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# ECLAC Statistical Briefings

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## The Portal of Inequalities in Latin America

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As a region, Latin America is characterized by high levels of inequality, reflected in both concentration of income and wealth and in large gaps in various areas of well-being among different population groups. Statistical information is vital in raising awareness of these gaps and in facilitating design and implementation of public policy to reduce disparities.

To contribute to analysis of this regional problem, the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) has developed a new tool to view information on the inequalities that exist in different areas in Latin American countries, selecting a set of indicators and categorizing them on its Portal of inequalities in Latin America.<sup>1</sup>

The Portal is one of multiple information resources offered by CEPALSTAT and aims to present data on different aspects of inequality in Latin American countries in a simple way, making it easy to understand. The site contains charts that show the gaps that exist and brief texts explaining how the indicators were put together, how to interpret them and what findings were reached.

This briefing note provides a short description of the key characteristics of the Portal and some of the findings.

<sup>1</sup> All the charts shown in this note are available on the Portal of inequalities in Latin America [online] <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/cepalstat/index.html?lang=en>.

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## Introduction

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Latin American and Caribbean societies have historically been characterized by acute inequalities, which have been present throughout the region's various economic cycles. Although progress has been made on reducing inequalities over the past two decades, the large social and economic gaps are a significant obstacle for sustainable development, poverty eradication and consolidation of democratic governance.

ECLAC recognizes that inequality is multidimensional, encompassing political, social and cultural areas, and should be understood in terms of relations, and that it is particularly closely linked to power dynamics. Therefore, inequality is reflected not only in concentration of economic resources, but also in exclusion and inequitable distribution of political power, whereby a small portion of the population holds a large part of wealth and decision-making power (ECLAC, 2010 and 2012).

The structure of the social inequality matrix proposed by ECLAC is based on axes and areas, providing insight into the different dimensions of inequality. The axes of social inequality are the key determining factors of people's experiences of inequality, such as social class or socioeconomic stratum, gender, race, ethnicity, age and territorial inequalities. In turn, the areas of social inequality are the specific aspects of development, such as income level, labour, education and health, where these inequalities appear and are perpetuated (ECLAC, 2016).

Having statistics that are comparable across the countries of the region and that are relevant to analysis of social inequalities is crucial to raising awareness of the different forms of inequality and to identifying disadvantaged groups. Such statistics are also valuable inputs for government decision-making on policies that aim to close gaps. The growing number of data portals and access to a wide array of indicators and statistics on a multiplicity of issues is not always leading to clear and methodical reading of such data by users, especially those who are not experts in the subjects addressed. In a context of data proliferation, it is beneficial to provide users with tools that enable them to successfully absorb information and accumulate knowledge.

With all of this in mind, the Statistics Division of ECLAC has developed the Portal of inequalities in Latin America, which can be accessed through the CEPALSTAT website. The Portal aims to present information on different aspects of inequality in Latin American countries in a simple way, making it easy to understand, using charts that clearly illustrate the gaps that exist and texts explaining how the indicators were put together, how to interpret them and what results were obtained.<sup>2</sup>

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## 1. Key features of the Portal of inequalities in Latin America

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The Portal displays the most characteristic inequalities in key areas of living conditions in Latin America, such as income distribution, and access to employment, social protection, education, housing and basic services. For each thematic area, the results are disaggregated according to one or more of the axes of the social inequality matrix, such as gender, ethnicity, race, age, socioeconomic stratum or location.

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<sup>2</sup> In November 2023, the ECLAC Portal of inequalities in Latin America was recognized for its good practices in implementation of tools and strategies that facilitate evaluation and monitoring, under the *Buenas Prácticas en el Uso de los Resultados de Evaluación y Monitoreo en el Ciclo de las Políticas Públicas* initiative launched by Mexico's National Council for the Evaluation of Social Development Policy (CONEVAL).

All the information available through the Portal comes from CEPALSTAT, which is the main gateway for the statistical information collected, produced, systematized and published by ECLAC. Each of the charts offers access to all the information available in the database for each of the topics presented. The dimensions in which inequalities exist are not limited to those shown in the charts; more information can be found through CEPALSTAT, and in ECLAC publications and observatories.

In order to develop the Portal, the key areas of inequality in Latin America were first identified, as were the indicators available through CEPALSTAT that were most pertinent to each area. Having made this selection, the best possible visual representations of each of these indicators were sought, keeping in mind that the charts compare levels across different categories. Different members of the Statistics Division collaborated on the conceptual and visual design of the Portal, programming of charts, construction of the web platform, and drafting of texts and comments that accompany the charts.

The charts were designed using the ECharts library, which allowed innovative features to be included in their visual appearance to facilitate interpretation, some of which are presented later in this briefing note. Users can configure the charts, and download them as images (in Portable Network Graphics (PNG) format), as well as the data used to construct them (in Excel format). In addition, there are direct links to the corresponding indicators in CEPALSTAT, the relevant methodological details, and to geovisualization using the CEPALSTAT Geoport.

The charts are interactive and enable analysis of the regional situation and of the situations of individual countries, for a wide range of years for which information is available. To the right of the charts are four texts describing the indicators and how to read them ("What does it measure and how can I read it?"), the construction methodology ("How is the indicator constructed?"), their uses ("What can I use it for?") and a summary of the findings ("Regional behaviour of the indicator").

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## 2. Areas of social inequality in Latin America

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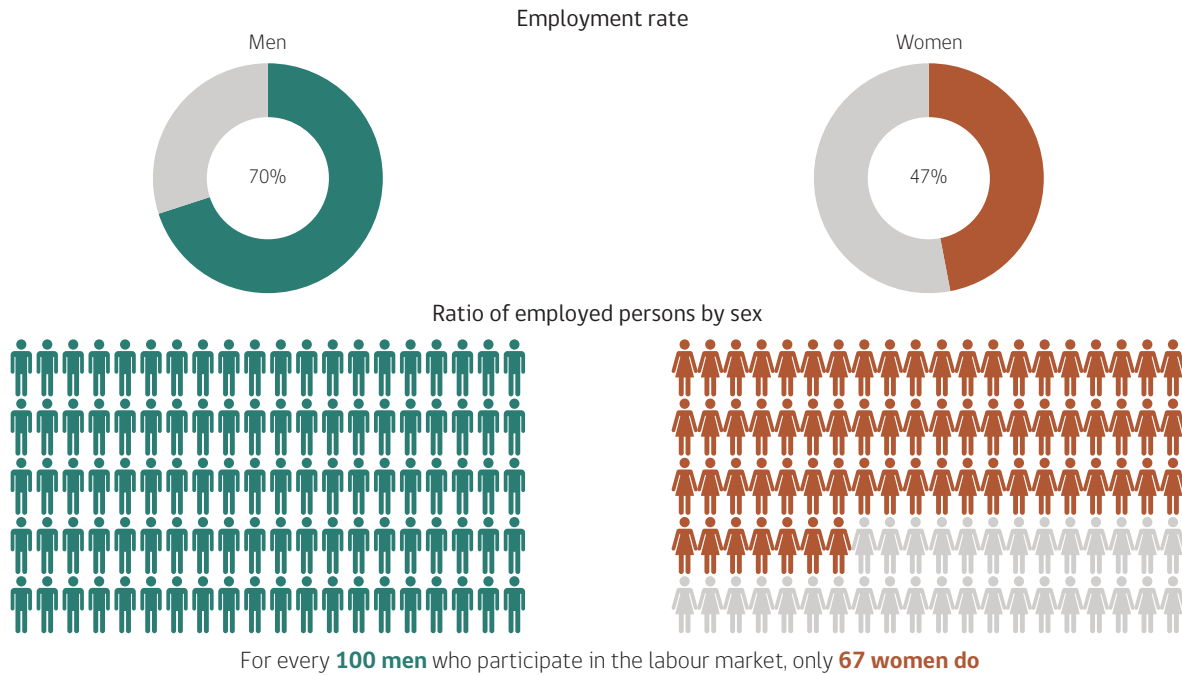
### a) Labour market and income

Social inequalities in the labour market are linked to heterogeneity of the production structure, characterized by gaps in productivity, access to and quality of employment and wages. Inequalities in access to employment become apparent, for example, when comparing employment rates for men and women. At the regional level, the average employment rate for men is 70%, compared to 47% for women (see figure 1).

Gender inequality in employment carries over into labour income. In fact, because the labour force participation rate is lower for women and because of the concentration of women in low-income activities, the income earned by women is only a third of the total income earned through labour. Turning to a second axis of inequality, socioeconomic stratification by household income quintile, on average in Latin America employed women in the bottom quintile receive just 1.1% of total income generated through employment (see figure 2).

» **Figure 1. Latin America and the Caribbean: employment rate and ratio of employed persons by sex, 2022**

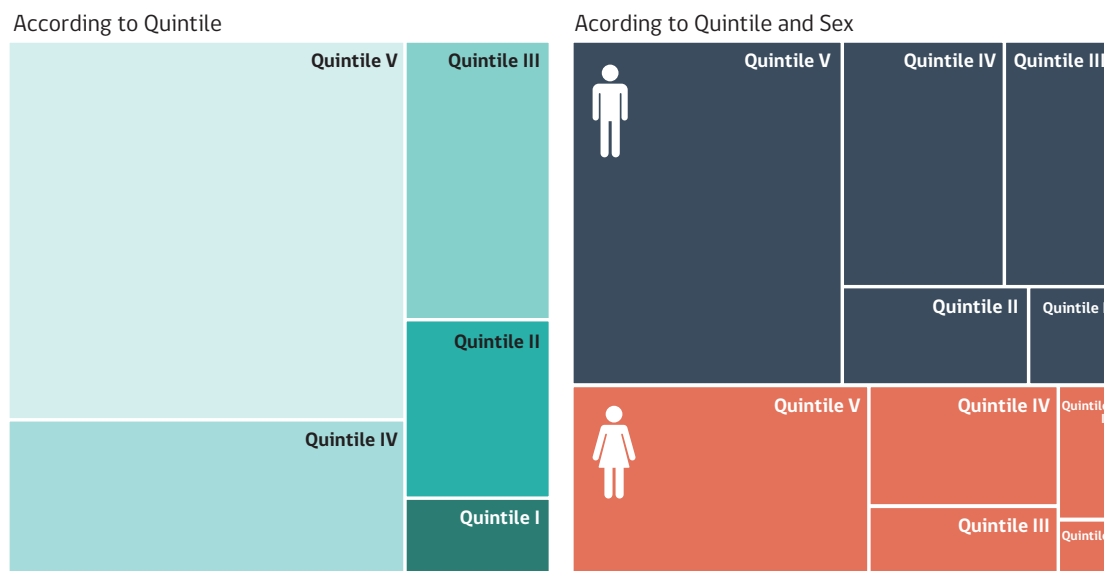
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT, on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) [online], last updated on 27 November 2023.

» **Figure 2. Latin America: distribution of labour income by per capita income quintile and sex, urban areas, 2022**

(Percentages)

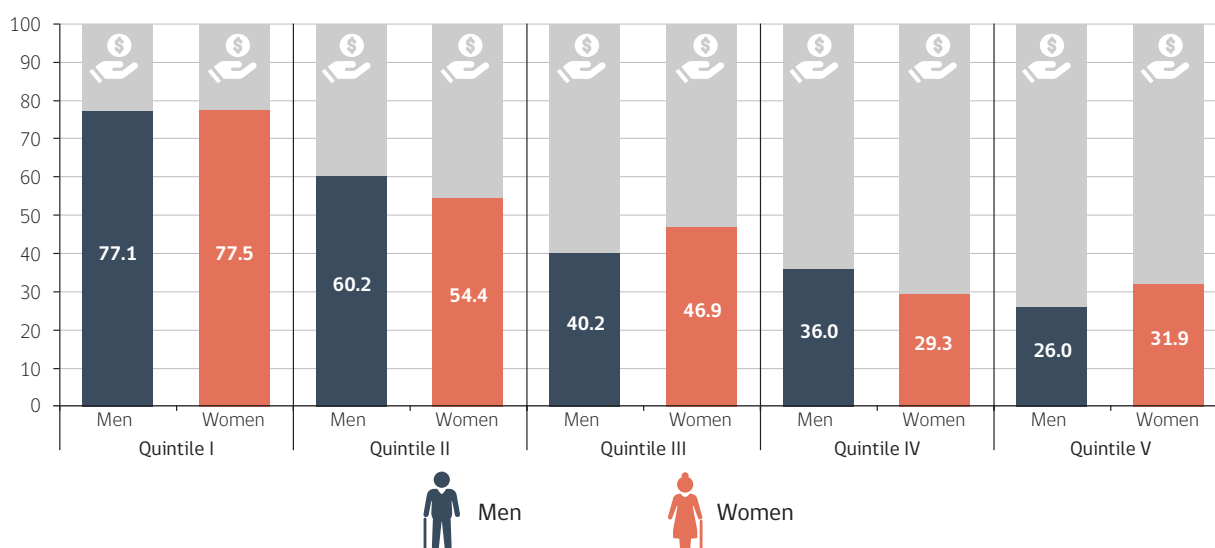


Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT, on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) [online], last updated on 27 November 2023.

These differences in labour income, which are caused by inequalities in opportunities and possibilities for labour integration, tied to characteristics such as sex or socioeconomic stratum, exist even after the end of activity as paid workers. Figure 3 shows the differences by income quintile and sex in terms of the percentage of people receiving pensions that are insufficient to meet their basic needs. For example, almost four out of every five older persons in the lowest income quintile receive pensions that are below the poverty line. There were no significant differences between men and women in this group. As household income increases, the percentage of older persons whose pensions are insufficient decreases. However, the decline is smaller for women, perpetuating the inequalities that are established during their working lives.

» **Figure 3. Latin America: older persons who receive insufficient pensions, by per capita income quintile and sex, 2022**

(Percentages)



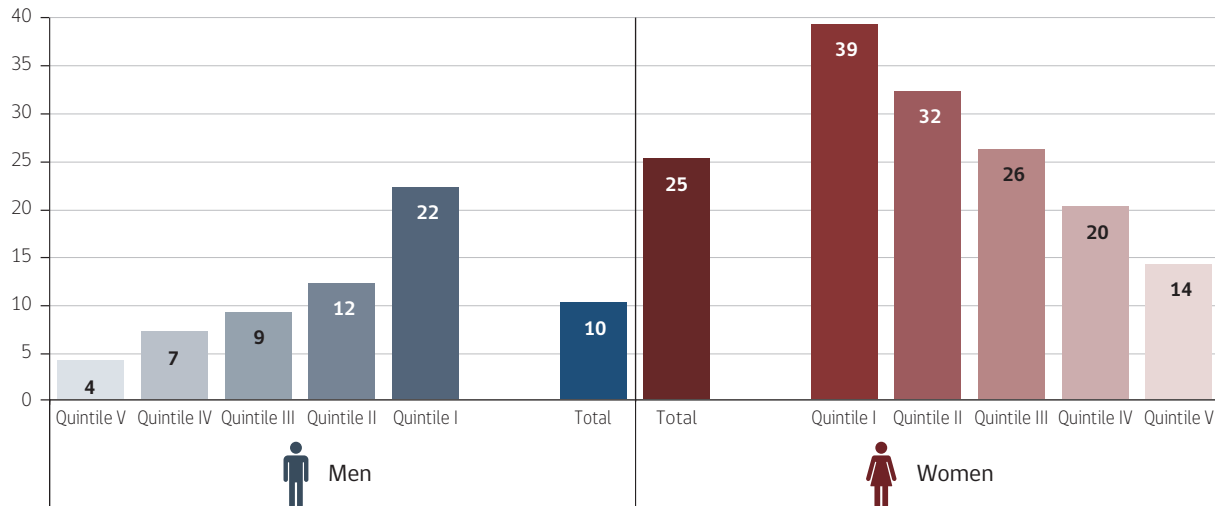
Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT, on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) [online], last updated on 30 November 2023.

The gaps in the labour market and in the pension system combine to determine people's total income. Among the population aged 15 and over, 25% of women have no income of their own, compared to 10% of men. This affects women's financial autonomy and makes them dependent on others for support. This inequality is evident in all income quintiles: the percentage of women with no income of their own exceeds that for men by 10 to 20 percentage points, depending on the quintile. However, the gap is larger in the lower income groups, almost 4 out of 10 women have no income of their own in the lowest income quintile, while this figure is 1.4 women out of 10 in the highest quintile (see figure 4).

Another axis of inequality related to significant gaps is ethnic or racial group. In countries whose household surveys include information on ethnicity or race, it is generally found that the Indigenous and Afrodescendent populations are overrepresented in the lowest income quintiles and underrepresented in the highest quintiles (see figure 5).

» **Figure 4. Latin America: population aged 15 and over without own income, by sex and per capita income quintile, 2022**

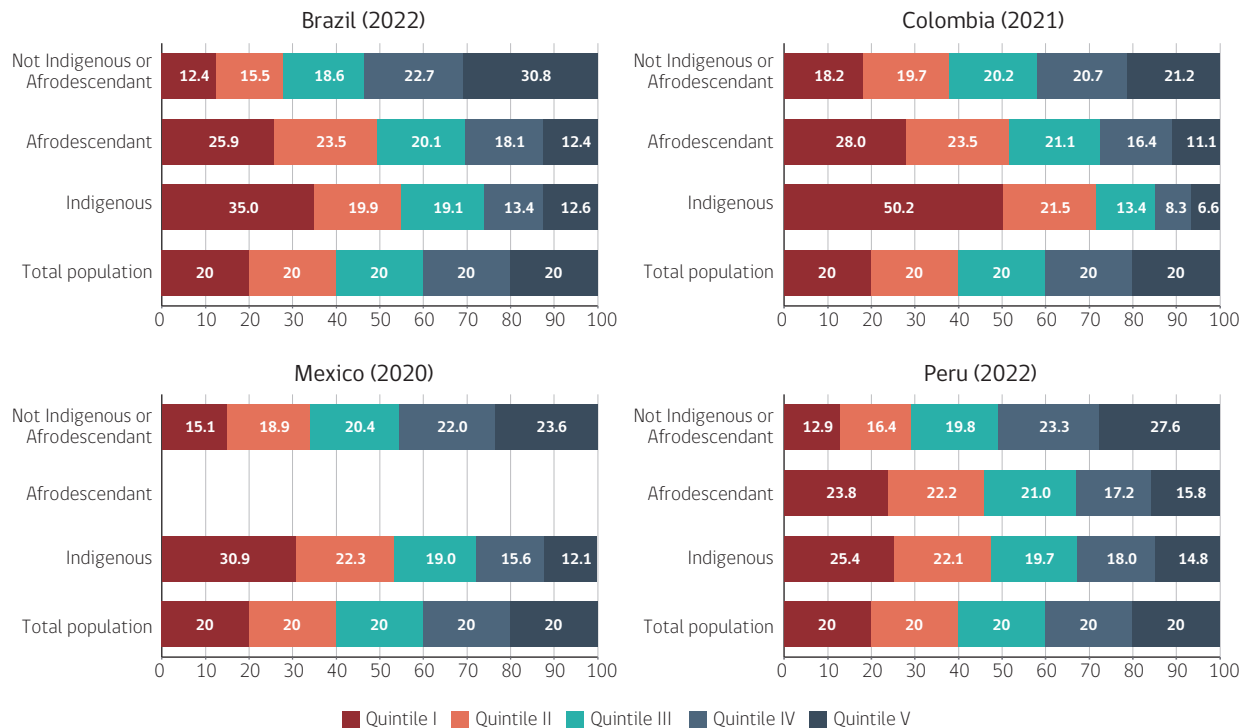
(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT, on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) [online], last updated on 29 November 2023.

» **Figure 5. Latin America (4 countries): distribution of persons in per capita income quintiles, by self-identified ethnicity or race, selected years**

(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT, on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) [online], last updated on 27 November 2023.

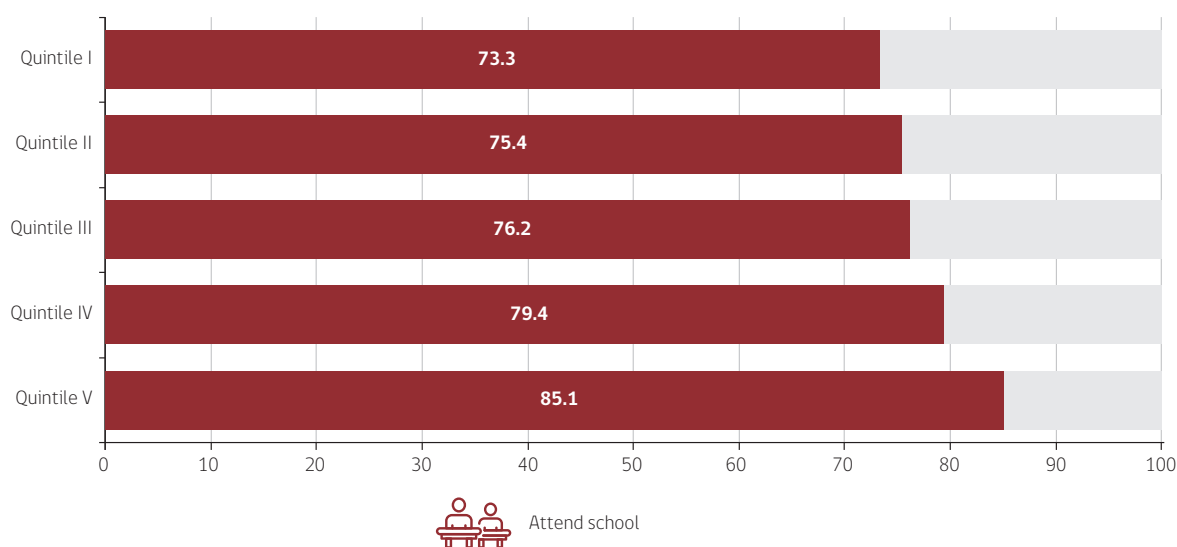
## b) Access to education, health, housing and basic services

Inequalities across different socioeconomic strata are not only present in the labour market, but also in the social protection system and the income derived from both. For example, although school attendance rates have improved over time, the percentage of adolescents and young persons aged 13–19 attending school varies across household income quintiles. While 85% of young persons in the highest income quintile attend school, this percentage is 73% in the lowest quintile (see figure 6).

This leads to differences in completion of secondary education, which in several countries has been established as the mandatory level of education and is related to other axes of social inequality.

### » Figure 6. Latin America: proportion of persons aged 13–19 attending school, by per capita income quintiles, 2022

(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT, on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) [online], last updated on 27 November 2023.

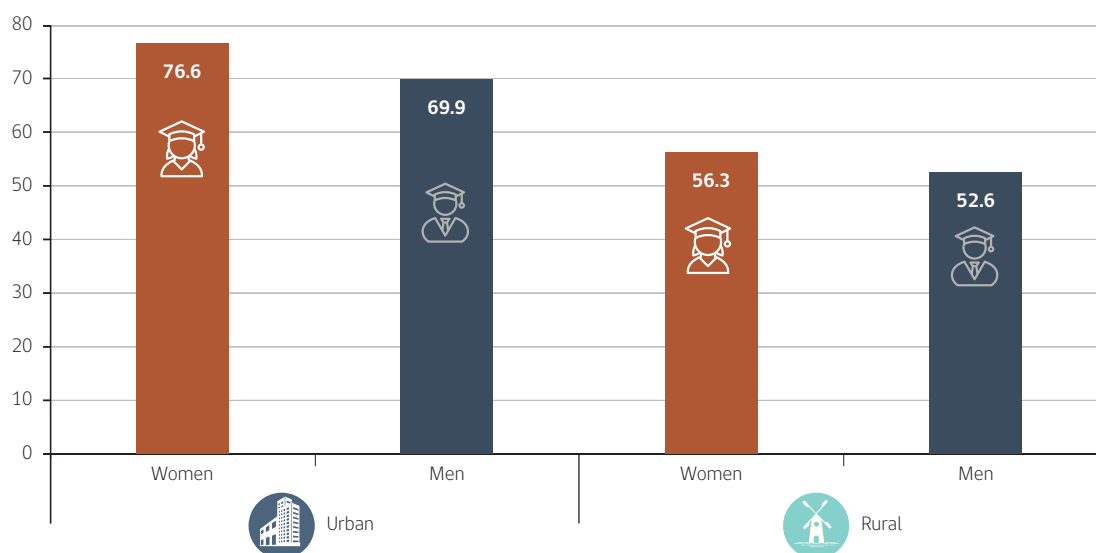
As shown in figure 7, not only are there differences in completion of secondary schooling by sex but also by area of residence. In fact, just 56% of women in rural areas complete secondary education, more than 21 percentage points lower than the 77% rate for women in urban areas. The situation is similar for men, 53% of whom complete secondary education in rural areas, compared to 70% in urban areas.

This pattern, of a higher percentage of young people completing their studies in urban areas, is found in all the countries of the region, as shown in the interactive graph on the CEPALSTAT Portal of inequalities in Latin America.

In the area of health, the situation is similar. In addition to disparities in access to health insurance owing to differences in income levels, access is also lower in rural areas than in urban areas. This may be partly a result of the availability of insurance in rural areas, given that near 39% of people in the highest income quintile have no health insurance.

» **Figure 7. Latin America: persons who have completed secondary education, by area of residence and sex, 2022**

(Percentages)

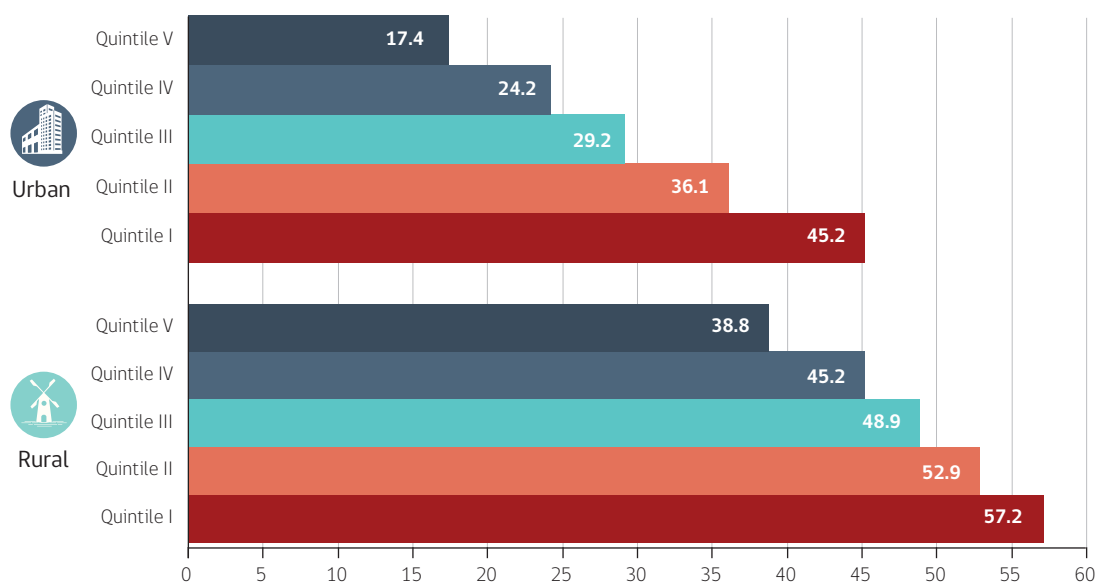


Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT, on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) [online], last updated on 23 November 2023.

In urban areas, coverage is higher, and the differences by household income level are more pronounced. While the difference in coverage between the top and bottom quintiles of the income distribution is 18 percentage points in rural areas (39% uninsured in quintile 5 versus 57% in quintile 1), the difference is 28 percentage points in urban areas (17% uninsured in quintile 5, compared to 45% in quintile 1) (see figure 8).

» **Figure 8. Latin America: population without health insurance, by area of residence and per capita income quintile, 2022**

(Percentages)

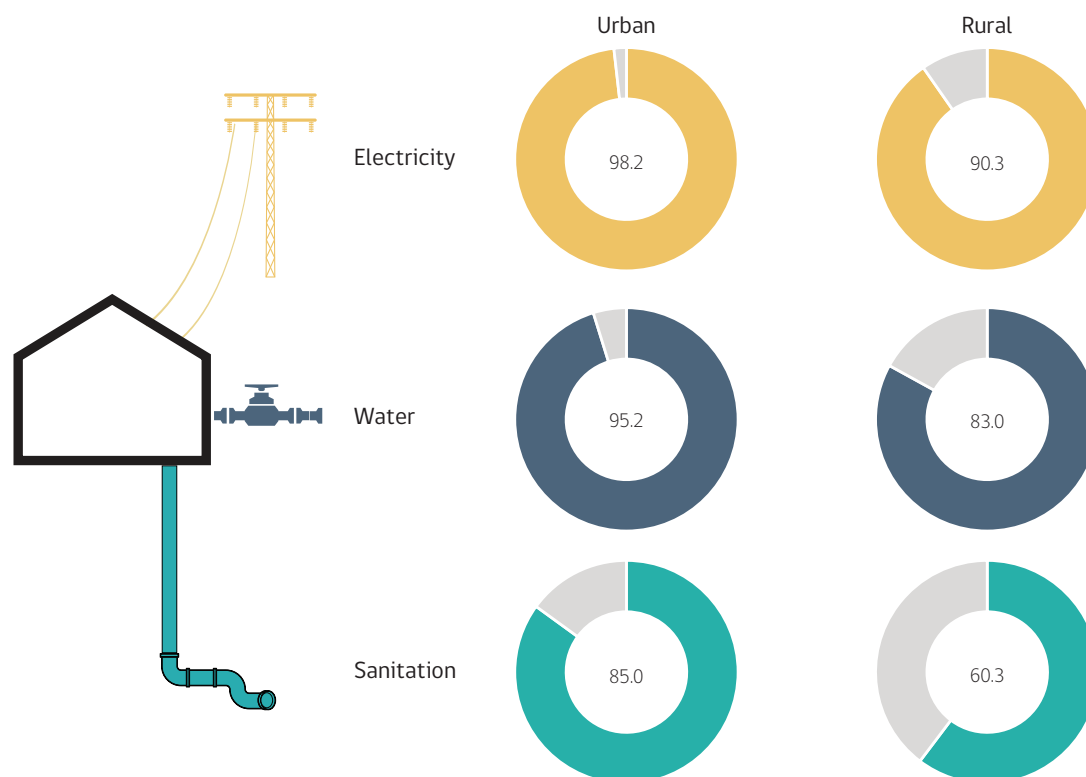


Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT, on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) [online], last updated on 30 November 2023.

Inequality in access to basic services show a similar pattern of lower levels of access in rural areas than in urban areas. On average for the region, electricity service availability is almost complete in urban areas (98%), compared to 90% in rural areas. The contrast is even greater in terms of the supply of drinking water, as 95% of households are covered in urban areas compared to 83% in rural areas. Meanwhile, sanitation services are available to 85% of households in urban areas, 25 percentage points more than the 60% rate for rural households (see figure 9).

» **Figure 9. Latin America: availability of basic services in homes, by area of residence, 2022**

(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT, on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) [online], last updated on 27 November 2023.

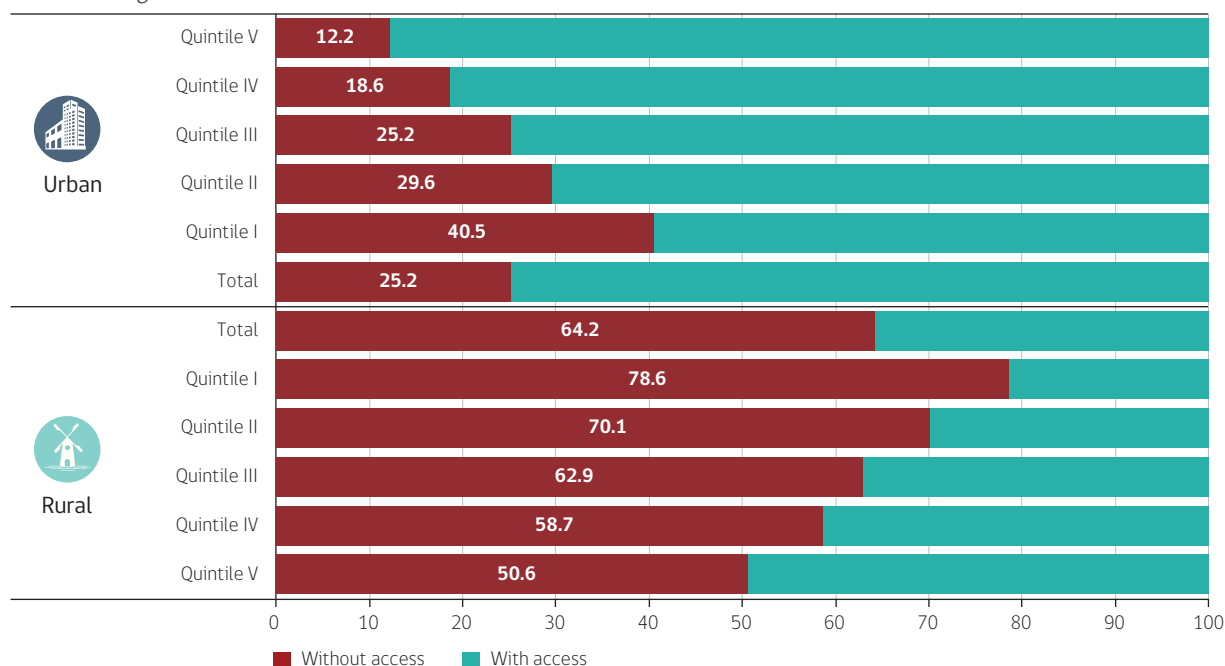
Note: The definitions of whether a service is available differ across areas.

### c) Internet access and political participation

The Internet has revolutionized access to and consumption of a wide range of services in areas such as communication, education and entertainment, as well as facilitating access to government and financial services, among other amenities. Internet access in the home, however, is segmented by both area of residence and household income level. The 64% of people who have no Internet access in the home in rural areas more than double the rate of 25% with no access in urban areas. Per capita income level is related to a second form of inequality in access to these services. In the lowest income quintile in urban areas, 41% of people have no Internet access in their homes, while in the highest income quintile, 12% have no access. In rural areas, the differences are smaller: 79% of people in the lowest income quintile have no Internet service in their home, compared to 51% in the highest quintile (see figure 10).

» **Figure 10. Latin America: internet access in the home, by per capita income quintiles and area of residence, 2022**

(Percentages)

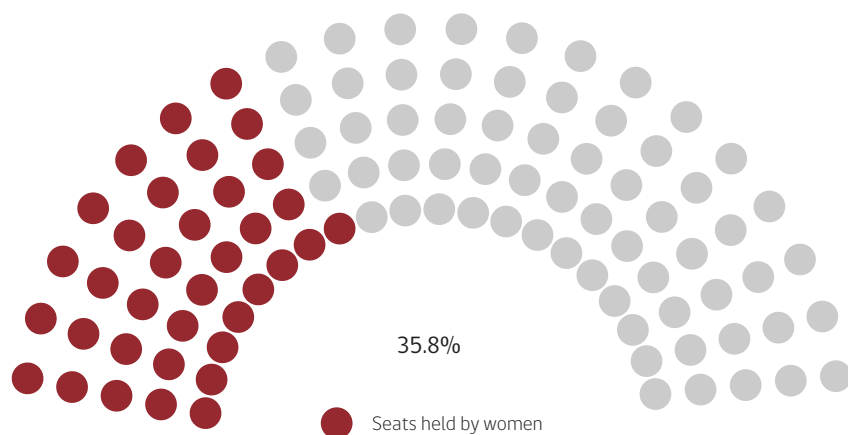


Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), CEPALSTAT, on the basis of Household Survey Data Bank (BADEHOG) [online], last updated on 27 November 2023.

There are significant differences between men and women in political participation, as measured by the number of parliamentary seats held: just 36% of seats are held by women, while in most countries, women account for more than 50% of the population eligible to be elected (see figure 11).

» **Figure 11. Latin America and the Caribbean: seats held by women in national parliaments, 2023**

(Percentages)



Source: Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC), on the basis of "Regional data bank for statistical follow-up to the SDGs in Latin America and the Caribbean" [online] <https://agenda2030lac.org/estadisticas/regional-data-bank-statistical-follow-up-sdg-1.html?lang=en>. last updated on 7 January 2024.

The information presented here is only part of what is available on the CEPALSTAT Portal of inequalities in Latin America, which publishes information on different aspects of inequality in Latin American countries through easy-to-understand visual representations and simple texts. This Portal can be accessed at [online] <https://statistics.cepal.org/portal/inequalities/index.html?lang=en>.

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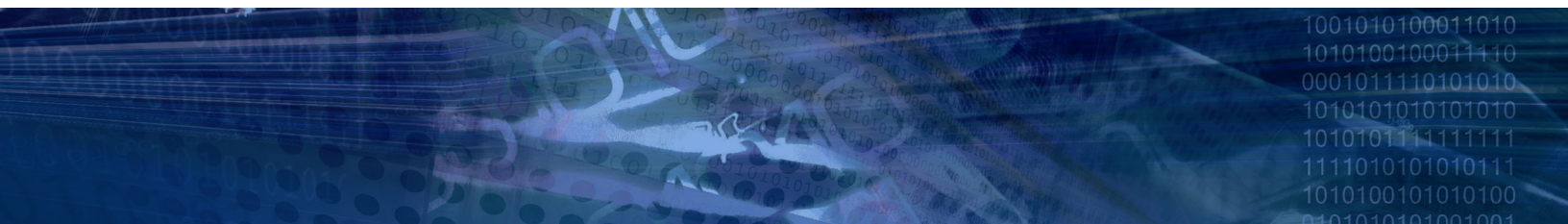
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