social protection responses will need to be developed from a systemic and holistic point of view. As previously noted, social protection has a key role to play in

<sup>10</sup> This concept was first proposed by Omran (1971) and has subsequently been modified, and sometimes criticised, to include new stages and redefinitions of its basic concepts (see Di Cesare, 2011 for a review of the conceptual development of the epidemiological and health transition).

<sup>11</sup> See "PAHO – Noncommunicable Diseases" [Online] <https://www.paho.org/es/temas/enfermedades-no-transmisibles>.

<sup>12</sup> An analysis of the incidence of diseases at older ages shows that mortality rates for communicable diseases continued to be high and were added to the increase in mortality from non-communicable diseases, such as cancer, diabetes, cardiovascular diseases and others (Huenchuan, 2021).

tackling climate change challenges and must be linked with health systems, especially in territories that need easier access to primary health care. Some 58% of reported infectious diseases that have impacted humanity show evidence of being aggravated by a climate hazard<sup>13</sup> (Mora and others, 2022). The increase in contact between pathogens and people due to climate change occurs through the increased proximity of pathogens to the population, or the population to the pathogens. For example, increases in global temperature and changes in precipitation have been associated with the expansion of the geographic range of mosquitoes, ticks, fleas, and other animals and insects that carry pathogens such as dengue fever, Lyme disease, Zika, and malaria, among many others. Another example is floods and storms that are linked to contaminated water overflows and promote the proliferation of hantaviruses, hepatitis, and *cryptosporidium*. Meanwhile, changes in land use have facilitated population movement into wilderness areas and brought people closer to new pathogens (Mora and others, 2022).

The health impacts of climate change are exacerbated as people face social, political, and economic circumstances that increase their vulnerability, which is explained by the factors identified by the WHO as social determinants of health (WHO/CSDH, 2008). The inequality in the region in terms of the living conditions in which people are born, grow up, work, and grow old is therefore a critical issue for social protection because of its profound impact on equality, as well as the physical, mental, and social well-being of society. The guarantee of rights for the entire population that social protection seeks to provide cannot escape the challenges posed by climate change within the epidemiological transition. As such, there is a need to develop tools for resilience and strengthen social protection systems to face these new, and sometimes unpredictable, challenges. Similarly, it is essential to develop resilient health systems that are connected to social protection schemes with strong epidemiological surveillance. This ensures the identification of threats and the capacity to quickly respond to new epidemics or pandemics without interrupting healthcare services, thus upholding the right to health (PAHO, 2021).

Another area of public health that has been affected by successive crises and compounded by the risks associated with the epidemiological transition is the double burden of malnutrition. This challenge has been exacerbated by profound transformations in dietary patterns in Latin American and Caribbean countries (FAO, 2006; FAO and others, 2018). The double burden of malnutrition, which refers to the coexistence of malnutrition and obesity in the same population, is a phenomenon rooted in poverty (ECLAC/WFP, 2017) which affects most countries in the region. The main factors linked to this nutritional transition are associated with economic, social, and cultural conditions, such as the transformation of food production and markets, as well as the characteristics of poverty and marginalisation. This, along with other factors, has resulted in increased physical inactivity and sedentary lifestyles, and a proliferation of unhealthy diets (ECLAC, 2019).

The double burden of malnutrition is a major public health challenge and has negative implications for capacity development, labour and social inclusion, and workers' productivity. It thus impinges on social and economic rights, which creates challenges for social protection systems to guarantee rights in different areas of social development. A series of studies conducted in the region on the impact and costs of the double burden of malnutrition by the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) have estimated the impact to be from 0.2% of GDP in Chile, where malnutrition has been eradicated, to 2.3% in Mexico, and 4.3% in Ecuador (Fernandez and others, 2017). Using the same methodology, studies conducted in subsequent years in other countries found the estimated impacts to fall within the range of 2.6% in the Dominican Republic and up to 16.3% in Guatemala.<sup>14</sup>

According to the latest report by FAO and others (2023), levels of undernourishment in the region persist at higher levels than in 2019 (although a decline was reported between 2020 and 2021), with more than 43 million people affected. Rates rose sharply in the Caribbean subregion, from 14.7% in 2021

<sup>13</sup> The literature review was conducted in 2020, and mainly considered research published after the year 2000.

<sup>14</sup> See the series of reports on the cost of the double burden of malnutrition [online] <https://es.wfp.org/publicaciones/el-costo-de-la-doble-carga-de-la-malnutricion-o>.

to 16.3% in 2022. However, there were notable improvements in South America over the same period, where the prevalence of undernourishment decreased from 7% to 6.1%, equivalent to 3.5 million people.

The region's new nutritional profile presents an epidemiological and health challenge because it not only increases food insecurity and the double burden of malnutrition in the population, but also makes people more prone to developing non-communicable diseases. As the FAO has repeatedly mentioned in its food security reports, the factors that affect food security and malnutrition, and which have recently become intensified structural risks, are conflicts and violence, climate change, economic slowdowns and recessions, and growing inequality (FAO and others, 2023, 2018). This illustrates the interaction among the various factors that comprise the region's reconfigured risk structure. Given these issues, not only should the importance of the universality and comprehensiveness of health systems be emphasised, but it is also imperative that social protection responses be strengthened.

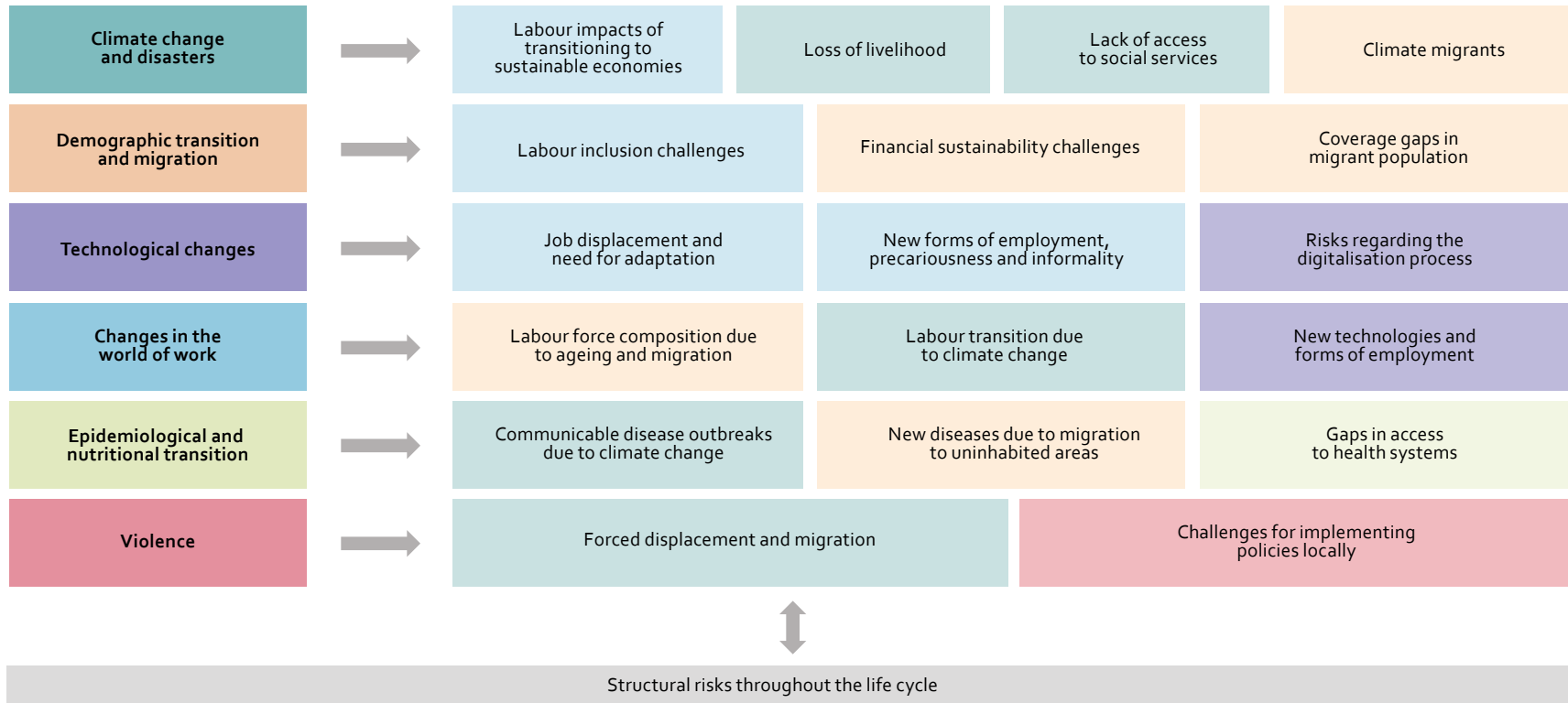
## **B. Interactions and synergies within the risk structure under reconfiguration**

As shown in the previous section, social protection systems in the region must handle at least three intersecting phenomena: (i) structural risks that have traditionally been addressed and only partially covered in the region (see section II.A); (ii) pandemic-related setbacks to people's well-being, especially in terms of their income levels and human capacity-building processes; and (iii) a reconfigured risk structure. To avoid worsening exclusion, social protection systems must combine responses to growing emergencies and crises with longer-term transformations. However, it also requires constantly adjusting the responsiveness of social protection systems to new challenges and opportunities, such as the rapid expansion of technological change. A social protection system response that may suffice today is likely to be inadequate tomorrow. This reconfigured risk structure conditions the future of social protection, both in terms of the design, content, and institutional frameworks of policies and instruments (see chapter IV), and in terms of their management and organisational mechanisms (see chapter V).

The reconfigured risk structure presented in this chapter brings with it a series of synergies and interactions among these risks that amplify their consequences. Numerous examples of risk interactions that intensify social protection challenges can be identified, as shown in diagram 3. For example, climate change may have implications for changes in the world of work as countries transition to sustainable economies. On the other hand, changes in the world of work are closely related to ageing, the just transition due to climate change and technological change. Meanwhile, violence has an impact on access to social protection systems as a whole, and in some cases intensifies migration processes. As also mentioned in section I.A.6 on the challenges associated with the epidemiological transition, climate change has had a major impact on this phenomenon, aggravating the ramifications for people. Moreover, all these risks have intensified and present specific characteristics according to the axes of the social inequality matrix (see chapter IV).

Based on approaches to social protection that have been discussed in recent years (Cecchini, Holz, and Robles, 2021; Cecchini and Martínez, 2011; ECLAC, 2020b and 2021a; Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004; Guhan, 1994; Schüring and Loewe, 2021; Bowen and others, 2020), it is essential for social protection systems to be strengthened to make them truly universal, comprehensive, sustainable, and resilient. The strategies and functions of social protection must also be made more complex to transform the underlying structural social conditions of vulnerability (Devereux and Sabates-Wheeler, 2004; Schüring and Loewe, 2021). For social protection policies, this implies forging more connections with strategies aimed at capacity and asset development in such areas as health, education, housing, and digital inclusion, and explicitly addressing the barriers that increase social exclusion, inequality, and social protection gaps. In doing so, social protection systems can become the backbone of the welfare states developing in our region.

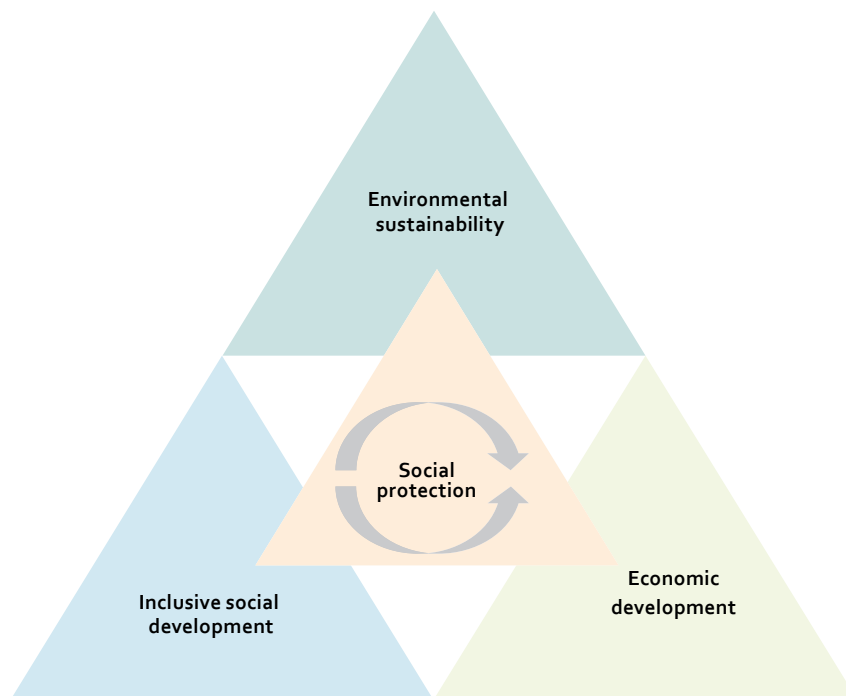
**Diagram 3**  
Interactions and synergies of ongoing changes and structural risks



Source: Prepared by the authors.

In summary, to tackle the reconfigured risk structure social protection systems must be strengthened by considering the three dimensions of sustainable development, striking a balance between economic development, environmental sustainability, and inclusive social development. Social protection therefore has a fundamental role to play and is at the heart of sustainable development (see diagram 4). Within the framework of the human-centred approaches of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development, this will support greater coordination for the eradication of poverty, a sustained reduction of inequality, and greater environmental sustainability as part of a just economic transition.

**Diagram 4**  
Social protection through the triple lens of the three basic dimensions of sustainable development



Source: Prepared by the authors.

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## II. The Persistent Gaps of Social Protection in the Region

Nincen Figueroa  
Raúl Holz

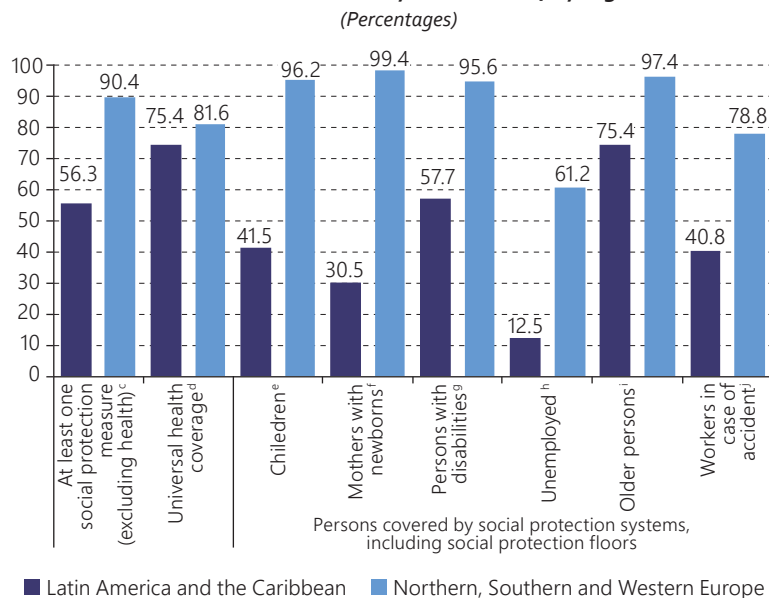
The strengthening of social protection systems in the current context must consider their persistent gaps in the region, especially in light of the weaknesses demonstrated by these systems during the COVID-19 pandemic. The pandemic confirmed the importance of having social protection systems capable of addressing the structural conditions of vulnerability, including, for example, vulnerability to disasters. In the face of these challenges, social protection systems play a preventive, mitigating, and resilience-promoting role. Furthermore, social protection systems should also consider coordination and integration with disaster risk management systems to identify the most vulnerable populations. Identifying the gaps that social protection systems exhibit in their response to disasters is essential for developing relevant recommendations. Therefore, this chapter will address gaps in social protection systems by providing information on these gaps, offering a brief overview of some of their indicators, and describing the main challenges that social protection systems face in the context of disasters.

### A. Gaps in social protection: a structural phenomenon in the region

According to the information provided by the ILO, in comparison to the levels achieved in countries in Northern, Southern, and Western Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean exhibit significant disparities in the coverage of the various components that make up the branches of social security as established in Convention No. 102 on Minimum Standards of Social Security. When analysing the effective coverage of social protection by population groups, it is observed that around 2020, only 56.3% of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean was covered by at least one social protection measure, as opposed to 90.4% of the European population (see figure 4). The disparities between these regions become more pronounced when examining the proportion of people covered by any of the fundamental entitlements of the social protection floors. In Latin America and the Caribbean, only 41.5% of children were covered by social protection transfers, whereas in Northern, Southern, and Western Europe, 96.2% of this population had access to these transfers. A similar situation was observed in terms of effective social protection coverage for mothers with newborns (30.5% compared to 99.4% in European countries), people with

disabilities (57.7% compared to 95.6% in European countries), and older persons (75.4% compared to 97.4% in European countries). Furthermore, the instruments providing social protection to workers show significantly reduced coverage. For instance, in the case of coverage for accidents, only 40.8% have such coverage compared to 78.8% in Europe. In situations of unemployment, only 12.5% of unemployed persons are covered as opposed to 61.2% in European countries. In all cases, the population with social protection coverage in the region is significantly lower than that of the European population.

**Figure 4**  
Latin America and the Caribbean (49 countries and territories)<sup>a</sup> and Europe (39 countries and territories)<sup>b</sup>  
effective coverage of social protection, estimates by population groups,  
2020 or the most recent year available, by region



Source: International Labour Organization (ILO), World Social Protection Database, based on the Social Security Inquiry (SSI). Available [online] <https://www.social-protection.org/gimi/WSPDB.action?id=32>.

<sup>a</sup> Anguilla, Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Aruba, the Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, British Virgin Islands, Cayman Islands, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Curaçao, Dominica, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Falkland Islands, French Guiana, Granada, Guadeloupe, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Martinique, Mexico, Montserrat, the Netherlands Antilles, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Martin (French Part), Saint Martin (Dutch Part), Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Saint Lucia, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Turks and Caicos Islands, the United States Virgin Islands, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

<sup>b</sup> Albania, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Channel Islands, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Faroe Islands, Finland, France, Germany, Gibraltar, Greece, Guernsey, Iceland, Ireland, Isle of Man, Italy, Jersey, Kosovo, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), North Macedonia, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland, United Kingdom.

<sup>c</sup> This refers to the ratio of the population receiving cash allowances, excluding healthcare and sickness entitlements, under at least one of the contingencies/social protection functions (contributory or non-contributory entitlement) or actively contributing to at least one social security scheme to the total population.

<sup>d</sup> This is defined as the average coverage of essential health services, calculated based on key interventions related to reproductive, maternal, neonatal, and child health, infectious diseases, non-communicable diseases, as well as the capacity and accessibility of healthcare services.

<sup>e</sup> This refers to the ratio of children/households receiving child or family cash allowances to the total number of children/households with children.

<sup>f</sup> This refers to the ratio of women receiving cash maternity allowances to women giving birth in the same year (estimated based on age-specific fertility rates published in the UN's World Population Prospects or on the number of live births corrected for the share of twin and triplet births).

<sup>g</sup> This refers to the ratio of persons receiving disability cash allowances to persons with severe disabilities. The latter is calculated as the product of the prevalence of disability ratios (published for each country group by the WHO) and each country's population.

<sup>h</sup> This refers to the ratio of persons receiving unemployment cash entitlements to the number of unemployed persons.

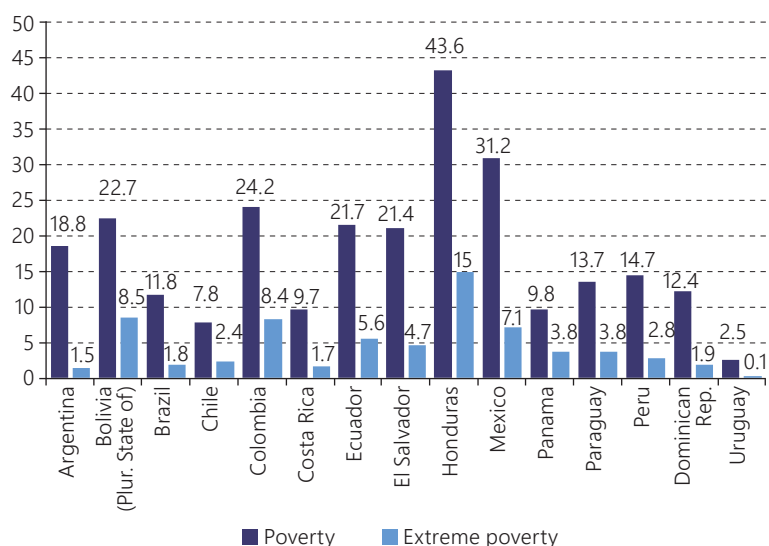
<sup>i</sup> This refers to the ratio of persons above the statutory retirement age receiving an old-age pension (including contributory and non-contributory) to persons above the statutory retirement age.

<sup>j</sup> This refers to the ratio of workers protected by injury insurance to total employment or the labour force.

## 1. Old and new challenges of contributory social protection in the region

The structural gaps in social protection, affecting a significant proportion of the region's population, are a reflection, in part, of the structure of the region's labour markets. These are characterised by high levels of informal employment, a predominance of lower-quality jobs, and persistent gender inequalities (ECLAC/ILO, 2023). In 2022, ECLAC estimated that 48.2% of workers in 11 countries in the region<sup>15</sup> were engaged in informal employment (ECLAC, 2023a). There is also a considerable percentage of workers in situations of poverty and extreme poverty, indicating that access to any form of paid employment does not necessarily guarantee the ability to meet basic life needs. At the regional level, approximately 1 in every 5 employed persons aged 15 and older were in a situation of poverty in 2022 (ECLAC, 2023b). In 2021, this situation disproportionately affected workers in Honduras (43.6%) and Mexico (31.2%), while in Argentina, Colombia, Ecuador, and El Salvador, the figure exceeded 20% (see figure 5). This highlights the difficulties in extending legal and effective coverage of entitlements to address the challenges that will intensify due to ongoing transformations.

**Figure 5**  
Latin America (15 countries): employed population aged 15 and older in a situation of poverty, around 2021<sup>a</sup>  
(Percentages)



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on household surveys from the countries. Household Surveys Database (BADEHOG). CEPALSTAT [online]. <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/>.

<sup>a</sup> The data corresponds to the year 2021 in: Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, and Uruguay; to 2020 in Chile, El Salvador, and Mexico; and to 2019 in Honduras.

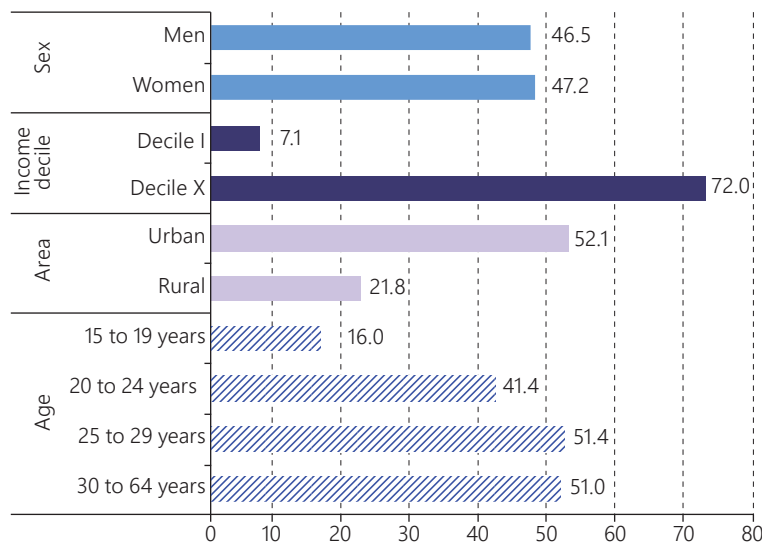
Contributory coverage in the region experienced a significant decline as a consequence of the pandemic, reflected in the reduction between 2019 and 2020 in the proportion of the economically active population contributing to the pension system. In 2020, contribution levels to the pension system were even lower than those recorded in 2010, reaching 44.3% (Arenas de Mesa, Robles, and Vila, 2024). Despite its recovery in 2021, only 45.7% of the economically active population was contributing to pension systems, as per administrative data from the countries.

In 2021, household survey data revealed heterogeneity in contributions to the pension system when considering various population groups, which are directly related to the axes of the social inequality matrix. As depicted in figure 6, the proportion of the economically active population contributing to

<sup>15</sup> Estimates based on informality rates reported by the statistical institutes of: Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay.

pension systems between the lowest and highest income deciles exhibits profound disparities, with a 65 percentage point difference. It is also noteworthy to highlight the significant disparities observed in this context between persons within the economically active population in urban (51.1%) and rural (21.8%) areas. Additionally, it is important to acknowledge disparities in access to pension systems when considering different life stages. For instance, the proportion of persons contributing to pension systems is significantly lower among active young persons aged 15 to 19 years (16%) compared to those aged 25 to 29 years (51.4%).

**Figure 6**  
**Latin America (8 countries):<sup>a</sup> effective coverage of pension systems, by gender, income decile, area of residence, and age groups based on household surveys in the countries, 2021**  
*(In percentages of the economically active population)*



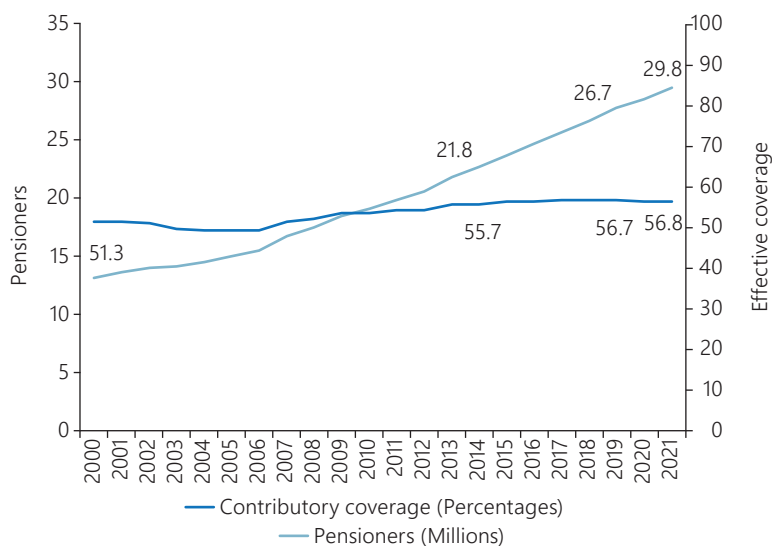
Source: Prepared by the authors based on national household surveys. Household Surveys Database (BADEHOG).

<sup>a</sup> Weighted average of the following countries: Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay.

On the other hand, as indicated by Abramo (2021), ethnic-racial inequalities emerge as one of the structuring axes of social inequality in Latin America. It extends systematically to various areas of rights and development, including the realms of labour and social protection. This also applies to the situation of Indigenous Peoples and Afro-descendant populations concerning their integration into low-productivity sectors and their low levels of contribution to pension systems (ECLAC, 2021a).

Historical gaps in contributions to pension systems have resulted in low levels of pension coverage in the region, remaining relatively consistent in percentage terms since the early 2000s. Considering access to contributory pensions, only 51.3% of persons aged 65 and older received pensions in 2000. This coverage increased by only 5 percentage points over two decades, reaching 56.8% of this population in 2021 (see figure 7). On the other hand, there is an increase in the population of older persons receiving contributory pensions, rising from 13.2 million pensioners in the year 2000 to 29.8 million in 2020 (Arenas de Mesa, Robles, and Vila, 2024). Additionally, Arenas de Mesa, Robles, and Vila (2024) highlight the persistent gender inequality in pension coverage for persons aged 65 and older in Latin America. Based on household survey information from 14 countries, they show that around 2021, 59.7% of men aged 65 and older received a contributory pension, compared to 52.7% of women in the same age group. This difference has maintained a similar trend to that observed in 2010 (61.2% for men and 54.7% for women).

**Figure 7**  
**Latin America (17 countries<sup>a</sup>): population aged 65 and older**  
**receiving contributory pensions, 2000–2021**  
*(In millions of people and percentage of the population aged 65 and older)*



Source: Arenas de Mesa, Robles, and Vila, "El desafío de avanzar hacia la sostenibilidad de los sistemas de pensiones en América Latina" (in press), 2024, based on administrative information from the countries.

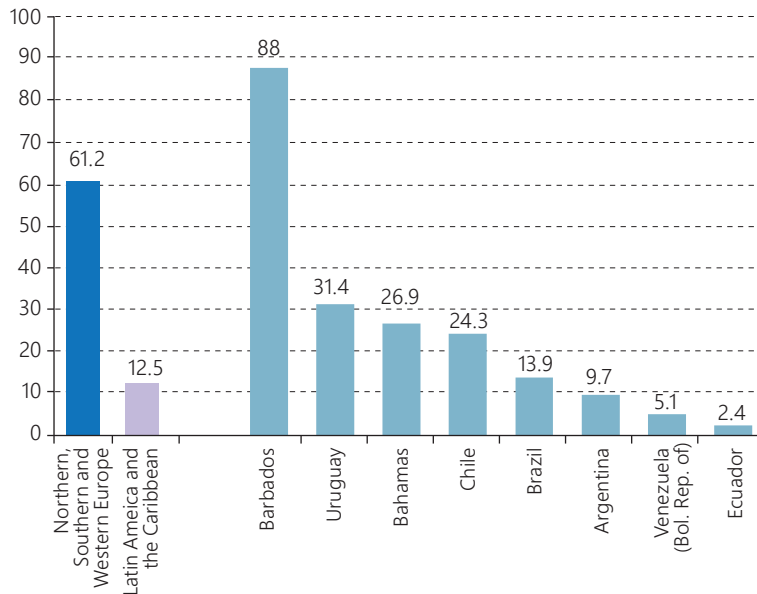
<sup>a</sup> Weighted average considering administrative information from the following countries: Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, and Uruguay. Preliminary data.

Protection in the face of unemployment is a fundamental pillar of non-contributory social protection entitlements. It is carried out through the provision of monetary transfers to persons who, while capable and willing to work, cannot secure employment. The primary objective is to mitigate the socio-economic impacts of a decrease in the income of workers and their households due to job loss (Isgut and Weller, 2016; ILO, 2021). In Latin America and the Caribbean, unemployment entitlements are less common, and only a select group of countries provides them: Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Uruguay.<sup>16</sup> Although these countries have adopted unemployment support systems, in the context of the COVID-19 pandemic they had to adjust their social protection policies and programmes to ensure adequate support for the unemployed (ECLAC, 2022b; Velásquez, 2003, 2021). Among the modifications implemented are reductions of the minimum required contributions to access entitlements, extensions of coverage to other groups or for partial unemployment, extensions of the duration of the measures, and an increase in amounts (ECLAC, 2022b). Despite these efforts, the coverage of such entitlements in 2021 reached only 12.5% of the total unemployed population in the region (see figure 8). Regionally, Barbados leads with 88%, followed by Uruguay (31.4%), Bahamas (26.9%), and Chile (24.3%). However, there is marked heterogeneity among countries in the proportion of unemployed persons receiving unemployment entitlements. This is evident in countries such as Argentina, Ecuador, and the Bolivarian Republic of Venezuela, where coverage does not exceed 10% of unemployed workers (see figure 8).

<sup>16</sup> In addition to the unemployment insurance in these countries, in Colombia, there are entitlements for unemployed persons provided by private entities and contracted on a voluntary basis. In the case of Mexico, although there is no nationwide system, workers in Mexico City who involuntarily lose their jobs have been able to access unemployment entitlements since 2008 (ECLAC, 2022b).

Occupational accident and professional illness insurance systems are essential in preventing affected workers and their families from increased vulnerability to new occupational risks and the rise of disasters that result in job destruction (ILO, 2021), yet only 40.8% of workers have this coverage (see figure 9). In the region, a heterogeneous reality is observed, with countries like Uruguay and Chile leading in coverage with 82.5% and 80.2%, respectively, while Peru lags behind with only 7.4% coverage.

**Figure 8**  
Latin America and the Caribbean (8 countries) and Europe (39 countries and territories):<sup>a</sup>  
proportion of unemployed persons receiving entitlements,<sup>b</sup> around 2021<sup>c</sup>  
(Percentages)



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from the International Labour Organization (2022). ILO Modelled Estimates Database, ILOSTAT. Available [online]: <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>.

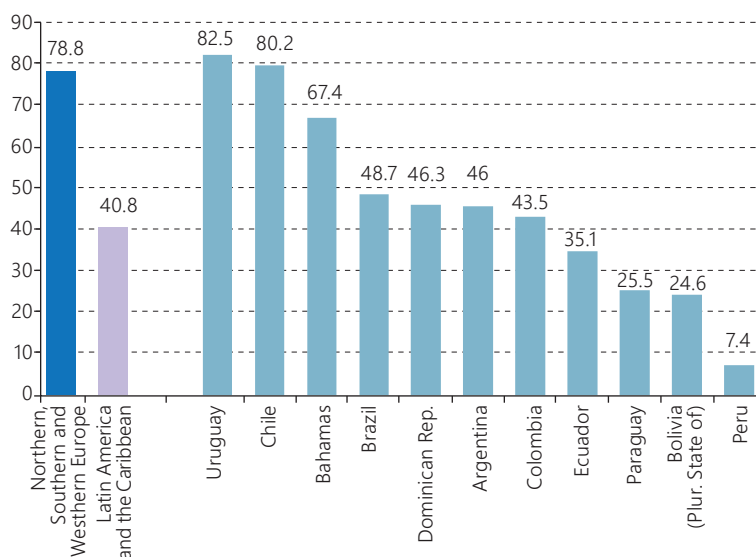
<sup>a</sup> Weighted average for both regions. The data for Europe corresponds to information from: Albania, Germany, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Denmark, Slovenia, Spain, Estonia, Finland, France, Gibraltar, Greece, Guernsey, Ireland, Isle of Man, Iceland, Channel Islands, Faroe Islands, Italy, Jersey, Kosovo, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, North Macedonia, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Norway, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), Portugal, United Kingdom, San Marino, Serbia, Sweden, and Switzerland.

<sup>b</sup> Ratio of recipients of unemployment cash allowances to the number of unemployed persons.

<sup>c</sup> The data corresponds to the year 2021 for Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Ecuador, and Uruguay, and to 2016 in the case of Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

This data underscores the significant challenges that the region faces in expanding contributory social protection coverage for all segments of the population.

**Figure 9**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (11 countries) and Europe (39 countries and territories):<sup>a</sup>**  
**proportion of workers with coverage in case of employment injury,<sup>b</sup> around 2021<sup>c</sup>**  
*(Percentages)*



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on data from the International Labour Organization (2022). ILO Modelled Estimates Database, ILOSTAT. Available [online] <https://ilostat.ilo.org/data/>.

<sup>a</sup> Weighted average for both regions. The data for Europe corresponds to information from: Albania, Germany, Andorra, Austria, Belgium, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Croatia, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Gibraltar, Greece, Guernsey, Ireland, Isle of Man, Iceland, Channel Islands, Faroe Islands, Italy, Jersey, Kosovo, Latvia, Liechtenstein, Lithuania, Luxembourg, Malta, Monaco, Montenegro, Netherlands (Kingdom of the), North Macedonia, Norway, Portugal, San Marino, Serbia, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, and United Kingdom.

<sup>b</sup> Ratio of workers protected by injury insurance to total employment or the labour force.

<sup>c</sup> The data corresponds to the year 2021 for Argentina, Chile, Colombia, Ecuador, Paraguay, the Dominican Republic, and Uruguay; to 2020 in Bahamas, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, and Peru.

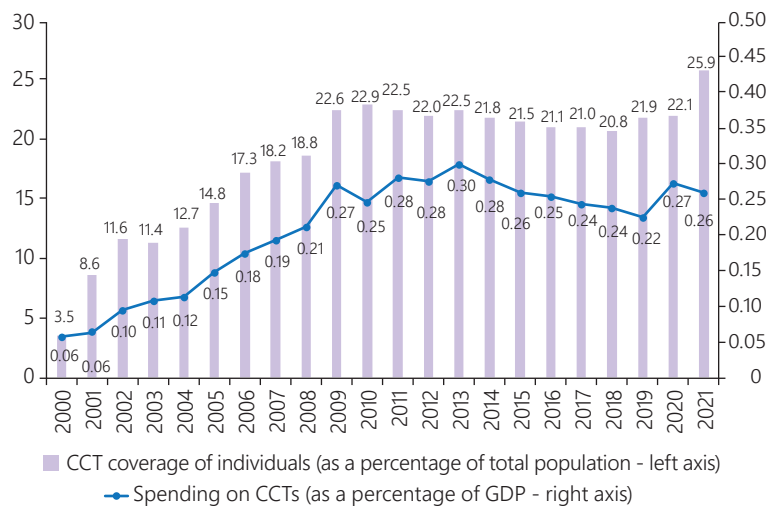
## 2. The role of non-contributory social protection in addressing the historical challenges of the region

In the last two decades, faced with the shortcomings of contributory social protection, countries in the region have implemented a series of public transfers<sup>17</sup> with the aim of reducing poverty and inequality levels, as well as ensuring basic consumption levels for people in situations of greater vulnerability. Among these measures, the most relevant in terms of expenditure and coverage expansion have been Conditional Cash Transfer (CCT) programmes and Non-Contributory Pension Systems (NCPS). Conditional Cash Transfer programmes are characterised by providing monetary transfers to families in situations of poverty or vulnerability, conditioned on meeting a series of requirements, in most cases, related to the attendance of educational centres and health check-ups for children and adolescents in the household, among other criteria. On the other hand, Non-Contributory Pension Systems are cash transfers primarily directed at older persons or persons with disabilities who have not had formal employment or have not made sufficient contributions to a pension system during their working life.

<sup>17</sup> The income received by households originates from various sources, including labour income, capital income, private transfers (remittances, donations, and gifts from other households), and public transfers. The latter includes social security transfers and poverty reduction programmes, among others (ECLAC, 2009). For the estimates made in this chapter, public transfers encompass entitlements from conditional cash transfer programmes, non-contributory pensions, and other public transfers. The latter refers to public monetary transfers delivered due to certain characteristics or the fulfilment of specific requirements by the recipient population. Given the importance of emergency transfers due to the COVID-19 pandemic and to achieve comparability between the pre- and post-pandemic periods and among countries, these transfers were excluded from analyses based on household surveys and are covered in-depth in Chapter III. However, adaptations made by countries to existing non-contributory programmes have been included in the analyses from administrative data based on the information provided by the Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean [online database] <http://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc>.

The available data in the ECLAC database on non-contributory social protection programs<sup>18</sup> allows for estimating the coverage and expenditure of conditional cash transfer programmes and non-contributory pensions from the year 2000 to the present. The expenditure on conditional cash transfer programmes steadily increased from 2000 until 2013, reaching its peak in that year at 0.3% of the region's GDP (see figure 10). Despite the progress made in the first decade of the 2000s, the upward trend in expenditure reversed in 2014, showing a significant decrease. In 2019, it reached 0.22% of the GDP, returning to levels similar to those of 2008 (0.21% of the GDP percentage). Due to the efforts of countries to increase payment amounts, make extraordinary payments, and expand coverage during the pandemic, investment levels in these programmes have regained momentum with expenditure levels of 0.27% of the GDP in 2020 and 0.26% in 2021.

**Figure 10**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (21 countries): the evolution of coverage<sup>a</sup> and expenditure<sup>b</sup>**  
**of conditional cash transfer programmes and other ongoing transfers, 2000–2021<sup>c</sup>**  
*(In percentages and as a percentage of GDP)*



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Non-Contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <http://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/>.

<sup>a</sup> Weighted average considering information on conditional cash transfer programmes and other ongoing monetary transfers from the following countries: Argentina, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay.

<sup>b</sup> Simple average considering information on conditional cash transfer programmes and other ongoing monetary transfers from the following countries: Argentina, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay.

<sup>c</sup> For the estimation of the complete series, the method of Cecchini and Atuesta (2017) was followed. Imputation of missing data per programme is carried out using available data, assuming equivalence with the last available data or a linear relationship between the two closest available data points. The average is based on the total population of countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, regardless of whether they have active programmes in the year of estimation.

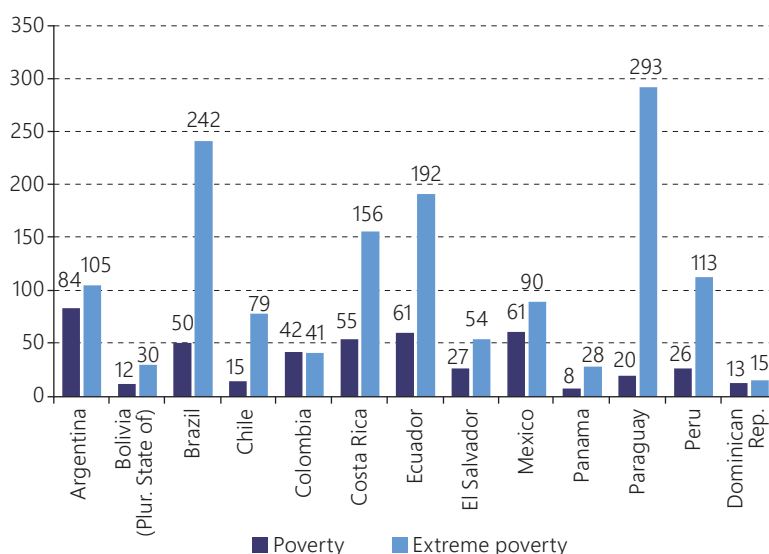
In terms of coverage, since 2009, more than 20% of the population in Latin America and the Caribbean belongs to households receiving conditional cash transfers. Specifically, 21.9% of the population was covered in 2019, and 22.1% in 2020. Due to modifications in the programmes or the implementation of

<sup>18</sup> The consolidation of non-contributory social protection requires monitoring the programmes implemented by countries. For over a decade, ECLAC has maintained the Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean. This database provides quantitative and qualitative information on conditional cash transfer programmes, non-contributory pensions, and labour inclusion programmes implemented in the countries of the region. Refer to the Conditional Cash Transfer Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean by ECLAC [online database] <http://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/>.

new measures, the number of programme recipients reached its historical peak in 2021, covering 25.9% of the total population of the region. This highlights the significance of these programmes in the social protection architectures of the countries.

Despite the significance of conditional cash transfer programmes in terms of their coverage, the data shows a low level of sufficiency of the amounts provided. In the year 2021, conditional transfers were notably lower than the average income deficit of households in poverty compared to the total poverty threshold in the 13 countries analysed using data from their household surveys. This means that the average amounts of conditional transfers were not sufficient to close the gap between the incomes of poor households and the poverty line. This indicator is better in Argentina (covering 83.8% of the income deficit), Mexico (60.9%), Ecuador (60.5%), Costa Rica (54.6%), and Brazil (50.4%). The lowest amounts were estimated in Panama (8%), the Plurinational State of Bolivia (11.8%), and the Dominican Republic (12.6%) (see figure 11).

**Figure 11**  
Latin America (13 countries): amounts of conditional cash transfer programmes as a percentage of the income deficit<sup>a</sup> of households in situations of poverty and extreme poverty, according to household survey data, around 2021  
(In percentages of the income deficit concerning the poverty line)



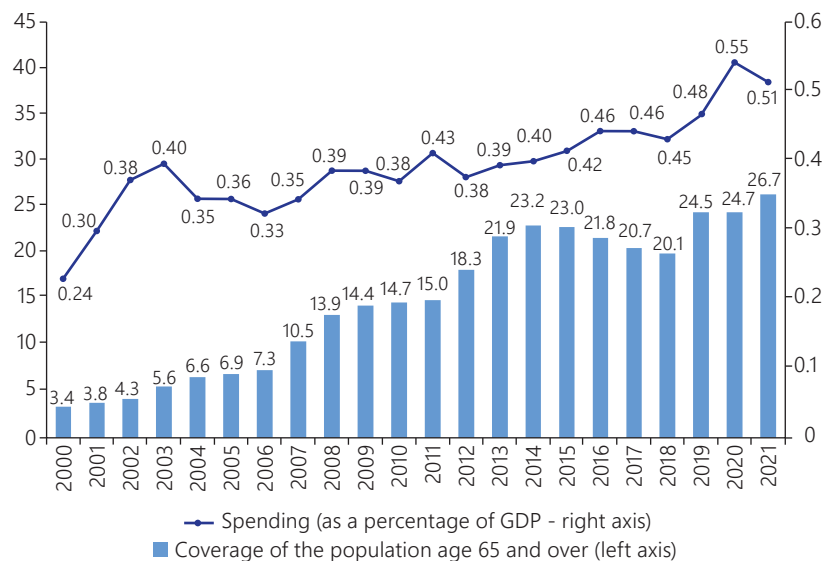
Source: Prepared by the authors, based on household surveys from countries. Household Surveys Database (BADEHOG).

<sup>a</sup> The income deficit refers to the gap between the per capita monthly incomes of households and the poverty or extreme poverty line.

The literature presents abundant evidence of the positive effects that these programmes have had on different outcome variables (Abramo, Cecchini, and Morales, 2019; Cecchini and Atuesta, 2017). Some examples include the studies of Edo, Marchionni, and Garganta (2017), which analyse the effects of Argentina's Universal Child Allowance programme, noting that the programme increases attendance in secondary schools among recipient children. In Brazil, Glewwe and Kassouf (2012) highlight the positive effects on school enrolment and the reduction of dropout rates from the Bolsa Familia programme. In Chile, Galasso (2011) examines the effects of Chile Solidario, demonstrating improvements in various indicators: enrolment in housing programmes, the probability of enrolling 4 to 5-year-old children in preschool education, and registering in the public health system. For Colombia's Familias en Acción programme, Barrientos and Villa (2013) observe the effects on the labour inclusion of destinaries. In Mexico, the entitlements of the Oportunidades programme (previously known as PROGRESA) were the second most important determinant of the decline in inequality between 1996 and 2004 (Soares and others, 2009).

During this century, non-contributory pension systems, particularly those related to old age, have experienced a notable expansion, marking one of the most significant changes in the coverage of social protection systems in the region (Arenas de Mesa, 2019). As seen in figure 12, expenditure on these programmes has increased over the last two decades. At the beginning of the century, expenditure represented 0.24% of the regional GDP, while in 2021 it had more than doubled, reaching 0.51% of the GDP. There is a consistent upward trend observed over the previous two decades. In the context of the pandemic, due to countries' efforts to transfer a greater amount of resources to the population aged 65 and older, spending on these programmes increased to 0.55% of the GDP.

**Figure 12**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (24 countries): evolution of coverage<sup>a</sup> and public spending<sup>b</sup>**  
**on non-contributory pension systems, 2000–2021<sup>c</sup>**  
*(In percentages of the population aged 65 and older and as a percentage of the GDP)*



Source: Arenas de Mesa and Robles (2023) based on ECLAC, Non-Contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/inicio>, and CELADE - Population Division of ECLAC. Review 2022, and United Nations, Department of Economic and Social Affairs, Population Division (2022). World Population Prospects 2022, online edition.

<sup>a</sup> Weighted average for coverage considering information on non-contributory pension systems from 23 countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay. Coverage calculation does not include information from Saint Vincent and the Grenadines.

<sup>b</sup> Simple average for expenditure considering information on non-contributory pension systems from 24 countries: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Guyana, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, and Uruguay.

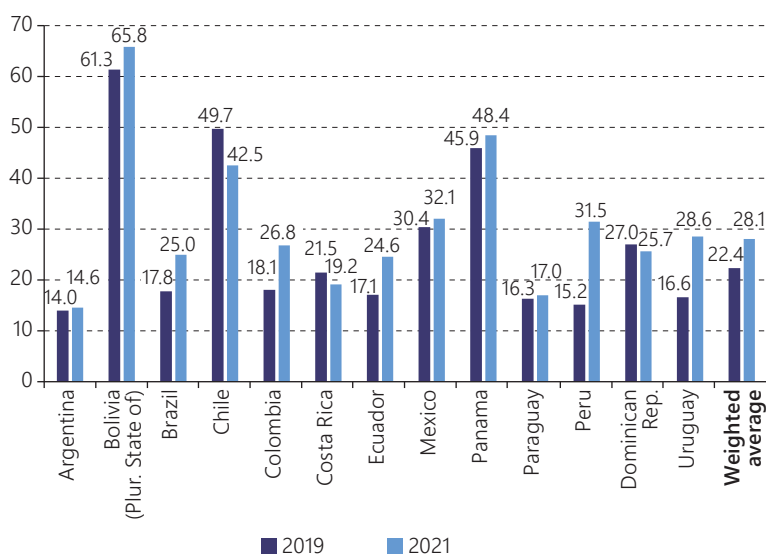
<sup>c</sup> For years where there is no coverage information, values are imputed following the following rule: if the missing values are at the beginning or end of the series, the first or last value is repeated up to 3 times. For missing intermediate values, the Akima interpolation method (1970) is used to fill in those values. In cases where the program's access age is for persons under 65 years and there is no information on age-disaggregated coverage, this is calculated by multiplying the reported total programme coverage by the ratio between the population aged 65 and older and the program's target population.

In 2000, non-contributory pension systems aimed at mitigating the risk of poverty in old age were present in 11 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, reaching a coverage of 3.4% for persons aged 65 and older. However, from 2000 to 2021, a phase of expansion of these types of programmes in the region became evident, rising to 24 countries with a coverage of 26.7% of the population aged 65 and older (Arenas de Mesa and Robles, 2024). Regarding the sufficiency of non-contributory pension

transfers with respect to the poverty line, Arenas de Mesa, Robles, and Vila (2024) estimate significant differences among countries in 2021. A large proportion of non-contributory pension programmes exceed the poverty line. For example, Brazil's *Benefício de Prestação Continuada* programme represents 218.3% of the country's poverty line, while in Uruguay, transfers from the *Pensiones no contributivas por vejez e invalidez* programme reach 178.7% of the poverty line. Lower sufficiency of these entitlements is observed in Colombia's *Colombia Mayor* programme (23%) and in Peru with the *Pensión 65* programme (36.5%).

Countries in the region have implemented other non-contributory cash transfers, beyond conditional cash transfers and non-contributory pension systems. These transfers are mostly financed through general taxes, following a solidarity-based approach, or through revenues from public enterprises or international cooperation funds (Cecchini, Villatoro, and Mancero, 2021). Estimates from household surveys in countries show that the coverage of total public transfers is important in the region. Around 2019, 22.9% of households in 15 Latin American countries received some form of public transfer. While the data presented in figure 13 does not include the new emergency transfers created during the pandemic, there is an increase in the percentage of covered households in 2021, which rose to 28.1% (see figure 13). This may be due to additional efforts implemented by countries in response to the pandemic such as increasing coverage or amounts of existing programmes (see Chapter III). Analysing the situation among countries, significant variability in the coverage of public transfers is observed around the years 2019 and 2021. During this period, the Plurinational State of Bolivia, Panama, Chile, El Salvador, and Uruguay achieved the highest levels of household coverage. It is worth noting the increase in coverage of these programmes in Brazil, Colombia, Ecuador, Peru, and Uruguay. On the other hand, Chile, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic show a decrease in coverage during the period.

**Figure 13**  
Latin America (14 countries): households receiving public transfers,<sup>a,b</sup>  
according to household survey data, around 2019 and 2021<sup>c,d</sup>  
(Percentages)



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on household surveys from countries. Household Surveys Database (BADEHOG).

<sup>a</sup> The estimates exclude emergency transfers implemented by countries to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

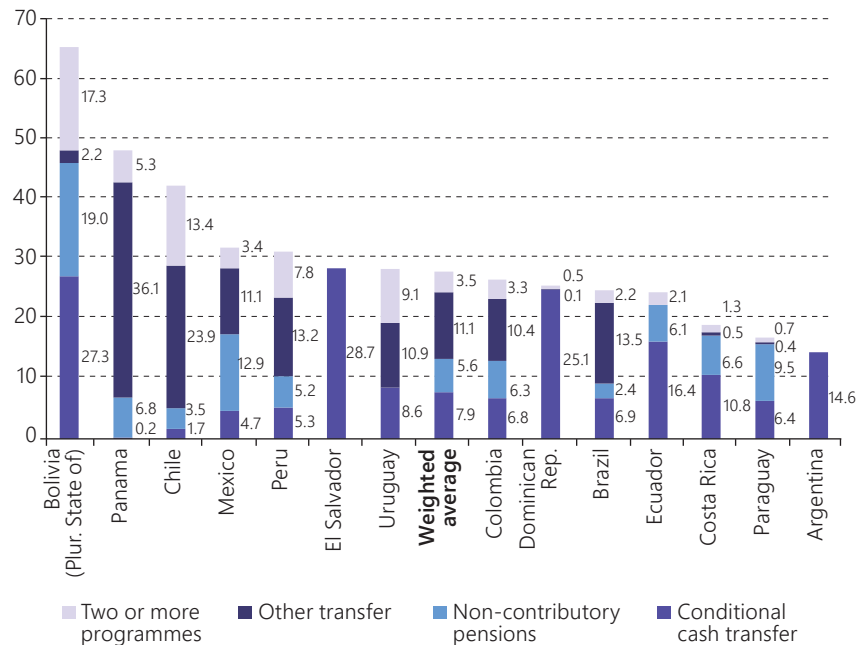
<sup>b</sup> In the case of Argentina, the household survey only measures the conditional cash transfer component of public transfers.

<sup>c</sup> In the case of Chile, the data corresponds to the years 2017 and 2020; in Colombia to 2018; and in Mexico to 2018 and 2020.

<sup>d</sup> Weighted average considering information from the following countries: Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. The data for El Salvador is only considered in the calculation of the weighted average.

In the vast majority of countries, conditional cash transfer programmes boast the highest coverage of the total population compared to other types of public transfers. For example, in the Plurinational State of Bolivia, El Salvador, and the Dominican Republic, the proportion of households receiving conditional cash transfers exceeds 20% of the total population (see figure 14). As for non-contributory pension systems, noteworthy coverage levels are observed in the Plurinational State of Bolivia (19%), Mexico (12.9%), and Paraguay (9.5%). Although significant progress has been made in the implementation of these programmes, there is an urgent need to address pending challenges related to the sufficiency of transfers and their coverage levels, as well as to enhance the coordination between contributory and non-contributory programmes.

**Figure 14**  
Latin America (14 countries):<sup>a</sup> distribution of households by type of public transfers received,<sup>b</sup>  
according to household survey data, around 2021  
(Percentages)



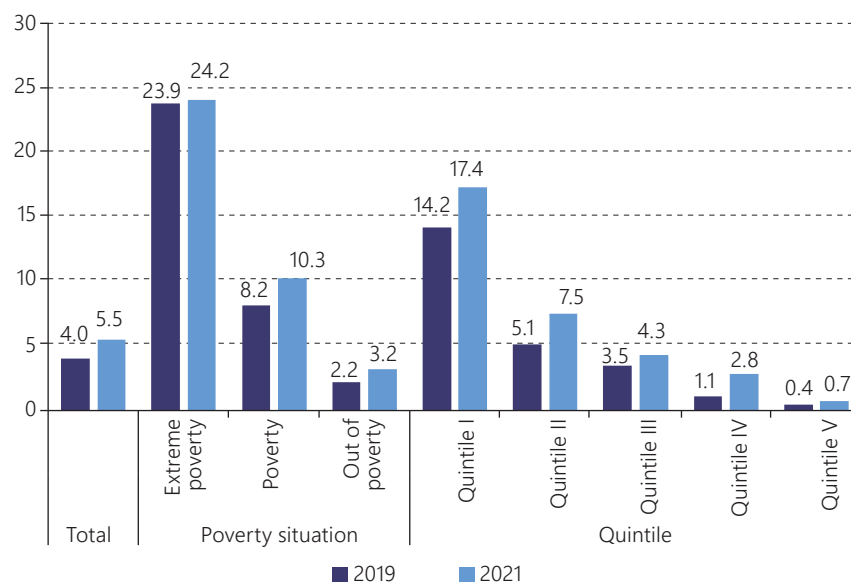
Source: Prepared by the authors, based on household surveys from countries. Household Surveys Database (BADEHOG).

<sup>a</sup> The estimates exclude emergency transfers implemented by countries to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>b</sup> In the case of Argentina and El Salvador, household surveys only measure the conditional cash transfer component of public transfers.

The significance of public transfer programmes is not only observed in coverage levels, but also in the proportion they represent relative to the total income of the most vulnerable households. Although around 2021, only 5.5% of the total income of households came from public transfers, this proportion was much higher among households in extreme and non-extreme poverty, with percentages of 24.2% and 10.3%, respectively (see figure 15). A similar situation is observed among the first income quintiles: 17.4% of the total income of households in the lowest income quintile comes from public transfers, and this proportion reaches 7.5% of income in the second quintile. This contrasts with the situation of the fifth quintile, where only 0.7% of the total household income comes from public transfers. In the period between 2019 and 2021, there is an increase in the contribution of public transfers to the total income of households, especially among non-poor persons (from 8.2% to 10.3%) and those belonging to the first quintile (from 14.2% to 17.4%).

**Figure 15**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (14 countries):<sup>a</sup> average percentage weight of income from public transfers<sup>b</sup>**  
**relative to total household income, by poverty status and income quintile, around 2019 and 2021**  
*(Percentages)*



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on household surveys from countries. Household Surveys Database (BADEHOG).

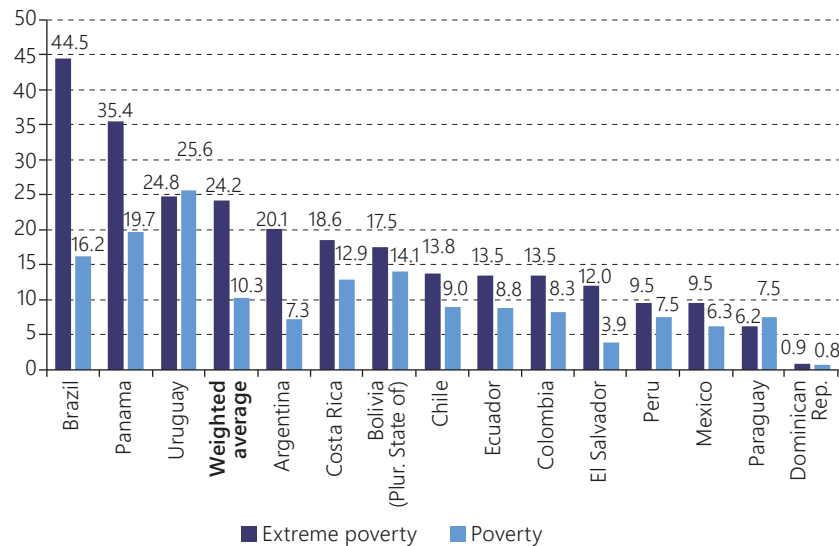
<sup>a</sup> Weighted average of the following countries: Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay.

<sup>b</sup> The estimates exclude emergency transfers implemented by countries to address the COVID-19 pandemic. In the case of Argentina and El Salvador, household surveys only measure the conditional cash transfer component of public transfers.

The weight of public transfers in the region is heterogeneous. As can be seen in figure 16, in 2021, the contribution of public transfers to the total income of households in poverty exceeded 20% in countries such as Brazil (44.5%), Panama (35.4%), Uruguay (24.8%), and Argentina (20.1%). This highlights the importance of social protection programmes in the region to ensure access to income for the vulnerable population, enabling access to basic levels of protection and well-being. However, it is also evident that challenges remain in the coordination among these public transfer programmes to guarantee population income protection.

When assessing the contribution of public transfers in relation to average income (i.e., the percentage that the average per capita transfer amount of the household represents compared to the total per capita average income of the recipient households), in most countries in the region, the amounts from non-contributory pension systems tend to exceed those of conditional cash transfers. For example, in Paraguay, the average per capita amount of non-contributory pensions is equivalent to 17.3% of the per capita average income of recipient households. Regarding conditional cash transfers, the highest proportions are found in Argentina, with 16.4%, followed by Ecuador, at 11.8%, and Costa Rica, with 10.7% (see figure 17).

**Figure 16**  
Latin America and the Caribbean (14 countries):<sup>a</sup> average percentage weight of income from public transfers relative to total household income,<sup>b</sup> by poverty status and extreme poverty, 2021  
(Percentages)

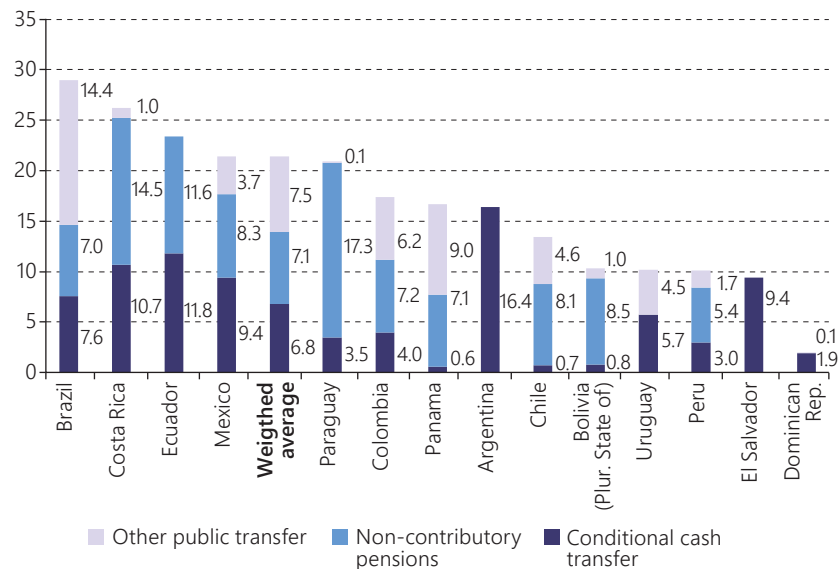


Source: Prepared by the authors, based on household surveys from countries. Household Surveys Database (BADEHOG).

<sup>a</sup> The estimates exclude emergency transfers implemented by countries to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>b</sup> In the case of Argentina and El Salvador, household surveys only measure the conditional cash transfer component of public transfers.

**Figure 17**  
Latin America (14 countries):<sup>a</sup> public transfers amount relative to the total income of recipient households,<sup>b</sup> by type of programme, around 2021  
(In percentages of the total income of recipient households)<sup>c</sup>



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on household surveys from countries. Household Surveys Database (BADEHOG).

<sup>a</sup> The estimates exclude emergency transfers implemented by countries to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

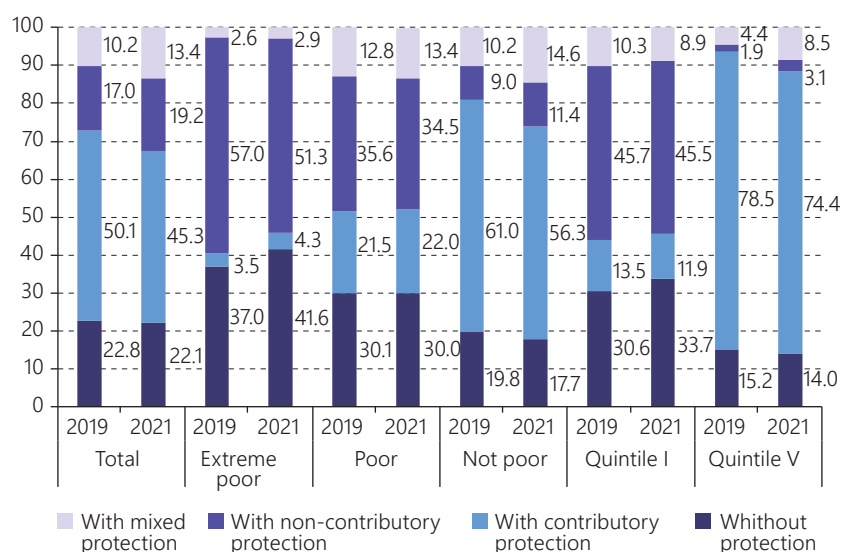
<sup>b</sup> In the case of Argentina and El Salvador, household surveys only measure the conditional cash transfer component of public transfers.

<sup>c</sup> This indicator expresses, for each programme, the average per capita transfer of the household as a percentage of the total per capita income of the recipient households.

### 3. The synergies of contributory and non-contributory social protection systems

Considering both access to contributory and non-contributory entitlements, in 2021 just over a fifth of the population in 14 Latin American countries did not have access to social protection systems, a slightly lower figure than the estimate in 2019 before the pandemic (22.8%) (see figure 18). The relative stability of this figure is due to two opposing factors. On the one hand, there was an increase in the proportion of people with access to both contributory and non-contributory social protection, rising from 10.2% in 2019 to 13.4% in 2021. On the other hand, there was a significant decrease in the proportion of people who access only contributory social protection, which dropped from 50.1% to 45.3%. The absolute figures show that the population covered by some form of social protection increased from 21 to 25 million among people in extreme poverty and from 67 to 73 million among people in poverty between 2019 and 2021. Despite this increase, it is worrying to note that there was an increase in the proportion of the population in extreme poverty without access to social protection. While in 2019, 37% of this group did not have such access, in 2021 the percentage rose to 41.6%. This phenomenon is better understood when observing that the number of people in poverty and extreme poverty increased significantly during the period.<sup>19</sup> The regional information shows that the flow of people who fell into poverty was greater than the number covered by permanent measures.

**Figure 18**  
Latin America and the Caribbean (14 countries):<sup>a</sup> distribution of persons by type of access to social protection in their households<sup>b</sup> by quintile, and poverty situation, 2019 and 2021  
(In percentages of the total population)



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on household surveys from countries. Household Surveys Database (BADEHOG).

<sup>a</sup> The estimates exclude emergency transfers implemented by countries to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

<sup>b</sup> The model considered in the exercise is based on the approach presented in CEPAL (2012a, 2012b, and 2011a). A typology was constructed to account for household access to contributory, non-contributory, mixed social protection, or the lack of access to social protection. The estimates were made based on household surveys in Latin American countries, considering households with contributory protection (where at least one member aged 15 and older is affiliated/contributing or a pensioner), with non-contributory protection (households receiving public transfers), or with both protections or none protection.

<sup>19</sup> According to data from CEPAL (2022b), the poverty rate in Latin America in 2021 reached 32.3%, which is 1.9 percentage points higher than in 2019. Regarding extreme poverty, although there is a slight improvement compared to 2020, the figure stood at 12.9% in 2021, returning to levels similar to those at the beginning of the 2010s. In absolute terms, this meant the entry of 15 million people into poverty between 2019 and 2021.

Of particular concern is the fact that, of the countries of Latin America with available information, almost one in five households with children and adolescents and without older persons, where the main income earner was employed, lacked access to social protection (see diagram 5). In the case of independent workers, the figure increases, estimating that approximately 1 in 3 households with children and adolescents whose main earners are in this occupational category were without access to social protection, mainly covered by non-contributory protection (33.7%). In light of this scenario, the development of labour inclusion strategies aimed at increasing formal work, articulated with social protection policies, is crucial as it would allow progress in overcoming stratified and fragmented access to social protection entitlements through guaranteed access to these systems.

**Diagram 5**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (14 countries):<sup>a</sup> distribution of households with children and adolescents and without older persons, according to the main income earner's occupational category and type of access to social protection, around 2021**  
*(Percentages)*



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on household surveys from countries. Household Surveys Database (BADEHOG).

<sup>a</sup> The estimates exclude emergency transfers implemented by countries to address the COVID-19 pandemic.

Despite significant progress in strengthening and consolidating social protection systems in the region, considerable challenges persist. Profound gaps in levels of social protection for the population are observed, reflecting the historical structural inequalities that affect the region. The joint action of social protection programmes (both contributory and non-contributory) that countries have developed and implemented plays an essential role. These programmes are crucial to mitigating and responding to the multiple risks faced by the population in the region, especially vulnerable groups, such as those resulting from the occurrence of multiple disasters (see section II.B). The data highlights the imperative need to move towards universal, comprehensive, sustainable, and resilient social protection systems.

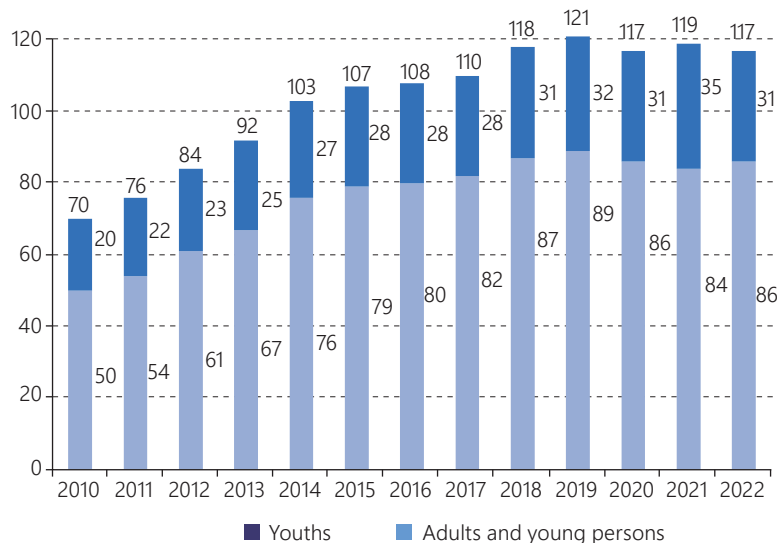
#### 4. Labour inclusion policies in the face of social protection gaps in the region

The countries in the region have implemented a series of social programmes aimed at promoting the labour inclusion of young and adult persons of working age who are in situations of poverty, vulnerability, or social exclusion. These policies have sought to encourage greater labour market insertion for the most vulnerable groups in the population in decent working conditions. This implies that through their

jobs, persons have guaranteed access to social protection, health coverage, and other entitlements that safeguard workers against risks associated with employment; in other words, a move towards labour inclusion (CEPAL, 2023b). It is expected that labour market insertion occurs in productive employment, meaning jobs that provide adequate income to surpass the poverty line and that ensure workplace safety. This entails guaranteeing the protection of workers against employment injury, occupational diseases, and other threats to their health and safety in the work environment.

In the last decade, there has been a significant increase in labour inclusion programmes across 22 countries in the region, rising from 70 programmes in 2010 to a peak of 121 programmes in 2019 (see figure 19). Despite a decrease in the number of these programmes in recent years, reaching 117 programmes in 2022<sup>20</sup>, countries have progressed in implementing these policies in various areas of intervention within labour inclusion programmes. Some programmes are focused on improving the labour supply, and other programmes are oriented towards expanding the demand for labour in the job market.<sup>21</sup> Situated between these two dimensions are labour intermediation policies that aim to connect job supply and demand. In addition to these dimensions of action, there are other institutional and regulatory policies that are integral to labour inclusion strategies which govern both dimensions. This includes aspects such as minimum wage regulation and the establishment of unemployment insurance, falling within the passive policies of the labour market.

**Figure 19**  
Latin America and the Caribbean (22 countries):<sup>a</sup> number of labour inclusion programmes identified<sup>b</sup>  
between the years 2010 and 2022



Source: Database of Non-Contributory Social Protection Programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) [online database] <https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/ilp>.

<sup>a</sup> Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Dominican Republic, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

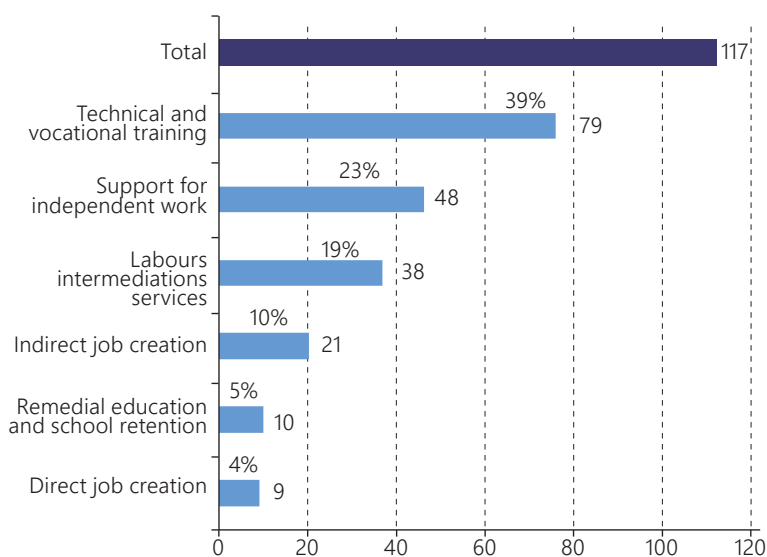
<sup>b</sup> In the estimation of programmes, conditional cash transfer programmes are included which allow recipients access to entitlements from labour inclusion programmes. Specifically, *Prospera* in Mexico (2014-2019), *Progresando con Solidaridad* in the Dominican Republic (ongoing since 2012), and *Comunidades Solidarias* in El Salvador (2005-2016) are considered.

<sup>20</sup> This phenomenon could be explained by the integration, in some countries, of initiatives in the field of labour inclusion, merging them into central or core programmes.

<sup>21</sup> For more information regarding the areas of action of labour inclusion policies, refer to the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean/International Labour Organization (CEPAL/ILO), "Conditional transfer programmes and the labour market", *Employment Situation in Latin America and the Caribbean*, No. 10 (LC/L.3815), Santiago, 2014, and L. Abramo, S. Cecchini, and B. Morales, *Social programmes, poverty eradication, and labour inclusion. Lessons from Latin America and the Caribbean*, ECLAC Books, No. 155 (LC/PUB.2019/5-P), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (CEPAL), 2019.

The most common interventions in the field of labour inclusion are technical training and support for independent work. Of the total labour inclusion programmes identified in 2022, 79 of them (equivalent to 39%) provide technical and professional training, while programmes aimed at supporting self-employment account for 23% of the total, with 48 programmes. In a smaller proportion are programmes focused on indirect job creation (21 programmes, 10%), education levelling and school retention (10 programmes, 5%), and direct job creation (9 programmes, 4%). There is also a notable presence of programmes that incorporate a labour intermediation component, constituting 19% of the schemes (38 programmes), as shown in figure 20. Although technical and professional training prevails as the central focus of labour inclusion programmes, other strategies that promote labour inclusion and improve working conditions are identified.

**Figure 20**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (21 countries): components of labour inclusion programmes, 2022<sup>a</sup>**  
*(In percentages and number of programs)*

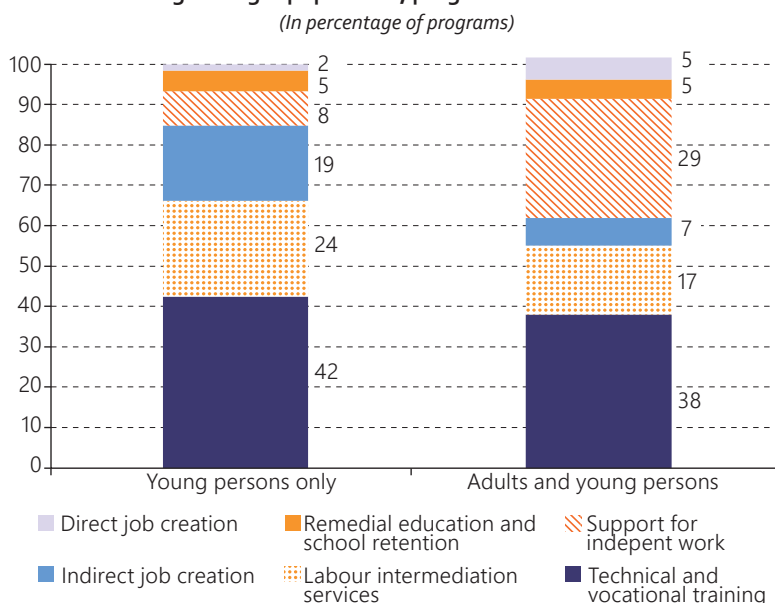


Source: Database of Non-Contributory Social Protection Programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/ilp>.

<sup>a</sup> Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

Figure 21 reveals that the type of labour inclusion programme differs based on the age group they target. The figures indicate that, despite the variety of approaches in labour inclusion programmes, technical and professional training remains a central element in both age groups. This reflects the importance of adapting interventions not only to the demands of the labour market, but also recognising the relevance of these actions at all stages of the life cycle. In programmes exclusively focused on young people, technical and professional training stands out as the essential component, constituting 42% of the programmes for this group. Labour intermediation services encompass 24%, followed by programmes for the indirect generation of employment and support for independent work, with 19% and 8%, respectively. Regarding programmes aimed at adults and young persons, technical and professional training is also crucial (38%). In this group, initiatives that provide support for independent work represent 29%, followed by labour intermediation services at 17%. Levelling of studies and school retention, as well as direct job generation, each account for 5%.

**Figure 21**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (21 countries): components of labour inclusion programmes**  
**according to target population, programmes in force in 2022<sup>a</sup>**



Source: Database of Non-Contributory Social Protection Programmes in Latin America and the Caribbean by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/ilp>.

<sup>a</sup> Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Guatemala, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

## 5. The importance of healthcare systems and comprehensive care policies

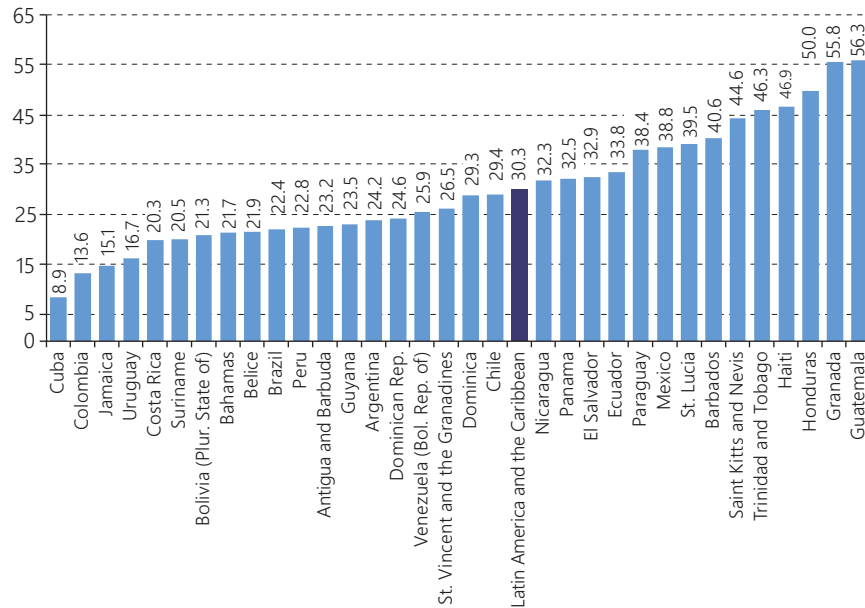
The region faces a series of gaps in terms of access to health and challenges for comprehensive care systems and policies. The latter is an essential component in reducing gender inequalities and advancing the universality of social protection systems in the region.

In the case of healthcare systems, although public spending on health has increased in the last two decades, this increase has not necessarily resulted in a reduced financial burden on households concerning health services. This implies committing a significant proportion of household incomes to finance expenses for healthcare services or medications. Around 2020, the average out-of-pocket expenditure in the region reached 30.3% of total health spending, equivalent to 2.19% of the regional GDP (see figure 22). This expenditure represents a proportion greater than 30% in 14 out of the 33 countries in the region, especially in countries such as Guatemala (56.3%), Grenada (55.8%), and Honduras (50%). On the other hand, Cuba (8.9%), Colombia (13.6%), Jamaica (15.1%), and Uruguay (16.7%) stand out with the lowest levels of expenditure in the region. High out-of-pocket spending hinders access to universal health, as the possibility of real coverage and quality services becomes inaccessible to a significant portion of the population (Marinho, Dahuabe, and Arenas de Mesa, 2023). This demonstrates the existence of profound gaps in access to health services, highlighting the lack of social protection among a significant portion of the population amid the risks of diseases and new epidemiological threats.

On the other hand, the social organisation of care has an impact on the access to social protection for caregivers (primarily women) and for those in need of care, further deepening the observed gaps in the region. The region still exhibits a significant deficit in comprehensive care policies (ECLAC, 2022c). In this regard, data from figure 23 shows that in the 10 countries analysed, around 60% of women aged 20 to 59 with the presence of children under 15 in the household do not participate in the labour market because they have to attend to family responsibilities. This figure drops to 18% when considering women

in households without the presence of children. The lack of access to services that would alleviate the caregiving burden on women is stratified, with profound differences observed based on the household income quintile. While in households in the lowest income quintile, approximately 30% of women are out of the labour market due to family reasons, only 5% of women in the highest income quintile face this situation.

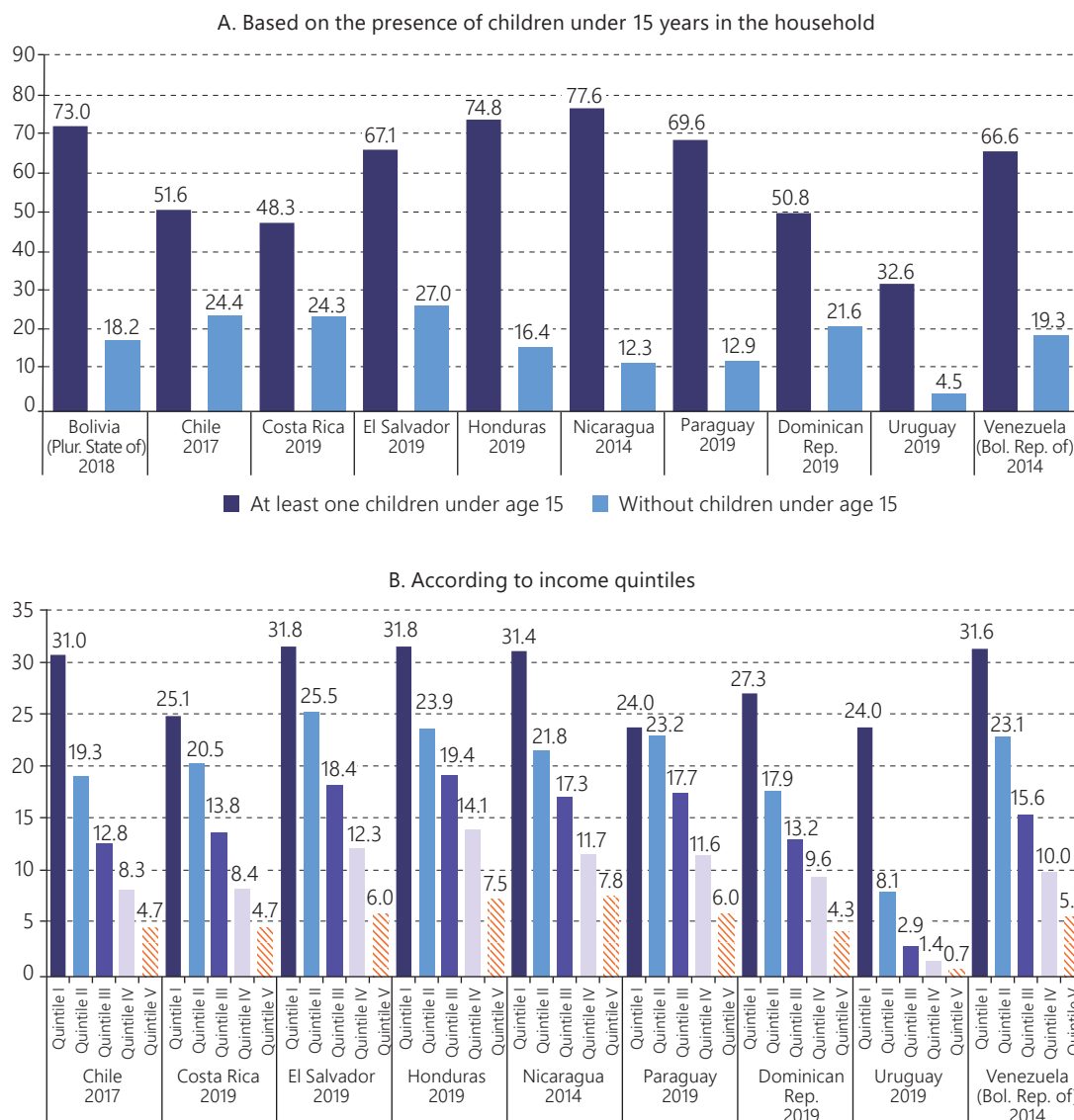
**Figure 22**  
Latin America and the Caribbean (33 countries): out-of-pocket expenditure as a percentage of total health spending, 2020



Source: M.L. Marinho, A. Dahuabe, and A. Arenas de Mesa (2023) "Health and Inequality in Latin America and the Caribbean: The Centrality of Health for Inclusive and Sustainable Social Development", Social Policy Series, Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

The examination of the social protection systems in the region reflects the efforts that countries have made in recent years to address historical gaps in this area, as well as the pending challenges that urgently need to be addressed. The fundamental role of non-contributory social protection stands out, which, in synergy with contributory social protection, has gradually increased the more vulnerable population's coverage by these entitlements. However, the data reveals growing challenges in strengthening and consolidating social protection systems, and in other areas such as access to health, the labour inclusion of the most vulnerable people, and the implementation of comprehensive care systems. This scenario is compounded by a reconfigured risk structure characterised by the increasing frequency of disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean. Combined with the previously mentioned social protection gaps, this significantly increases the vulnerability of persons and households. Therefore, the next section presents the main lessons for the region's social protection systems in the face of the rising threat of disasters.

**Figure 23**  
**Latin America (10 countries): women aged 20 to 59 who are out of the labour market due to family reasons, around 2019**  
*(Percentages)*



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), Social Panorama of Latin America, 2020 (LC/PUB.2021/2-P/Rev.1), Santiago, 2021, based on the Household Surveys Database (BADEHOG).

## B. Social protection and disasters in Latin America: progress and challenges

Since 1960, there has been an increase in the frequency of disasters in Latin America and the Caribbean. As floods persist in South America, storms are prevalent in the Caribbean, Central America, and Mexico. Significantly, between 2000 and 2023, droughts affected the largest number of people in the region. Faced with this scenario, it is necessary for countries to consider preventive, mitigating, and transformative measures to reduce the impact of disasters on the population. This is of particular relevance for the most

vulnerable groups, who, in emergencies, disasters, or catastrophes, often lose their sources of livelihood due to their lower capacity for prevention, mitigation, and recovery from the impacts of these events. As such, this can deepen existing inequalities and increase the number of people in poverty. Because of this, it is important to have a transformative social protection system that addresses the underlying structural conditions that create vulnerability to disasters and plays a preventive, mitigating, resilience-promoting, and recovery-facilitating role in case of disasters (Cecchini, Holz, and Robles, 2021; ECLAC, 2021b).

## 1. Lessons for social protection systems in the face of disasters in light of the pandemic

The social, economic, and health crises triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic and the responses of social protection systems serve as a unique opportunity to assess the disaster response capabilities of social protection systems. This experience gains even greater relevance due to the nearly real-time monitoring and analysis of public policy responses in general and of social protection in particular. There is no comparable information that consolidates social protection responses to other disasters, making it impossible to do so for other disasters at such a detailed level.

A primary lesson from the pandemic is to consider risks in a systematic manner and in interaction with other events. For example, between 2020 and 2023, a large number of people in the region were affected by the overlap of disasters with natural origins (biological, climatological, geophysical, hydrological, and meteorological) and COVID-19 (see table 1). This is further exacerbated by the economic and food crises that affected the analysed regions (ECLAC, 2022b and 2022d). Therefore, addressing the simultaneity of risks and crises requires thinking about the social protection response in a systemic way for both old and new risks.

**Table 1**  
Natural disasters that affected the region simultaneously with the COVID-19 pandemic, by subregion<sup>a</sup>  
(March 2020 – May 2023)

Subregion	Number of disasters	Total affected	Total deaths
Caribbean <sup>b</sup>	42	5 917 273	3 288
Central America and Mexico	70	15 061 971	816
South America	167	7 224 885	2 202
Latin America and the Caribbean	279	28 204 129	6 306

Source: Analysis Prepared by the authors on EM-DAT, CRED/UCLouvain, Brussels, Belgium. Emdat. Accessible [online] at <https://public.emdat.be/data>. Period under consideration: March 2020 to May 2023.

<sup>a</sup> During this period, disasters were recorded in the following countries: Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Barbados, Belize, Brazil, Costa Rica, Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, French Guiana, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Saint Lucia, Paraguay, Peru, Puerto Rico, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago Uruguay, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

<sup>b</sup> The majority of deaths in the Caribbean (2575) are attributed to the earthquake in Haiti.

The responses from social protection systems to the pandemic are unprecedented, not only in the number of measures taken, but also in the coverage of the population and amount of social spending. Countries in the region acted swiftly and implemented various measures due to a lack of permanent and universal social protection instruments. While the majority of these measures involved new programmes, they were often of short duration, and the transfer amounts tended to be insufficient to meet the basic needs of the population (see Chapter III). This raises questions about the role of social protection in guaranteeing more lasting and sufficient incomes while ensuring access to social services such as education and health. This reflection should consider not only the recent context of the pandemic and its immediate consequences, but also the persistent and profound gaps in social protection systems examined in section II.A. Furthermore, it involves thinking in the medium and long term about the role of social protection systems in responding to disasters.

Another element that the pandemic highlighted was the speed with which social protection systems are capable of responding. The responses of social protection systems revealed varying degrees of swiftness in the creation and expansion of diverse social protection programmes. In this regard, prioritisation mechanisms based on pre-existing records have proven inadequate for reaching households previously excluded from social protection systems (Berner and Van Hemelryck, 2020) (see Chapter III). The experience seems to confirm that countries that already had social protection programmes for disasters were able to scale up programme responses more quickly. For example, the Dominican Republic had previously invested in an institutional framework that already integrated, at least partially, elements of risk management with social protection. This is observed in the social information system and payment methods in response to previous climate-related disasters. In contrast, countries whose programmes lacked disaster responses and had pre-existing information systems faced greater challenges in expanding coverage to other forms of vulnerability exposed by the pandemic.

Although the responses to the pandemic managed to cover more than half of the population at certain times, the pandemic also deepened the gaps in social protection systems. Large segments of the low or lower-middle-income population have been unable to regain pre-pandemic levels. For instance, strata with incomes up to 3 times the per capita poverty line increased from 76.1% in 2019 to 78.4% in 2020, to 78.6% in 2021, and to return to 78.4% in 2022 (ECLAC, 2022a).

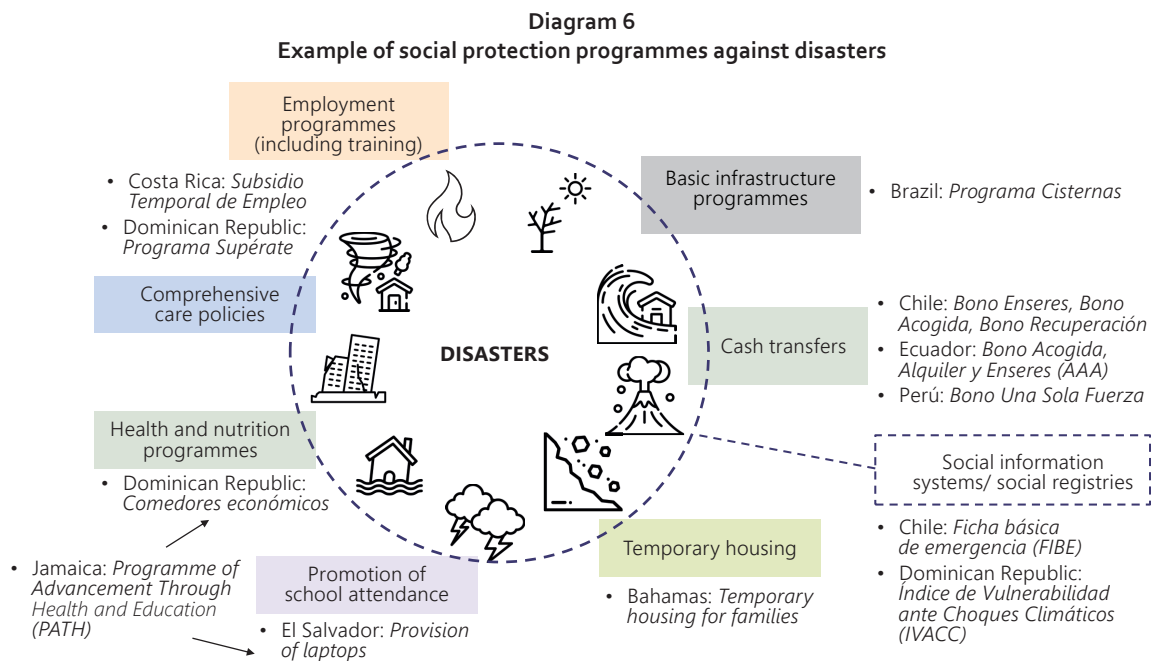
All these elements reflect reactive social protection systems with institutional weaknesses, affirming the importance of having social protection systems that incorporate disaster risk management aspects to identify vulnerable populations in the face of disasters, catastrophes, or emergencies. The pandemic reaffirmed the critical role of social protection instruments in preventive functions, during disasters or emergencies, and in the recovery phase by ensuring a certain standard of well-being and living conditions for the population. To promote resilience in households and communities, it is necessary to protect income sources, guarantee access to social services, and promote decent work through interventions that aim not only to support short-term absorption capacities, but also to strengthen the adaptive and transformative resilience capacities of households and communities affected by disasters (ECLAC, 2021b).

## 2. Social protection programmes for disasters: beyond emergency transfers

In the region, responses from social protection systems to disasters tend to be influenced by institutional fragmentation. On one hand, social protection systems are generally developed around the care of vulnerable persons and households in poverty. On the other hand, national emergency systems, the governing bodies for disasters, have been constructed in parallel and often without direct coordination with social protection entitlements. This leads to responses with lower coverage, less suitability, and sometimes less swiftness when faced with emergency situations, disasters, or catastrophes (Cecchini, Holz, and Robles, 2021; ECLAC, 2021b).

Within this framework, the social protection tools developed to address disasters in the region include a variety of mechanisms that help mitigate impacts on different realms of rights. Specifically, there are programmes for employment, infrastructure, promotion of school attendance, health and nutrition programmes, temporary housing, basic infrastructure programmes, and cash transfers to address emergency situations (Cecchini, Holz, and Robles, 2021). These programmes tend to fall into three types: (i) stable programmes that operate independently of disasters but include special actions to ensure access to entitlements in emergencies; (ii) temporary programmes specifically created to address disasters, activated at the time of the emergency; and (iii) emergency programmes created at the time of the disaster, contingent in nature and of limited duration. For example, Brazil illustrates the first two cases with the *Benefício de Prestação Continuada* (BPC) and the *Programa Bolsa Família* (PBF) as existing social protection programmes that integrate actions for disasters and emergencies, while the *Benefícios Eventuais* programme is specifically designed to be activated in times of emergency. Mexico also has a programme activated in emergencies called the *Programa para el Bienestar de las Personas en Emergencia*. Examples of the last type include: the *Bono Enseres* and *Bono Acogida* to address the mega fires in 2021, the

*Bono Recuperación* for the Viña del Mar fire in 2022, and the *Bolsillo Electrónico de Emergencia* to address the consequences of frontal systems in the central south of the country in 2023, all in Chile; the *Bono de Acogida, Alquiler y Alimentación (AAA Bonus)* in Ecuador to address the consequences of the earthquake in 2016; and the *Bono una Sola Fuerza* to complement the *Programa Juntos* and the *Programa Pensión 65* in Peru to address the emergency caused by the rains from El Niño Costero in 2017 (see diagram 6 and table II.A.1 in Annexes).<sup>22</sup>



Source: Own elaboration based on S. Cecchini, R. Holz, and C. Robles (2021), "Social protection systems in the face of disasters," in S. Cecchini, R. Holz, and H. Soto de la Rosa (eds.) *Management and institutional framework of social policies for equality in Latin America and the Caribbean. Toolbox*, Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

A critical need for programmes to achieve scale, enact promptly, and be accessible to the population affected by a disaster is to characterise and identify persons and families affected by emergencies. For this purpose, rapid assessment surveys are conducted which include basic information about the home's location, family composition, characteristics, and assessment of housing damage. In many cases, these basic emergency surveys are carried out by Ministries of Social Development and similar entities. This is the case, for example, in Brazil with the *Formulario Nacional de Registro de Información de Familias y Personas en Situación de Emergencia y Calamidad Pública*, in Chile with the *Ficha Básica de Emergencia (FIBE)* and the *Ficha Básica de Emergencia Hídrica (FIBEH)*, and in Mexico with the *Solicitud de Apoyo*. The Dominican Republic is characterised by having a fairly integrated disaster information system. In this country, the *Ficha Básica de Emergencia* classifies the impact on persons and families in a disaster is managed by the *Sistema Único de Beneficiarios (SIUBEN)*. SIUBEN centralises information about households and subsequently prioritises them for the selection process as destinataries of the *Bono de Emergencia*. It is attached to the Cabinet of Coordination of Social Policies and operates under the direct responsibility of the Vice Presidency of the Republic. This system also allows estimating the probability of a household being affected by a climatic shock by constructing the Climate Shock Vulnerability Index (IVAAC) (for more details on data collection instruments, see table II.A.1 in annexes).

<sup>22</sup> The countries selected for the analysis serve to illustrate the heterogeneity of responses from social protection systems in the face of disasters and do not aim to be in any way a comprehensive reflection of the entire variety present in the region.

The evidence from the selected countries confirms the significant heterogeneity in social protection systems when dealing with disasters. The scalability, timeliness, and accessibility of programmes vary according to institutional arrangements, critically including the existence and adaptation of information systems in emergency situations. For social protection programmes to respond in a way that; 1) guarantees the well-being of affected persons and families and 2) mitigates the effects of disasters, always considering the underlying structures of vulnerability to emergencies, the evidence supports the use of social protection systems that integrate clear actions in the event of disasters. This is streamlined when these actions are formalised in social protection systems with defined normative frameworks, whose main functions include specific actions in the face of disasters, or temporary programmes that are activated during disaster events.

While there is a social institutional framework that conditions or facilitates the role of protection systems in the face of disasters depending on the scenario, there is room to advance towards programmes and social information systems that integrate elements of disaster risk management. As a counterpoint, this scenario differs from that of some European countries where responses to similar phenomena are more directly linked to the contributory system and the labour market (see box 1).

#### Box 1

##### Emergency social programmes in European Union countries: the case of part-time work schemes and ensuring the supply of basic services

Similar to Latin America, in countries that are part of the European Community, leadership in addressing the impacts of disasters tends to be concentrated in national civil protection agencies. Additionally, within the framework of the European Union (EU), there is the Civil Protection Mechanism, which aims to strengthen cooperation among EU countries and 8 participating states in civil protection to improve disaster prevention, preparedness, and response. Among the priority disaster risks in the region are extreme weather events, floods, droughts, wildfires, geophysical risks, epidemics/pandemics, animal and plant diseases, nuclear and radiological accidents, critical infrastructure disruption, industrial accidents, terrorism, and cyber threats (European Union, 2021).

Based on the cases reviewed within the framework *Short Time Work Measures*, it is observed that in several countries, disasters serve as grounds for employees to continue receiving their salaries (or a percentage of them). Part-time work schemes may involve a partial reduction in the number of hours worked for a limited period (such as a partial suspension of the employment contract), or temporary layoff, or a complete suspension of the employment contract. In both cases, the employment contract continues, and the employment relationship is not severed. In these instances, part-time work schemes are intended to assist employers in achieving flexibility during periods of temporary economic downturn without resorting to layoffs.

In the case of the French partial unemployment system (*Activité partielle*), disasters or exceptionally adverse weather conditions are recognised as reasons for the temporary reduction or suspension of activity. In this scenario, employees receive 70% of their hourly wage, and partial activity is allowed for a maximum period of 6 months, with the option to renew it once. The part-time work scheme in the Netherlands applies to situations of external risks to normal business operations, such as fires, epidemics, and floods. During part-time work schemes, the employee remains in that employment, and income generally remains the same. Employers pay for actual hours worked, and the state pays the salaries for the reduced hours directly to the employer. Contributions to the pension system continue as they were before this situation. A similar arrangement also occurs in the Belgian temporary unemployment system (*Tijdelijke werkloosheid*), which is applied when employability is affected by bad weather or an unforeseen event. The German social code also includes compensation if there is a substantial loss of working hours with a loss of salary due to an unavoidable temporary event (European Commission, 2020; ETUC, 2020).

Other programmes activated in response to the impacts of specific disasters are those designed to ensure the provision of essential services. Etoka, Sengupta, and Costella (2021) examine cases in the United Kingdom and France in Europe. In England, vulnerable households receive an advance monetary transfer through the *Cold Weather Payment* programme, enabling them to address winter-related challenges. This entitlement is triggered after seven days of low temperatures and is disbursed within the following fourteen days. It is automatically assigned to persons receiving certain state transfers, including pensions, income support, or employment subsidies, among others. Furthermore, it complements winter fuel transfers and the warm home discount scheme.

On the other hand, the authors highlight the French Energy Voucher programme (le Chèque Énergie). Established in 2018 and more recent than the English programme, this assistance aims to cover energy (gas or electricity) costs for vulnerable households. Eligibility is determined based on factors such as the payment of annual taxes and income levels ranging from 10,700 euros for single-person households to 22,470 euros for households with four members.

Source: S. Etoka, S. Sengupta, and C. Costella (2021), "Social protection for extreme temperatures: Experiences from the UK, USA, and France. Short Case Studies." Climate Center. Available online: <https://www.climatecentre.org/wp-content/uploads/Extreme-temps-case-studies.pdf>; European Trade Union Confederation (ETUC) (2020), "Short Time Work Measures Across Europe," COVID-19 WATCH. Available online: [https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/publication/file/2020-04/Covid\\_19%20Briefing%20Short%20Time%20Work%20Measures%2031%20March.pdf](https://www.etuc.org/sites/default/files/publication/file/2020-04/Covid_19%20Briefing%20Short%20Time%20Work%20Measures%2031%20March.pdf); European Commission (2020), "Short-time work schemes in the EU," Study report, European Network of Public Employment Services; European Union (2021), "Overview of natural and man-made disaster risks the European Union may face 2020," Publications Office of the European Union, Luxembourg. Available online: <https://op.europa.eu/en/publication-detail/-/publication/89fcf0fc-edb9-11eb-a71c-01aa75ed71a1>.

Building on the analysed regional experiences, the remaining part of this chapter will outline some challenges and recommendations regarding the role of protection systems before, during, and after disasters.

### 3. Challenges and recommendations for social protection systems in the face of disasters: before, during, and after

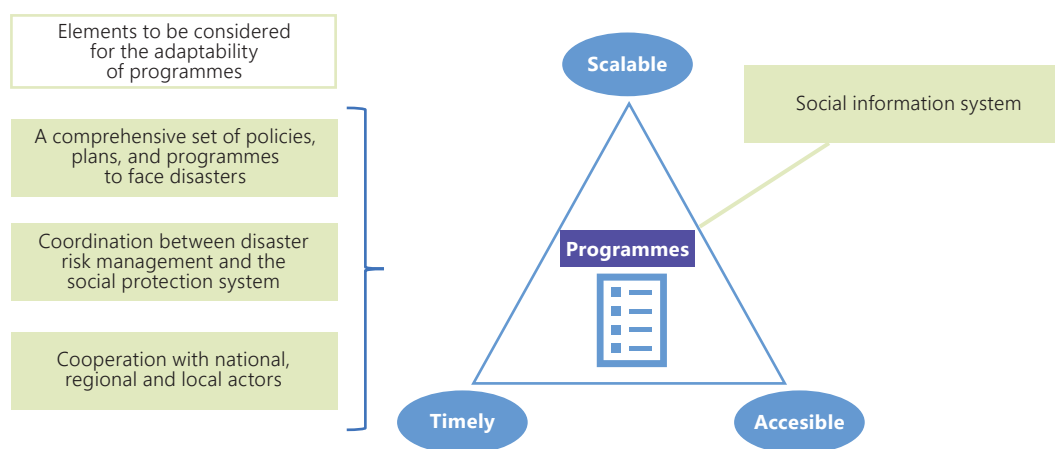
In the face of disasters, social protection systems in Latin America have generally acted in a reactive manner, relying on disaster risk management that is rarely articulated and poorly integrated with social protection systems. This scenario has resulted in social protection responses that may not necessarily complement or align with other sectoral actions and strategies, such as those in health, education, housing, and civil protection against disasters. In this context, it is necessary to advance the articulation and integration of the disaster risk management system with the social protection system (CEPAL, 2021b). Additionally, the involvement of other sectors, such as housing, health, security, food, and nutrition, among others, is essential. This is aimed at coordinating the involved institutions and aligning their established emergency programmes with those already implemented by social protection systems.

Likewise, it is necessary to define the role of the social protection system in the face of disasters with a transformative perspective that outlines its function before, during, and after a disaster (see diagram 2 in chapter I). In each moment this role is crucial for a transformative social protection system capable of guaranteeing people's rights in emergency contexts. The roles of social protection systems should be complementary to achieve an efficient and effective response. Other general measures include the integration and cooperation of national, regional, and local actors in social protection systems against disasters; the adaptation of social information systems to disaster situations; and the establishment of monitoring and evaluation systems for the responsiveness of social protection systems to disasters (for more information, see Cecchini, Holz, and Robles, 2021).

Building upon the broader challenges and recommendations outlined in previous documents (Cecchini, Holz, and Robles, 2021; CEPAL, 2021b), this section presents additional specific actions for social protection programmes in the face of disasters. As identified in the previous subsection, three types of responses generally prevail. First are social protection programmes that include disaster response activation among their functions. These responses may be characterised by advancing payment schedules, extending transfer durations, increasing the amounts provided, and expanding coverage. Second are temporary programmes specifically designed to address emergencies and activated only in the event of a disaster. These are typically targeted at persons and families unable to cope with disaster situations on their own, providing goods, services, or cash. Third are programmes created at the time of the disaster to address the impacts of an emergency. These programmes often have less institutional consolidation and translate into actions with less predetermined objectives, goals, and tasks.

In the regional context of significant gaps in social protection systems and institutional weaknesses in the response of social protection systems to emergencies, it is essential to address challenges and recommendations for these systems. From a dual resilience perspective (both institutional and social) wherein social protection systems can fulfil their functions throughout the various stages of a disaster (CEPAL, 2021b), the proposal is to move towards integrated programmes within the framework of resilient social protection systems. These programmes should, at the very least: (i) facilitate the scalability, both horizontally and vertically, of the programmes; (ii) ensure a timely response, and (iii) guarantee accessibility to entitlements in the event of a disaster. To achieve this, it is necessary to have a social information system adapted to disaster situations and an organisation that: (i) promotes increasing comprehensiveness of the set of policies, plans, and programmes in the event of disasters; (ii) encourages coordination between national social protection systems and disaster risk management; and (iii) promotes the integration and cooperation of national, regional, and local actors in social policy management in the face of disaster (Cecchini, Holz, and Robles, 2021) (see diagram 7).

**Diagram 7**  
Towards resilient social protection programmes



Source: Prepared by the authors, based on S. Cecchini, R. Holz, and C. Robles (2021), "Social Protection Systems in the Face of Disasters," in S. Cecchini, R. Holz, and H. Soto de la Rosa (coords.) *Toolbox: Management and Institutionalization of Social Policies for Equality in Latin America and the Caribbean (LC/TS.2021/157)*, Santiago.

In the 2021 Regional Conference on Social Development position paper, proposals were put forth in response to disasters, including: (i) income protection through an emergency basic income and income guarantee as a universal floor; (ii) food and nutritional security with a food basket or transfer, a hunger relief bonus, and support for food supply; (iii) guaranteed access to housing and basic services; (iv) care systems to address disasters; (v) strengthening social and labour inclusion; and, (vi) expanding the labour market through investment in social infrastructure (CEPAL, 2021b). Building upon this framework, and in a complementary manner, the following are some challenges and recommendations for social protection systems to be considered before, during, and after emergencies and disasters:

**(a) Challenges and recommendations to consider in advance**

- It is essential to ensure that entitlements provided in response to disasters adhere to a rights-based approach. This implies that the affected population should be recognised as rights holders within the framework of the social protection system policy, aiming for the progressive realisation of rights and not regressive action.
- Evaluate the feasibility of establishing a unified cash transfer programme in response to disasters.

- Evaluate the desirability of having social protection programmes and entitlements that are directly integrated with programmes, services, and transfers associated with other sectoral policies, such as health, education, housing, and food security. For example, facilitating access to basic infrastructure programmes to ensure water supply, establishing temporary shelters, ensuring educational continuity, guaranteeing access to first aid and primary health care in the affected area, ensuring food and nutritional support, and having work and employment programmes such as temporary employment subsidies or training programmes.
- Define how the social protection system integrates with risk management and the supportive functions it plays in response to an emergency. This may include, among other actions: identifying the affected population, providing shelter services, food assistance, organising transportation for vulnerable groups, and supplying and distributing aid.
- In line with the above, clarify the provisions directly related to programmes, services, and entitlements linked to the health, housing, civil defence, food security sectors, and other sectoral policies that are not included in the functions of social protection.
- Within the framework of a transformative social protection system in the event of disasters, it is recommended to identify and characterise the more enduring social, economic, and territorial vulnerabilities to disaster risks for certain population groups linked to structural aspects of poverty and the axes of social inequality in the region. This requires more systemic and intersectoral approaches to distinguish between structural and contingent vulnerability situations.
- Considering the specificity of territories, it is recommended to assess regulatory changes to facilitate regulations for the implementation and operation of social protection programmes in the face of disasters.
- Examine the coverage of entitlements in the territory to contribute to budgetary planning and assess their relevance according to the needs of the population.
- Within the framework of social protection system legislation, it is recommended to include entitlements in the face of disasters.
- Guarantee entitlements by prioritising especially vulnerable population groups in the face of disasters, such as children, adolescents, people experiencing homelessness, among others, and populations residing in particularly disaster-prone areas.
- Establish protocols for access, as well as procedures to be adopted in the event of disaster, through reliable and simple information about: the type of entitlements, such as goods, services, and cash transfers; access criteria; and the timeframe and manner of delivery.
- Establish protocols for coordination among different levels of government within the social protection system at various stages during a disaster.

**(b) Challenges and recommendations to consider during a disaster**

- Identifying the priority population to establish rapid procedures for the delivery of defined entitlements, including updates to the registry, is crucial. Having records of potential recipients with broad coverage in advance is key in this regard.
- Ensure widespread dissemination of the entitlements associated with the social protection programme throughout the territory, including the access criteria.
- Evaluate the need to advance the delivery of cash transfers, services, and/or goods, increase coverage and amounts of delivery, and assess the need to extend deadlines for implemented measures.
- Provide transfers, ensuring their integration with other social and general policy actions.

- Deliver transfers based on rights and gender-based approach and without conditioning the delivery on being registered in any registry or having a fixed address.
- Distinguish between public entitlements and offerings derived from donations from civil society.
- Monitor payment channels at different levels of government, identify difficulties and obstacles that persons and families may face in accessing entitlements, and seek solutions and innovations for aid delivery (including timelines, amounts, coverage, and payment channels).

**(c) Challenges and recommendations to consider after a disaster**

- In the context of transformative social protection and considering the impacts of the disaster, evaluate the need for regulatory changes, expansion of coverage and amounts, and the appropriateness of delivery mechanisms.
- Determine whether the vulnerability of persons and families affected by the disaster, who are already recipients of social protection programmes, has worsened. Evaluate the need for additional social protection entitlements, as well as actions and coordination with other existing social policies in the region.
- Identify persons and families who have received entitlements to cope with disasters but are not yet included in other social protection programmes or recipient registries, providing guidance to overall registry development.
- Considering the return to normalcy for persons and families after the disaster, assess the need to extend timelines for the provision of entitlements.
- Implement family support programmes to provide guidance and assistance to persons and families whose socio-economic situation has been affected by the disaster, allowing them to access more permanent entitlements if necessary.
- Update the social registry to include potential recipients of social protection programmes, adding those whose situation changed in the context of the disaster.

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## Annex II.A1

**Table II.A.1**  
**Examples of Emergency Social Programmes and Features of its Data and Operation**

Country	Examples of Emergency Social Programmes	Characteristics of the Entitlement	Data Collection Information
Bahamas	1. Shelter Management	The Disaster Management Unit (DMU) is primarily responsible for shelter management, in addition to participating in seven (7) out of the fourteen (14) emergency support functions. The DMU must: assist in identifying and inspecting shelters to determine their suitability before an event, disaster, or the beginning of the hurricane season; manage shelter supplies; assist in identifying, training, and assigning shelter managers and officers to work in designated shelters; and help identify, train, and assign volunteers to conduct Initial Damage Assessments (IDA).	No information.
Brazil	1. Programa Cisternas (The Cistern Programme) 2. Eventual Benefits (Benefícios Eventuales) 3. Benefício de Prestação Continuada (BPC) (Continuous Benefit Payment) 4. Bolsa Família Programme (BFP)	1. The Cistern Program: The program's target audience consists of low-income rural families affected by drought or regular water scarcity, with a priority focus on the Brazilian semi-arid region. The Brazilian semi-arid region is the program's priority area. To participate, families must be duly registered in the Unique Registry of Federal Government Social Programs. The Cisterns Programme can be used for family, school, or production purposes. The selection of communities is done collaboratively with the implementing entity and the involvement of representative local institutions. 2. Eventual Benefits: These are temporary provisions that are part of the guarantees of the Unified System of Social Assistance (USSA), aimed at citizens and families who cannot independently cope with adverse situations that weaken the livelihood of the citizen and their family, such as birth, death, temporary vulnerability, or disasters and emergencies. It is provided in the form of goods, services, or monetary resources through social work with families and aims to guarantee effective social protection through a formal process of guiding and directing the public toward social assistance services, programmes, projects, and other entitlements, as well as various public policies. Provisions directly related to programmes, projects, services, and entitlements linked to the fields of health, housing, civil defence, food security, and other sectoral policies are not included in the occasional social assistance measures.	The National Secretariat of Social Assistance makes available the National Form for Registering Information of Families and Individuals in Emergency and Public Calamity Situations in USSA. The form is a tool to assist in the management of USSA (especially in the areas of social assistance surveillance) at the three levels of government to conduct an emergency diagnosis in social assistance emergency contexts.  The instrument aims to map the situation of the affected population, their profile, and immediate needs, especially the audience of Social Assistance, prioritised groups, and those in situations of higher vulnerability.  There is a shorter version of the form, allowing for a quicker application, and a more comprehensive version with more detailed questions, for example, regarding family type and issues arising from the situation of emergency.

Country	Examples of Emergency Social Programmes	Characteristics of the Entitlement	Data Collection Information
		<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>3. Continuous Benefit Payment (CBP): paid to persons aged 65 or older and people with disabilities of any age, who are unable to provide for their own sustenance or have their family provide for them. CBP recipients in the affected territory have the right to advance the BPC payment schedule. An advance equivalent to the amount of one monthly minimum wage is permitted, and it can be repaid in up to 36 fixed instalments. The actions to advance the payment schedule and the possibility of advancing a portion depend on budgetary and financial availability and are only applicable in cases where the disaster or emergency is recognised by the Union. Recognition of emergency situations regulated by the protection and civil defence area is therefore not applicable.</li> <li>4. Bolsa Família Programme (BFP): in the event of an emergency or a state of public calamity declared by the State or the Union, special actions can be taken to ensure families' access to Programme entitlements. These actions are directly related to the payment of the transfer and registration update processes. For municipalities/DF in an emergency context that request special interventions, the deadlines for updating, registration, and impacts on BFP transfers are extended.</li> </ol>	
Chile	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia (Emergency Family Income)</li> <li>2. Bono recuperación (Recovery Bonus)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Emergency Family Income: Its objective was to mitigate the effects of the pandemic, but it sparked a discussion about a universal basic emergency income.</li> <li>2. Recovery Bonus: a specific bonus with a maximum amount of CL\$1,500,000, delivered only once to the head of the household for each family affected by the fire on November 3, 2022, in Viña del Mar, and registered through the Basic Emergency Form. The amount is based on the level of damage to homes and household characteristics. The recipient family must be in a regular settlement or one recognised by the Ministry of Housing and Urbanism. In response to previous disasters, successive governments have used bonuses (such as the Household Goods Bonus) as a tool for assistance.</li> </ol>	<p>Establishment of the Social Information System in Emergencies (SISE) in 2021 and its registration tools: the Basic Emergency Form (BEF) and the Basic Water Emergency Form (BWEF).</p> <p>Coordination is established among the Ministry of Social Development and Family, municipalities, and the Ministry of Housing. For the allocation of transfers, information from BEF and BWEF is considered, as well as the socioeconomic characterisation tool, the Socioeconomic Qualification (SEQ).</p> <p>The Basic Emergency Form is a field-applied tool to identify and characterise the population affected by an emergency.</p>

Country	Examples of Emergency Social Programmes	Characteristics of the Entitlement	Data Collection Information
Costa Rica	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Subsidio temporal de empleo (Temporary Employment Subsidy)</li> <li>2. Beneficio de emergencia (Emergency Benefit)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Temporary Employment Subsidy: Once a state of emergency is declared by executive decree in any part of the national territory, the National Employment Program of the Ministry of Labour and Social Security may grant the temporary employment subsidy to persons who, as a result of this state, experience job loss or loss of their usual source of income.</li> <li>2. Emergency Benefit: The action of the Mixed Institute of Social Aid (MISA) in cases of emergency materialises by offering subsidies to families in poverty for clothing, basic household items, and rental payments for families that have suffered any type of emergency due to disasters such as floods, earthquakes, fires, collapses or landslides, tremors, tornadoes, among others.</li> </ol>	For the delivery of the Emergency Benefit, the Municipal Emergency Committee, of which MISA is a part, submits the certified list of affected persons or families. These persons are then assessed by the institution's personnel in the field, through the application or update of the Social Information Form (SIF).
Jamaica	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Health and Education Promotion Programme (PATH)</li> <li>2. Rehabilitation Programme</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Health and Education Promotion Program (HEPP): Conditional cash transfer to promote the development of human capital, considering school attendance, poverty alleviation, reduction of child labour, and employment promotion. Selection is based on socioeconomic level and household characteristics. One of the program's four objectives is to prevent families from falling further into poverty in the event of an adverse shock.</li> <li>2. Rehabilitation Program: It consists of four types of grants (for small businesses, purchase of medications or other emergencies, and education) and one specifically for emergency assistance, such as a disaster. Applicants must not have insurance coverage. Generally, assistance is provided for personal items, basic food, or hygiene products.</li> </ol>	For the HEPP, demographic and other socioeconomic data about individual family members are collected, and the information is entered into the Beneficiary Identification System (BIS). The BIS applies an indirect means test to derive the family's score. Families that have scored equal to or below the established cut-off point for the Program are provisionally selected to participate.
Mexico	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Programa para el Bienestar de las Personas en Emergencia (Programme for the Well-being of People in Emergency)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Programme for the Well-being of People in Emergency (PWPE): Provides economic or in-kind support to persons affected by social or natural emergencies. Allocates resources for the acquisition of goods in kind and for the operation of shelters, as well as assisting in the transportation of persons and/or movable property that needs to be mobilised. It also addresses emergency situations related to food, caused by natural phenomena, social conditions, or economic factors that hinder access to food to meet a person's basic nutritional needs. Priority attention is given to persons residing, traveling through, or staying in municipalities and localities with a predominantly indigenous or Afro-Mexican population or with a high or very high degree of marginalisation.</li> </ol>	For the PWPE, information is collected through the Support Request. In the case of migrants from the southern border, the Welfare ID for Migrant Population is applied.

Country	Examples of Emergency Social Programmes	Characteristics of the Entitlement	Data Collection Information
Dominican Republic	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Programa Supérate + Bono de emergencia (Self-Improvement Programme and Emergency Bonus)</li> <li>2. Comedores Económicos (Economic kitchens)</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Self-Improvement Programme: Its objective is to promote decent and quality employment that ensures persons' exit from poverty. It considers expansion mechanisms in the event of national or local emergencies through an Emergency Bonus, which consists of an unconditional and temporary cash transfer.</li> <li>2. Economic Eateries: is an agency of the Presidency of the Dominican Republic, attached to the Cabinet for the Coordination of Social Policies and incorporated into the Social Protection Programme through the Social Assistance subprogram. It assists the most vulnerable sectors of the country by providing raw or cooked food. Among its functions is to support government institutions and non-profit organisations, as well as to assist persons affected by natural disasters.</li> </ol>	<p>For the Emergency Bonus, families are selected and classified based on the degree of direct impact, which is determined from the Basic Emergency Form managed by the Single Beneficiary System, attached to the Cabinet for the Coordination of Social Policies under the direct responsibility of the Vice Presidency of the Republic. This Single Beneficiary System centralises information about households and prioritises them for the selection process as destinataires of the Emergency Bonus.</p> <p>The Single Beneficiary System also allows estimating the probability of a household being affected by a climatic shock by constructing the Climate Shock Vulnerability Index.</p>
Trinidad and Tobago	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. General Assistance Grants</li> <li>2. Temporary Food Support Program</li> </ol>	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. General Assistance Grants: Provides a variety of grants to citizens/legal residents experiencing extreme need for temporary assistance. It is targeted at disaster victims and impoverished households or vulnerable groups. Includes grants for clothing, food, education, medical equipment, medications, and rent, among other things.</li> <li>2. Temporary Food Support Program: Part of the disaster assistance service of the Ministry of Social Development and Family Services, along with other educational subsidies, clothing, and household items.</li> </ol>	<p>Affected citizens can access financial grants through the Critical Incident Response System. The consequences of disasters are assessed using the DANA analysis (Damage Assessment and Needs Analysis)<sup>a</sup>.</p>

Source: Prepared by the authors, based on official information from the countries.

<sup>a</sup> See [online at]: <https://www.odpm.gov.tt/node/75>.



### III. Social protection, crisis, and the pandemic: lessons from a comparative perspective

Bernardo Atuesta  
Tamara Van Hemelryck<sup>23</sup>

This chapter analyses the social protection response in Latin American and Caribbean countries. It concentrates on emergency non-contributory social protection measures due to their role during the pandemic and their impact mitigating increases in poverty. The chapter also identifies the main lessons learnt from this experience in terms of the challenges facing social protection systems in the region and the need for sustainable responses to emergencies and disasters.

A third of the measures analysed were created specifically to respond to the crisis. Within the social protection responses to the pandemic, a more limited number of measures consisted of extending or adapting existing non-contributory social protection measures. The analysis also makes it possible to offer recommendations concerning the challenges faced by these programmes in the future and, more broadly, on the strategies aimed at the social protection of vulnerable groups in the context of building universal social protection systems as well as the future of social protection post-pandemic.

In Latin America and the Caribbean, responses to the socio-economic impacts of the health crisis show that emergency measures, and specifically non-contributory cash transfers, were key to meeting the primary needs of poor and vulnerable households in times of crisis. Countries responded in innovative ways both with the number of measures implemented and with their approaches to managing the following areas: (i) regulatory and operational changes, (ii) registration systems, selecting and contacting recipients, (iii) approaches to delivering entitlements, (iv) changes in processes, protocols, access requirements

<sup>23</sup> Sections A, B, and C of this chapter were prepared by Bernardo Atuesta, while section D was developed by Tamara Van Hemelryck. Section E is based on B. Atuesta and T. Van Hemelryck "Emergency social protection against the impacts of the pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean: evidence and lessons learned for universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient social protection systems," Project Documents (LC/TS.2022/143), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2022 and R. Frei, A. Castillo and V. Silva, "Social Protection and Labor Inclusion in Latin America and the Caribbean after the COVID-19 Crisis" (unpublished), 2022.

and suspending conditionalities, (v) public-private coordination and coordination with civil society (ECLAC, 2021a) and, (vi) digital transformation in the form and type of responses.

Despite these innovations, social protection systems demonstrated weaknesses when dealing with the crisis, presenting significant challenges in the opportunity, suitability, timeliness and adequacy of the measures, especially to adequately respond to the diverse impacts of the crisis on vulnerable groups that had not traditionally been included in social protection policies (such as informal workers, migrants, and vulnerable middle strata) (Atuesta and Van Hemelryck, 2022; ECLAC, 2021a). Thus, it highlights the importance of strengthening contributory social protection measures, such as unemployment insurance, and of articulating strategies for contributory and non-contributory social protection and emergency social protection.

The chapter closes by identifying lessons, strengths, and challenges for strengthening universal, comprehensive, resilient, and sustainable social protection systems in the region from a comparative experience.

## **A. Emergency measures adopted in Latin America and the Caribbean in response to the pandemic between 2020 and 2022**

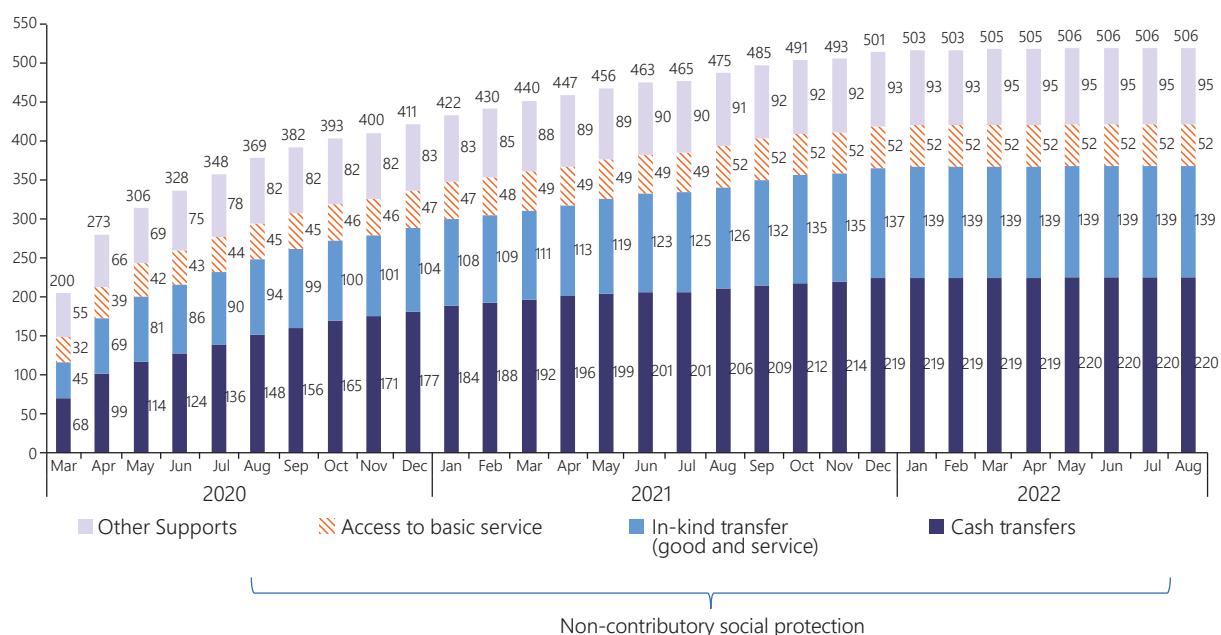
Ensuring an income sufficient to cover the basic needs of households is a fundamental task for social protection systems, particularly in periods of crisis such as the one experienced during the COVID-19 pandemic. For this reason and due to the imposition of restrictions on free movement, Latin American and the Caribbean countries endeavored to implement social protection measures that would alleviate the economic burdens that the most vulnerable households had to endure. This section presents the main characteristics of these measures, which were announced between March 2020 and August 2022, and analyses the outlook for emergency measures in the future.

Latin American and the Caribbean countries announced multiple emergency measures aimed at mitigating the negative effects of the economic and social crisis caused by health regulations imposed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Announcements of these measures grew rapidly between March and May 2020: non-contributory social protection measures and other supports for households and affected persons reached a total of 306. Between June and August 2020, countries in the region announced an average of 20 measures per month, reaching a total of 369 measures (Atuesta and Van Hemelryck, 2022). At this time, the preponderance of cash and in-kind transfers was already notable, reaching 40% and 25% of the total measures, respectively. From then on, the announcements of emergency non-contributory social protection measures continued, but at a slower speed. Between September 2020 and March 2021, an average of 10 monthly measures were announced; between April and December 2021, this average dropped to 6; and between January and August 2022, it fell to less than 1 monthly measure added (see figure 24).

In the period between March 2020 and August 2022, 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean announced a total of 506 emergency measures targeting the population affected during this period of crisis. Of these measures, 411 correspond to non-contributory social protection programmes, and include 220 cash transfers, 139 in-kind transfers and 52 measures to ensure and facilitate access to basic services (water, energy, telephone, and Internet), by prohibiting the cutting of services, reconnecting those cut off for non-payment, and postponing or reaching agreements for the payment of bills. The remaining 95 measures provided other supports aimed at controlling the spending of crisis-affected families. Among these are tax relief (through exemption from fines, suspension of collection dates and auctions for non-payment, and postponement of tax payments), measures to fix and control the prices of basic food basket products and rents, and payment facilities (for example, deferral of credit and mortgage payments, loan rescheduling and refinancing, payment exemptions or suspension of interest on arrears

and fines). Particularly of note, new cash transfers represented 33% of all the measures implemented. When considering the total number of measures, these measures have the highest coverage (see figure 25). Given their importance, the remainder of this document focuses on cash and in-kind transfers.

**Figure 24**  
Latin America and the Caribbean (33 countries): number collected of emergency non-contributory social protection measures and other support for the population in situations of poverty and vulnerability announced from March 1, 2020 to August 31, 2022, according to the month-end close<sup>a b</sup>



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), based on official information from countries; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://www.cepal.org/en/subtopics/covid-19>; "Social Protection Measures to Confront COVID-19," Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/en/listamedidas.php>.

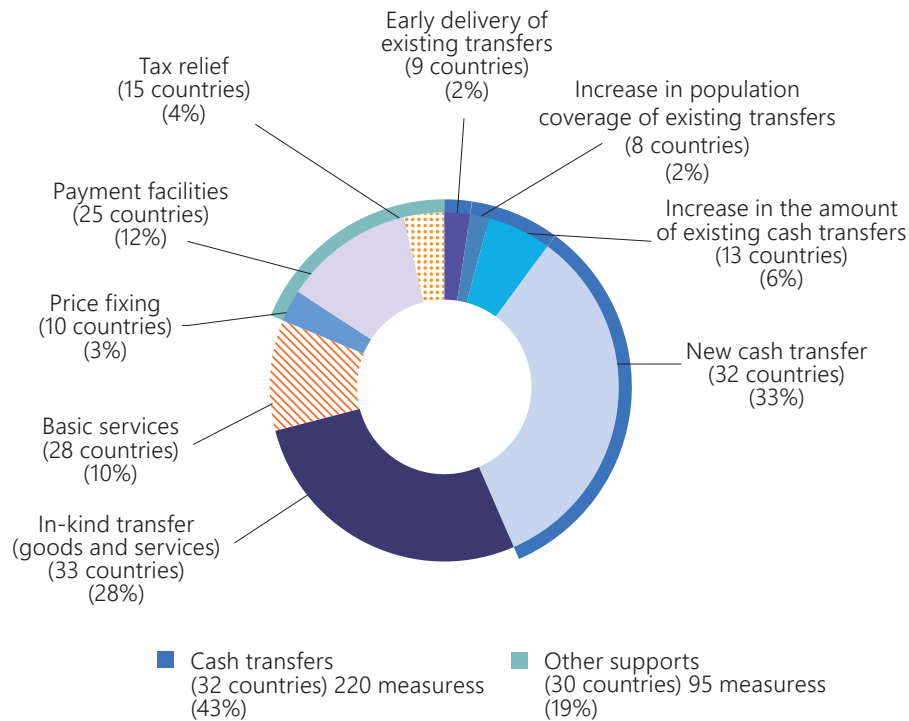
<sup>a</sup> The countries included are: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

<sup>b</sup> In-kind transfers include goods such as the delivery of food, medicines or work or technology equipment and services such as training courses and vocational training, labour intermediation, free educational courses and health care support.

In terms of their target population, most of the measures were aimed at poor and vulnerable households that experienced a particularly sharp decline in income and consumption levels during the pandemic. Some measures, however, were aimed at specific population groups due to their unique vulnerabilities within this context. About 18% of emergency cash and in-kind transfers were aimed at persons with disabilities (67 measures), while 8% were mainly aimed at indigenous persons (30 measures), 3.6% at Afro-descendant populations (13 measures) and only 3% at the migrant population (11 measures). In relation to the area of residence, only 10.4% of non-contributory emergency cash and in-kind transfers were targeted at the rural population (38 measures). In terms of age groups, 44% of cash and in-kind transfers were targeted at adults (160 measures), given their higher likelihood of loss of employment income. Children and adolescents were the target of 28% of emergency cash and in-kind transfers (102 measures), while older persons were prioritised by 21% (77 measures) and young persons by 7% (25 measures) of the total measures. With regard to the eligibility criteria for the measures dependent on the employment situation of workers, 15.6% of measures were aimed at the unemployed population

(57 measures), 14.5% at informal workers (53 measures) and 11% (40 measures) at formal workers (see figure 26). In particular, it is worth noting that efforts were made to cover informal workers, specifically those who were previously poorly covered by non-contributory social protection policies. During the specified period, 47 emergency cash transfer measures and 6 in-kind transfer measures were identified as a priority for this population.

**Figure 25**  
Latin America and the Caribbean (33 countries): emergency non-contributory social protection measures and other support for the poor and vulnerable, by type of measure, from March 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 to August 31<sup>st</sup> 2022<sup>a</sup>

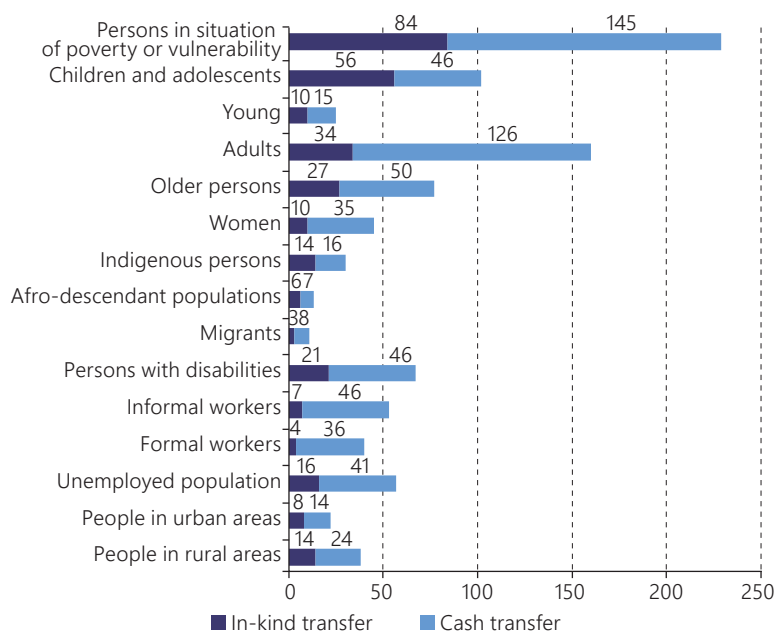


Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), based on official information from countries; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://www.cepal.org/en/subtopics/covid-19>; "Social Protection Measures to Confront COVID-19," Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/en/listamedidas.php>.

<sup>a</sup> This includes the 506 measures announced between March 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 and August 31<sup>st</sup> 2022. The countries included are: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

The rapid response and implementation of emergency measures by countries in the region signified a great financial and operational effort to identify and reach those most affected by the economic crisis that accompanied the pandemic. The following section details the role of cash transfer programmes and non-contributory pension systems during the pandemic (section III.B), and presents estimates of coverage, expenditure, and sufficiency of emergency non-contributory cash and in-kind transfer measures (section III.C).

**Figure 26**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (33 countries): number of emergency cash and in-kind transfer measures by target population, by type of measure, from March 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 to August 31<sup>st</sup> 2022<sup>a,b</sup>**



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), based on official information from countries; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://www.cepal.org/en/subtopics/covid-19>; "Social Protection Measures to Confront COVID-19," Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/en/listamedidas.php>.

<sup>a</sup> A total of 365 emergency provided cash and in-kind transfer measures (including 6 measures in the basic services category) are considered. The countries included are: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

<sup>b</sup> Different target populations may overlap, i.e. a measure may have more than one target population within the above groups.

## B. The role of cash transfer programmes and non-contributory pension systems during the pandemic, and analysis of their future challenges

Existing conditional cash transfer programmes and non-contributory pension systems in most countries in the region (see section II.A) facilitated the rapid responses to the crisis caused by the COVID-19 pandemic. Specifically, 19 countries in the region made use of the institutional framework and infrastructure provided by conditional cash transfer programmes (PTC) and non-contributory pension systems (NCPS) to design and develop the 88 emergency measures for cash and in-kind transfers during the pandemic. These measures included changes to 36 of the currently in-use programmes that existed in the region prior to the pandemic, as well as the implementation of new measures using the institutional framework of current programmes. This undoubtedly demonstrates that the social protection systems implemented have a significantly adaptive capacity. This experience offers particularly valuable lessons on the design of these measures and their scope for horizontal and vertical expansion in the event of future crises (see section III.D).

One of the changes adopted by the existing ongoing programmes was the early delivery of transfers during the COVID-19 crisis. In this regard, 12 programmes announced early deliveries: Peru's *Programa Nacional de Apoyo Directo a los más Pobres* (JUNTOS) was the only conditional cash transfer programme, while the other 11 programmes were non-contributory pension schemes. Another change to the existing

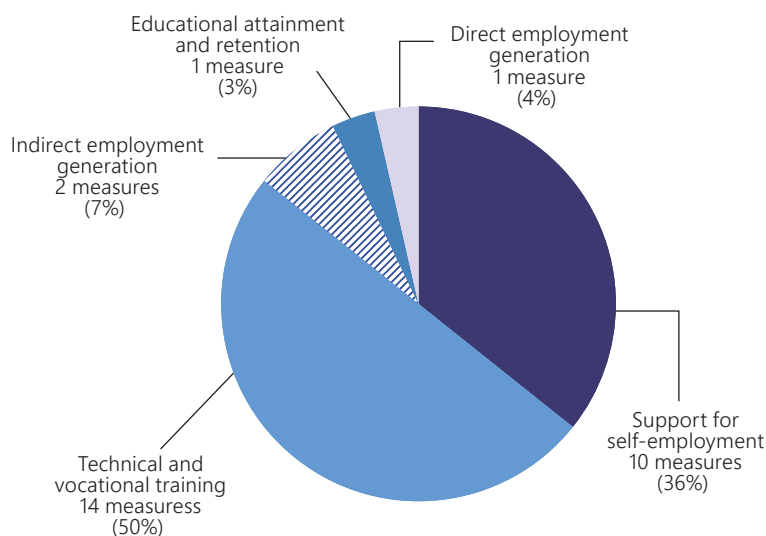
(pre-pandemic) programmes was increasing the coverage or the amounts transferred to their users, with the aim of covering the population most affected by the crisis and guaranteeing them a minimum income for subsistence. Specifically, 9 conditional cash transfer programmes and five non-contributory pension programmes announced an increase in payments, while an increase in coverage was introduced for 5 conditional transfer programmes and 2 non-contributory pension programmes. For example, in Brazil, the coverage of the *Bolsa Familia* programme was increased by 1.2 million households; programmes such as Colombia's *Familias en Acción* provided their users with larger amounts or additional transfers during the crisis. In addition, 2 conditional cash transfer programmes made changes to the way transfers are made. In Jamaica, food was delivered from the food support component of PATH (Programme of Advancement Through Health and Education) to students at schools and other distribution points in each school. In Honduras, the *Bono Vida Mejor* made transfers via an electronic wallet. In addition, five conditional cash transfer programmes which existed prior to the crisis officially announced a suspension of conditionalities in education and health. These programmes were Brazil's *Bolsa Familia*, Colombia's *Familias en Acción*, Costa Rica's *Avancemos and Crecemos* programme, and Guatemala's *Bono Social*.

Most countries in the region implemented new emergency cash and in-kind transfer measures during the pandemic, making use of the institutional framework and recipient registries from current conditional cash transfer and non-contributory pension programmes. These existing institutional frameworks and programmes were used to identify recipients of new measures, as well as the persons or households that already receive government entitlements. For example, the Plurinational State of Bolivia used the *Registro Único de Estudiantes* (RUDE) (Single Registry of Students), the database of recipients of the Renta Dignidad grant, the administrative records of the Juan Azurduy grant and the Information System of the Single Registry of Persons with Disabilities were used to deliver the new measures' entitlements during the pandemic: *Bono Familia*, *Canasta Familiar*, and *Bono Universal*. Other similar cases were Chile's *Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia* (IFE) and the use of the Social Registry of Households, Peru's *Bono Familiar Universal*, which was aimed at households receiving the *Programa Nacional de Apoyo Directo a los más Pobres* (JUNTOS) and households with a recipient of Pension 65 or the CONTIGO programme, among others.

In addition to conditional transfer programmes and non-contributory pensions, countries in the region also implemented ongoing non-contributory social protection programmes aimed at the labour inclusion of young people and adults in situations of poverty and vulnerability.

As with conditional cash transfer programmes and non-contributory pension programmes, some countries in the region made changes to their existing Labour Inclusion Programmes (LIP) during the COVID-19 pandemic, while others developed new measures aimed at stimulating economic and employment recovery in the aftermath of the crisis. Countries such as Argentina, Colombia, Mexico, Peru, and Saint Vincent and the Grenadines capitalised on their programmatic offer and pre-established institutional framework of LIP to increase the amounts of transfers, deliver additional transfers to their recipients, increase coverage, and offer new courses and professional training. However, most countries in the region designed new emergency non-contributory measures aimed at recovering jobs that were lost during the COVID-19 crisis, with little to no connection to their LIP. For example, in Argentina, the MANTA Scholarship programme for artisanal production development was implemented with the aim of helping to alleviate the economic impact of the COVID-19 crisis faced by artisans with a one-time transfer of up to \$100,000 Argentinian Pesos (US\$ 1,379 ) per person. In Colombia, the *Economía para la Gente* strategy was designed to aid in the recovery and bolstering of the production units of the vulnerable population as well as formal and informal microenterprises affected by the pandemic. In addition to these measures, countries such as Antigua and Barbuda, Barbados, Costa Rica, Grenada, Guyana, and Saint Lucia made free online courses available to complement studies and improve the employability and productivity of people whose employment activity was affected by the crisis. In total, 28 measures aimed specifically at strengthening people's labour inclusion during the crisis were identified (see figure 27).

**Figure 27**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (15 countries): emergency measures for labour inclusion,**  
**by type of main field of activity, from March 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 to May 31<sup>st</sup> 2023<sup>a</sup>**  
*(In number and percentage of measures)*



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), based on official information from countries; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://www.cepal.org/en/subtopics/covid-19>; "Social Protection Measures to Confront COVID-19," Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/en/listamedidas.php>.

<sup>a</sup> The countries included are: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Barbados, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Grenada, Guyana, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Peru, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines and Saint Lucia.

### C. Estimated coverage, expenditure, and sufficiency of emergency measures for cash and in-kind transfers

The emergency measures of cash and in-kind transfers implemented during the pandemic reached an estimated expenditure of US\$ 6.194 billion between January and August 2022. This is around 13% of what was pledged in 2021, which in turn was close to 50% of the estimated expenditure of these measures in 2020. Meanwhile, the estimated coverage reached 50.2% of the regional population in 2020 (325.9 million people), decreased to 47.2% (309.3 million) in 2021 and fell to 15.6% (102.0 million) in 2022 (see table 2). Although restrictions on freedom of movement eased in most countries in the region during 2022 and employment began to show signs of recovery, households most severely impacted financially by the pandemic are likely to still require support. This underscores the necessity of formulating exit strategies and establishing a timeframe for social protection measures during the post-peak period of the crisis.

Although the countries in the region made efforts to reach a large part of the affected population, at least during the first months of the pandemic, the amounts of most emergency cash transfers were not sufficient to cover the basic needs of the population in a sustained manner. This is apparent when the amounts of emergency cash transfers are compared to the poverty and extreme poverty lines. When looking at the highest coverage of emergency cash transfers in Latin American and Caribbean countries for the period March 2020 to August 2022, only Chile consistently provided monthly cash transfers greater than the value of the poverty line during the pandemic period. With respect to the value of the extreme poverty line, only Panama is added to the list, followed by Argentina, Colombia and Brazil, with average monthly cash transfers of around 0.9 times the value of their extreme poverty line. The rest of the countries provided cash transfers at lower values (see figure 28). This data calls for reflection on the expected levels of sufficiency that emergency entitlements should have in the event of future crises and the institutional and financial sustainability challenges that must be considered to ensure they achieve an adequate level of subsistence.

**Table 2**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (33 countries): coverage, number of measures**  
**and expenditure on emergency transfers (cash and in-kind), 2020–2022<sup>a</sup>**

(Distribution in percentages, total in millions of current US dollars)

	March to December 2020	January to December 2021	January to August 2022
Number of measures	401	468	506
Coverage (Percentages)	50.2	47.2	15.6
Coverage (Millions of people)	325.9	309.3	102.0
Expenditure (Millions of current dollars)	89.685	45.271	6.194

Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), based on official information from countries; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://www.cepal.org/en/subtopics/covid-19>; "Social Protection Measures to Confront COVID-19," Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/en/listamedidas.php>; International Monetary Fund (IMF), Central Bank of Venezuela, and official country information.

<sup>a</sup> The number of measures corresponds to the total number of non-contributory emergency measures and other support, while the expenditure and coverage estimates take into account the emergency measures of non-contributory cash and in-kind transfers.

The sufficiency levels of the transfers are closely linked to the duration of the measures, which also influences their ability to protect the welfare and consumption levels of the population. For example, an analysis of emergency cash transfers implemented between March 1<sup>st</sup>, 2020 and January 22<sup>nd</sup>, 2021 showed that, of the 114 measures considered, 79.3% lasted three months or less and 50% lasted only one month (Robles and Rossel, 2021).

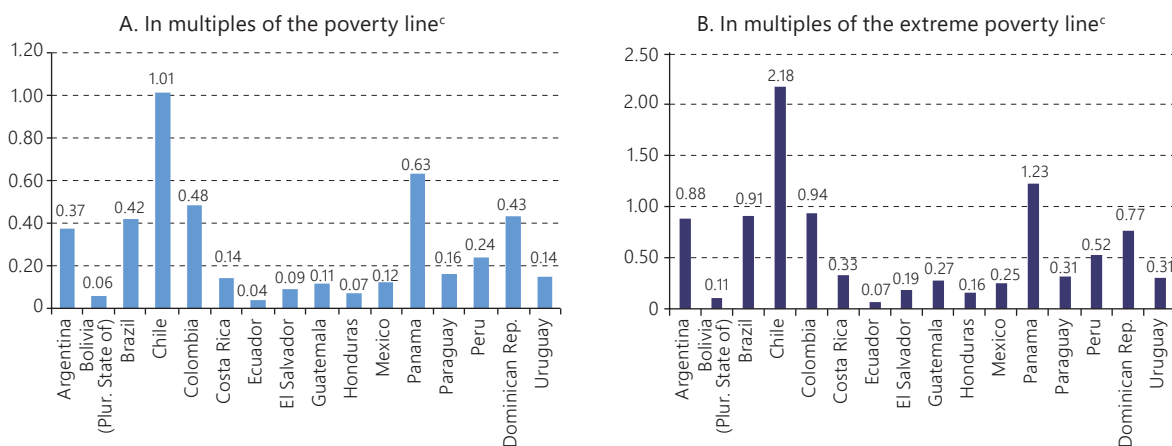
Of the 365 emergency cash and in-kind transfers announced by countries in the region between March 2020 and August 2022, only 50 were active in 2022 and as few as 24 of them continued in 2023. Of the 26 measures that ended in 2022, 21 measures were new programmes, such as Chile's *Bono Para Trabajadores Culturales* programme, which provided a one-time cash transfer of around US\$ 530 to more than 30,000 cultural workers who had seen their incomes reduced by the pandemic. The remaining 5 measures were changes to pre-existing programmes that reverted to their original programmes once ended, such as school supply delivery programmes or school feeding programmes in Antigua and Barbuda, Costa Rica, Guatemala, and Peru (see figure 29).

Of the measures that have continued in 2023, 17 were changes to pre-existing programmes, and the remaining 7 were created during the pandemic with the potential to be part of the ongoing emergency non-contributory social protection system. The first set of measures includes the *Tekoporá* programme, a Conditional Transfer Programme (PTC) in Paraguay, which announced the inclusion of 15,000 new families, or Mexico's *Jóvenes Construyendo el Futuro* Programme, which increased the number of courses and webinars offered to young persons who have lost their jobs and to businesses affected by the pandemic. The second set includes measures such as Uruguay's *Bono Crianza* (child entitlement), which supported vulnerable households by providing food and hygiene products, or buying products to help raise children from 0 to 3 years of age. In this set, there are also continuous measures that were planned before the pandemic, but were implemented earlier due to the crisis, such as the Value Added Tax (VAT) relief (*Giro Social*) in Colombia, which compensates for the regressivity of VAT by providing cash transfers to people living in extreme poverty. It is important to consider that, in at least two cases, ongoing conditional cash transfer programmes were temporarily modified as a result of the emergency measures implemented.

Finally, it is worth reflecting on the timeliness of the response and its overall impact on poverty and inequality. Studies have highlighted that Latin American and Caribbean countries were slower to implement emergency measures at the beginning of the pandemic compared to other regions in the world. On average, 72 days passed following the first case before there was a response (Beazley, Marzi and Teller, 2021). From a similar perspective, based on the Stringency Index and Index of Economic

Policies,<sup>24</sup> Filgueira and others (2020) show that most governments in the 16 Latin American countries analysed introduced and implemented health containment measures faster than economic and social measures. This contrasts with the situation in countries with more developed social protection systems, where unemployment and health insurance were implemented simultaneously with health measures, acting as automatic stabilisers.

**Figure 28**  
Latin America and the Caribbean (16 countries): average monthly amount of cash transfers to address the COVID-19 pandemic in the period from March 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 to August 31<sup>st</sup> 2022, by country<sup>a,b</sup>



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), based on official information from countries; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://www.cepal.org/en/subtopics/covid-19>; "Social Protection Measures to Confront COVID-19," Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/en/listamedidas.php>; ] <https://estadisticas.cepal.org/cepalstat/Portada.html>; and International Monetary Fund (IMF), "Exchange rates selected indicators: national currency per U.S. dollar, period average," Washington, D.C., 2022 [online] <https://data.imf.org/?sk=4c514d48-b6ba-49ed-8ab9-52b0c1a0179b&slid=1390030341854>.

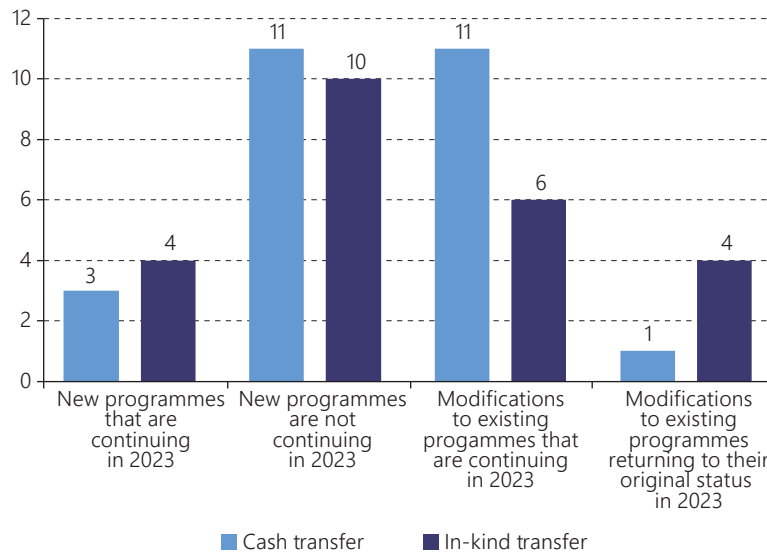
<sup>a</sup> The monthly amount of each measure in the period from March 2020 to August 2022 (30 months) is calculated as the product of the monthly US dollar amount and the effective duration (between March 2020 and August 2022) divided by 30, based on information reported by countries as of August 31<sup>st</sup> 2022.

<sup>b</sup> The following measures are considered by country: *Tarjeta Alimentar* (Food Card) in Argentina; *Bono Universal* (Universal Grant) and *Bono contra el Hambre* (Anti-Hunger Grant) in Bolivia (Plurinational State of); *Auxilio Emergencial* (Emergency Aid) in Brazil; *Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia* (Emergency Family Income) (IFE 1.0 and IFE 2.0), *Bono COVID Navidad* (COVID Christmas Bonus), *IFE Ampliado* (IFE-COVID Extended Grant) (former IFE COVID (IFE-Quarantine and IFE-Transition) and *IFE Universal* (IFE Universal Grant) in Chile; *Ingreso Solidario* (Solidarity Income) in Colombia; *Bono Proteger* Programme in Costa Rica; *Bono de Protección Familiar por la Emergencia Sanitaria* (Health Emergency Family Protection Grant) in Ecuador; *Bono de 300 dólares* (Grant of US\$ 300) in El Salvador; *Bono Familia* (Family Grant) in Guatemala; *Honduras Solidaria* Programme in Honduras; *Programa para el Bienestar de las Personas Adultas Mayores* (Pension Programme for the Well-Being of Older Persons) (advance payment equivalent to four months) in Mexico; *Plan Panamá Solidario* (Panama Solidarity Plan) and *Nuevo Plan Panamá Solidario* (New Panama Solidarity Plan) in Panama; *Pytyvõ* Grant and *Pytyvõ* Grant 2.0 in Paraguay; *Bono Familiar Universal* (Universal Family Grant), *Segundo Bono Familiar Universal* (Second Universal Family Grant), *Bono 600* (600 Grant) and *Bono Yanapay* (Yanapay Grant) in Peru; *Quédate en Casa* (Stay at Home) programme in the Dominican Republic; and *Operativo Canasta* (Emergency Food Basket) in Uruguay.

<sup>c</sup> The monthly value per person of the 2020 urban poverty and extreme poverty lines is calculated in current US dollars, according to CEPALSTAT. The most recent values for poverty and extreme poverty lines in urban areas were defined in 2014 for Guatemala, and 2019 for Honduras and Panama. Thus, the values corresponding to these lines were calculated using the prices from the year with the most recent data on the amount of transfers for each component, as appropriate, adjusted using the consumer price index (CPI) published by CEPALSTAT.

<sup>24</sup> The data and indices have been taken from the Oxford Covid-19 Government Response Tracker. Available [online] <https://www.bsg.ox.ac.uk/research/researchprojects/coronavirus-government-response-tracker>. For more information, see Filgueira and others (2020).

**Figure 29**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (16 countries): Number of active emergency cash and in-kind transfer measures in 2023, by age, and duration, by type of measure<sup>a</sup>**



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), based on official information from countries; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://www.cepal.org/en/subtopics/covid-19>; "Social Protection Measures to Confront COVID-19," Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/en/listamedidas.php>.

<sup>a</sup> The countries included are: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Grenada, Guatemala, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Lucia, and Uruguay.

It is also worth highlighting the effects that implementing emergency cash transfer measures had on poverty and inequality indicators. ECLAC estimated that without these measures, poverty and extreme poverty rates in 2020 would have been between 1.8 and 2.9 percentage points higher, respectively.<sup>25</sup> Concerning inequality, the region's average Gini coefficient would have increased from 0.453 in 2019 to 0.471 in 2020 without the implementation of these emergency measures, while its 2020 level was estimated at 0.457 (ECLAC, 2022).

In addition to the analysis of key indicators on the coverage and expenditure of the emergency measures announced presented in this section, the operational innovations that allowed for their implementation in the countries in the region should be mentioned. The following section describes the main institutional and operational elements of emergency non-contributory social protection measures during the COVID-19 pandemic.

## D. Features of the design and institutional organisation of emergency cash and in-kind transfers and key innovations

### 1. Institutional arrangements and innovations

Identifying how governments organised themselves internally to implement emergency measures helps to grasp the capacity and obstacles that countries circumvented in this process. While chapter V discusses in greater depth the institutional elements for strengthening protection systems, this section will examine

<sup>25</sup> Based on information from 2020 household surveys from seven Latin American countries: Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Peru, Paraguay and the Dominican Republic.

the main features of the innovations created by Latin American and Caribbean countries, which can be studied under the four areas of social institutionality as classified by Martínez and Maldonado (2019): (i) the legal and regulatory dimension, (ii) the organisational dimension, (iii) the operational dimension, and (iv) the financing dimension.

Firstly, the legal and regulatory dimension allows for the translating of commitments made to the population, thereby facilitating the implementation of social policies and safeguarding the availability of resources. It should be noted that, as a result of the need for a rapid response to the emergency, many of the measures were adopted temporarily. However, with the spread of the pandemic, some of these short-term and temporary protocols were extended. For example, in Chile, a law was passed to define *Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia* (Emergency Family Income), which was then modified three times during the first year to adapt to the needs of the population, and was also accompanied by a significant number of decrees establishing the details of its allocation. The same happened in Argentina with the *Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia* (Emergency Family Income) and in Brazil with the *Auxílio Emergencial* (Emergency Aid Programme). Along with the legislative and regulatory changes made, it was also necessary to introduce changes to legislation to make financial resources available for cash transfers under some of these measures. Legislation, specifically decrees, were particularly useful, quick, and flexible tools for amending laws, adapting processes, or creating provisions to respond to the pandemic.

Legislation also played a key role in the regulation of health and labour practices by declaring COVID-19 a disease, incorporating workplace regulations to ensure health and safety, and ensuring medical care, special care for at-risk groups, special leave (such as reduced or flexible working hours), mental health services, and working from home as safe ways to continue working without exposing workers to infection. These practices were observed in both Latin American and European countries (ILO, 2021).

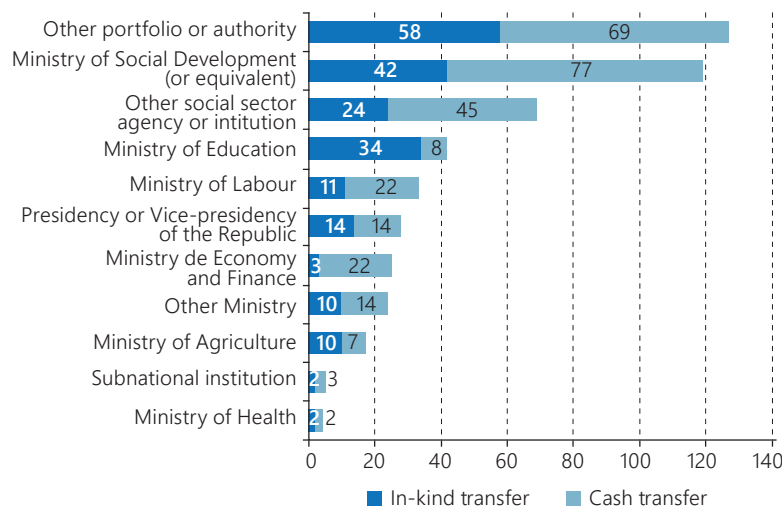
Secondly, the organisational dimension refers to not only the formal structure and decision-making models, but also to coordination functions for social protection implementation. This determines how work is distributed between the central, sub-national, and local levels, with various forms of communication with other actors such as civil society organisations, the private sector, and the target population itself. In most Latin American countries, social authority lies with the presidency, vice-presidency, or presidential delegate, and more recently with the ministries of development or social inclusion (often with intersectoral social or public policy coordination bodies)<sup>26</sup>.

The role of the social sector was identified as particularly significant in the design and implementation of emergency social protection measures. Ministries of Social Development or equivalent entities were responsible for 119 emergency measures, and sectoral social agencies or institutions were responsible for a total of 69 measures (see figure 30).

The development of the emergency programmes, however, required coordination between different actors, as illustrated by the fact that more than 100 measures were implemented under the coordination of various institutions. For example, some measures were the result of the synergy between Ministries of Social Development and other non-social entities, such as Ministries of Agriculture (e.g. *Apoyo de Emergencia Alimenticia* programme in Trinidad and Tobago), or social entities, such as Ministries of Labour (e.g. *Ingreso Solidario* in Colombia). The participation of other ministries and institutions, such as the Ministries of Education, the Presidency, the Ministries of Finance, and institutions responsible for health, food and the productive sector were also significant. This emphasises the role that intersectoral coordination plays in emergency responses (ECLAC, 2021b).

<sup>26</sup> See ECLAC, 2021, Institutional Framework Database for Social Policy in Latin America and the Caribbean, updated December 2021 [online database]: <https://dds.cepal.org/bdips/dim21.php>.

**Figure 30**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (32 countries): number of measures by type of entities responsible for and executing emergency cash and in-kind transfers, by type of measure, between March 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 and August 31<sup>st</sup> 2022<sup>a,b,c</sup>**



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), based on official information from countries; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://www.cepal.org/en/subtopics/covid-19>; "Social Protection Measures to Confront COVID-19," Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/en/listamedidas.php>.

<sup>a</sup> The countries included are: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

<sup>b</sup> The different responsible and implementing entities may overlap, i.e. a measure may have more than one responsible or executing entity.

<sup>c</sup> There are 14 measures with no information, 6 of which are in-kind transfers and 8 are cash transfers.

According to Lustig and Tommasi (2020), it is essential that institutions work closely with groups and communities. Further, they must have the capacity to coordinate with central agencies, ministries, and programme implementers in order to prioritise and attend to the needs of given communities. In that regard, during the pandemic, different coordinated efforts were made: (i) between territorial units and institutions and local organisations; (ii) with the private sector and civil society for the development of labour inclusion programmes through cash or in-kind donations, especially for the delivery of food, care and hygiene items, and electronic devices to support students; (iii) with multilateral organisations to implement emergency measures in response to the pandemic. To name some examples, in Jamaica, the Jamaican Red Cross provided support through *Food for the Poor*, or, in the case of Honduras, the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) provided technical support for the selection process of territories where food would be delivered.

The third dimension, the technical and operational dimension, refers to the tools for the management, planning, evaluation, and transparency of social programmes. In line with section III.B, it is worth highlighting three types of adaptations that can be identified through the modifications made to existing programmes as part of the emergency measures mobilised: (i) minor adjustments in design (changes in processes, protocols, delivery methods); (ii) vertical expansion (increase in amounts, frequency of payments and type of services), as well as suspending the conditionalities of cash transfers (lifting some of the requirements for a range of programmes), and adapting protocols and operating processes such as delivery methods of entitlements; and (iii) horizontal expansion (increase in coverage). This expansion

was carried out either using the frameworks provided by the programmes<sup>27</sup> or seeking to reach a larger number of people affected by the pandemic<sup>28</sup> (ECLAC, 2021b). As is to be expected, minor adjustments as well as vertical expansion of programmes were the first changes implemented by countries to rapidly respond to the health measures and effects of the pandemic (Berner and Van Hemelryck, 2020; Beazley, Marzi and Steller, 2021; Palomo and others, 2022).

Additionally, an analysis of this dimension shows that potential recipient registries and participant registries are fundamental tools for public policy decision-making. These registries contain data regarding identification, characterisation, living conditions, and programmes received by persons and households. These interconnected sources of information were indispensable for the design, development, and operation of emergency measures during the pandemic. According to Beazley, Marzi, and Steller (2021), the availability of existing data to identify potential recipients of emergency measures through social or participant registries allowed countries to respond more quickly and more effectively. These authors also note that this coincides with greater institutional strength, including infrastructure, legislation and funding for the social protection system, and advances in digital inclusion.

However, these measures were not sufficient to identify all vulnerable groups due to a lack of accurate data on the population and the situation of persons and their households. In a context where emergency responses will be increasingly necessary, strengthening these registries and information systems will be critical.

It is worth noting that in 81 of the announced measures it was possible to identify the use of social registries at a ministry or institution level, while 79 of the measures used social registries with a national coverage. At the same time, participant registries from existing pre-pandemic programmes (70 measures) were used. Nonetheless, these registries were unable to capture the full extent of those affected by the crisis. As a result, governments in the region had to resort to supplementary data from alternative sources to identify population groups that are often absent from these databases, including informal workers, the homeless, and migrants. This is evidenced by the creation of new user registries for 54 of the emergency measures (see figure 31).

The identification and subsequent selection of the prioritised groups for emergency measures during the pandemic required certain types of specific data. As shown in panel B of figure 8, administrative data were the most used (by 140 measures) to supplement information from state social information registries, an indication of regional governments' urgency to deliver support to the population affected by the crisis. This is due to the data being quickly accessible and regularly updated for prompt decision-making. Nonetheless, the data are not always exhaustive, which explains why 76 measures resorted to using information collected directly from potential recipients, while 53 measures integrated information available from a variety of sources.

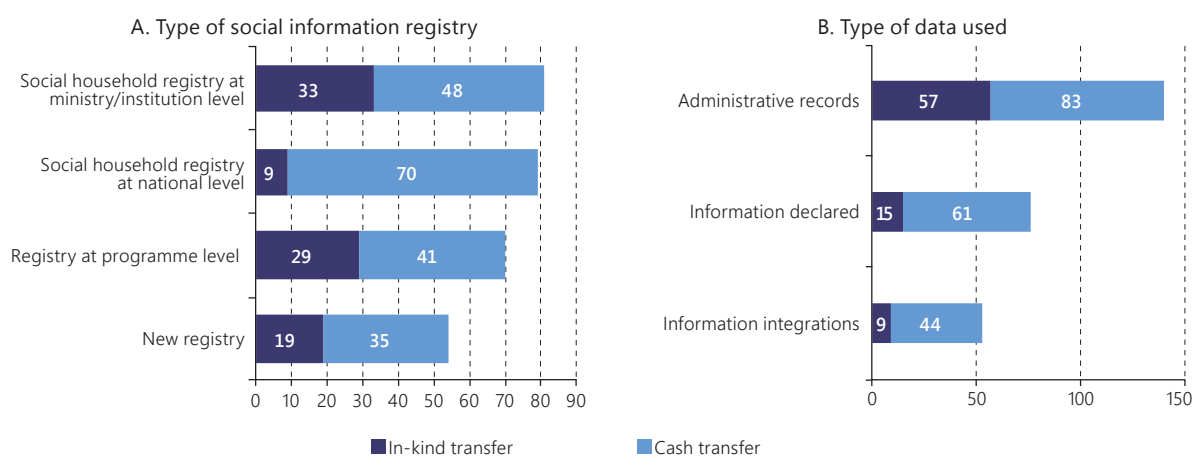
The lack of information in the social registries and administrative records of some of the prioritised groups (such as informal workers, indigenous persons, and migrants) led to the rapid adoption of strategies and innovations to actively reach and deliver support to them. Some of the innovations were the combination of social registries and other sources of information as well as the creation of new registries of potential participants, mentioned above. Information and communication technologies (ICTs) were also incorporated to identify new recipients, improve social information systems and registries, adopt

<sup>27</sup> For example, in the case of the *Quédate en Casa* programme in the Dominican Republic, families that were part of the *Sistema Único de Beneficiarios (SIUBEN)* who did not have the Solidarity Card were included. In Brazil, people on the waiting list of the *Bolsa Família* programme were included (IPC-IG, 2021).

<sup>28</sup> In Trinidad and Tobago, the Emergency Food Support to New Beneficiaries–Food Hampers programme provided a family food basket according to social protection criteria to those who requested it, regardless of whether they were previously receiving it or not, and in the same country it was possible to extend the Food Card–Food Support programme with an IDB loan for households where a member, who worked in the informal sector, experienced a loss of income due to the COVID-19 crisis. In Argentina, something similar happened with the *Subsidio de Contención Familiar* programme, which increases the coverage of the food card to now cover children up to 14 years old (previously up to 6 years), pregnant women from the third month who receive AUH, persons with disabilities who receive AUH, and mothers with more than seven children.

new approaches, protocols, or tools to identify potential recipients of emergency programmes, and use maps and local organisations to complement the available information. Open registration platforms were implemented to reach the population not made visible by the registries, and without sufficient means or knowledge to register for national user registries (Berner and Van Hemelryck, 2020; Hammad, Bacil and Soares, 2021; ECLAC, 2022). This was vital for the inclusion of informal workers and other groups (such as migrant populations) who did not receive non-contributory or contributory social protection entitlements prior to the pandemic.

**Figure 31**  
Latin America and the Caribbean (32 countries): number of emergency cash and in-kind transfer measures, by type of information registry and by type of measure, between March 1<sup>st</sup> 2020 and August 31<sup>st</sup> 2022<sup>a,b,c</sup>



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), based on official information from countries; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://www.cepal.org/en/subtopics/covid-19>; "Social Protection Measures to Confront COVID-19," Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/en/listamedidas.php>.

<sup>a</sup> The countries included are: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

<sup>b</sup> The categories in the charts in panels A and B are not mutually exclusive (i.e. a measure could use information from social registries and new records simultaneously). It is also possible for the same measure to use both administrative records and data declared by persons.

<sup>c</sup> To identify the type of social information register used, 114 measures had no information, while in the case of the type of data used, 120 grants were not available in sufficient detail to be classified.

In addition to the process of identification and selection of potential recipients of emergency measures, countries in the region developed delivery methods for the goods and services provided by the social programmes implemented, including flexibility in the place of delivery and adapting the means of payment (Atuesta and Hemelryck, 2022; Berner and Van Hemelryck, 2020). Assessing the impact of these innovations and their potential coordination with pre-existing strategies is part of the work countries have ahead of them to strengthen the operation of their social protection systems.

The fourth dimension in the institutional framework essential for implementing social protection plans, particularly emergency plans, pertains to the financial dimension. At the beginning of the pandemic, it was clear that countries needed to reallocate budgetary resources to provide a timely and sufficient response. Extraordinary budgetary expenditures were common, and involved the use of strategies that did not directly involve spending, but rather a reduction in tax revenues. Examples include the provision of tax relief through tax reductions, deferred payment or exemption, the use of government credit guarantees, government loans to the private sector, or the capitalisation of funds or public financial

institutions (ECLAC, 2020a). Alternative sources of financing were also used, such as fixed income instruments associated with the green transition or inclusive social development projects in Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, or Mexico (ECLAC, 2021c; ECLAC, 2021d). In the case of countries with significant levels of fiscal debt or in countries that did not have sufficient national budgets to respond to the crisis (such as Argentina, Belize, Dominica, and Jamaica, which exceeded the 100% debt-to-GDP threshold in March 2021), governments turned to multilateral organisations (ECLAC, 2021c). This was the case for Caribbean countries that received support from entities such as the Caribbean Development Bank (CDB), the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), the International Monetary Fund (IMF), or the World Bank (ECLAC, 2021e).<sup>29</sup>

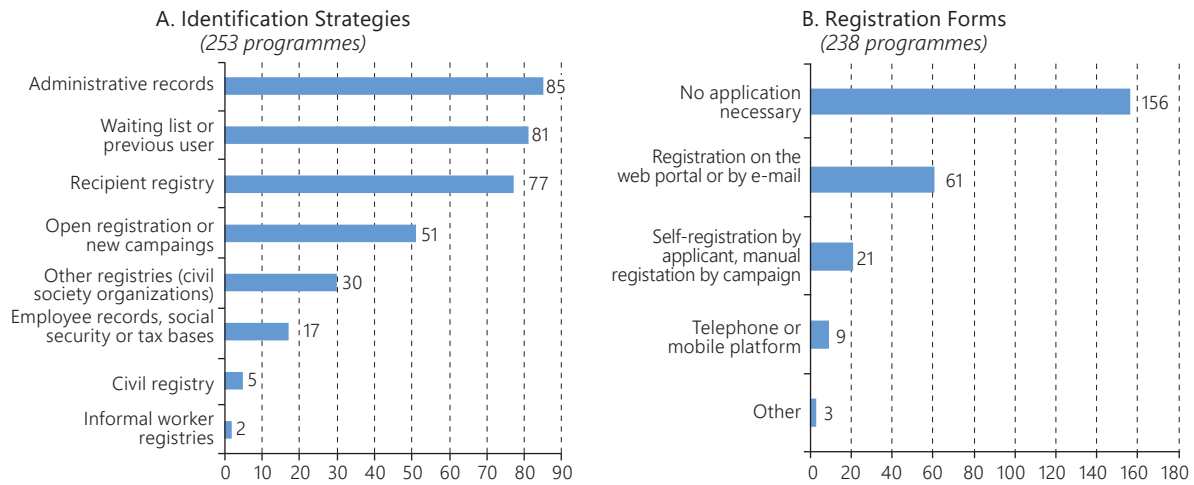
## 2. Digital transformation of social protection systems: lessons and challenges from the pandemic experience

Digital social protection systems are systems that incorporate information technologies in the design, allocation, implementation, and evaluation of social entitlements. They can also improve the performance, speed, and scale of social responses and be more flexible and cost-effective (Ohlenburg, 2020). The use of technology and digital tools was critical to determining the type and approach of responses during the pandemic (Berner and Van Hemelryck, 2020). Latin American and Caribbean countries have implemented innovations of this nature at both institutional and operational levels, particularly in the processes of registration, identification, selection, and communication with recipients, also including advancements in the delivery methods of social protection entitlements. Even though the use of technology was new to these processes, it was notable how widespread it was, as all Latin American and Caribbean countries had introduced digital innovations of some kind.

However, the incorporation of technology into social entitlement operations is not unique to the pandemic. Since the beginning of the 21<sup>st</sup> century, with the so-called Fourth Technological Revolution, several countries in Latin America and the Caribbean (as well as from other continents) have been digitally improving social protection systems, from incorporating new ways of handling large volumes of information (big data), interoperating social information systems, to using artificial intelligence to automate some of the processes. Countries used technological and digital tools to enhance data sharing, administrative data and records collected through web platforms and mobile phones, digital identification, consensual data sharing, interoperability of information, and remote delivery and payment of money transfers (Berner and Van Hemelryck, 2020; GIZ, 2021). Perhaps technology's most prominent role in social protection during the pandemic was in the use of social registries and the delivery of entitlements. As described in the previous section, the quickest way to identify recipients of measures was through existing databases, mostly from information on existing social security databases and social registries (see figure 32.A). However, given the magnitude of the pandemic, such information was inadequate. As a result, identification and additional registration campaigns were launched to incorporate the hardest-to-find populations. From the different strategies employed, approximately 69.8% of the population was identified from administrative records, user records, or information collected by the programmes (list of participants). Yet in 23.9% of the cases, the use of new registries, registries for informal workers, and other registries were required to collect information on persons who are not on formal government records. At least 70 measures used digital tools to register additional people in order to reach new participants (see figure 32.B).

<sup>29</sup> The Caribbean Disaster Emergency Management Agency, a regional inter-governmental agency that aims to support the efforts of twenty Caribbean countries in disaster management and to encourage the coordination and implementation of disaster risk management (CARICOM), is an interesting example of how countries can prepare for emergencies. CDEMA member countries can be consulted [online] <https://www.cdema.org/about-us/what-is-cdema#which-states-are-members-of-cdema>.

**Figure 32**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (33 countries): participant identification measures**  
**and registration forms in non-contributory programmes<sup>a,b</sup>**



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), based on official information from countries; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://www.cepal.org/en/subtopics/covid-19>; "Social Protection Measures to Confront COVID-19," Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/en/listamedidas.php>.

<sup>a</sup> The countries included are: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

<sup>b</sup> A measure may use multiple strategies.

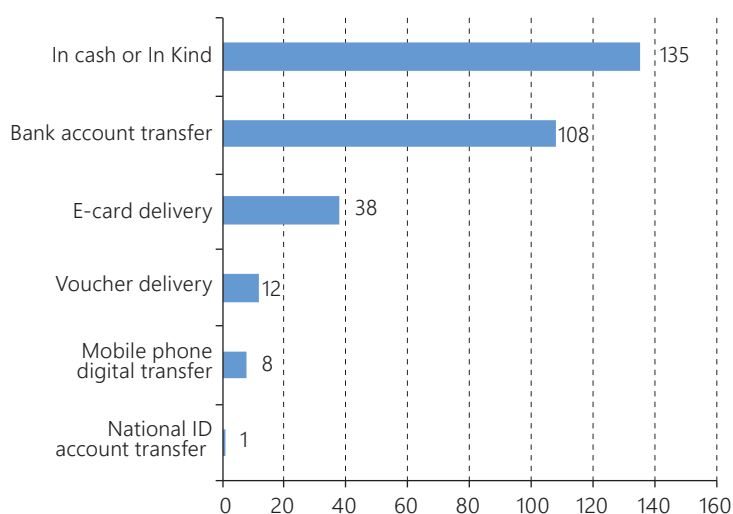
Innovations were also made in payment measures for cash transfers and in the in-kind delivery of emergency measures. Most countries implemented traditional and digital tools, or a combination of both. For example, technology was used to deliver support via mobile phones or to create accounts from phone apps to minimise face-to-face contact. However, due to the digital gap, traditional payment methods were needed to accompany these tools (see figure 33).

In sum, the pandemic revealed that technologies provide opportunities to facilitate registration, identification of potential recipients, and the implementation of social protection measures. For example, in order to achieve horizontal expansion towards universality, interoperability of social information systems must be improved, which means incorporating technology at different stages of the process, creating or improving user registries, and, above all, having a unique identification system for the population through civil registries. In addition, strengthening direct contact with the most vulnerable populations, such as those who are technologically disadvantaged or do not have access to communication and technological systems, is key (Hammad, Bacil and Soares, 2021). In order to achieve inclusivity of social policy and particularly user identification and selection procedures, the implementation of technological solutions needs to be combined with manual systems such as local offices, home visits, and face-to-face contact to ensure communication through different channels between the State and the population.

It is therefore important to consider the operational challenges, limitations, and potential risks involved in technological solutions such as gaps in digital literacy, technological inequality, issues related to privacy, data protection and security, and quality of information, among others. Although accurate information is not yet available to assess the experiences of users who received transfers and the extent of inclusion and exclusion errors (Gelb and Mukherjee, 2020), early evidence suggests that precise identification of recipients at the expense of greater exclusions became even more problematic during the pandemic crisis (Masiero, 2020). Digital forms of registration for the identification of potential

recipients as well as deliveries require appropriate digital capabilities and digital infrastructure to ensure inclusivity in the social protection responses to the population. This is even more relevant in a region characterised by limited incorporation of digital technology and low levels of investment in innovation, where the quality, accuracy, and timeliness of information are not always guaranteed due to the lack of protocols to verify and update this information (Ohlenburg, 2020; GIZ, 2021, Berner and Van Hemelryck, 2020). Further, as discussed in Chapter V, excessive data usage or collection and sharing lacking a justified framework can be detrimental to the information system. This increases the risk of compromising data privacy and security, which can lead to less accurate user identification and selection (Chirchir and Kidd, 2011). This is particularly important in countries in the region where information systems are still developing, institutional capacity is very low, or the quality of information may not be the best and may be outdated.

**Figure 33**  
Latin America and the Caribbean (32 countries): methods of payment for non-contributory emergency cash measures (302 programmes)<sup>a</sup>



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), based on official information from countries; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), COVID-19 Observatory in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://www.cepal.org/en/subtopics/covid-19>; "Social Protection Measures to Confront COVID-19," Social Development and COVID-19 in Latin America and the Caribbean, [online database] <https://dds.cepal.org/observatorio/socialcovid19/en/listamedidas.php>.

<sup>a</sup> The countries included are: Antigua and Barbuda, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Belize, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Cuba, Dominica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Grenada, Guatemala, Guyana, Haiti, Honduras, Jamaica, Mexico, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Saint Kitts and Nevis, Saint Lucia, Saint Vincent and the Grenadines, Suriname, Trinidad and Tobago, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

<sup>b</sup> There are 31 measures with no information on the means of delivery.

The widespread use of these technologies revealed a double digital gap in the region, both between and within countries. This gap is demonstrated, on the one hand, by governments in the region in terms of their digital and physical infrastructure, their capacity for data and information management, their capacities for integration and interoperability between different databases and platforms, and also with regard to the existence of outdated rules for regulating digital technologies. On the other hand, there is still a large gap in the access, use, and ownership of technologies by persons in the countries. This tends to reflect the matrix of social inequality in the region, and may even be widening existing inequalities by adding the risk of digital exclusion (Martínez, Palma and Velázquez, 2020; Ohlenburg, 2020). The poorest and most vulnerable people face limited connectivity and a lack of technological devices, coupled with a lack of digital skills, and a cultural context detached from technological transformation. During the pandemic, these factors determined their right to health, education, and work, and increased the risk

of widening socio-economic inequalities (ECLAC, 2020a; Martínez, Palma and Velásquez, 2020). Thus, it is of critical importance to pay attention to the distributional effects and social rights impacts of digital social protection (see Chapter V).

## E. Reflections on emergency responses by means of contributory social protection measures and employment protection measures<sup>30</sup>

Although the chapter has mainly focused on the analysis of emergency social protection measures with a primary focus on non-contributory social protection measures aimed at the most vulnerable population, it is also important to consider the role that contributory social protection measures have played. In particular, it identifies unemployment insurance as a key social protection measure to tackle emergencies alongside a set of employment protection measures. As comparative analysis shows, it should also be stressed that these measures were most used in regions with more developed social protection systems.

On the one hand, operational innovations implemented in relation to unemployment insurance stand out in those countries where they currently exist. Based on information from 6 countries in the region, Argentina, Bahamas, Barbados, Brazil, Chile, and Uruguay, ECLAC (2022) confirmed changes consisting of a reduction in the number of minimum contributions required in order to claim this entitlement, the incorporation of new users in a situation of partial unemployment, the increase of its duration and payment amounts, as well as other measures that made it possible to speed up the procedures and withdraw funds.

In particular, according to Frei, Castillo, and Silva (2022), there were two main forms of response based on unemployment insurance. On the one hand, countries facilitated access to entitlements by extending coverage, relaxing eligibility criteria or including previously excluded groups of workers, as well as by temporarily extending entitlements. For example, in Brazil, the eligibility criteria was relaxed, and in Uruguay, new groups of part-time workers were introduced. On the other hand, the use of unemployment insurance funds to safeguard jobs and temporarily ensure income protection has also been observed in some countries. This was the case in Chile, where these funds were used to finance the safeguarding of jobs<sup>31</sup>. As these authors suggest, it will be important to establish and monitor methods for recovering these funds in the future, especially in the context of future crises. Furthermore, the low effective and legal coverage of this entitlement in the region is a significant limitation of its use during times of crisis, and demands priority attention. According to ILO data, in 2020 only 17.7% of the unemployed in Chile and 10.3% in Argentina were using unemployment entitlements, compared to 6% in Mexico and 4.7% in Ecuador (ILO, 2022a)<sup>32</sup>.

On the other hand, it is possible to highlight a series of employment protection measures implemented during the pandemic. Some of them are mentioned below. First, it is important to mention the working-from-home measure. According to ECLAC (2021c), 24 countries in the region encouraged this type of measure, adapting respective measures. Second, for jobs that could not be done remotely, a second type of measure was introduced (such as changes in working hours, exceptional working hours, and wage reductions) in 20 countries in the region.

Third, job retention policies and work incentives were implemented to safeguard jobs. These include regulatory measures, such as a ban on dismissing workers or reducing their working hours, and measures such as monetary incentives for job retention or state contributions to finance wages for the

<sup>30</sup> This section is based on B. Atuesta and T. Van Hemelryck, "Emergency social protection against the impacts of the pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean: evidence and lessons learned for universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient social protection systems," *Project Documents* (LC/TS.2022/143), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), 2022 and R. Frei, A. Castillo and V. Silva, "Protección social e inclusión laboral en América Latina y el Caribe tras la crisis del COVID-19" (unpublished), 2022.

<sup>31</sup> This measure is different to the withdrawals from individually funded pension funds approved in the pandemic.

<sup>32</sup> It should be noted that this is a global phenomenon. According to the ILO, only 18.6 % of the global labour force has access to unemployment insurance, which also includes transfers and public unemployment support (ILO, 2022b).

companies hardest hit by the crisis. In the region, a heterogeneity of responses was observed. As Frei, Castillo, and Silva (2022) indicate, countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Chile, and Colombia sought to institutionalise employment protection through decrees and laws to support job retention measures and wage subsidies, which contributed to the coordination of these measures with the rest of the social protection system and with labour policies.

Fourth, the use of leave and severance pay measures are also identified. In the case of Chile, the introduction of this measure for domestic workers during the pandemic by obliging employers to pay a percentage of wages into a compensation fund stands out. By contrast, in the case of Brazil, employers were allowed to suspend payment from the *Fundo de Garantia do Tempo e Serviço*, the fund from which severance payments come. Workers were allowed to withdraw part of this fund as an alternative social protection measure, with potential negative implications for future scenarios of high unemployment (Frei, Castillo, and Silva, 2022). Fifth, 17 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>33</sup> granted care leave for workers from vulnerable groups to COVID-19 and workers with care responsibilities (ECLAC, 2021c).

Sixth, with regard to policies that protect and promote the development of MSMEs, measures were identified with the objective of increasing credit and easing credit terms (lower interest rates, payment deferrals and debt moratoriums) and, to a lesser extent, direct subsidies (as in the cases of Argentina and Chile). Other measures such as tax deferrals or exemptions from licence payments were also introduced, as in the cases of Brazil and Chile. Contrary to the experience in some countries of the European Union, support measures such as loans and grants were generally not conditional in Latin America and the Caribbean<sup>34</sup>. Furthermore, in the region, measures did not have special conditions, except for a few programmes such as the *Modalidad Apoyo Solidario a la Palabra para MiPymes in Mexico*, aimed at MSMEs that did not dismiss workers or lower salaries during the year. At the same time, some cases of targeted programmes are identified, such as *Jóvenes y MyPymes en Argentina*, and programmes to help SMEs in specific economic sectors such as tourism (*Reactívaté turismo* in Chile), or fisheries (*Componente de Apoyo para el Bienestar de Pescadores y Acuicultores* in Mexico) (Frei, Castillo, and Silva, 2022).

Finally, it is important to mention the measures that coordinate social protection responses and labour inclusion in emergencies: the emergency employment programmes. Although such programmes have already existed for a long time in the region (Velásquez, 2021), this area has remained unexplored (Frei, Castillo, and Silva, 2022). Among economies in the OECD and European Union, one-third have implemented direct employment creation programmes in the public sector since the start of the pandemic in 2020 (OECD and others, 2021).

Figure 34 summarises the main measures adopted along this dimension, according to ECLAC definitions (2021c).

A comparative look at the responses of European, Latin American, and Caribbean countries to the crisis sheds light on the role of contributory policies and employment protection policies when confronted with events of this magnitude. In Europe, responses demonstrated a different approach, with social protection policies associated with unemployment insurance and other permanent cash transfer schemes taking on greater centrality within consolidated welfare states. The pre-existing floor for social protection in these countries, as well as their capacity for adjustment and flexibility in emergencies, are key elements to consider for strengthening social protection in Latin America and the Caribbean.

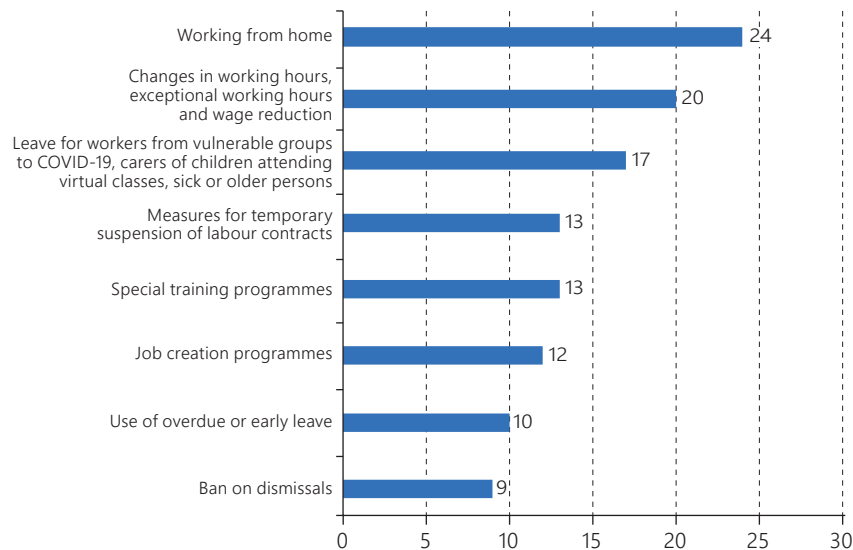
According to information provided by Gentilini and others (2022, 2021), emergency responses in European countries, especially in countries in the European Union, were characterised by a combination of measures linked to contributory social protection (social security) in 28.1% of cases, non-contributory

<sup>33</sup> The Latin American countries that implemented this type of measure are Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Colombia, Cuba, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Guatemala, Haiti, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of). In the Caribbean, Belize, Guyana, Suriname, and Trinidad and Tobago adopted such measures.

<sup>34</sup> Some countries in Europe required that MSMEs were financial stable before the crisis and, in others, privileged SMEs that have placed greater emphasis on innovation, digitisation and ecological sustainability (OECD, 2022).

(social assistance) in 44.6% of cases, and the labour market in 27.3% of cases. Meanwhile, in Latin America and the Caribbean, the share of social assistance measures (60.3%) was significantly higher than those linked to social security (17.6%) and the labour market (22%).

**Figure 34**  
Latin America and the Caribbean (33 countries): number of countries that have adopted key measures to support formal employment during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2020–2021



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2021c), *Economic Survey of Latin America and the Caribbean, 2021* (LC/PUB.2021/10-P), Santiago, 2021.

## F. Summarising some lessons learned from emergency response for the future of social protection

After reviewing the series of efforts undertaken by Latin American and Caribbean countries during the pandemic, it is essential to synthesise some of the lessons learned. This is particularly relevant in the context of fast-paced changes and growing risks that can lead to new crises and emergencies, such as the one experienced during the pandemic (discussed in Chapter IV). In particular, it is important to emphasise four areas of lessons and recommendations, which are reinforced in the final chapter of this document.

Firstly, it is hoped that the region will learn from the pandemic and countries will strengthen the measures needed to achieve more comprehensive and inclusive social protection systems. Compared to what countries with more developed social protection systems (i.e., Europe) had experienced at the beginning of the pandemic, the region had to face a major crisis with significant structural deficits in its social protection systems and in its legal and effective coverage of key measures, such as unemployment insurance. In the face of future crises, these measures can play a fundamental role in protecting the living standards of workers and their families. Furthermore, it is essential to have institutionalised measures to safeguard the living conditions of the population in the various dimensions covered by emergency response, strengthening inter-sectoral coordination and collaboration (Atuesta and Van Hemelryck, 2022).

Secondly, it is important to highlight the role played by previously existing measures. The infrastructure of pre-existing conditional transfer programmes, non-contributory pension systems, and labour inclusion programmes was essential to the swift regional response (particularly to support the most vulnerable populations) in the face of the crisis. The institutional framework and these

programmes' measures were not only used to provide support to persons and households previously identified as in situations of poverty and vulnerability, but also to direct and provide new support to those who were excluded from these programmes (such as informal workers, migrants and the homeless, among others). The pandemic revealed the lack of coverage of a population that was highly vulnerable to crises, and was not covered by ongoing non-contributory social protection programmes. Therefore, a critical aspect for the future success of ongoing programmes is to continue identifying this population, leveraging the information systems employed during the pandemic. There is also a need to integrate this previously unidentified or "invisible" population as part of the permanent coverage of ongoing programmes, particularly noteworthy in the case of informal workers. However, the capacity of these measures to address broader challenges is an unresolved issue in the region. In particular, it is important to analyse in greater depth aspects such as the timeliness, adequacy, and duration of the measures implemented, as well as to better understand the scope and future of the new measures implemented during the pandemic.

Thirdly, in addition to the capacity shown by social protection systems in the region to adapt measures already available to them, a series of opportunities and challenges also emerged with respect to strengthening various elements linked to their design and operation. The availability of convenient information with current data on the most vulnerable groups of the population is an essential part of this process, especially in the case of the middle strata. The middle strata in many countries are not part of the information systems because they are not part of the poverty group that these registries usually cover first. To this end, robust social registries, adequate criteria and tools to define the poor and most vulnerable population, legislation to support data sharing and cooperation between government agencies, and the use of digital methods for identification, registration, evaluation, and payment of transfers are essential. The programme design should ensure flexibility and adequate infrastructure for communication with the recipients of entitlements and banking services.

Fourthly, in light of the above, countries need to be able to identify, assess, and communicate the potential use of digital and technological tools to improve the operation of social protection systems. To do so requires a deeper understanding of what data is required, from whom, for what purpose, how it will be used, and with what safeguards, as without such definitions it will be difficult to justify and legitimise its use to the public. As such, it becomes very important to define which technologies to use with the process in which they will be applied. Technology and digital systems can be particularly relevant, for example, to generate a single repository of people's data that collates different sources of information on the population and helps to determine the best strategies for protecting their rights. The use of technical, digital, and IT resources to consolidate people's data means moving towards the interoperability of State IT systems. It can also allow the information gathered to be used to make the public supply of goods and services available to people in a more transparent and efficient way. Alongside other contributions, it can facilitate the delivery of information and services by creating different channels of communication and engagement with citizens. As discussed in Chapter V, for the successful development of information systems and their digital transformation, it is vital to ensure good data governance by incorporating the necessary regulations to ensure data protection and privacy. This translates into implementing protocols and planning the incorporation of technologies in the social protection system so that this is done in a progressive way (Newlands and others, 2021). Data security and data protection protocols will need to consider all the stages that data passes through (i.e., the data collection, processing, storage, and exchange), identifying both the users of the data and those responsible for producing the information as part of the broader challenges in the future of social protection.

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## IV. Strategic guidelines to meet the challenges of future social protection

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### A. Guidelines for identifying and designing strategic instruments

Wide social protection gaps persist in the region, as presented in chapter II. In the current context, characterised by a series of cascading crises (ECLAC, 2022a) and a reconfigured risk structure, it is crucial to address and eliminate these gaps and inequalities. Doing so requires concerted actions with a three-pronged approach to public policies and strategies. First, actions must tackle structural deficits to progressively close gaps and eliminate inequalities in legal and effective coverage. They must also guarantee the sufficiency of contributory and non-contributory social protection entitlements while ensuring financial sustainability. Second, they must strive to create or strengthen mechanisms for emergency and crisis adaptation and response to help sustain human capacity-building and address the risk of poverty in a transformative way (ECLAC, 2021). Third, they must address the medium-term changes required to deal with a risk structure that conditions social protection, anticipating and planning for the required changes. This chapter first provides a set of guidelines on designing policies that aim to employ this three-pronged approach. It then identifies policy instruments that could address the challenges of the current context.

It should be noted that, given the current scenario of reconfigured risks, the processes of transforming social protection systems must consider the different starting points in the levels of development of such systems in each country (Robles and Rossel, 2021). Strengthening universal, comprehensive, sustainable, and resilient social protection systems must be seen as a strategic process on the path towards building a welfare State in the region. This requires acknowledging that it is a gradual and progressive process, marked by the identification of successive stages or strategic components of expansion. These must be

considered according to the progress status of each country's welfare regime and social protection system. Financial sustainability must also be included as an intersectoral criterion when implementing a strategy that addresses the aforementioned three-pronged approach that also ensures coverage and sufficiency as a mirror of the quality of entitlements (Arenas de Mesa, 2019).

Four guidelines can be integrated into the design of comprehensive strategic policies to strengthen social protection systems. These areas of action are: (i) working towards closing gaps in access to social protection systems; (ii) adopting intersectoral approaches when designing policies that are sensitive to differences; (iii) increasing the sufficiency and quality of regular and emergency entitlements; and (iv) considering the central role of effectively prioritising actions. Each of these issues is discussed in detail below.

### **1. Working towards closing the gaps in access to social protection systems**

This first criterion is related to the need to address the persistent structural deficits of social protection systems. To this end, it is essential to take a broad and comprehensive view of social protection systems and to close the current gaps and inadequacies in coverage. Since social protection seeks to eliminate the risk of poverty, reduce inequalities, and address the phenomena of vulnerability and social exclusion throughout the life cycle (ECLAC, 2020; ILO, 2021), the aim is to create a social protection matrix that includes the various components of these systems: contributory and non-contributory policies as well as labour inclusion and regulation policies, care policies, and those aimed at guaranteeing universal health coverage and access to education (see diagram 8). All of these policies support these objectives and are key in the context of ongoing transformations.

As diagram 8 shows, countries can consider various policies for each of these components. Non-contributory policies include all cash and in-kind transfers, as well as policies that seek to protect household income such as family allowances and entitlements. It also includes all subsidies for access to social services, and old-age and disability non-contributory pension systems. Contributory social protection includes social insurance aimed at covering the nine branches of social security. The component linked to labour inclusion policies encompasses these types of policies, in addition to the set of regulations that support employment with decent working conditions. Policies to ensure access to quality education and health care include instruments that have become an even higher priority for human capacity development at a time of transition and recovery from the impacts of the pandemic. Finally, comprehensive care policies are also included in the scheme because of their central role in preventing poverty and reducing inequalities, including gender inequalities.

After analysing the coverage of countries' instruments in the various components of social protection systems, new policy frameworks could be created to develop specific policies or instruments. New reform processes, both structural (in the case of health or pension systems) and parameter-based (in the case of pension systems), could also be created as necessary. Closing the coverage gaps will mean both improving legal coverage and ensuring higher levels of effective coverage for the entitlements identified as part of the countries' social protection systems.

Improving legal coverage implies the availability of the various entitlements that should be established in the regulatory dimension of a social protection system (see diagram 8). Identifying these entitlements is based on the framework of the international human rights instruments that define the right to social security and, more broadly, the set of social rights. The ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), which defines the nine basic branches of social security,<sup>35</sup> and the basic social security guarantees established by the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202), provide specific guidelines on the basic entitlements that should be safeguarded in countries.

<sup>35</sup> The nine branches of social security, established by the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102), are: medical care, sickness benefits, unemployment benefit, old-age benefit, employment injury benefit, family benefit, maternity benefit, disability benefit, and survivors' benefit.

However, the region faces significant challenges in this area. It will be crucial to ensure an increase in the effective coverage for such entitlements, meaning the number of people who receive entitlements must be regulated at the national level based on these legal instruments.

**Diagram 8**  
**Matrix of social protection policies**

Life cycle		Early childhood	Childhood	Adolescence	Youth	Adults	Older persons
Social protection	Non-contributory	Permanent and emergency cash or in-kind transfer policies, subject or not to co-responsibility requirements (cash transfer programmes, labour inclusion and others). Family allowances and entitlements are included					
		Subsidies and mechanisms to access permanent universal and emergency social services May include a family support system to provide support for accessing a scheme for prioritised access to existing policies					
							Non-contributory old-age pension systems
		Disability pension schemes					
	Contributory	Family allowances					Pension schemes (disability, old-age, and survivors)
		Leaves					
		Social insurance for employment injury and diseases, sickness entitlements, maternity entitlements, and unemployment insurance					
Inclusion policies and labour regulation		Labour regulations and standards for decent work (formalisation and contracts, collective bargaining, minimum wage, and ending of child labour, among others)					
					Active labour-market policies and labour inclusion programmes in emergency contexts		
Health		Universal health-care access and coverage (population covered, entitlements and quality, financial protection, and social determinants of health)					
Education		Access to quality education			Lifelong learning		
Care		Comprehensive care policies					

Source: Prepared by the authors.

Efforts to close the coverage gaps of social protection system instruments in the countries must also consider the need to ensure regular and other specifically designed entitlements for recurrent emergencies and crises (especially the impacts of disasters and the climate crisis) and the possible repercussions of the epidemiological transition. This means recognising the diverse nature of the reconfigured risk structure. First, there is a need to specifically strengthen instruments linked to social protection systems for disaster and emergency management (see section II.B). This is the case for the most direct and obvious impacts of climate change, such as increased occurrence of forest fires, droughts, hurricanes, and other extreme weather events. Cash transfers and entitlements to ensure access to social services and comprehensive care policies are among the instruments to be considered. However, given their longer-lasting impacts, a sustained and pre-planned transition and transformation strategy is required. This is the case of the challenges related to digital social protection (and the need for a digital basket and entitlements which seek to close the digital exclusion gap), the demographic transition, the epidemiological and nutritional transition, and violence. Developing specific strategies for each of these changes is one of the tasks that future social protection must confront today. These elements are discussed in greater detail in the following sections.

## 2. Adopting intersectoral approaches when designing policies that are sensitive to differences

The pandemic highlighted populations that had previously been marginalised to varying degrees in terms of their exclusion from access to social protection systems. These populations include the poorest and most vulnerable as well as informal workers and people in the middle-income strata who, because of their income levels, have often not received non-contributory entitlements despite also exhibiting vulnerability when disasters and crises strike. Mechanisms and entry points into the system must be considered which ensure access to all people in the design process so that no one is left behind.

Policies should incorporate an approach centred on the underlying components of the matrix of social inequality in Latin America (ECLAC, 2016), as well as the dynamics that make up the reconfigured social risk structure based on the elements identified in Chapter I. This entails adopting specific intersectoral approaches during the policy design process to address the underlying components of social inequality in the region, which include socioeconomic level, gender, life cycle, ethnicity and race, and territory, in addition to other multiple drivers such as disability and migration (ECLAC, 2016). Thus, the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development notes the central role of universalism that is sensitive to differences. Universalism refers to the adoption of the principle of universality for access to social services from a rights-based approach, alongside efforts to design policies that actively overcome existing gaps and inequalities so as not to leave anyone behind, recognising the diverse identities and demands of the people prioritised by the policies (ECLAC, 2020).

As the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development indicates, “[t]he rights-based approach, with its principles of non-discrimination and equality, participation and empowerment, and accountability and transparency, forms the normative basis for social policies aimed at achieving inclusive social development and sustainable development” (ECLAC, 2020, p. 12–13). Similarly, its first line of action on strengthened social protection systems indicates the need to move towards “[...] comprehensive and universal social protection systems that, in their design and operation of their policies and intervention models, mainstream the rights-based, gender, ethnic and racial, life-cycle, territorial and disability approaches” (ECLAC, 2020, p. 32), in line with the approach of universalism sensitive to differences. This considers, for example, life-cycle, gender equality, and ethnic or intercultural approaches, among others (see box 2).

### Box 2

#### Integrated approaches to applying a universalism that is sensitive to differences in the design of social protection systems

According to a rights-based approach and the principle of a universalism that is sensitive to differences, a set of perspectives that have been noted in various analyses can be considered when designing social protection policies and systems to improve the situation of specific populations. These perspectives are closely tied to the underlying components of the social inequality matrix in Latin America (ECLAC, 2016).

Because the life-cycle approach identifies the differentiated social protection requirements of persons and their families at different stages of their lives, it is key to regulating entitlements in social protection systems. Given the intersectionality in the accumulation of inequalities and structural discrimination, it is important to consider a life-cycle approach in social protection policies that seek to address these problems. This approach recognises that the risks and vulnerabilities people face, including those related to gender, ethnicity and race, and where they live, are not isolated issues but instead are interconnected throughout a person’s life. Interventions to address these risks must be tailored to different life stages and ensure comprehensive support for persons. Such an approach recognises that each stage of the life cycle brings with it particular opportunities, challenges, and risks (ECLAC, 2016). The life-cycle approach can therefore be considered as the central axis that connects the necessary entitlements that must be prioritised to provide social protection during a context of recurrent crises.

Regarding gender equality, a gender-based perspective is an approach that recognises and addresses the different challenges and vulnerabilities faced by women and girls due to gender-based inequalities and discrimination. These circumstances require policies that ensure the inclusion, empowerment, and overall well-being of women and girls.

Based on an analysis framework that assesses the degree to which this perspective is integrated into social protection policies and programmes, this approach seeks to transcend overtly discriminatory or gender-blind perspectives, and adopt a transformative position where policies and programmes address the structural causes of gender inequality to transform unequal and discriminatory relations (UNICEF, 2020; Holmes, 2023).

An ethnic or intercultural approach in social policy can be understood as a combination of actions aimed at providing universal access to social protection, as well as those aimed at ensuring the collective rights of Indigenous peoples (including adequate services in terms of cultural relevance). Thus, implementing this approach to actively reduce ethnic inequalities in access to social protection would entail contemplating actions to address the normative and operational elements in human rights instruments while simultaneously reducing inter-ethnic gaps and Indigenous poverty (Robles, 2009).

The territorial approach to social protection policies can also have implications at various stages of the design of social protection systems and policies. For example, regarding rural populations, it is important to identify and address the obstacles that these populations specifically face in their access to the various schemes and entitlements of social protection systems. This involves considering various financing mechanisms for policies that cover this population, and strategies that address the transition from social assistance to social insurance for these populations (ILO/FAO, 2021).

**Sources:** Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2016), *La matriz de la desigualdad social en América Latina* (LC/G.2690(MDS.1/2)), Santiago; Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (2023), *Institucionalidad social en América Latina y el Caribe: eje central para avanzar hacia un desarrollo social inclusivo*, Santiago, United Nations, 2023 (in press); UNICEF (2020), Gender-responsive age-sensitive social protection: a conceptual framework; Holmes, R. (2023), "Integrating gender equality and inclusion into social protection systems", Social Protection Technical Assistance, Advice and Resources (STAAR) Facility, DAI Global UK Ltd, United Kingdom; Robles, C. (2009), "Pueblos indígenas y programas de transferencias monetarias con corresponsabilidad. Avances y desafíos desde un enfoque étnico", *Social Policy Series 156* (LC/L.3170-P), Santiago; ILO/FAO (2021). *Extender la protección social a las poblaciones rurales: Perspectivas para un enfoque común de la FAO y la OIT*. Geneva.

Integrating these various approaches into the design of social protection entitlements and policies is essential to guaranteeing basic needs and access to well-being for the entire population, with special emphasis on those groups that have historically been excluded. In turn, each of these approaches has a specific approach, and is linked to the various stages involved in social policies: (i) problem identification (diagnosis); (ii) design process; (iii) approval process (administrative or legal); (iv) implementation; and (v) evaluation (ECLAC, 2023a).

### 3. Increasing the sufficiency and quality of regular and emergency entitlements

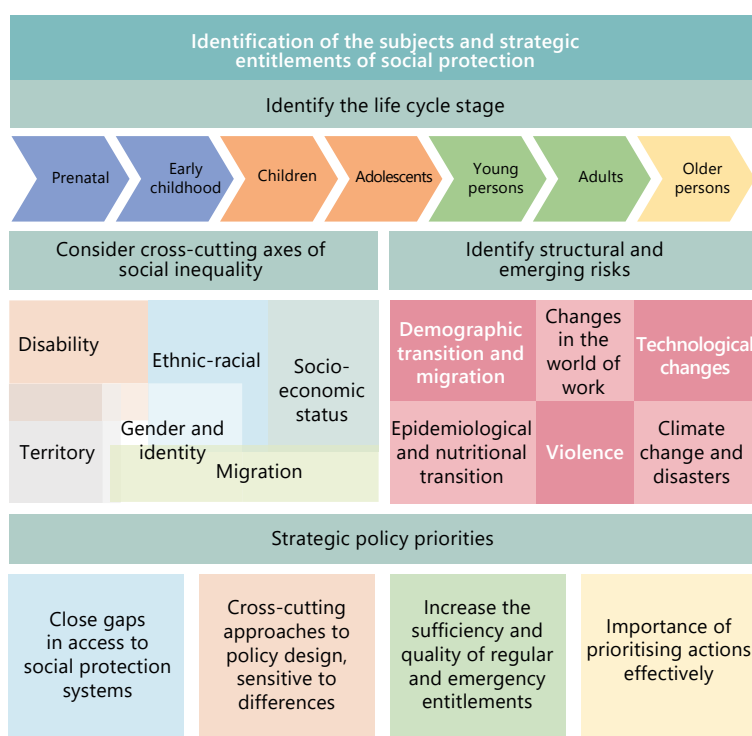
A third criterion to strengthen social protection systems with universal entitlements in order to address a reconfigured risk structure is to implement policy designs aimed at increasing entitlements sufficiency to achieve higher quality levels of social protection, and to address the risk of poverty as well as the impacts of inequality. The levels to which sufficiency can be expanded will depend on countries' fiscal space, and the intersectoral agreements that can be reached, among other factors. This depends on the social legitimacy given to this issue and the possibility for countries to build social and fiscal pacts on the social protection thresholds they agree to guarantee. For example, with the agreed goal of lifting all children and adolescents out of poverty, a range of policy options can be drawn on to expand the sufficiency of family entitlements and transfers prioritising children and adolescents. Similarly, regarding the levels of progress in non-contributory pension systems, moving forward on sufficiency objectives within this component of pension systems should also be a priority (see section IV.C). The sufficiency threshold to be included in the entitlements policy design will depend on the arrangements and consensus established in each country. As ECLAC (2023a) has noted, it is possible to set financing goals as part of a stronger social institutional framework to safeguard the necessary resources, making social policies sustainable by considering them a social investment which impacts sustainable development. Here again, it is important to consider the frameworks set out by international human rights instruments in this area, including the ILO Social Security (Minimum Standards) Convention, 1952 (No. 102) and the Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (No. 202).

#### 4. Considering the central role of effectively prioritising actions

The fourth and final criterion to consider when setting strategic commitments to strengthen social protection systems deals with the need to effectively prioritise the actions required to achieve universal, comprehensive, sustainable, and resilient social protection systems. This assumes that all identified gaps cannot be addressed simultaneously, and that steps to expand coverage and sufficiency levels must be done in stages. This component must be taken up centrally by the institutional bodies in charge of the design, approval, implementation, and evaluation of social protection policies.

One way forward in prioritising interventions is to consider the gaps in coverage and sufficiency in the instruments of social protection systems (see diagram 8) according to the life cycle stages, the underlying components that reproduce social inequality in the region, and the dimensions that make up the reconfigured social risk structure (see diagram 9). Such prioritisation can guide the design of social protection normative frameworks, including, for example, policy framework documents can be developed that then correspond to the social institutional framework envisaged in this area (see chapter V).

**Diagram 9**  
Proposed components for the identification of strategic social protection policies



Source: Prepared by the authors.

When setting priorities, the different stages of development of countries' social protection systems must also be taken into account. For example, in some countries these systems are more recent and have a lower level of entitlement expansion, coverage, and sufficiency. In accordance with the social protection floors approach, these countries will need to consolidate a set of entitlements aimed at guaranteeing basic levels of personal income protection. Such entitlements should align with nationally defined standards and key goals such as overcoming extreme poverty, achieving food and nutritional security, and access to health. Priority can first be given to people living in poverty and extreme poverty, in accordance with the line of action 1.3 of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development (ECLAC, 2020). Safeguarding the income protection of households with children, adolescents, and older persons is essential. This should

be based on a life-cycle approach and implemented through both contributory and non-contributory means (see sections IV.B and IV.C). It is also important to make entitlements more accessible for people of working age outside the labour market, while also connecting them where possible to an evolving labour market (see sections IV.B and IV.F). The emphasis at this early stage of policy development is on building an institutional infrastructure for social protection systems, which is key to further expansion.

Subsequently, pursuing strategies that integrate existing entitlements would better align the public offer of social protection to the population. As part of this process, attention to territorial dynamics is vital. This has been shown by the region's experience in expanding conditional transfer programmes, providing family support in the territories, and more recently, using local or digital one-stop-shop schemes as coordinating mechanisms (ECLAC, 2023a). This requires the existence of social services that can be effectively linked to adequate levels of coverage and quality results in a broad sense, so as to allow for accessibility and relevance with attention directed at the underlying components of social inequality. With this in mind, priorities must also include the necessary expansion of coverage in access to basic health services, quality education, and other services that are crucial for the functioning of the social protection system as a whole.

Finally, some countries in the region are moving towards comprehensive and multisectoral systems to address specific social issues. This is the case, for example, with the establishment of comprehensive care systems or policies and early childhood care, as well as expanded entitlements coverage for self-employed and informal workers with increased levels of coordination between the contributory and non-contributory systems. A systemic approach is also required to deal with highly complex risks, such as those related to the implications of violence in the territories on the population's welfare. In this situation, a strategy to deploy the State's offer of social protection at the territorial level could be part of a broader strategy to prevent violence.

In short, strengthening social protection systems requires a three-pronged structural focus directed at the persistent historic gaps that were illuminated by the pandemic, in the face of growing emergencies and the future challenges that will condition social protection. This new context has a wide-ranging impact on all stages involved in the development of social protection systems. It is therefore essential to consider these structural risks and future challenges in order to rethink social protection entitlements and services to fit the new paradigms. To this end, the criteria discussed in this section must be accounted for to effectively develop social protection systems that are resilient to crises and consider sustainability as a way to connect the goals to improve such systems.

Based on the elements reviewed in this section, the following sections of this chapter will elaborate on five areas of policy recommendations to progressively strengthen and advance social protection systems. These guidelines are in no way exhaustive in terms of the various instruments and initiatives that could be leveraged to consolidate universal, comprehensive, sustainable, and resilient social protection systems. Rather, they reflect an analysis of the historical development of these systems in the region and years of accumulated data.<sup>36</sup> Accordingly, they aim to offer stimulating proposals to make strides in the strengthening of social protection systems as a comprehensive pillar of a welfare state in line with the countries' different levels of development to cope with recurrent crises. These proposals are centred on the areas of: (i) income protection; (ii) family entitlements and care policies, with a focus on both ends of the life cycle as well as reducing inequality; (iii) structural reforms in key sectors (pension and health-care systems); and (iv) the challenges of better connecting social protection and labour inclusion policies.

It is worth noting that these proposals are also complementary to those that have been highlighted by the European Commission (2023) and the ILO (2021) for the future of social protection. The European

<sup>36</sup> In addition to analysing secondary sources, part of this data has been drawn from technical assistance to seven Latin American countries—Brazil, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and the Dominican Republic—as part of the ECLAC-BMZ/GIZ project “Recover Better: Overcoming the COVID-19 Pandemic Consequences in Latin America and the Caribbean”. Recommendations on strengthening the institutional framework of social protection systems based on these technical assistanceS are included in chapter V of this document.

Commission underscores the role of policies aimed at the beginning of the life cycle, inclusive social protection, and lifelong learning. This includes access to labour inclusion policies, adequate income support and quality care for older persons, and inclusive and high-quality services which reflect a concern for financial sustainability for a resilient welfare state (see box 3). For its part, the ILO (2021)—in addition to highlighting the need for structural change in economies and societies, strengthening of social protection systems to make them resilient, and sustainable and equitable investment—has noted the role of several policies at this juncture. Such policies include those aimed at closing coverage gaps and supporting transitions in life and work, including the role of active labour-market policies and their link to skills development, those aimed at promoting work-life balance and access to care services, and the role of social protection for a just transition.

### Box 3

#### European Commission's proposal on the future of social protection

The proposals discussed in this chapter partly echo those recently prioritised by the European Union in a report by the High-Level Group on the future of social protection and the welfare state in the EU (European Commission, 2023). This group took up the issue of how to strengthen social protection systems and the welfare state at a time of various megatrends, including climate change, the impacts of new forms of employment, and the digital and green transitions. The group came up with 21 strategic recommendations, categorised as follows:

- At the beginning of the life cycle, actions aimed at achieving affordable early childhood education and care; income support and access to services to prevent child poverty; entitlements to support starting a family; and high-quality jobs for young persons, complemented by financial support for further education and training.
- Inclusive social protection and lifelong learning, including access to social protection for all employed persons regardless of their professional status; access to high-quality jobs throughout a person's working life; training and retraining opportunities for the digital and green transitions; inclusion of migrants in social and labour market policies; and job retention schemes to protect incomes, jobs, and skills during crises.
- Adequate income support and quality care in old age: facilitating continuity of employment for healthy older persons through flexible working hours and workplaces adapted to their requirements; access to an adequate pension and decent minimum entitlements to address poverty in old age; recognition of care time in the pension system and high-quality, affordable long-term care services.
- Promotion of high-quality and inclusive services, including affordable and energy-efficient housing and transport, and high-quality and inclusive social services.
- Ensure financial sustainability for a resilient welfare state by broadening the tax rate through progressive taxation according to income, consumption, capital, carbon, and energy; consider a minimum EU-level tax rate and secure public finances to support sustainable social protection spending.
- Strengthen the European Union's capacity to ensure access to social protection in the future, through legislation to fulfil the principles of the European Pillar of Social Rights, including a minimum package of social rights, based on this instrument, and enforced at national level (European Commission, 2023).

These actions transcend the spheres of action traditionally associated with social protection systems in Latin America and the Caribbean. They are closely linked to the concept of welfare states and address the sectoral and employment spheres required to develop comprehensive welfare. They are closely aligned with the European Pillar of Social Rights (EPSR), which was established in 2017. The EPSR sets out 20 principles in three main areas: equal opportunities and access to the labour market, fair working conditions, and social protection and inclusion to create a Europe that is inclusive, fair, strong, and full of opportunity. Included within these principles are income protection through a minimum income, which can be combined with incentives for (re)inclusion in the labour market for those who are able to work, and for all who lack sufficient resources to live a decent life. Access to goods and training is also included (European Commission, 2022).

Source: European Commission (2023), *The future of social protection and of the welfare state in the EU*, Directorate-General for Employment, Social Affairs and Inclusion, Publications Office of the European Union, 2023, <https://data.europa.eu/doi/10.2767/35425>.

## **B. Income protection: a wide-ranging function that must be strengthened by social protection systems in the region**

Viewed from the perspective of welfare states, social protection systems play a central role in guaranteeing adequate standards of living to protect people's income, consumption and opportunities, and the ability to exercise their rights (ECLAC, 2020; ILO, 2021; Marcel and Rivera, 2008). To this end, the arrangements that states make to organise the income protection function within social protection systems are crucial. Such arrangements will determine the extent to which these systems move towards a welfare state, helping to ensure two of their main functions: guaranteeing a minimum level of income, irrespective of employment status, and reducing vulnerability to social risks (Briggs, 1961, ECLAC, 2021). Today, income protection is a highly relevant topic at a time marked by a reconfigured risk structure and the prevalence of wide inequalities among the population, including in the degree of vulnerability to poverty.

As the profound impacts of the pandemic made clear, the region faces a structural deficit in income protection. Latin America has high levels of informality, which, combined with limited access to social protection, reveal a significant level of unprotected income in the region that must be dealt with. This situation is not only detrimental to the people's current living conditions, but also shows a high risk of vulnerability to future crises. Despite improvements in cash transfer programmes, particularly conditional cash transfers, income protection faces important limits in safeguarding the income and consumption levels of persons and households (see section II.A). The current cascade of crises has shown that efforts being made are insufficient to prevent increases in poverty and skill losses, resulting in costs that may exceed the resources needed to finance a more comprehensive cash transfer policy. Such a policy should be implemented to complement the expansion of basic services and other entitlements, as shown in diagram 8.

While some of the initiatives implemented during the pandemic were built on pre-existing conditional cash transfer programme measures, it is worth noting that the vast majority of measures announced by governments were new (see chapter III). This approach has again been identified in the context of countries' responses to rising inflation, especially in cash and in-kind transfer measures. Following a review of the measures implemented by the countries in the region to address rising inflation levels and reduce its impacts, 51 policies were identified. These included cash transfers, in-kind transfers, new subsidies, and increased coverage of subsidy programmes and non-contributory pensions; 22 of the 51 measures are new.<sup>37</sup>

This highlights three complementary phenomena: first, the flexibility of social protection systems, and the presence of institutional adaptation mechanisms within governments to mobilise financial resources and design such measures to leverage a window of opportunity; second, the ability of existing programmes to adapt vertically (sufficiency) and horizontally (coverage) to emergencies, reflecting a level of resilience in social protection systems when added to the preceding point; and third, a structural deficit in this dimension that becomes clear during emergencies, and which reflects continually insufficient levels of legal and effective coverage of contributory and non-contributory social protection. Four factors that condition the income protection dimension of social protection systems now and in the future are discussed below.

### **1. Four factors that condition the income protection dimension of social protection systems now and in the future**

The first factor that conditions income protection by social protection systems is the recognition that both contributory and non-contributory entitlements are required, and that the strengthening of both

<sup>37</sup> This review analysed official information related to the measures implemented by different countries in the region to combat the effects of the price increases resulting from the inflation crisis. The countries considered in this study are the following (18 in total): Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, Uruguay, and Venezuela (Bolivarian Republic of).

components will be central to the future of social protection. In particular, there is an urgent need to strengthen contributory social protection systems in order to close the gaps in legal and effective coverage (see section II.A).

The second factor is that access to social income protection should be safeguarded for a significantly larger share of the population than that currently covered by conditional cash transfer programmes in the region. Indeed, such protection should be designed as a guarantee of universal access that can be activated when required. Given the prevailing social stratification and high levels of vulnerability, events with the potential to destabilise achieved levels of well-being — such as the impacts of transformations in the world of work and temporary or permanent climate change— will require income protection mechanisms to be made more widely available.

A third factor conditioning social protection is the resilience or adaptability of entitlements as emergencies and crises become recurrent. In this regard, the design of an emergency basic income that can be activated in the event of a crisis (such as the COVID-19 pandemic) can be considered. The pandemic tested the resilience and adaptability of the systems and their programmes to implement these types of measures. Several innovative approaches were adopted, and adaptations were made to existing entitlements to temporarily modify them (such as increasing the amounts or adapting access requirements and even lifting conditionalities). The design of such measures would need to consider very early on the levels of coverage and sufficiency that could be provided (Robles, Atuesta, and Santos Garcia, 2023; Robles and Santos Garcia, 2023). Doing so requires (i) a legal framework that offers stability and rapid capacity to act during certain crises;<sup>38</sup> (ii) a budgetary framework that provides financial sustainability for this type of entitlement, for which the mechanism to be designed to finance this measure must be explored and pre-determined so as to ensure its rapid implementation; and (iii) social institutions that work to improve the technology required to quickly identify who needs this transfer during an emergency (which is especially important during disasters, climate change challenges, and new phenomena linked to the epidemiological transition).

Fourth, an intersectoral aspect of these factors is financial sustainability and the potential restrictions faced by the region's countries to achieve a more stable expansion of coverage and adequate entitlements. This issue goes beyond the mechanisms to be activated during crises. Incremental priority-based, and sustainable schemes are urgently required to ensure access that provides the necessary assurances to people in the new context.

## 2. Income protection mechanisms and policies

Various alternatives are being discussed in the regional and global debate on income protection mechanisms which could be implemented simultaneously and coordinated according to countries' needs. As previously mentioned, a primary necessary strategy to strengthen income protection is to bolster contributory social protection systems. In this context, unemployment insurance is a critical policy for income protection, and must be modelled to cope with crisis periods and new structural risks, in addition to strengthening pension systems.

A second mechanism is based on increasing the coverage of non-contributory income protection schemes. In recent decades, Latin America has adopted the expansion of conditional transfer programmes (CTPs) as a key strategy for overcoming poverty. Although CTPs have been widely embraced in the region, and have had positive impacts on access to services such as education and health and the reduction of poverty and extreme poverty (Cecchini and Madariaga, 2011; Cecchini and Martínez, 2011; Vargas, Robles and Espíndola, 2021), they still face significant challenges in terms of coverage and sufficiency. Even combined with other social protection entitlements, they were unable to handle the magnitude of

<sup>38</sup> For example, in Chile, a bill was drafted in early 2023 for the activation of the Emergency Family Income (Ingreso Familiar de Emergencia – IFE) in the event of a lockdown to plan for a mechanism to protect household income. See [online] <https://www.gob.cl/chileapoya/>.

the COVID-19 pandemic. Moreover, the application of conditionalities has been the subject of ongoing analysis with regard to the potential implications for the principle of non-discrimination, and confusion among recipients (Rosset, Courtoisie, and Marsiglia, 2014). There is an ongoing debate on the role of conditionalities and the effects that transfers (cash and in-kind) can have on key human development indicators, with and without conditionalities (see, for example, ODI/UNICEF, 2020).

As such, the design and implementation of universal transfer schemes is an intensely debated policy topic. In this context, the life-cycle approach is crucial to protect the population based on the challenges they face at different points in time and to prioritise the policies to be implemented. Entitlements that prioritise persons at both ends of the life cycle—childhood and old age—are an initial approach in this area. They prioritise income protection for these groups as they face high vulnerability at these two stages, as well as limited capacity for economic autonomy, and significant social protection gaps. Examples of policies along these lines are universal or quasi-universal entitlements for children and older persons and non-contributory pension systems (Robles and Santos Garcia, 2023; Farias, Santos Garcia, and De Wispelaere, 2023).

Another option explored in the regional debate is minimum income policies for income protection, which include basic income and guaranteed minimum income policies. Basic income consists of a cash transfer provided on a regular, individual, universal, and unconditional basis. This entitlement can be set up in different ways depending on the levels of coverage of different population groups and sufficiency with respect to the poverty line. It is, as understood here, a policy that is complementary to the set of policies forming part of the social protection systems in the region's countries. Meanwhile, with means-tested guaranteed minimum income policies, all households below a certain income threshold are entitled to a transfer so they can reach that threshold. Comparative analyses generally find that minimum income policies are linked to incentives for labour inclusion (De Wispelaere and Farias, 2023; Farias, Santos Garcia, and De Wispelaere, 2023). At a time when the world of work is being completely transformed, this can be an important instrument to promote in the face of eventual labour restructuring and transition processes (see section IV.F).

Given the reconfigured risk structure and the increasing frequency of disasters and shocks in the region, the importance of emergency transfers within non-contributory systems should be reiterated. These programmes were crucial during the COVID-19 pandemic to prevent worsening poverty. Even when they were unable to fully offset the adverse effects of the crisis, they are key policies for bridging the gap between government responses and the recovery of the affected population. These measures also set precedents by increasing the resilience of households and communities, and mitigating future disaster risks (Farias, Santos Garcia, and De Wispelaere, 2023).

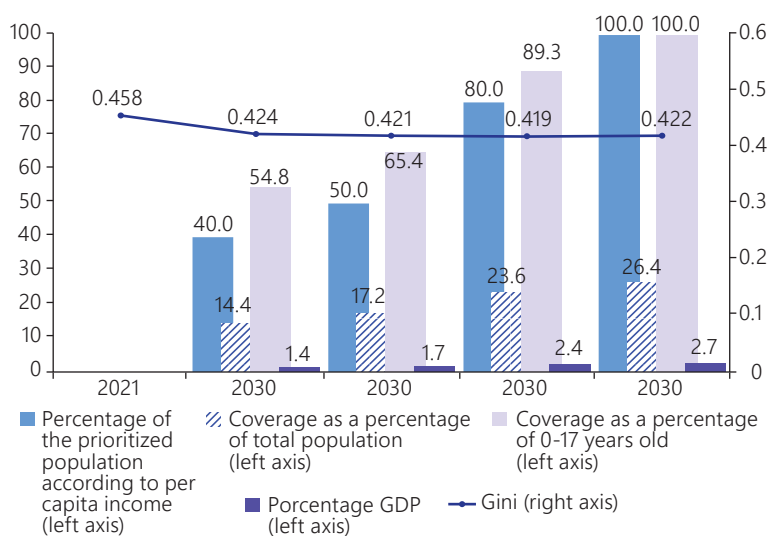
Regarding the mechanism of strengthening and expanding non-contributory coverage for income protection, Espíndola (2023) conducts an estimate on the cost of reducing poverty via prioritised transfers to people living in poverty. In this analysis, the cost of a transfer equivalent to the absolute poverty gap was estimated for three scenarios: (i) the entire population; (ii) the population aged 0 to 17; and (iii) the population aged 65 and over. The findings show that the cost of closing this gap for the entire population through a transfer covering the difference between household income and the poverty line in the region is, on average, 2.1% of GDP. This percentage drops to 0.9% for the population under 17, and 0.1% for the population aged 65 and over. When these estimates are repeated based on the extreme poverty line, the regional averages of the transfer cost would be 0.3% for the total population, 0.1% for children and adolescents, and 0.02% for the population aged 65 and over (see tables IV.A.1 and IV.A.2 in the annex for the gaps for children and adolescents).

Implementing this type of policy first requires a robust social information system to be in place. The system must be frequently updated, allowing for the proper identification of persons who live in poverty or extreme poverty at a given moment and thus require some form of entitlement to remediate this gap. This would minimise or avoid errors of inclusion and exclusion among the prioritised groups, which entails high administrative costs. Learning from the experiences of countries with well-established

welfare states, such as those in Europe, can support progress in identifying the requirements for adequate system design and implementation (Espíndola, 2023).

In this context, Espíndola (2023) estimated the annual cost of implementing entitlements equivalent to an extreme poverty line for children, adolescents, and older persons, regardless of their income situation. Figure 35 shows the example of a transfer for children and adolescents, and an estimate of a progressive increase in entitlement coverage that would be extended to the total prioritised population by 2030. For example, if the goal were to implement a transfer that would cover 50% of this population by 2030, the cost would be 1.7% of GDP; if the goal were to reach a quasi-universal transfer for children and adolescents belonging to the poorest 80% of the population, it would cost 2.4% of GDP.

**Figure 35**  
Latin America and the Caribbean (15 countries): estimated coverage, costs, and redistributive impact of a transfer for children and adolescents, based on a monthly transfer per person equivalent to an extreme poverty line<sup>a</sup> in 2030  
(Percentage of populations and of GDP)



Source: Arenas de Mesa, A. (2023), adapted from Espíndola, E. (2023), "Estimating the cost of cash transfers associated with the implementation of options to protect income levels in Latin America", in Santos García, R., C. Farías and C. Robles (eds.) (2023), "Income support and social protection in Latin America and the Caribbean: debates on policy options", *Project Documents* (LC/TS.2023/27), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

<sup>a</sup> The extreme poverty lines at the national level were calculated by ECLAC. The additional cost of these estimates with regard to the current programmes is shown.

There are a number of policy options that countries can explore to strengthen the income protection pillar of their social protection systems. Rethinking the design of current entitlements can be a way forward in terms of taking a life-cycle approach and achieving universal coverage.

### C. Social protection and the life cycle: family entitlements and long-term care within strategic priorities with a focus on children and older persons

According to Esping-Andersen and Myles (2012), reducing inequalities in welfare states requires addressing three types of risks: (i) those related to the life cycle, requiring a permanent insurance approach (horizontal redistribution); (ii) those linked to social stratification between more and less disadvantaged

groups (vertical redistribution), requiring measures for poverty eradication or for progressive taxation; and (iii) policies aimed at intergenerational redistribution, which addresses risks arising from social inheritance through mechanisms that promote equal opportunities, such as health and education policies.

In light of ongoing demographic changes (which include an accelerated process of population ageing as well as persistent and renewed risks that will require protected pathways to ensure the full development of capacities), it will be especially important to implement a life-cycle approach to strengthen social protection systems. Within this cycle, childhood and old age represent stages of life during which persons may lack or have a diminished autonomous capacity to earn income and participate in the labour market. During these stages, contributory and non-contributory instruments of social protection must be closely linked. Prioritising these stages does not imply taking attention away from policies linked to other stages of the life cycle and interventions that safeguard the transition to youth and adulthood. Instead, the aim is to identify strategic policies within these stages that should be strengthened as part of the framework of the risk structure and that can bring synergy to enhanced capacity development. By considering both life-cycle stages simultaneously, the limitations imposed by the specific features of sectoral policies can be overcome. The focus can be placed on persons and families, as well as on the connections that exist between policies that ensure well-being throughout the life cycle (Filgueira, 2014).

A prioritised focus on both ends of the life cycle —i.e. childhood and adolescence and old age— encompasses a broad set of policies that can be mobilised by social protection systems.

## 1. Family entitlements<sup>39</sup>

One of the pillars of well-established welfare states is a robust system of family entitlements. This includes entitlements aimed at guaranteeing the comprehensive development of children and adolescents as well as care policies that include both the population requiring care and caregivers, key factors for modifying the social organisation of care.

Family entitlements encompass policies and programmes aimed at ensuring (directly or indirectly) the welfare of families with children. These can be delivered through transfers and services, or reflected in regulations seeking to promote joint responsibility between work and home life. These measures include: (i) transfer policies for families with children under the age of 18, which cover monetary compensation for the costs of having children; (ii) leave policies; and (iii) care services and preschool education (OECD, 2011).

Family entitlements have developed significantly in European countries in recent decades. Most of these countries have some form of family allowance anchored in national legislation with relatively broad eligibility criteria through social insurance mechanisms, universal non-contributory schemes, or tax exemptions. Many of these countries provide specific additional entitlements for families in situations of vulnerability and parents in single-parent households. There are specific entitlements that are conditional on family characteristics (entitlements for single parents, child support payments, or allowances for large families), the characteristics of children and adolescents (entitlements for young children, or education-related entitlements), or on the parents' employment situation (working tax credits, or specific childcare allowances). Universal transfers for families with children and adolescents in Europe became a crucial tool for reducing poverty and inequality in the early years of life, with medium- and long-term effects on child development as well as the economic and social development of countries. These entitlements are predictable as they are paid regularly to provide security to the recipients; they are unconditional, without the need for recipients to fulfil certain behaviours to receive the transfer; and they are universal, given to all children and adolescents in the country, regardless of the level of vulnerability faced by the family.

Latin America still lags far behind Europe when it comes to family entitlement development, but it has made some significant strides in recent decades. Despite still being far behind the level of European countries, most Latin American countries have been working to consolidate transfer systems for families

<sup>39</sup> This section is based in part on Cecilia Rossel's document "Family entitlements and long-term care: lessons from Europe and strategic choices for a welfare state in Latin America" (see Rossel, 2023).

with children and adolescents, especially with the development of cash transfers for populations in situations of vulnerability (Cecchini and Atuesta, 2017; Cecchini and Madariaga, 2011). However, many of these efforts are not protected by national laws, and when they are, there are no explicit funding or indexation mechanisms, which make them relatively volatile systems (Filgueira and Rossel, 2017). As discussed in section II.A, the coverage and sufficiency levels of these entitlements are limited. In particular, the income dimension has been largely overlooked in comprehensive early childhood care policies. Thus, in addition to continuing to promote intersectoral interventions for comprehensive early childhood development and designing new policies for comprehensive adolescent development (López, 2021), the importance of promoting and strengthening family entitlements aimed at all households with children and adolescents in the region has been elevated (Filgueira and Rossel, 2017; Rossel, 2023).

Maternity and paternity leave are also a core part of family entitlements. As for the lengths of these types of leave, the ILO sets a standard of at least 14 weeks.<sup>40</sup> In a survey of 24 countries in the region, all have maternity leave, albeit with significant variations in scope and duration. Meanwhile, with respect to paternity leave, only one third of the countries in the region grant leave of eight days or more, while the rest grant leave of fewer days or no leave at all (IPC-IG/UNICEF, 2020). Regarding maternity and paternity leave in Latin America, the most significant gap is in basic coverage and the level of stratification that exists for access to these entitlements. Although still in the nascent stages, progress has been made in the region in creating parental leave (e.g. parental components in leave policies in Chile and Uruguay).

Finally, early childhood care and education services in Latin America have made substantial progress, although they still lag far behind progress made in Europe and other developed regions. Over the last two decades coverage of these services has been increasing, but considerable challenges remain in the stratification of access and quality (López Boo and Ferro, 2019; Vegas and Santibáñez, 2010). Coverage for early childhood development education services (0–2 years) was 18.6% in 2020 in the region (ECLAC, 2022c). This is far below European levels, where coverage rates for education and care services for 0–2-year-olds exceed 50% in countries such as Luxembourg, the Netherlands, Iceland, Norway, and Denmark. The average for this type of coverage was 32.6% in 26 European Union countries around 2020 (OECD, 2016c). The European experience is notable for the wide range of formats in which services are provided, their duration, and their flexibility, with some daycare models providing up to 10 hours, as well as low workload and non-standard hours of care (OECD, 2016a and 2016b). These are relevant policies to consider for the region while various alternatives and comprehensive care policies are discussed.

In particular, two critical challenges facing the region should be noted (Rossel, 2023). First, despite some progress, a universal system of interconnected transfers and services has not yet been established. Cash transfers cover specific and sometimes limited objectives; leave policies do not cover people living in poverty and extreme poverty nor informal workers; and the coverage of care services remains limited and segmented in quality. Secondly, the fiscal effort in most of these policies remains modest, and has not been fully stabilised within social protection systems. The provision of transfers and services is often not anchored to firm funding rationales, and there are no legally binding criteria regarding sufficiency or quality (Filgueira and Rossel, 2017).

In recent years, the role of multisectoral interventions at this stage of the life-cycle in particular has been discussed, with high levels of intersectoral coordination. Providing nurturing and loving care<sup>41</sup> seeks to link interventions in five core components: (i) good health; (ii) adequate nutrition; (iii) responsive care; (iv) safety and security; and (v) early learning opportunities. This multipronged approach leads to virtuous outcomes for the development of skills required for learning, as well as the personal and social capacities that are assimilated during early childhood (Castillo and Marinho, 2022). The region has seen

<sup>40</sup> ILO Convention 183 states that leave should not be less than 14 weeks (ILO, 2000a), while Recommendation 191 suggests that it should be at least 18 weeks (ILO, 2000b).

<sup>41</sup> Nurturing and loving care comprises the “[...] set of conditions that enable the optimal care of young children. It refers to a stable environment created by parents and other caregivers, supported by policies, services, and the community, that ensures children’s health and nutrition, protects them from risks, and provides opportunities for early learning, through interactions that are emotionally supportive and responsive” (WHO, UNICEF and World Bank, 2018, p. 15). See also Castillo and Marinho (2022).

a major development in systems for the comprehensive protection of early childhood rights built around investments, goods, services, and transfers that simultaneously address the various dimensions of capacity development during this stage (D'Alessandre, 2018; López, 2021). One concrete example of this approach has been the creation of comprehensive early childhood care policies or systems that consolidate interventions in the areas of health, nutrition, education, and care services (De Achaval and Aulicino, 2015).

This comprehensive care model undoubtedly requires prior development of the institutional frameworks of social protection systems. To work, this model requires systems that can be interconnected and offer referrals to services in different sectors. These are systemic initiatives that can be promoted as part of comprehensive interventions to address specific issues, as identified in section IV.A.

## 2. Long-term care policies for older persons

Considering the dynamics of accelerated population ageing in the region, social protection policies for older persons, and especially pension and health systems and care policies, are becoming increasingly important. More specifically, long-term care policies form a core set of policies that are expected to put a heavier fiscal burden on countries, based on the current process. They will also likely play a transversal role in the way social protection systems are structured in the region.

Policies for long-term care for older persons address the need to ensure minimum care for an increasingly ageing population with a rising life expectancy and a high incidence of non-communicable or chronic diseases which have a direct impact on the population's quality of life. Long-term care includes services and assistance for older persons who require help performing daily activities or need some form of permanent care (European Commission, 2021).

These policies encompass various support mechanisms for the performance of daily activities, including insurance and transfer policies for care, long-term care services for dependent older persons, and policies to promote care at home and to support caregivers. Care services can also be categorised as: (i) institutional or residential care; (ii) partial or semi-residential care; and (iii) home-based care. Institutional or residential care is care provided in a hospital or residential facility where care recipients live with staff providing continuous care. Partial or semi-residential care also takes place within an institutional setting that does not involve the permanent residence of care recipients, such as care provided in day or night care centres, short-stay services, and outpatient care. Finally, home-based care policies refer to care provided by professionals or persons in the care recipient's home, such as home nursing or home-care services (European Commission, 2021).

With regard to how such policies could be applied in Latin America, it is worth noting that many European countries have made significant efforts to develop long-term care policies in recent decades. One area where this is noticeable is in the development of universal and compulsory social insurance policies linked to long-term care with different modalities. These include hybrid options with private insurance, models based exclusively on contributory systems, and models financed on the basis of general revenues. In the last two decades, countries such as Germany and the Netherlands, along with Nordic countries such as Denmark, Finland, and Sweden, have developed models for financing long-term care based on taxation or compulsory national insurance systems, which impacts access, covered entitlements, out-of-pocket spending, and care providers. The changes have generally been directed at making eligibility criteria more flexible and setting mandatory contributions to expand coverage and entitlements. In this regard, some countries have created specific transfer policies for long-term care, sometimes associated with insurance systems, which provide people in need of care with alternatives to receive the services they require from the providers, and under the conditions of their choice. European countries have also begun expanding long-term institutional care services (such as nursing homes) and, above all, policies to promote care at home. Finally, there has been a significant deployment of policies in Europe to support both formal and informal care workers. Efforts include the strengthening of labour and regulatory regulations to set minimum training standards for care workers (Cès and Coster, 2019; European Commission, 2021)

and respite care<sup>42</sup>, including additional policies applicable for emergencies, holidays, short stays, overnight stays, and rehabilitation, among others (Colombo and others, 2011). European countries have also made significant progress in creating specific standards to regulate the quality of long-term care. In most countries, established quality frameworks are supported by quality registration, assessment, and accreditation systems (Cès and Coster, 2019).

In contrast to European countries, in Latin America, long-term care needs in old age are mainly met by families through unpaid care provided by relatives or out-of-pocket household spending. Furthermore, there is very little development of care services for the dependent adult population (Batthyány, 2015; Rossel and Filgueira, 2015), with risks related to quality and high costs on the health system (Roffman and Apella, 2021). This shortcoming in care services also creates obstacles for the labour inclusion of women, on whom the burden of caregiving falls almost exclusively.

Although most countries in the region have specific institutions and policies aimed at older persons, as well as regulations regarding services for dependent persons, these efforts have not materialised into comprehensive and coordinated policies with an adequate level of quality and coverage for the growing demand for long-term care facing the region. However, Costa Rica and Uruguay are exceptions. Costa Rica has care services for older persons provided mainly through day care centres and home care (Sauma, 2012). In Uruguay, the National Care System (Sistema Nacional de Cuidados – SNC) established in 2016 (Law 19.353) includes care for dependent persons (children, disabled persons, and older persons) and respite care for professional caregivers. For older adults, the system includes personal helpers, telecare, and day centres.<sup>43</sup> The National Care System coverage is universal, but focuses on persons with severe disabilities.

In short, the region faces considerable challenges in terms of achieving coverage, financing, regulation, and quality of the services provided at levels comparable to those in European countries. This section has provided an overview of family entitlements, including quality childcare policies, as well as specific long-term care policies for older persons in the region. These issues are part of the broader challenge of consolidating comprehensive care policies that deal with the overall social organisation (ECLAC, 2023b). Such policies must simultaneously address the needs of those who require and provide care. These populations also include caregivers and persons with disabilities who require support and care. In addition to expanding the supply of care services, efforts to develop policies on comprehensive care must also cover policy regulation and the working conditions of care workers and training programmes in this area (UN Women and ECLAC, 2022), as well as policies related to resources and time for care (Rico and Robles, 2016). The design and consolidation of these policies is one of the most far-reaching challenges for the present and future of social protection systems.

## **D. Developing comprehensive, sustainable, and solidarity-based pension systems<sup>44</sup>**

Pension systems represent a fundamental element of universal social protection systems and of countries' welfare architectures. They play a key role in providing income security for millions of older persons. The importance of pension systems within social protection systems will only grow in the coming years as a result of accelerated population ageing. Migration dynamics also come with a number of challenges for pension system management, particularly in terms of ensuring greater interoperability between systems in countries that allow people to access a pension in old age. The opportunities and risks of digital social protection will play a key role in this process. Moreover, the instability that can be created by the various forces at play in the ongoing changes in the world of work may come with risks to maintaining the

<sup>42</sup> Respite policies are short-term support alternatives for the primary caregiver, usually associated with holidays, emergencies, and other rest-related needs.

<sup>43</sup> The system also includes residential care, but targets are set for the regulation of the nursing home market.

<sup>44</sup> This section is based on Arenas, Robles and Vila (2024), "El desafío de avanzar hacia la sostenibilidad de los sistemas de pensiones en América Latina", *Social Policy Series*, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (in press).

contribution levels required to ensure the financial sustainability of the systems. Anticipating the impacts of these changes will be vital to ensure a balance in which connecting contributory and non-contributory entitlements results in universal and quality insurance, thus helping to achieve one of the core objectives of pension systems: the eradication of poverty in old age.

As ECLAC has noted, sustainable pension systems must be consolidated from three angles—coverage, sufficiency, and financing—and integrate (as a core part of their design) the principles of social security, including social solidarity and gender equality (Arenas de Mesa, 2019; Arenas de Mesa, Robles and Vila, 2024). This approach has underpinned a number of recent pension reforms, particularly in those countries which, after the structural reform of the Chilean pension system in 1981, incorporated an individually funded scheme. An analysis carried out for 10 Latin American countries<sup>45</sup> on reforms implemented and discussed regarding the private pension scheme between 2008 and 2021 showed that for at least eight, there was a trend towards expanding and improving the social security component, while none of them included a proposal to improve the individually funded scheme (Mesa-Lago, 2022). There is a tendency in these debates to strengthen the principles of social security and, in particular, social solidarity in at least part of the components considered in the reform processes. This trend has already been identified in previous analyses over the past decade (Arenas de Mesa, 2019; ECLAC, 2018). Nevertheless, pension systems in the region face several challenges in each of their core dimensions and need to be strengthened as a matter of priority to address the growing demand they will continue to experience.

First, pension systems continue to face substantial coverage challenges that were further deepened by the crises triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic. Although coverage figures show an increase in 2021 compared to the situation in Latin America in 2020, they are still below 2019 levels. In 2021, 45.7% of the working population in 17 Latin American countries were paying into pension systems. In other words, 54.3% of this population, equivalent to about 140 million people, was not covered by this entitlement (see figure 36). This situation is a major challenge that demands urgent attention. Current labour and financial sustainability conditions in the region are limited in their ability to deal with coverage deficits and rising fiscal pressure for pensions in a very short time period, compared to the European experience. Whereas in 1960 the dependency ratio between people aged 65 and over and the population aged 15 to 64 was 13.6% in Europe and 6.2% in Latin America and the Caribbean, in 2020 this ratio reached 29.4% in Europe and 13.1% in Latin America and the Caribbean. By 2050, this rate is expected to reach 50.4% in Europe and 29.5% in Latin America and the Caribbean. In other words, while this rate will have more than tripled in Europe between 1960 and 2050, it will have more than quadrupled in the LAC region (Arenas de Mesa, Robles, and Vila, 2024).

With respect to the gaps in contributory pension systems, non-contributory pension systems have made it possible to significantly increase the percentage of older persons covered and reduce existing gender gaps. Coverage of this population has grown sharply: while 11 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean were identified as having such a system in 2000, by 2021 this figure had risen to 28 countries. This involves an increase in estimated coverage from 1 million people aged 65 and over in 2000, to more than 16 million people aged 65 and over in 2021 (i.e. an increase from 3.4% to 26.7% of this population between 2000 and 2021). Estimates have shown that without these systems, poverty among people aged 65 and over would rise from 13.4% to 18.5%, and extreme poverty from 3.6% to 7.8% (Arenas de Mesa, Robles, and Vila, 2024).

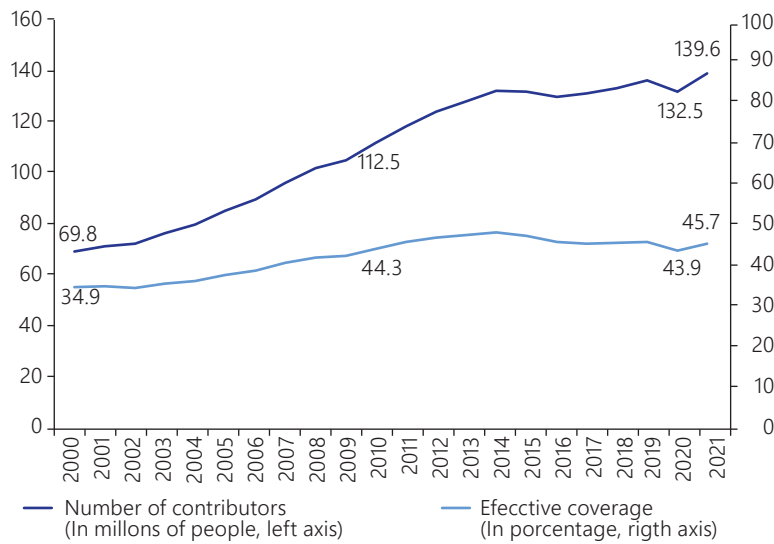
The expansion of non-contributory pension systems is unquestionably a highlight of social policy in the last two decades. Currently, only 5 out of 33 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean do not have such systems or programmes.<sup>46</sup> This expansion has established crucial infrastructure in the region's

<sup>45</sup> These countries are: Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Chile, Colombia, Dominican Republic, El Salvador, Mexico, Panama, Peru and Uruguay. For further background, see Table 7 in Mesa-Lago (2022).

<sup>46</sup> These countries are Grenada, Haiti, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Saint Lucia. For more information, see the Non-contributory Social Protection Programmes Database in Latin America and the Caribbean, Santiago [online] <https://dds.cepal.org/bpsnc/>. This database contains information on the status of 35 non-contributory pension programmes in 25 countries in Latin America and the Caribbean. No information is available for the non-contributory pension systems currently in place in Dominica, Jamaica, or Suriname.

countries that will make it possible to tackle a major unresolved challenge: the eradication of poverty in old age. It is also important to highlight the way these systems contribute to narrowing gender gaps in access to pension systems, thus helping to reduce inequality in this area (Arenas de Mesa and Robles, 2023).

**Figure 36**  
**Latin America (17 countries): economically active population (EAP)**  
**contributing to the pension system (coverage of active participants), 2000–2021**  
*(Millions of people and percentage)*



Source: A. Arenas de Mesa, C. Robles and J. Vila (2024), "El desafío de avanzar hacia la sostenibilidad de los sistemas de pensiones en América Latina", Social Policy Series, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) (in press).

However, the expansion of non-contributory pension systems cannot solve all the problems of pension systems in the region. Providing adequate entitlements remains a priority challenge that must be addressed by countries that have achieved higher levels of coverage. In 2020, 21.2% of people aged 65 and over received pensions below the poverty line in 13 Latin American countries, a figure that rises to 23.2% among women. This means that nearly one in four women received pensions that did not cover their basic needs. The levels of non-contributory pensions were also considerably lower than those of contributory pensions. From a financial sustainability standpoint, average spending in 17 Latin American countries has increased from 4.6% to 5.4% of GDP between 2017 and 2020 (Arenas de Mesa, Robles, and Vila, 2023).

In short, the region now needs to develop a new cycle of reforms to address the structural deficits that have been weighing on pension systems. Such reforms will need to be made while also confronting new challenges, with changing labour markets and new risks which may impact their operation. As 2020 showed, among other repercussions for pension systems, the pandemic involved a decade-long setback in coverage of the working population (ECLAC, 2022b).

Some of the issues that these reforms can address in this context are, firstly, making visible the role that pension system designs play in their final results, and highlighting the central role of the state in creating and implementing them. Although pension-related inequalities mostly reflect those originating in the labour market, they can be mitigated by a pension system design that seeks to reduce rather than deepen them. This can be achieved, for example, by identifying all those measures that may have a discriminatory and more unequal effect, such as the application of gender-differentiated mortality tables in individually funded schemes. Another example is the role that various existing mechanisms can play

in recognising periods of care, and thereby reducing gender inequalities in care. Of course, the fiscal contribution will continue to be vital in the further expansion of non-contributory pension systems in order to eliminate the risk of poverty in old age.

Second, it is essential to continue developing strategies to broaden the contributory base of the pension systems by including self-employed and informal workers while strengthening the institutional framework to eliminate pension evasion. This will also entail better coordination of the contributory and non-contributory entitlements of the pension systems to avoid incentives to remain outside the contributory systems. Third, at a time of rising uncertainty, improved solidarity will be required when designing and implementing pension systems. Leaving entitlement levels to be determined entirely by the market seems neither feasible nor desirable. This will require consensus on basic levels of social protection that can be provided through pension systems as part of the social, fiscal, and intergenerational pacts required for their present and future sustainability.

## **E. Developing universal health systems coordinated with universal social protection systems**

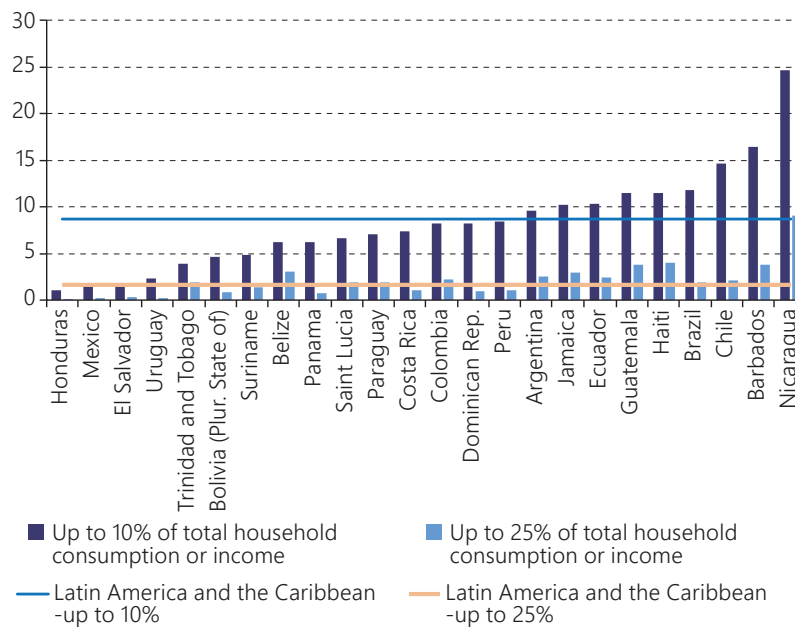
As part of the structural sectoral reforms, which have a direct impact on the various components of a reconfigured risk structure in the region, expanding universal health systems is a strategic priority. Health is a human right, understood according to the Constitution of the World Health Organization (WHO) as a state of complete physical, mental, and social well-being. According to the WHO, “the enjoyment of the highest attainable standard of health is one of the fundamental rights of every human being without distinction of race, religion, political belief, economic or social condition” (WHO, 1949, p. 1). Health has also been recognised as one of the basic guarantees of social security systems. Thus, according to the ILO Social Protection Floors Recommendation, 2012 (R202), access to essential health care throughout the life cycle is a minimum guarantee of social protection. Additionally, guaranteeing the right to health contributes to inclusive and sustainable social development, with profound impacts on economic development and environmental sustainability as well (Marinho, Dahuabe, and Arenas de Mesa, 2023).

However, achieving universal health coverage remains a challenge for Latin American and Caribbean countries. The health crisis triggered by the COVID-19 pandemic revealed the structural weaknesses affecting the region’s health systems and their inadequate coordination with social protection systems. Indicators such as excess deaths, disruption of essential health services, unmet demand for health care, the displacement effect, and the decrease in life expectancy show the far-reaching impact of the pandemic on both health systems and public health (ECLAC/PAHO, 2021; Cid and Marinho, 2022). Given the emergence of new health crises with epidemiological risks, these systems must be strengthened.

A major part of the difficulties experienced by health systems in attending to the population during the COVID-19 pandemic is attributed to the structural weaknesses that characterise this sector in the countries of the region. The underfunding, segmentation, and fragmentation led to a series of obstacles that hindered the containment of the virus’s spread, as well as a comprehensive and timely response to the pandemic (ECLAC, 2022b). Health systems in Latin America and the Caribbean are characterised by low public spending, a result of which is insufficient availability of medical staff and hospital beds. This is accompanied by high out-of-pocket expenditures, which not only perpetuate inequality in health access, but also lead to situations of catastrophic spending and impoverishment<sup>47</sup> (see figure 37). These indicators demonstrate people’s lack of financial protection against health eventualities and the income-related barriers to health-care access that persist in the region.

<sup>47</sup> Catastrophic health spending refers to out-of-pocket expenditure that imposes a substantial burden on household budgets. It is measured based on the thresholds of 10% or 25% of total household income or consumption.

**Figure 37**  
**Latin America and the Caribbean (24 countries): incidence of catastrophic health spending (%) as a percentage of total household consumption or income, 10% and 25% thresholds, latest available year<sup>a</sup>**  
 (Percentages)



Source: M.L. Marinho, A. Dahuabe, and A. Arenas de Mesa, A., "Salud y desigualdad en América Latina y el Caribe: la centralidad de la salud para el desarrollo social inclusivo y sostenible", *Social Policy Series*, N° 244 (LC/TS.2023/115), Santiago, Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC).

<sup>a</sup> For Bolivia (Plur. State of) and Peru, 2019 is the recent year reference; for Belize, Costa Rica, and the Dominican Republic, 2018; for Argentina, Brazil, and Panama, 2017; for Barbados, Chile, Colombia, Mexico, Saint Lucia, Suriname, and Uruguay, 2016; for El Salvador, Guatemala, Nicaragua, Paraguay, and Trinidad and Tobago, 2014; for Ecuador and Haiti, 2013; and for Honduras and Jamaica, 2004.

Chronic underfunding is combined with segments or subsystems with different and separate modalities of financing, affiliation, and service provision that prevent solidarity between different income levels, and furthermore condition access to health care based on the population's ability to pay rather than on need. This creates significant difficulties in health care access and gaps in terms of quality and entitlements covered, mainly among population groups in situations of vulnerability. Segmented systems are generally reflected in the presence of a public system for people receiving non-contributory entitlements, a social security sector for people accessing contributory health care, mainly formally employed people and their families, and a minority of the population affiliated with the private sector. While there are differences in health access and quality in countries with high levels of segmentation, the countries in the region with lower levels of segmentation and with financing that tends towards universality and solidarity (such as Costa Rica and Uruguay) have better health outcomes in terms of health indicators such as maternal and infant mortality, and life expectancy (ECLAC, 2022b). Furthermore, when considering the organisation and coordination of health services, the region has significantly high levels of fragmentation. This is reflected in the existence of health facilities that operate in a disjointed manner, without allowing for adequate standardisation of content, quality, and cost of care.

These weaknesses coalesced in a negative way during the pandemic response, thus exposing the difficulties faced by the region's health systems in guaranteeing the right to health amidst challenges that emerged due to a reconfigured risk structure. The pressure on health systems from new risks and ongoing processes is undeniable. One example of this is the challenges associated with the current epidemiological transition, marked by an increasing prevalence of non-communicable and chronic diseases, resulting in a heavy burden on health systems and a significant deterioration in public health. This transition goes hand in hand with the demographic transition, marked by an ageing population which amplifies and accelerates the new profile of the predominant diseases in the region's countries (see section I.A.4).

However, public health depends not only on people's access to health systems, but also on the conditions in which they are born, grow up, live, work, and age – i.e. the social determinants of health (WHO/CSDH, 2008). These determinants are unequally distributed across society, according to the underlying components of the social inequality matrix (ECLAC, 2016). The impact of these factors on health explains the need to strengthen the coordination between health policies and the other components of social protection systems (ECLAC, 2021).

Social protection contributes significantly to achieving the right to health for all people via actions and programmes such as paid leave, cash transfer programmes, labour inclusion programmes, pension systems, care systems and policies, housing programmes, and access to basic services, among others. Such support mechanisms contribute positively to people's health status, and to the reduction of health inequalities throughout the life cycle. In turn, given the interdependence between the right to health and other rights, health policies can enhance the functioning of social protection systems by helping to reduce all dimensions of poverty and inequalities (Hone and others, 2018).

Primary health care (PHC) plays a strategic role in coordinating with social protection and promoting the changes required by health systems to move towards universality, which is why it is considered a priority area (Marinho, Dahuabe, and Arenas de Mesa, 2023). First, PHC contributes directly to reducing inequalities and overcoming poverty by acting on the social determinants of health, primarily through the first level of health care. From there, PHC implements nutrition and food delivery programmes, financial protection, access to sexual and reproductive health, and monitoring of the risk of violation of rights of vulnerable populations, among others, which strengthen the functioning of social protection systems. PHC also helps increase access to and effective coverage of health systems.

By strengthening PHC, it is then possible to address the fragmentation of health services and the segmentation of the demand for care, based on people's ability to pay (ECLAC, 2022b). Along with increasing public spending on health in the region with a view to achieving PAHO's recommendation to allocate 6% of GDP to the sector, consolidating a solid and robust PHC strategy supports the development of health systems that (i) guarantee universal access and coverage; (ii) are linked to other sectors and public policies, and especially other dimensions of social protection; (iii) ensure the financial sustainability of coverage and entitlements for future generations; and (iv) are resilient enough to pre-empt challenges and adapt to changes without violating people's right to health. This is essential to address the risks emerging from the reconfigured risk structure, thus consolidating an inclusive and sustainable social development strategy that leaves no one behind.

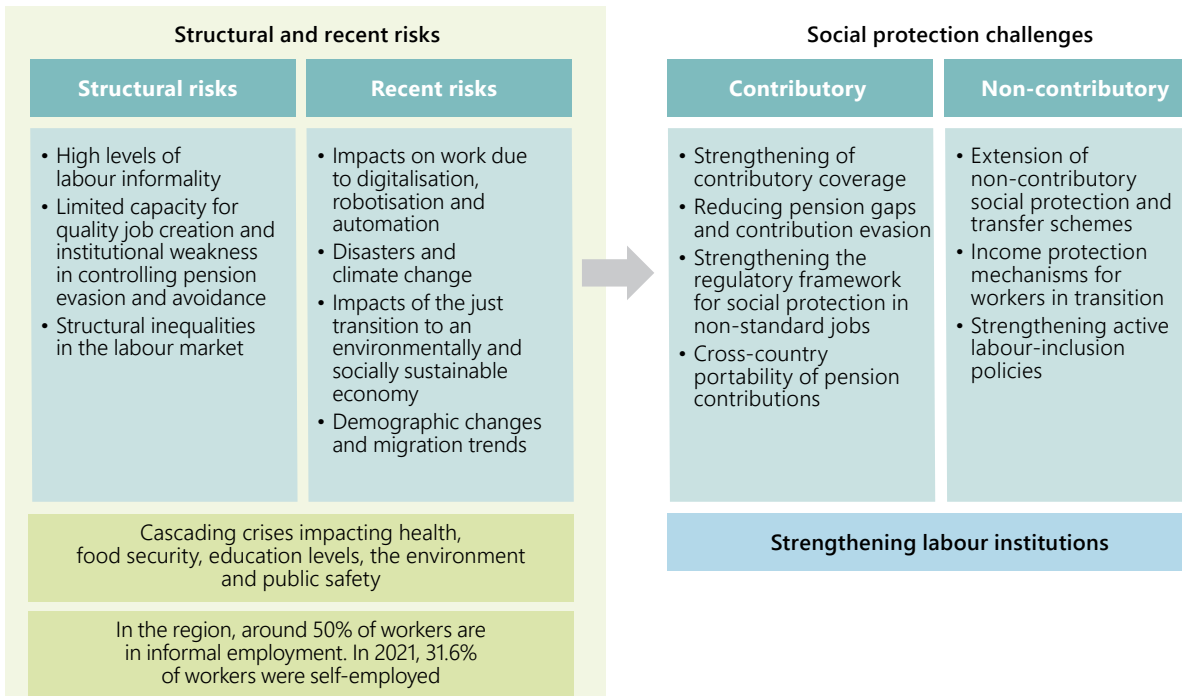
## **F. Achieving better coordination between social protection and labour inclusion policies**

As ECLAC has argued, employment is the master key to reducing inequalities (ECLAC, 2010). However, for this to become a reality, it is not enough to consolidate broad levels of employment —efforts must also be made to improve labour inclusion. Labour inclusion is an objective of inclusive social development that seeks to ensure all members of the workforce have access to decent jobs which provide adequate levels of remuneration and social protection coverage. In other words, it combines a twofold focus on labour inclusion and attention to the conditions of employment (ECLAC, 2023b). Access to social protection plays a dual role in achieving this objective: first, it allows people to acquire the necessary skills to access higher quality jobs, thus reducing some of the barriers to entry into the labour market; second, it gives them permanent protection against the fluctuations of employment and labour-market trajectories, along with economic protection in old age.

Given the structural and recent risks facing the region, there are many challenges for labour inclusion with guaranteed access to social protection (see diagram 10). The region presents an unfulfilled promise of universal access to social protection through formal employment, given the high levels of

labour informality that affect around half of the region's working population. This in turn is explained by and reinforces the limited capacity to create quality employment, thus hindering labour inclusion with decent remuneration, working conditions, and access to social protection. A third factor is the weakness of labour institutions in monitoring compliance with pension obligations in the region's countries, although there has been some progress in this respect. In some cases, this reduces the effective social protection coverage of formal workers, which limits their access to or sufficiency of entitlements such as pensions due to pension gaps created in the past (ECLAC, 2018), and it can even maintain informal jobs within the formal sector of the economy (Abramo, Cecchini, and Morales, 2019).

**Diagram 10**  
The challenges of labour-market inclusion with access to the social protection system in the region



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

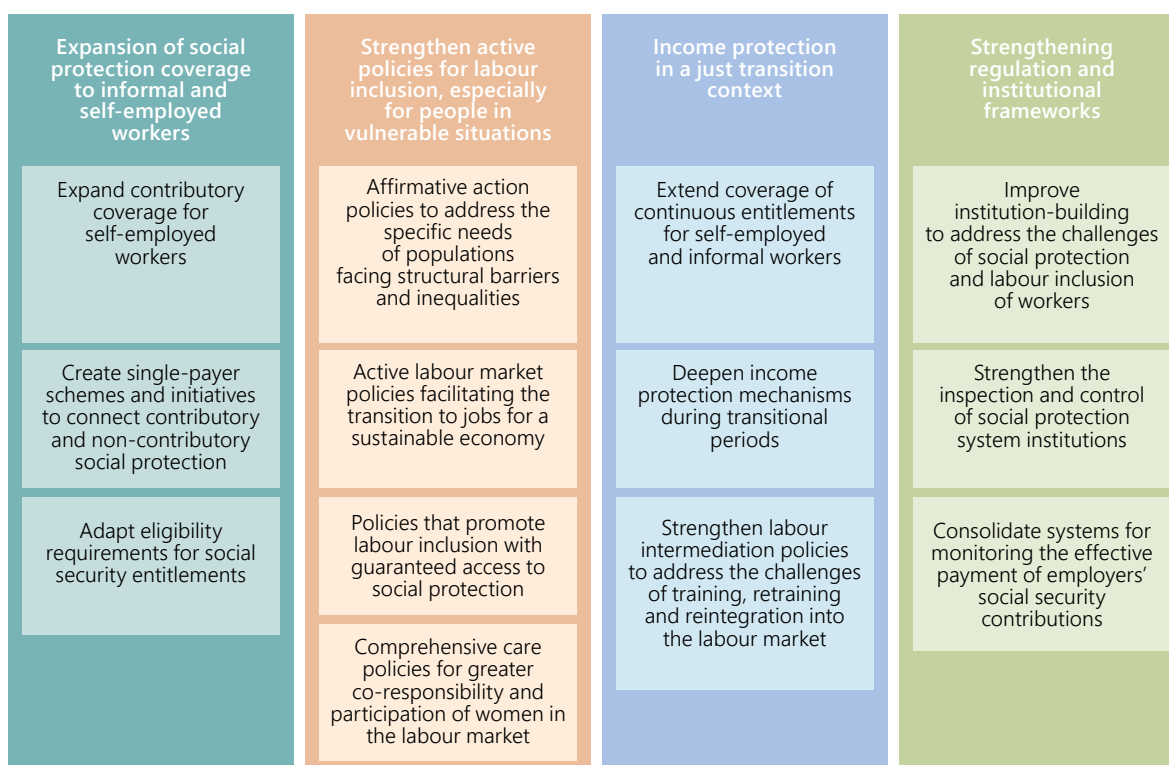
Persistent inequalities in labour market access also mean that certain populations experience greater difficulties in accessing quality jobs. For women, this phenomenon is strongly linked to the inequalities in the labour market and the lack of comprehensive care policies. These inequalities also affect other populations such as young persons, persons belonging to Indigenous groups and populations of African descent, persons with disabilities, and migrants, among others, for whom the components of social inequality and factors such as discrimination intersect (ECLAC, 2023b).

As detailed in chapter I, in addition to these structural risks, there are also risks of a more recent nature linked to transformations in the world of work. These transformations include those associated with the technological revolution and the impacts of digitalisation, robotisation and automation, as well as new information and communication technologies in production processes and jobs. They also include the consequences of the demographic transition and the progressive ageing of the population, in addition to increased migration, and the repercussions associated with the challenges of transitioning to an environmentally sustainable and just economy (ECLAC, 2019; Weller, 2023; Huepe, 2023). The latter issues may also result in new processes of job destruction and creation.

Given these risks, social protection systems face a number of challenges (see diagram 10). In terms of contributory policies, challenges include: (i) the need to strengthen strategies to expand coverage for workers, usually improving quality in terms of the sufficiency of entitlements and insurance coverage; (ii) the strengthening of labour inspection, including preventing pension evasion and avoidance; (iii) the regulation of new forms of employment; and (iv) the portability of pension contributions, among other possible measures. In addition to these items, labour institutions must be strengthened. Conversely, in the area of non-contributory policies, along with expanding them to ensure universal coverage for all people, greater coordination with labour inclusion policies is required. More specifically, this is needed to handle labour transition contexts during potential periods of labour reintegration because of the changes already underway. Further, these risks also pose challenges to the design of labour inclusion policies and the strengthening of active policies, particularly those aimed at people living in poverty or in situations of severe vulnerability or social exclusion. Such policies must effectively facilitate access to employment under decent working conditions, with adequate levels of remuneration, workplace safety, and guaranteed access to social protection. Data from the region are mixed on this point, and show significant challenges to be overcome in order for these policies to effectively guarantee access to social protection for their recipients.

Considering this information, it is possible to identify a set of recommendations for social protection policies that seek to confront the challenges of labour inclusion and move towards universal social protection for workers. The recommendations can be divided into four categories: (i) expanding social protection coverage to informal and self-employed workers; (ii) strengthening active policies for labour inclusion, especially for the most vulnerable; (iii) incorporating mechanisms for income protection within the context of the just transition; and (iv) strengthening labour regulations and institutions (see diagram 11). Each of these recommendations is developed below.

**Diagram 11**  
Policy proposals to strengthen social protection to address the challenges of labour inclusion



Source: Prepared by the authors.

## 1. Expanding social protection coverage to informal and self-employed workers

The region has extensive experience in designing policies to expand contributory coverage for self-employed workers (Bernal, 2022; Gontero and Weller, 2017; Robles, Tenenbaum, and Jacas, 2023). These policies include legislation that has sought to regulate the compulsory or voluntary social security contributions (depending on the country) of self-employed workers, as is the case in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, and Uruguay (Bertranou, 2009). While these regulations are not always universal and there are challenges in ensuring the necessary coordination and monitoring required for their implementation, they can contribute significantly to expanding contributory coverage.

Second, single-payer policies have also been created and implemented in some countries such as Argentina, Brazil, Colombia, and Uruguay. These mechanisms allow self-employed workers to enrol for social security entitlements through a system that simplifies tax and social security contributions. The fiscal contributions required to sustain this measure, coupled with the high instability of self-employed workers' incomes and the possible difficulties they may encounter in meeting their social security contribution payments (Gontero and Weller, 2017), may make the financial sustainability of this measure more complex.<sup>48</sup> It is also key to emphasise the importance of developing a strategy for these workers to gradually transition to the general social security regime, so they can access full social security entitlements rather than only partial entitlements, as is the case with this type of policy (Abramo, 2021). However, these schemes may offer the possibility for closer links between contributory and non-contributory social protection, such as by creating the option for inclusion in these schemes through participation in cash transfer programmes.

Third, adapting eligibility requirements for social security entitlements is a measure that also supports the expansion of social protection coverage to those who are not formally employed. Examples include the *Pensión Rural* in Brazil; the *Beneficios Económicos Periódicos* system (BEPS) in Colombia;<sup>49</sup> a maternity allowance for self-employed women, the *Subsidio Familiar* for housewives and the *Subsidio Maternal* in Chile;<sup>50</sup> and the *Asignación por Embarazo para Protección Social* in Argentina.<sup>51</sup> These policies exemplify possible alternatives for extending social protection coverage to self-employed and informal workers, which also may include workers in new forms of employment. Regarding those working in atypical forms of employment or for platforms, various adaptations to the entry requirements of existing instruments have been identified, and can extend such coverage through the elimination or reduction of minimum thresholds for hours worked, earnings, length or times of employment, continuity, and contribution minimums (Behrendt and Nguyen, 2018; Spasova and others, 2022).

## 2. Strengthen active policies for labour inclusion, especially for people in vulnerable situations

At least three areas need to be considered when working to better connect labour inclusion policies and social protection policies as a whole. First, based on an approach of a universalism that is sensitive to differences, and taking into account the underlying components of social inequality in the region, labour inclusion policies must consider the specific barriers and support needs of the populations experiencing the most vulnerability. For example, this entails developing specific incentives for labour inclusion of the most excluded populations through affirmative action policies to specifically address the barriers they face, and implementing specific training programmes (Huepe, 2023). It is essential to consider the gender barriers and inequalities that women especially face in their inclusion in the labour market, and to connect the expansion of care systems with labour-market inclusion policies.

Second, within the context of discussions on the just transition and in the midst of recurrent crises,

<sup>48</sup> Aguiar and others (2023) report on other challenges of the single-payer social regime in Uruguay, and specifically a possible consolidation of a "second-rate social security system" that does not provide entitlements to overcome job insecurity and increase the population's levels of social protection.

<sup>49</sup> See Bernal (2022).

<sup>50</sup> See [online] <https://www.chileatiende.gob.cl/hito-vida/Tener+un+hijo+o+hija/Solicita+apoyo+econ%C3%B3mico+durante+el+embarazo>.

<sup>51</sup> See [online] <https://www.argentina.gob.ar/justicia/derechofacil/leysimple/asignacion-por-embarazo-para-proteccion-social#:~:text=%C2%BFQu%C3%A9%20es%20la%20asignaci%C3%B3n%20por,cobrar%209%20meses%20como%20m%C3%A1ximo>.

active labour-market policies must be strengthened so that they can facilitate the transition to jobs for a sustainable economy, including training in new skills, and support for job searches and re-employment opportunities (ITUC, 2019; ILO, 2018).

Third, it is imperative that most of the region's existing labour inclusion programmes give workers access to social protection systems to achieve the goal of labour inclusion. For example, schemes such as on-the-job training programmes, the promotion of micro-entrepreneurship, or direct job creation, should include access to social protection systems. The regional experience shows a disparate reality in this area (Espejo and others, 2023).

### 3. Income protection in a just transition context

To address the structural gaps in social protection coverage that particularly affect self-employed and informal workers, and given the challenges posed by changes already underway, the existing mechanisms that seek to protect these groups' incomes must be further enhanced. This entails extending key instruments with low legal and effective coverage in the region, such as unemployment insurance. It is also crucial to improve mechanisms that continue to extend income protection coverage to informal and self-employed workers. Examples of these mechanisms include transfers during maternity periods when no leave coverage exists (e.g. in Argentina and Chile), and pension system contributions (e.g. in Brazil and Colombia), among others. These policies can be designed with a view towards including these workers in contributory social protection, as well as filling the coverage gaps that persist in the region.

Second, entitlements must safeguard the income levels of workers in the process of retraining and reintegrating the workforce, comprising part of just transition strategy and mitigating the impact of technological changes on jobs. The experience of minimum income policies in Europe could offer a way forward. These are policies that often combine cash transfers with mechanisms to enhance the labour-market inclusion of recipients (Frazer and Marlier, 2015), as is the case of the *Ingreso Mínimo Vital* in Spain. For their part, conditional transfer programmes have, in some cases, included conditionalities subject to a work requirement. This approach can be reconsidered and strengthened to take the current context into account so that cash transfer schemes include informal workers in the region, and support their integration into jobs aligned with a just environmental and technological transition. During emergencies, synergies can be strengthened between a basic emergency income and labour inclusion policies, particularly those aimed at skills training (as the pandemic showed) as part of the synergies between active and passive labour-market policies.

This, in turn, is linked to the strategic role that labour intermediation policies can play in these processes. These types of policies will be increasingly important in dealing with the challenges of training, retraining, and reintegration into the job market arising from the digital revolution and the transition to an environmentally sustainable economy. The aim is to link workers to new job offers and programmes that enable them to expand their skills. These policies can be better connected to unemployment insurance, so that when the entitlement is received, access to programmes aimed at labour-market reintegration and training in new skills will also be provided.

### 4. Strengthen regulation and institutional frameworks

Finally, it is worth highlighting the role of a stronger institutional architecture of social policy in jointly addressing the challenges of social protection and labour inclusion. Part of the labour institutional framework refers to the rules that govern the relationship between employers and employees. These rules encompass "[...] labour legislation, inspection policies, collective bargaining mechanisms and the setting of minimum wages, among other actions that delineate the general conditions of work" (Huepe, 2023, p. 208). The inspection and oversight function is central to ensuring that employers are paying their social security contributions, which allows employees access to all social security entitlements during and at the end of their working lives. This role must be strengthened as crises become recurrent and the world of work changes to account for the essential role of social protection in guaranteeing decent living

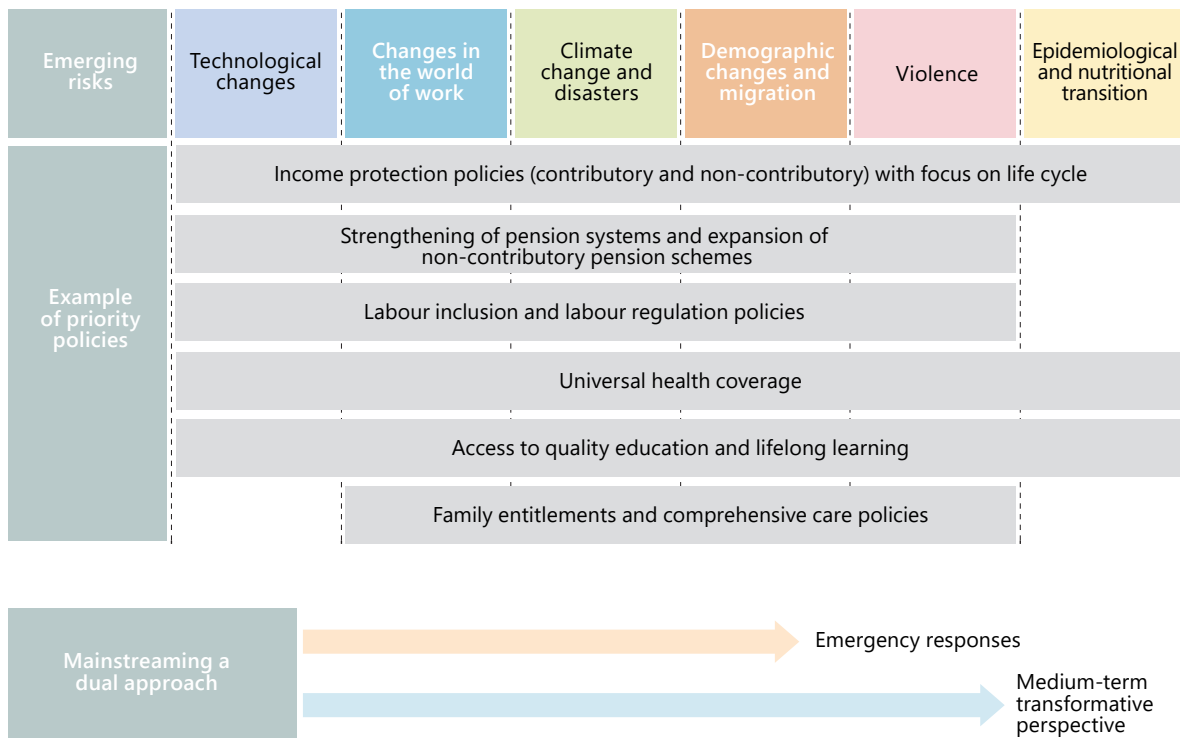
conditions in circumstantial moments, and throughout the life cycle. In this context, it is important to strengthen capacities and resources to ensure more effective labour inspection. In particular, mechanisms that ensure the correct payment of social security contributions to reduce social security evasion and avoidance must be reinforced.

### G. Closing thoughts

Although the proposals discussed in this chapter do not claim to be exhaustive, they can be regarded as strategic guidance on addressing the future challenges of social protection systems. They offer possible ways to achieve universality and reduce gaps in coverage and sufficiency, with attention given to the differentiated needs of the target populations, and with a focus on comprehensiveness and coordination between the various policies and components of these systems as well as their resilience to recurrent crises. To make policies sustainable, improvements must be carefully designed and prioritised to incorporate or extend existing entitlements in accordance with the guidelines provided at the beginning of this chapter. Strengthening the institutional architecture of social policy will be key in this area, as discussed in the next chapter.

As diagram 12 shows, the policies analysed in this section as a whole address the various phenomena that explain the current reconfigured structure of social risks, which also contribute to the structural risks in the region. These risks include poverty, vulnerability, inequality, informality, and gaps in access to social services for skills development. These policies are also linked to the components of the social protection systems identified in diagram 8, which comprise the various contributory and non-contributory policies, labour inclusion and regulation policies, comprehensive care policies, and policies aimed at guaranteeing universal access and coverage to health, and access to quality education, combined with lifelong learning.

**Diagram 12**  
Policies to deal with a risk structure under reconfiguration



Source: Prepared by the authors.

In this way, they take a three-pronged approach to tackling structural deficits in social protection systems, creating or strengthening mechanisms for adaptation and response to emergencies and crises, and managing changes in the risk structure that will condition social protection in the future. Each of these phenomena requires specific policies and combines a focus on emergency response and medium-term changes, in accordance with the diverse nature of the risks. With regard to policies aimed at establishing medium-term change processes, these include policies to prepare social protection systems and their various components to cope with the demographic and nutritional transition, the climate crisis, changes in the world of work, and technological transformations. Policies are also required to deal with events with a high probability of creating immediate shocks to the population's welfare levels, such as disasters and economic crises.

Advancing towards a comprehensive outlook on the future of social protection in Latin America and the Caribbean is a challenge for guaranteeing collective well-being and limiting uncertainty through policies that seek to achieve inclusive and sustainable social development. Social protection is at the heart of these policies, and the consolidation of strategic choices conditions this possibility.

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## Annex IV.A1

**Table IV.A.1**  
**Latin America (15 countries): monthly and annual values<sup>a</sup> of a transfer equivalent to the absolute poverty gap among the population aged 0–17 years, around 2021**  
*(In 2018 dollars and percentages)*

Poverty gap						
Country	Year	Incidence of poverty	Average monthly transfer value	Target population	Annual spending	
		Percentages	In dollars	In thousands of people	In millions of dollars	As a % of GDP in 2022
Argentina <sup>b</sup>	2021	42.1	62	3 388	2 635	0.5
Bolivia (Plur. State of)	2021	40.2	38	1 671	809	2
Brazil	2021	38.8	45	20 608	11 676	0.6
Chile	2020	20.3	64	913	732	0.2
Colombia	2021	49.8	39	7 361	3 626	0.9
Costa Rica	2021	30.2	47	362	216	0.3
Dominican Republic	2021	36	30	1 171	445	0.5
Ecuador	2021	38.9	31	2 403	928	0.9
Honduras	2019	61.7	43	2 036	1 095	4.2
Mexico	2020	50.6	45	18 753	10 620	0.9
Panama	2021	25.3	37	299	141	0.2
Peru	2021	27.7	38	2 834	1 373	0.6
Paraguay	2021	29.5	26	730	242	0.6
El Salvador	2021	41.8	39	748	363	1.3
Uruguay	2021	9.8	34	85	36	0.1
Simple average <sup>c</sup>		36.2	41	63 363	34 937	0.9

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Espíndola (2023), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

<sup>a</sup> Figures aggregated annually and as a percentage of GDP include an administrative cost equivalent to 5% of the amount of benefits.

<sup>b</sup> Urban areas.

<sup>c</sup> Simple average of the countries, with the exception of the target population and annual expenditure in millions of dollars, which correspond to an aggregate of 15 countries.

**Table IV.A.2**  
**Latin America (15 countries): monthly and annual values<sup>a</sup> of a transfer equivalent**  
**to the absolute extreme poverty gap among the population aged 0–17 years, around 2021**

Extreme poverty gap						
Country	Year	Incidence of extreme poverty	Average monthly transfer value	Target population	Annual spending	
		Percentages	In dollars	In thousands of people	In millions of dollars	As a % of GDP in 2022
Argentina <sup>b</sup>	2021	6	31	484	183	0
Bolivia (Plurinational State of)	2021	14.6	24	607	175	0.4
Brazil	2021	13	23	6 939	1 885	0.1
Chile	2020	5	44	225	119	0
Colombia	2021	22.7	20	3 357	786	0.2
Costa Rica	2021	6.8	23	82	23	0
Dominican Republic	2021	9.5	15	307	55	0.1
Ecuador	2021	11.2	14	689	117	0.1
Honduras	2019	25.2	13	833	130	0.5
Mexico	2020	14.1	18	5 219	1 126	0.1
Panama	2021	10.1	19	119	27	0
Peru	2021	6.4	18	654	137	0.1
Paraguay	2021	8.9	11	221	28	0.1
El Salvador	2021	12	20	214	51	0.2
Uruguay	2021	0.1	24	1	0	0
Simple average <sup>c</sup>		11	21	19 950	4 843	0.1

Source: Prepared by the authors on the basis of Espíndola (2023), Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of the Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG).

<sup>a</sup> Figures aggregated annually and as a percentage of GDP include an administrative cost equivalent to 5% of the amount of benefits.

<sup>b</sup> Urban areas.

<sup>c</sup> Simple average of the countries, with the exception of the target population and annual expenditure in millions of dollars, which correspond to an aggregate of 15 countries.



## V. Opportunities and challenges for strengthening institutional capacities for social protection

Raúl Holz  
Amalia Palma

In a world facing multiple crises and a reconfiguring risk structure simultaneously, the institutional capacity to address the gaps in social protection systems in a financially sustainable manner is permanently challenged. Despite the progress made in recent years, there are still challenges to address in the consolidation of a sufficiently solid and flexible institutional framework. This framework must meet emerging challenges while also guaranteeing access to social protection in order to eradicate poverty and significantly reduce inequalities (ECLAC, 2023).

As previously indicated, it is possible to characterise the institutional architecture of social policy based on four dimensions: (i) legal and regulatory; (ii) organisational; (iii) technical and operational (linked to policy implementation); and (iv) financial (ECLAC, 2015, 2022, 2023; Martínez and Maldonado, 2019) (see section III.D.1). From this perspective, despite the heterogeneity of institutional models and scopes across the region, common challenges applicable to social protection systems include: (i) adjusting national regulatory frameworks to the international standards and commitments adopted by the countries; (ii) articulating social policies that are fragmented by sectoral dynamics and between different levels of government, as well as having clearly defined leadership in social policy; (iii) establishing technical-operational tools that make social policy viable throughout the policy cycle, which includes the capacity to effectively and transparently manage resources in order to generate trust and certainty among citizens; and (iv) having sustainable financial resources that align with the objectives (ECLAC, 2021, 2023; Martínez and Maldonado, 2019). For the Ministry of Social Development (MSD), often designated as the governing body of social policy and in charge of non-contributory social protection, a challenge also emerges pertaining to the simultaneous and four-dimensional advancement of the social institutional framework considering that the actors (deliberative and decision-making bodies) tend not to be the same and are beyond the realm of their coordination.

From a rights-based approach, and considering the four dimensions of the institutional framework for social policy, several components that can be strengthened in the context of recurrent crises are discussed below.<sup>52</sup> These include, as indicated in Chapter III, an organisational framework based on norms and plans that can provide the structure and basic principles to guide the formulation and implementation of social protection policies. This in turn requires a clearly identified social authority and adequate coordination mechanisms. Second, with the objective of progressively achieving universal coverage, the strategic prioritisation of policies and programmes from a rights-based approach is fundamental. Third, comprehensive social protection is necessary to advance resilient systems that incorporate all dimensions of development and therefore respond effectively and efficiently to new crises. Moving forward together will allow to unite the efforts of the different social and economic development sectors for the development of comprehensive programmes. Coordination between different policy sectors and different levels of government is key to solving multifactorial social problems. Fourth, progress is needed in understanding the digital transformation of social protection systems. This is a growing phenomenon that transcends elements usually identified as financial access and digital applications for entitlements. It also has implications for each of the functions of social protection systems and their institutional framework, including the human and technical capacities of ministries. Further, as indicated in the introduction, it is a phenomenon that may condition the social protection of the future. Fifth, it is essential to consolidate social information systems, with broad and possibly universal social registries of potential recipients. This will advance the incorporation of the active search principle in the design of social protection policies, identifying the needs of the population and especially persistent gaps to leave no one behind, as indicated in lines of action 1.8 and 3.1.9 of the Regional Agenda for Inclusive Social Development (ECLAC, 2020). Finally, the challenge of financial sustainability and the quality of human resources is briefly outlined to ensure well-being in accordance with social rights and to ensure the effective implementation of social protection policies and programmes.

It should be noted that, in addition to these challenges, there are also a number of opportunities to explore based on the progress achieved during the COVID-19 pandemic. Chapter III discussed in detail the response mobilised in terms of non-contributory social protection in this context. A series of innovations in the implementation of these measures were highlighted, including the increase in social spending on social protection, the massive expansion of the coverage of social registries, and the incorporation of new mechanisms to connect the supply and demand of social entitlements, with a strong technological and digital component. This process of strengthening the institutional capacity of social protection systems is not an assured achievement, and must be translated into sustainable actions that make it possible to incorporate advancements and learn from the implementation lessons.

### **A. A guiding institutional framework from a rights-based approach to establish the foundation of a social protection system**

Having a guiding framework for the social protection system which translates into regulatory, normative or policy guidelines is of particular relevance. It provides the structure and basic principles that guide the formulation and implementation of social protection policies to eradicate poverty and reduce inequalities. From a rights-based approach, it provides a normative framework with guiding principles and criteria for the social protection system. This is then positioned as the ultimate goal of policies and must be considered at all stages of the design and implementation of policies and programmes. It responds to a series of principles that should be incorporated to guide the ultimate objective of policies and programmes

<sup>52</sup> The components described in this chapter are not intended to be exhaustive of all the institutional challenges facing social protection systems. They have been identified from the position papers of the Regional Conference on Social Development in Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC, 2021 and 2023) and analysed on the basis of empirical evidence systematised in the process of technical assistance to seven countries in the region: Brazil, Costa Rica, Honduras, Mexico, Paraguay, Peru and the Dominican Republic within the framework of the ECLAC-BMZ/GIZ Project "Transformative Reactivation: Overcoming the consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in Latin America and the Caribbean".

towards the universal guarantee of all human rights, especially the so-called economic, social, cultural, and environmental rights (ESCR) anchored in existing international instruments. Some of the elements considered essential for social protection programmes from a rights-based approach are: (i) equality and non-discrimination; (ii) comprehensiveness; (iii) institutional framework; (iv) participation; (v) transparency and access to information; and (vi) accountability (Cecchini and Rico, 2015; Sepúlveda, 2014).

A rights-based social protection system, legally binding, requires states to ensure compliance with human rights obligations both in the content of their social protection policies and in the process by which they are implemented. Each policy should assist in removing barriers to the enjoyment of one or more rights. In this way, a legally grounded social protection programme is more likely to be sustained and to contribute effectively to the eradication of poverty and reduction of inequalities. Although there has been progress in the legal and constitutional recognition of social rights, it has not necessarily translated into formal expressions of social guarantees in social protection (Cecchini and Rico, 2015; ECLAC, 2023; Martínez and Maldonado, 2019; ECLAC, 2023).

Institutional frameworks for social policy must clearly determine the means of access to their components, articulate them among the responsible entities, and employ coordination mechanisms between them. It is therefore not a matter of having a single entity as the only one responsible for implementing the policies and programmes that make up the social protection systems. The specific framework will vary depending on how the sectoral offer of social protection policies and programmes is organised in the country and how contributory and non-contributory entitlements are articulated, as well as on the decisions and institutional capacities of each country. Their expression at the legal level also makes it possible to link entitlements with the budgetary allocation required for their implementation. Therefore, despite there being no single model for establishing a guiding framework for the social protection system, it is important that the mandate creating the specific entity or the social protection system stipulates that the latter will provide coverage for potential contingencies that may arise over the course of a person's life.

Furthermore, it is not enough to have a clear mandate. The legal command must have a correspondence in the organisational structure of the MSDs and other institutions involved in the operation of social protection systems. In fact, it is essential that there be coherence between the mandates and the organisational structure for the exercise of their functions (ECLAC, 2023). This organisational structure should also be based on legislation capable of being adjusted to the political, economic, and social context, ultimately providing the necessary flexibility to adapt to the challenges arising from new scenarios. In the context of this flexibility and reflecting the coherence between the mandates and organisational structure, it should be possible to accommodate the prioritisation of thematic areas and population groups.

Progress in coherence between the mandates and the organisational structure should be followed by a corresponding enhancement in governing, coordinating and managerial capacities necessary to leading a comprehensive social protection system. For its part, the governing function requires sequential coherence with the operational management of programmes and defined objectives. This helps to prevent discretion in and duplication of programmes. In turn, it is important that there are governing and resource capacities within the smaller administrative units to coordinate, manage, and implement programmes in accordance with the prioritised population (ECLAC, 2015; Martínez and Maldonado, 2019).

Within the guiding framework, it is critical to identify the actors in social policy and participating institutions. Once identified, it is important to specify the mandates and roles of social authority and coordination mechanisms, and to define how the mandates of various institutions are articulated (ECLAC, 2023). To this end, it is important to elaborate plans that define policies and operational implementation. These plans are key to organising and ordering the actions and priorities to be undertaken and in defining how coordination between the different components and instruments of social protection systems will be carried out.

For the effective functioning of the governing role, it is essential that all participating units operate in a coordinated manner. This requires that the coordination bodies are included in the legislation, and that their functions are clearly established. A norm regulating the social protection system must clearly establish the functions and objectives of each entity and social entitlement, coordinating the relationship between all of them, so that the system can function harmoniously with the other components and entities that comprise it.

## **B. Prioritisation of policies and programmes from a rights-based approach**

From a rights-based approach, prioritisation should be used with the objective of progressively achieving universal coverage. In this regard, one of the fundamental strategic decisions of any social policy is the prioritisation of the most vulnerable groups and populations, such as children and adolescents, young and older persons, Indigenous people, Afro-descendant populations, and persons with disabilities. However, it is essential to bear in mind that the prioritisation of social protection programmes is a critical component of a broader development strategy that aims for the universal realisation of all economic, social, cultural, environmental, civil, and political rights (ECLAC, 2020; Arenas de Mesa and Cecchini, 2022; Martínez, Maldonado Valera, and Schönsteiner, 2022).

In the case of countries expanding their social protection system, it is crucial to advance in the consolidation of entitlements to guarantee basic income protection for all (see section IV.B). From a life-cycle approach, one option for making progress in reducing current poverty levels and inequalities is to prioritise the extremes of the life cycle; children and older persons (Santos Garcia, Farias, and Robles, 2023). These populations face special challenges in the protection of their income, highlighting the relevance of social programmes at the extremes of the life cycle and the lower end of the income distribution. Based on ample academic evidence arguing that comprehensive early childhood care programmes are key to interrupting the intergenerational transmission of poverty, reducing inequality, and promoting human development, some countries in the region have chosen to prioritise entitlements for families with children in the early stages of child development. Moreover, many countries in the region also have non-contributory pension systems for older persons. This concern for the extremes of the life cycle has also been reflected through increased coverage in the mandates of ministries of social development and their organisational structure (ECLAC, 2023).

The prioritisation also makes it possible to decide what type of entitlements should be delivered at specific times, thus improving the effectiveness and efficiency of actions aimed at specific groups. In this sense, having clear, precise, and updated social information<sup>53</sup> makes it possible to articulate existing entitlements, as well as new components that support the fulfilment of social policy objectives. However, the focus must remain on the long-term objective of universality. Therefore, it is also necessary to consider how to expand coverage and sufficiency over time, and finance it in a sustainable manner (ECLAC, 2020).

## **C. Towards greater comprehensiveness of social protection**

The comprehensive supply of social protection policies and programmes must respond to the demands and needs of the population. Thus, a challenge arises on the supply side of social protection programmes and policies that involves not only the MSD or the entities in charge of implementing social security policies in the countries, but also other sectors, that have, for instance, the mandate for education, health or labour policies. Horizontal and vertical coordination is therefore key given the interdependence between the areas and levels of government involved, but always with the ultimate objective of achieving greater comprehensiveness in social protection. It is therefore important that a social protection system should

<sup>53</sup> Social information corresponds to the socioeconomic characterisation of households and individuals, as well as data on the entitlements they receive from the State.

have an intersectoral dimension that addresses the multidimensional nature of social issues, and that this should be formalised through legislation at the national level. However, the demand side of families, individuals, and communities presents a challenge for social protection's response to the rights, needs, and risks inherent to each stage of the life cycle (longitudinal) and across population groups (transversal) (Cecchini and Martinez, 2011; ECLAC, 2020). Coordination thus acquires a crucial role throughout the entire policy cycle of social protection systems (Schwarzer, Tessier and Gammage, 2014).

Actions can achieve increasing levels of horizontal comprehensiveness (across young persons, persons with disabilities, or Indigenous persons, for example) or also target specific issues (poverty, social inclusion, community development, and social protection, among others). Therefore, social protection policy must be articulated in such a way that policies aimed at priority areas and population groups are coordinated so that efforts are not duplicated, and vulnerable groups are not omitted.

The main challenge in this area is coordination between sectors within the government. This is the case of the coordination between entities such as the MSD and those in charge of social security and labour inclusion policies (i.e., Ministries of Labour and social security entities), as well as others from the social sector (education, health, housing, and others) and sectors whose policies have an impact on social issues (economy, environment, and disaster management, among others). This is important because it allows the involvement of various actors, making the development of social protection policies more effective (Cecchini and Martinez, 2011). In emergency situations, the coordination between the disaster management sector and the social sector can translate into the latter using its information systems to identify the affected population, and manage shelter services or the delivery of monetary entitlements to allow for timely protection of the welfare and consumption levels of the population in need (ECLAC, 2021).

Policy comprehensiveness is also achieved through vertical coordination between administrative levels (from the central level to local governments). This requires coordination between different levels of government, from national to subnational, articulating objectives, instruments and/or prioritised groups of policies and programmes in the same sphere.

Given that social protection policy has both a non-contributory and a contributory component, it is important that the entities in charge of both coordinate to maximise the use of resources, with the objective of expanding coverage in a progressive and economically sustainable manner. This includes at least three aspects: (i) coordination with the entities responsible for the non-contributory components, which generally depend on the MSD; (ii) coordination of those entities that manage the contributory components, which include sectoral ministries (health, labour, and social security, among others); and, (iii) establishing coordination mechanisms and spaces for the different social protection actors to operate as a single system. An example of the latter is the commissions created to recommend policies and strategic guidelines for early childhood care and development systems, which bring together key strategic actors (such as different ministries and public entities) with expertise in the subject.

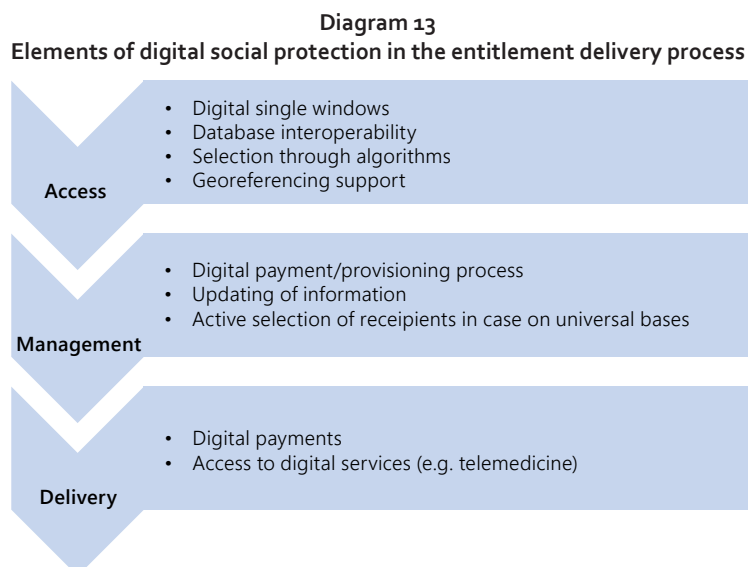
The strengthening of institutional competencies in the territory is fundamental to progress toward the integration of social policy. In this regard, it is crucial that policies consider the geographical specificities of each country or region. The single window, representing centralised access points for various social services, may be an example of an instrument that can facilitate the integration of social protection at the territorial level by contributing to improved access for the population to social services. It brings together the range of public programmes and entitlements available to a country's citizens. In other words, the social services at the national or subnational level are made available to the population, providing decentralised access as they are delivered within the territories. At least three types of single windows can be identified in the region: (i) face-to-face, in a physical office; (ii) virtual, through an electronic portal; and (iii) through a form of family accompaniment. The latter work directly in the field with people and can play a fundamental role, as they often have an orienting component that guides participants and tells them which entitlements they are eligible to receive (ECLAC, 2023).

## D. Challenges of digital social protection<sup>54</sup>

Digital technologies can play a key role in moving towards universal social protection, although there is also a risk of increasing access and information gaps for people with poor connectivity and/or digital skills. Beyond the digitalisation of information, digital social protection implies a transformation of social protection systems based on the use of new technologies in design, implementation, and management. Likewise, the digital transformation of the economy will involve renewed challenges and a transformation of social protection as new vulnerabilities emerge (Palma, 2024).

In the context of technological changes, digital transformation is undeniable. To the extent that the institutional frameworks for social policy are updated, they also need to adapt to these innovations, but with the precaution of taking into consideration the dimensions of exclusion that may occur in the process.

The digitalisation of social protection systems during the COVID-19 pandemic was a real-time experiment to observe the effects of digitalising the management of social protection. From the entry of recipient databases to the selection processes, digital technology was used to improve and facilitate the coverage of information systems and to obtain data on the population attended to. One of the challenges was the interoperability of information systems from different public information sources. Although this process facilitates the entry and selection of users of social entitlements, it can also be an initial barrier to exclusion for the population that cannot access digital services. For example, during the pandemic, the population had difficulties in accessing this information due to lack of access, or in some cases due to issues related to the identification of individuals. In the management of programmes, the delivery of entitlements and the digital payment process can generate exclusion when the population has limited access to the financial system. Even when digital banking has been extended, the same process of recognition or digital identification can generate biases in the process. Finally, in the receipt of entitlements, exclusions may arise as the process becomes digitised. For example, the delivery of transfers via digital means requires access to an ATM or some form of intermediary to utilise the resources (see diagram 13).



Source: Palma (2024), based on Gupta (2021) and Chirchir and Barca, (2020).

<sup>54</sup> This section is based on Palma, A., "La transformación digital y la protección social: elementos para el análisis" [Digital transformation and social protection: elements for analysis], Technical note, in press, 2024.

During the pandemic, when most activities moved to the digital world, the implications of the significant inequality in connectivity among the population within and between countries became evident, thus affecting the capacity of institutions to respond to the emergency. People had to abruptly learn to operate in the digital environment, and social protection systems had to respond quickly, generating innovations for the search of users and delivery of entitlements in the digitalised world (Atuesta and Van Hemelryck, 2022). This implied a great challenge for the governments of the region where there was still a low degree of internet connection, and especially for the population in vulnerable situations, who are the main users of these systems and simultaneously the most marginalised in the digital world (see section I.A.1) (ECLAC, 2022; Sunkel and Ullmann, 2019). Beyond responding to these gaps, the challenge for social policy institutions lies in ensuring that they do not widen, which implies that the systems respond to the context appropriately and are sensitive to differences. Among the recommendations for the social institutional framework is that the inclusion of technology should be based on criteria in relation to the context, generating possibilities rather than obligations which limit the population without access. Progress must also be made in closing gaps, for which ECLAC has proposed a basic digital basket to bring these changes closer to the population in situations of vulnerability. In addition, an institutional challenge from the legal-normative dimension is guaranteeing data privacy while making progress in data protection (IPC-IG, 2022; ECLAC, 2022).

One of the challenges that digital social protection imposes on social policy institutions is the need to be responsive to rapid changes and to be efficient and effective in responding to new demands. The adoption of digital technologies for the design, implementation, and management of social protection imposes demands on physical and digital infrastructure, as well as on the skills and knowledge required for data and information management. This entails high initial costs and a cognitive maturation time that exceeds the short term. Digital transformation requires a greater effort to reconfigure the way an organisation continuously improves and changes, as technology is not only becoming more integrated in all spaces every day, but is also constantly evolving (McKinsey, 2023). Compounding this is the challenge of constantly updating information and the exponential advancement of new technologies. However, once the implementation is achieved, digitalisation entails a cost reduction that should be considered in the process as it does not limit the sector's budget (Lowe, 2022). On the other hand, access to and use of technologies also involves high initial costs for the population experiencing poverty and vulnerability, such as the acquisition of computers or similar devices and basic digital training.

Likewise, among the risks to digital social protection forewarned by the Report of the Special Rapporteur on extreme poverty and human rights are: the political decisions that underlie the supposed technological neutrality, which can affect human rights and democratic decisions; the eventual gender, racial, and ethnic biases in the assumptions and decisions of digital social protection; the possible reproduction and increase of inequalities by algorithms and other predictive analytics which exacerbate the biases of existing policies and data (United Nations, 2019, p. 25).

One of the challenges of digital social protection worth highlighting in relation to the legal-normative dimension is the need to guarantee the rights of the population and prevent their infringement, including the right to privacy. The rights to privacy and data protection are well recognised in national and international legislation and numerous legal instruments which impose obligations on States in relation to the protection of these rights (Sepúlveda, 2018).

Among the new technologies, biometric technology appears not only as an opportunity, but also as a possible source of new risks for the population. Biometric systems allow the identification of a person based on their biological and behavioural characteristics, among which are their fingerprints, iris, or some other behavioural characteristic (Sepúlveda, 2018; Preciozzi, 2022). The use of this type of information allows for faster matching, linking, and sharing of information, though decreasing the risk of fraud, raises concerns regarding the rights and freedoms of those individuals whose data are processed. There must be standards and legislation to regulate the use of this data for social protection, taking into consideration the rights of the individuals whose data has been processed and the obligations of those who process it (Sepúlveda, 2018).

Likewise, one of the main challenges for technology is to be human-centric; and this extends to digitalisation and artificial intelligence. A human-centric approach is about doing things differently to reach everyone in accordance with their circumstances, rather than further digitalisation to do the same things faster, cheaper, or more conveniently through digital channels. It is not just an issue of managing social protection systems, but of adapting and transforming the service delivery system in a way that, at a lower cost, is efficient in responding to the community (Lee-Archer, 2023).

To address future risks, it will be key to adjust laws, improve digital and physical infrastructure, and expand digital literacy, access, and use of technologies. It is critical for technology to serve the objectives of moving towards universal social protection, as it does not solve policy problems on its own, nor does it reach everyone effortlessly. This requires appropriate digital social protection governance underpinned by transparent processes. Unequal control over data includes access to data and the power to decide what does and does not become data. This depends on control over the physical and digital infrastructures that generate, process, store, transfer, and use data, which can pose a problem that must be addressed for economic development, human agency, and collective self-determination (Fisher and Streinz, 2021). At least three forms of expression of “data injustice” can be identified which should be monitored in the post-pandemic scenario: (i) legal, when people cannot digitally authenticate themselves and, consequently, suffer exclusion; (ii) informational, which accounts for situations in which users are not fully informed of how their data are used by agencies that handle them; and (iii) related to the design of programmes and the limited results in the levels of social protection effectively provided with respect to the real needs of people (Masiero, 2020).

A related challenge is advancing measures for the protection of the population’s data. Inadequate protection of personal data in social protection programmes can have negative impacts on privacy. For example, this information can affect people through stigma, discrimination, abuse, and exploitation when the available information is not safeguarded and becomes public also making it subject to scams (Lowe, 2022; IPC-IG, 2022). Another effect is that it can undermine public support for programmes when mass disclosure of information diminishes trust. Relevant information for programme purposes can mean shorter processing times and costs, but there is also an urgent need for institutions to be held accountable for these potential risks (Sepúlveda, 2018).

Beyond the great availability of data, digital transformation implies changes that will undoubtedly affect all areas of society, from people’s identity to employment options. In short, going forward, social protection will be increasingly associated with digitalisation and the application of artificial intelligence. But, as Acemoglu and Johnson (2023) argue, both the direction that technological innovations take and who they end up benefiting are not determined a priori and depend on power relations in society.

## **E. The challenge of expanding the coverage of social information systems**

One of the potential opportunities offered by this highly digitalised world is the possibility of having a large amount of information available for decision-making. In social protection, databases and information are crucial. Collecting, preserving, using, analysing, and sharing data are among the main roles of information technologies in the field of social protection. One of the advantages of this process is to move towards universal social registries, where digitalisation allows progress toward high levels of coverage, interoperability, and efficient updating of information, which are necessary characteristics of social registries. The integration of different sources of information that converge in universal social registries and consolidated social information systems is therefore crucial for the functioning of social protection policies (ECLAC, 2023).

The existence of universal and updated social registries would strengthen the social protection response to emergencies. In principle, having all the information integrated would make it easier to expedite the delivery of entitlements to the population in urgent need (IPC-IG, 2022).

There are various strategies for increasing the coverage of these systems, which can be classified into two main categories. The first is to facilitate and promote access to the information system through: (i) extensive surveys, where the State deploys field teams, especially in areas where the prioritised group of the social information system resides; (ii) diversifying the channels of access to the system by involving other public services that also implement social programmes, requiring coordination with them; and (iii) online access, meaning the development of a digital application for filling out the information system entry form, which can be made available in the field (through designated public services collaborating with the MSD) or through the web, without the need for intermediaries. Another way to advance in the universality of registries is to encourage the registration of the entire resident population of the country, not just the population experiencing the greatest vulnerability (Berner and Van Hemelryck, 2020; Díaz and Van Hemelryck, 2023).

The second strategy is to increase coverage during the transition process from one instrument to another by using the available databases. To this end, it is necessary to consider whether the information contained in the other databases can complement the social information system in light of the system's objectives; evaluate how up-to-date the information contained in the database is since data obsolescence poses a risk; and determine how complete the data are, since data needed for the information system may be missing (Díaz and Van Hemelryck, 2023).

Indeed, keeping information up to date is essential because it lends legitimacy and validity to the information system, especially when resources are scarce and must be focused on prioritised groups. There are several ways to update data. Information campaigns can be developed to make the population aware of the importance of keeping their data up to date, and mechanisms can be designed and implemented so that households themselves can access and update their information within the system. It is also important to increase the channels for updating data, for which other public entities must be involved. Finally, there is data that can be updated directly by public agencies when they have the information, without the need for citizens to do so. During the pandemic, many countries opted to update information by cross-referencing self-reported information with administrative databases, which allowed for at least verifying basic household data such as composition, number of children, or kinship ties. Additionally, the possibility of cross-checking with tax or social security contribution databases could make it possible to update income data (Berner and Van Hemelryck, 2020).

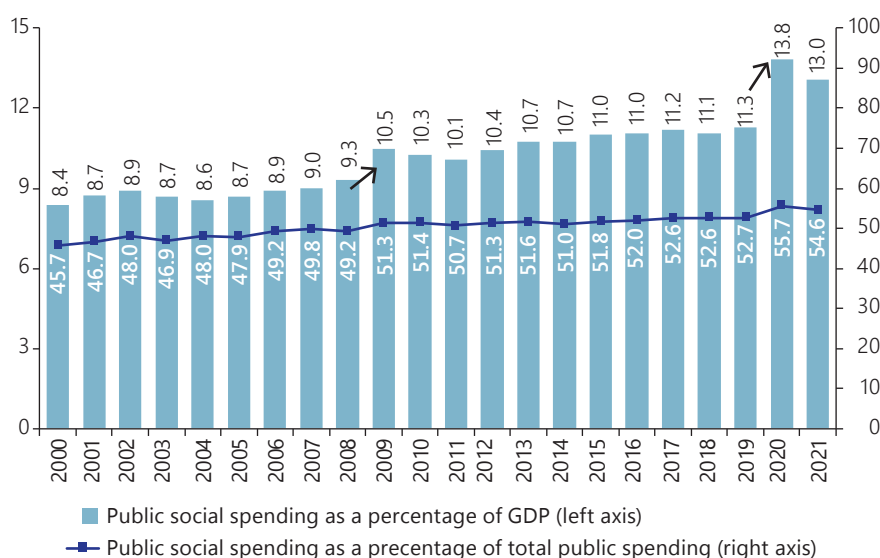
The integration of information in universal social registries is key to the future of social protection and is a challenge for institutions. The technology must be in place to advance interoperability, but even more important is the generation of agreements and collaboration between the different social policy sectors to share information on programme recipients.

An important challenge is to ensure that the instruments used to collect data have legitimacy among the citizenry, since this is the only way to maintain them over time. To this end, the technical soundness of the socioeconomic characterisation tool must be combined with the social perception that it is capable of really determining who should be prioritised by the State in its programmes and entitlements. In addition, it is very important to legally enshrine the responsibility of public entities to protect the personal data that forms part of the information system. For this, investment must also be made in improving the available technological infrastructure. A challenge lies in advancing protocols and standards to guarantee the protection of information and transparency in its use to legitimise the processes that incorporate such data. The protection of personal data is a critical aspect of system design, and requires much more attention (Berner and Van Hemelryck, 2020; Lindert and others, 2022).

## F. Financial sustainability and quality human resources to advance towards universal social protection

The sustainability of financial resources is key to strengthening the institutional capacity of policies and consolidating social protection responses to structural and emergency challenges. In the context of the pandemic, social spending in Latin America reached 13% of GDP in 2021, lower than in 2020, but much higher than in the last two decades. Central government social spending declined in share of total spending, from 55.7% in 2020 to 54.6% in 2021, but remains its most important component (see figure 38). Some countries exceed 17% of GDP, while others do not reach 10%. Nonetheless, generally the challenge of maintaining sustainable levels of social spending persists, both to address the impacts of crises and to reduce the social gaps that have been carried over from the past. Financial sustainability is therefore essential for social protection to address the challenges of coverage and sufficiency. This requires growing solidarity so that access to social protection does not depend on contribution levels (ECLAC, 2022).

**Figure 38**  
Latin America (17 countries): central government social spending, 2000–2021<sup>a</sup>  
(Percentages of GDP and total public spending)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), *Social Panorama of Latin America and the Caribbean* (LC/PUB.2022/15-P), Santiago, 2022.

<sup>a</sup> The averages correspond to the arithmetic mean of the values of 17 Latin American countries: Argentina, Bolivia (Plurinational State of), Brazil, Chile, Colombia, Costa Rica, Dominican Republic, Ecuador, El Salvador, Guatemala, Honduras, Mexico, Nicaragua, Panama, Paraguay, Peru, and Uruguay. The coverage of the Plurinational State of Bolivia corresponds to central administration and that of Peru to the general government. Data for the Plurinational States of Bolivia and Panama correspond to 2020.

Note: This level of social spending achieved responds to a GDP growth higher than the growth of social spending.

Demographic dynamics and the characteristics of the labour market in Latin America, such as its high informality, imply increasing fiscal pressure to provide levels of social protection that guarantee adequate income for a sufficient level of welfare. Contributory coverage in the region faces significant deficits, as illustrated in section II.A of the document. Given this scenario, and considering the transformations underway, to make progress in financial sustainability it is critical to expand the contributory component and thus reduce the fiscal burden. It is also essential to expand the coverage of non-contributory social protection and the other components of these systems. This requires a solid social and fiscal covenant that considers the challenges of the future of social protection.

The institutional capacity of social protection systems to guarantee the effective implementation of policies also depends on the quality of human resources. This was evident during the pandemic crisis, which highlighted the crucial role of human resources in the direction, coordination, and execution of social development policies. It is therefore important to pay attention to it from a perspective of sustainability that ensures quality and continuity over time. In the context of social protection systems, human resources have broad functions ranging from formulating policy strategies to establishing coordination mechanisms between the entities involved in policy implementation. All of this is essential to ensure that social policy is transformed into concrete action, and that it has an impact on inclusive and sustainable social development (ECLAC, 2023).

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## VI. Final considerations: the future of social protection within the consolidation of a welfare state in Latin America

Claudia Robles

As this document has shown, Latin America is at a historic turning point. The cascading crisis, which includes the health, economic and social impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic, is compounded by a reconfigured social risk structure. This process has been marked by the intensification of various critical obstacles that ECLAC had already identified as emerging in 2019. Due to their level of intensity and interaction, these obstacles amplify the risk structure and worsen the impact of the various structural risks that the region has historically faced.

As such, social protection systems in the region must address a series of simultaneous and highly complex changes, as well as at least three intersecting challenges: (i) structural deficits and inequalities to deal with risks that have only been partially covered in the region, (ii) the setbacks to people's well-being caused by the pandemic, especially their income levels and the process of human capacity-building, and (iii) the current risk structure. These phenomena, and in particular the reconfigured risk structure, condition the future of social protection systems in terms of not only the design, content and institutional frameworks of the necessary policies and instruments but also their management and organisation mechanisms. This means that social protection systems must prepare for a wider range of social risks that undermine rights and may result in the loss of welfare levels. Moreover, in the current context, social protection must be strengthened to be able to not only adapt to these risks but also to transform the underlying conditions of vulnerability faced by individuals, households and territories.

Each of these phenomena calls for specific policies. With regard to policy design, the challenge is to combine actions aimed at bridging historical gaps in social protection, address the impacts of the pandemic and, at the same time, promote preparedness and preventive policies, mitigate the impacts and transform the conditions that underpin greater vulnerability to different types of phenomena. The policies required to address the potential impacts of risks associated with long-term change differ from those that demand immediate responses to emergencies. In the first case, such policies include those aimed

at preparing social protection systems and their various components to cope with the demographic and nutritional transition, the climate crisis and changes in the world of work and technology. In the second case, policies are also needed to deal with events with a high probability of undergoing immediate shocks to the population's welfare levels, such as disasters and economic crises. As noted in this document, risks must be approached systemically and in terms of how they interact with other risks, which makes the design of social protection systems more complex. As such, stronger policy planning and more human, technological and financial resources are needed.

The components and policies of social protection systems must be developed and implemented in a comprehensive way. This requires strengthening social institutional frameworks as a basic infrastructure for progress in developing quality social policies (ECLAC, 2023). Moreover, the need to combine short- and medium-term responses to critical events and progressive changes means that resilience should be mainstreamed into social protection systems.

Based on the lessons of the pandemic and the cascading crisis for social protection systems, this document has underscored the importance of adopting intersectoral measures to strengthen those systems and design appropriate policies. These include working to close historical gaps in entitlement coverage and sufficiency; mainstreaming rights-based and other approaches to address the underlying components of social inequality; and an effective prioritisation of actions, with a view to moving forward in building a welfare state. As has been noted, setting priorities must account for countries' institutional capacities and the state of development of their social protection systems, including financial considerations. Thus, strengthening social protection systems in the current context requires careful consideration of the sustainability dimension of the policies to be implemented. More specifically, financial sustainability plays a preponderant role with regard to the need to consolidate far-reaching compounds with contributions from various actors in order to move forward with the changes that social protection systems will require to cope with future challenges.

Based on these considerations, the following have been put forward as possible strategic policy areas to include in the future of social protection: (i) the reinforcement of income protection policies, (ii) the strengthening of family allowance policies, comprehensive childcare and integrated care policies, (iii) structural reforms in key sectors (pension and health systems), and (iv) the enhanced coordination of social protection and labour inclusion policies.

Below are four ideas to consider for the future of social protection with a view to supporting the necessary development and strengthening of welfare states in the region. These ideas are fundamental for strengthening social protection systems to deal with present and future challenges, with a dual aim of addressing short-term impacts and transforming the structural conditions that determine people's vulnerability over the long term.

First, the debate on the sustainability of social protection systems has intensified and should be at the forefront of countries' efforts to strengthen these systems. As Arenas de Mesa (2023) points out, sustainability is linked to the capacity of institutions to fulfil their social protection mandates and commitments to current and future generations. It involves three dimensions that must be achieved simultaneously and in a balanced way: coverage and sufficiency of entitlements and financial sustainability (Arenas de Mesa, 2023 and 2019). Sustainability must therefore be a main concern of the institutional frameworks for social policy that support social protection systems in the region.

Second, the sustainability of social protection systems needs to be supported by three connected principles that are highly relevant in the current context and, until now, only partially incorporated in the expansion processes of social protection systems: universality, solidarity and efficiency (ECLAC, 2000 and 2006). These three factors are central to the political legitimacy of social protection systems and the achievement of sustainable social, fiscal and intergenerational pacts. Solidarity refers to the ability of societies to redistribute risks, a fundamental issue in the current context, allowing each person to

contribute according to their means and receive entitlements according to their needs. It is a vital aspect for tackling and reducing inequalities and ensuring that needs are fully covered and that resources are allocated efficiently (ECLAC, 2018a; Sojo, 2017). The principle of efficiency seeks to achieve the best possible results in terms of entitlement coverage and sufficiency by taking into account the availability of limited resources (ECLAC, 2000), i.e. making solidarity and universality viable and effective. The principle of universality refers to being fully able to exercise one's rights and be protected against various contingencies or social risks in line with a sensitive approach to differences and without leaving anyone behind (ECLAC, 2018a and 2006). Creating a stronger welfare state, based on the progress made today in social protection systems and social policies as a whole in the region's countries, will require addressing these three principles in a cross-cutting manner, so that their results give rise to a scenario in which it is possible to guarantee universal levels of welfare regardless of people's conditions of origin and obtain the best possible results given the current restrictions.

Third, the role of universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient social protection systems in reducing inequalities through explicitly targeted design is essential. As ECLAC has indicated, social protection is a key dimension of inclusive social development for the region (ECLAC, 2020). Strengthening social protection bridges welfare gaps and overcomes structural inequalities that hinder sustainable development and the full enjoyment of economic, social and cultural rights. In particular, based on an approach to universalism that is sensitive to differences (ECLAC, 2020), inclusive social development, and thus sustainable development, cannot be achieved if inequalities are not substantially and sustainably reduced. Inequalities contribute to the fact that a significant proportion of the region's population does not have guaranteed access to income protection instruments or health and education systems. Given the risk structure under reconfiguration, such inequalities could deepen and intensify, thereby expanding the levels of vulnerability of the population and impacting other dimensions. Moreover, as previously noted, social protection plays a fundamental role in achieving higher levels of social inclusion and social cohesion (ECLAC, 2020; Maldonado, 2023), which are central elements for inclusive social development and sustainable development.

As ECLAC has also pointed out, inequality is inefficient and an obstacle to achieving sustainable development. Reducing inequality is not only an ethical imperative but also an investment strategy that would increase the levels of productivity required for sustainable development, given the close correlation between higher levels of inequality and lower levels of productivity at the global level (ECLAC, 2018b).

Thus, advancing inclusive social development for sustainable development in the face of a reconfigured risk structure means decisively addressing these structural inequalities. In terms of social protection systems, these inequalities are reflected in differing levels of effective and legal access, quality and sufficiency, and timeliness of benefits, all aspects that must be addressed in order to build universal social protection systems (see, among others, Arza and others, 2022 and Martínez Franzoni and Sánchez-Ancochea, 2021). Addressing and reducing inequalities is crucial in tackling the challenges of the future of social protection and overcoming the current levels of stratified and segmented access to social protection in the region. To this end, it is vital to consider that social policies produce egalitarian results when most of the population benefits from them at a similar level of sufficiency (Martínez Franzoni and Sánchez-Ancochea, 2021).

The social protection policies discussed in chapter IV seek to level the playing field by creating more equal starting conditions and intervening in the inequalities that arise throughout the life cycle and expose people to differing degrees of risks that determine their vulnerability. As the pandemic showed, the possibility of implementing policies with broad coverage in access to key services and benefits for equality, such as income protection policies, family benefits and long-term care policies, is also a relevant aspect when considering the high levels of income vulnerability faced by the region. Again, this points to the importance of planning for gradual progress that can be implemented in countries to close structural gaps in key areas of social protection systems while progressively increasing the levels of coverage,

adequacy and quality of benefits and ensuring financial sustainability. This does not exclude the possibility of prioritising resources and efforts, but rather suggests the importance of doing so while considering the medium-term goal of building a welfare state.

Fourth, making strides towards universal social protection requires broad social pacts. Social protection systems reflect, first and foremost, consensus on agreed minimums that must be accessible to all people. These minimums influence the progress that can be made in eradicating poverty, reducing inequalities and increasing levels of social cohesion, all key components for moving towards more resilient societies in the future. As ECLAC indicates: “a protection system is more than an institutional structure; it is a political agreement [...] It determines what rights apply to all, how they are guaranteed and how they are made viable. This involves institutions, rules, programmes and resources” (ECLAC, 2006, p. 36). Social protection systems thus reflect broader redistributive alliances, which can transcend the political cycles of incumbent governments, and lend viability to agreements on institutions and resources that must be mobilised to achieve a broader social welfare objective.

A new social pact as a policy instrument based on broad and participatory dialogue can channel structural change that advances not only the expansion of rights but also the redistribution of resources and opportunities. However, a social pact must also be accompanied by a new fiscal contract that addresses structural fiscal weaknesses, such as the low tax burden, its regressive structure and tax evasion. It must also create fiscal sustainability that guarantees both the financial sustainability of social spending to ensure the provision of quality public services and the financial sustainability of social protection systems (ECLAC, 2021). This calls for progressive tax systems, with a legitimised contribution to social protection systems as a mechanism for contributing to a changing society. It also demands clarity regarding the contribution by employees and employers, and thus the necessary coordination between the contributory and non-contributory components of social protection and, in particular, the expansion of the former.

Finally, in a context of profound changes, intergenerational pacts (Birnbaum and others, 2017) are also needed that will make it possible to sustain agreements on the levels of well-being that will be ensured throughout the life cycle and the investments required to overcome the difficulties resulting from the current development model. Strengthening investment in early childhood policies and policies for families with children and adolescents as well as safeguarding guaranteed levels of economic security in old age by strengthening non-contributory and contributory pension systems should be part of this agenda. In this way, social protection will play a decisive role in reducing inequalities and supporting necessary progress towards inclusive social development, a strategic dimension of sustainable development.

Given the various challenges highlighted here, the window of opportunity created by the pandemic must be seized to rethink the central role of social protection systems in building societies that embrace inclusive and sustainable social development. In particular, the pandemic situation clearly showed the deep vulnerability that persists in the region, the challenges faced by these systems and the magnitude of the task of putting effective mechanisms in place to protect people’s welfare levels during a highly complex situation. The actions that result from the commitment to act on these findings must first and foremost consider the challenges posed by the future of social protection in order to develop universal, comprehensive, sustainable and resilient systems that leave no one behind.

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